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MODERN LANGUAGE TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A collaborative action research project to promote
enquiry-based teaching and learning in the Irish
post-primary classroom

Ph.D. Thesis

submitted by

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to the

School of Education, National University of Ireland Galway

June 2017

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List of Abbreviations

AR	Action Research
AfL	Assessment for Learning
ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland
CAR	Collaborative Action Research
CELT	Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching
CES	Centre for Effective Services
CoP	Community of Practice
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
FC	Flipped Classroom
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
MFL	Modern Foreign Language
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NIPT	National Induction Programme for Teachers
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
NUIG	National University of Ireland Galway
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PCK	Pedagogical Content Knowledge
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PLC	Professional Learning Community
PST	Professional Support Team
SSE	School-Self-Evaluation
TALIS	Teaching and Learning International Survey
TC	Teaching Council (Ireland)
TY	Transition Year
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

Declaration

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own work, except as otherwise acknowledged in the text. The material has not been submitted, either in whole or part, for a degree at this or any other university.

Annelie Carslake

June 2017

Abstract

This action research study explored support systems for teachers enquiring into their modern language classrooms in Irish post-primary schools.

Its findings show that each classroom context was a starting point for an investigation into different topics: mixed-ability teaching, heightening motivation for language learning, increasing students' independency or improving students' reading and listening skills. Not only were the topics teachers enquired into unique to each setting, each enquiry process was individual.

The research reported in this thesis sets out to find a different avenue to the prevalent technical culture in teacher continuous professional development (CPD) in Ireland, where knowledge is imparted to teachers or the sharing of tips and tricks is given a high priority. Findings strongly suggest that a technical approach to teacher CPD is not fully adequate in responding to actual teacher learning needs. CPD that includes a personal, social and contextual dimension seems more promising and effective for teacher learning.

Central to this study were teachers' individual enquiries that were shared in a collaborative network of seven modern language teachers. As lead researcher, I accompanied and guided teachers during their enquiries, asking myself how best to support them. My own enquiry focused on illuminating and highlighting teachers' successes and challenges during the year-long project.

By adopting a dialogic approach, teachers and I co-created this study which led to an organic process of teacher CPD. The different dynamics at play in our network created a self-organising system that can be characterised as a hybrid system where second and third level practitioners meet.

The major contribution of this thesis is its holistic insight into my action research journey, teachers' enquiry journeys and our joint collaboration. Critical learning incidents and findings discussed demonstrate the complexity of teacher professional learning and can inform policy-makers, teacher CPD providers and stakeholders in designing and implementing CPD initiatives.

Acknowledgements

I used the word ‘journey’ quite often in this thesis to describe the uniqueness of an action research study. Writing my acknowledgements after four years of committing my time to a doctoral degree, makes me think of this Ph.D. as a journey along which people joined and helped me to reach the finishing line.

First of all, I want to thank my supervisor Dr Manuela Heinz. While we are close in age, I do refer to her as my *Doktormutter*, the German term for supervisor. Manuela always made time for me in a very busy academic schedule. She listened to my worries, she celebrated milestones with me and she gave me inspiration when I felt stranded in a cul de sac. I also want to thank my General Research Committee members, Dr Tina-Karen Pusse, Dr Brendan Mac Mahon and Dr Patrick Farren, for the advice and impetus they gave me at the annual meetings.

As recipient of a Hardiman Research Scholarship, I could fully concentrate on my dissertation which I am very grateful for. Due to the structured Ph.D. programme, I did not spend my days in a dark room hovering over books – the university, especially the School of Education, provided ample opportunities to meet other postgraduate students, to speak about our projects or simply share a cuppa and not feel alone on this endeavour.

I am immensely grateful to the teachers who participated in this study giving up their valuable free time for interviews or collaborative meetings on Saturdays. Their openness and honesty, their dedication to their work and enthusiasm were outstanding. I feel privileged to have worked with them.

Many friends accompanied my Ph.D. journey and kept me sane and happy: my housemates from University Park, Jim McNicholas, Catherine Geraghty, Louis Crowe and most importantly Francesca Magnoni who knew best what a Ph.D. journey feels like and helped me avoid pitfalls and setbacks.

Heartfelt thanks go to Hilary and Helen Carslake, avid Word Race players and grammar buffs who actually enjoyed reading through all chapters, correcting prepositions and telling me when I went a bit too far using the thesaurus.

This leads me to John Carslake, whom I met in my third year of the Ph.D. and married in my fourth; whose love for nature, incredible spontaneity and creativity made me open my eyes to a whole new world; whose ability to appreciate the little things in life felt so refreshing. I have a lot to thank him for: from mixing me alcohol-free cocktails with unorthodox ingredients like pepper and chilli, to picking me wild flowers, writing me cheery notes for my desk or cooking me dinner when I was forgetting to eat properly. John, you are one in a billion.

Finally, I want to thank my parents Frank and Christel Eberhardt and brother Michael for their eternal love and support. Even though my parents do not speak English and will not be able to read this œuvre, I know how proud it makes them that I reached this stage.

The last year of the Ph.D. also saw my bump grow tremendously. I assume finishing this chapter leads to starting a new chapter - or shall I say, journey? Here is to the little life inside me that patiently waited for the final sentences to be written before entering this world.

Für Christel und Frank Eberhardt

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background to this Thesis

A number of recent research and policy reports indicate that second language teaching and learning in Ireland is fraught with difficulty and that current levels of modern language proficiency of Irish citizens are unsatisfactory. The European Commission, in its 2012 published Eurobarometer report, lists Ireland among the five countries where citizens are ‘least likely to be able to speak any foreign language’ (European Commission 2012a, p.5). While nearly all students learn a foreign language in secondary school (European Commission 2012b), Ireland does not reach the European goal of *Mother Tongue plus Two*, which envisages Irish citizens being able to communicate confidently in their native languages (Irish and English) plus two modern languages. The Royal Irish Academy addresses this in its *National Languages Strategy* as the main challenge for Ireland: to become truly multilingual (Royal Irish Academy 2011). A foreign language policy by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) was supposed to be published in 2015. The DES stated recently that it ‘will publish the Foreign Languages in Education Strategy and commence implementation’ in 2017 (DES 2017, p.13). Such a policy is urgently needed because of minimal language skills and an increasingly heterogenous Ireland where 12% of students were born outside the country (DES 2014).

The *Hyland Report* furthermore argues that Irish students lack general competencies that leave them unprepared for third level education or employment. Even though it has ‘been addressed with monotonous regularity during the past 50 years’ (Hyland 2011, p.6), students still do not achieve the skills required. Critical thinking, creativity, and communicative competence, for example, are essential skills to be exerted and taught in school. Nevertheless, ‘the points system rewards rote learning, instrumental learning and memorization while simultaneously discouraging exploration [and] self-directed learning’ (ibid., p.7).

At the beginning of the 21st century, educational topics are at the forefront of international debate. Reports by the EU and OECD, of which Ireland is a member, address how to equip citizens with the skills they need to meet new challenges like ever-developing technology, multilingualism and demands of a knowledge society. The OECD report *Teachers Matter* summarises it like this:

The demands on schools and teachers are becoming more complex. Society now expects schools to deal effectively with different languages and student backgrounds, to be sensitive to culture and gender issues, to promote tolerance and social cohesion, to respond effectively to disadvantaged students and students with learning or behavioural problems, to use new technologies, and to keep pace with rapidly developing fields of knowledge and approaches to student assessment. Teachers need to be capable of preparing students for a society and an economy in which they will be expected to be self-directed learners, able and motivated to keep learning over a lifetime. (OECD 2005, p.7)

Ireland's ability to meet these challenges will significantly depend on the quality of teaching and learning. It is no wonder, however, that concerns arise about how to keep abreast of this situation and how to develop teacher knowledge in such an ever-changing world. Teachers, after all, are increasingly recognised as the most important factor in student performance that is open to policy influence (Mourshed & Barber 2007; Scheerens 2010; Cochran-Smith 2012). The 1991 OECD review on Irish education highlighted that teaching is a long-term commitment within which learning takes place all the time - during initial training, induction and in-service (Coolahan 2007). Musset (2010) states, however, that

traditionally, teacher education has focused mostly on initial teacher education. Continuing training should be closely articulated with initial teacher education: many times, continuing training programmes are carried off with little coherence with the initial education received by teachers. (Musset 2010, p.8)

The Teaching Council of Ireland acknowledges this problem in their 2011 *Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education* by saying the 'issue must be addressed as a matter of priority' (Teaching Council 2011, p.9). The Teaching Council states that effective CPD is

participative in nature, should encourage teachers to evaluate their pedagogical beliefs and practices, to critically reflect on their professional practice and working environments and to engage in professional collaboration. (ibid., p.20)

Ireland has, currently, no minimum in-service training requirement and no overarching policy for modern language teacher development. Effective CPD programmes are needed not only to 'relieve the tendency to overcrowd initial training courses' (Coolahan 2007, p.15) but, more importantly, to support teachers throughout their careers. CPD initiatives in place suffer from

a contradiction between the realities of teachers' workplaces and in-service courses that not quite connect to teachers' classrooms and school contexts (Teaching Council 2011).

Because of Irish citizens' lower proficiency in modern languages and because of the decisive role teachers play in changing that situation, this thesis targets the teaching and learning of modern languages, and possibilities for teachers to deal with the complexity of their classrooms.

1.2 Research Questions and Methodology

The study is based on a collaboration with modern language teachers in secondary schools in Ireland during the school year of 2014/2015. At first eight, then seven teachers enquired into their classrooms, using an action research approach. They worked collaboratively with other teachers and myself to propel their enquiry.

As a teacher educator and the main researcher of this study, I took on the role of designing the overall project and, once the collaborative enquiries had started, guiding and supporting teachers throughout their enquiries. My own enquiry focused on the question: *How can I support teachers of modern languages to develop an enquiry practice and work collaboratively to enhance their teaching and their students' learning?* Figure 1.1 visualises the research puzzle including the connections between the core question triggering the research of the teacher educator/researcher and practicing teachers' enquiries and how they are interconnected.

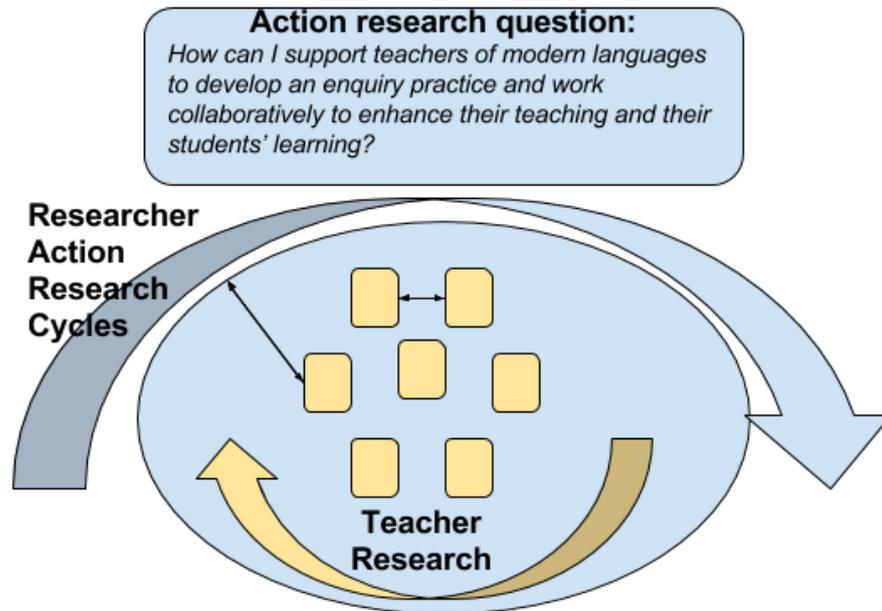


Figure 1.1: Interconnectedness of teacher research and action research by researcher

The big arrow resembles my action research cycles starting out with my main research question. The squares and arrow inside the circle mirror the participating teachers each having their own enquiry but also a collaboration with the other group members and myself. The bended arrows signal an ongoing enquiry on part of myself and the teachers which influence each other. The teachers' journeys influenced my reflection and action plans, whereas my action plans influenced the teachers.

While I distinguish between action and teacher research, I use practitioner research as an umbrella term (McNiff et al. 1996; Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2009) for this study. Action research and teacher research are two similar forms of practitioner research. I do not intend to indicate a hierarchy with this distinction but rather distinguish between the contexts of where, or rather by whom, practitioner research was carried out. Borg differentiates between action and teacher research the following way:

Teacher research is [...] a broader term than action research – while action research (when conducted by teachers) is also teacher research, not all teacher research follows the procedures which define action research. (Borg 2010, p.394)

My research methodology is action research (see chapter 3.3). Teachers were invited to follow the cyclical process that defines action research. It was, however, more important to let them voice their wishes and interests in this collaborative enquiry without imposing a methodology on them.

As I started the thesis, I wrote down several research questions which were, subsequently, shaped by the action research process. It was encouraging to see other action researchers experiencing the same ongoing changes:

[I]f a research project is considered a journey, the research questions are the constant companions of the researcher. They may change over time, but they are central to the progress of the endeavour as they serve as guidelines and sign posts [sic] along the way. (Benitt 2015, p.104)

The following core research questions guided me during the process (i, ii, iii) and at the final stage of the project (iv).

i) How can I support teachers of modern languages to develop an enquiry practice and work collaboratively to enhance their teaching and their students' learning?
ii) What happens when teachers enquire into their classrooms and work collaboratively?
iii) Which factors propel or impede teacher collaborative enquiry as a form of CPD?
iv) To what extent can collaborative and enquiry-based classroom research enhance teaching practice and student learning in the modern language classroom?

In this qualitative action research study, I used a variety of data collection methods including classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, field notes, reflective writing and an online workspace as well as email correspondence, to explore my core research questions and a range of sub-questions (see chapter 4.1) and to ensure that data is triangulated.

Strategies from grounded theory and narrative enquiry guided me in looking closely and systematically at the data. With the help of my critical friend in form of my supervisor and with the constant ongoing review of national and international research literature, I reduced

the amount of data to core themes which I found most intriguing, interesting and informative (see chapter 6).

1.3 Why is this Research Important and Timely?

As mentioned before, teachers and their ongoing professional learning contribute most to successful student learning. CPD activities are, however, often ineffective as they fail to acknowledge and respond to ‘the complex teaching and learning environments in which teachers live’ (Opfer & Pedder 2011b, p.377). In the *Language Education Policy Profile for Ireland* it is stated that ‘many teachers of languages were demoralised and felt that their goodwill was not supported’ (DES 2006, p.29). In their recommendations, the DES made ‘systematic CPD for language teachers’ a priority (ibid., p.53).

This action research study explores and addresses the challenges highlighted in current research. It connects CPD with teachers’ daily practices, thus embracing the complexity of teaching and learning (Opfer & Pedder 2011a; 2011b). The study aims to develop and support reflective dialogue (McNiff & Whitehead 2002), collaboration (Wenger 2000; Zeichner 2010) and evidence-informed practice (Timperley et al. 2007; Sinnema et al. 2011).

Irish studies in which primary, post-primary and third level teachers use an action research approach do exist (McNiff & Collins 1994; McNiff & Whitehead 2002; Glenn et al. 2012; McDonagh et al. 2012). However, no study has, so far, used action research to explore practitioner enquiry with a group of post-primary modern language teachers.

Research into language teacher education is sparse (Kubanyiova & Feryok 2015). While some advancements have been made in the field of *language teacher cognition* regarding ‘the invisible dimension of teachers’ mental lives’ (their beliefs, language learning histories etc.) (ibid., p.435), the aspect of how language teacher learning affects student learning is under-researched.

This study aims to explore the action dimension of teacher professional learning. While this is the first Irish-based study focusing on a collaboration with one group of modern language teachers, it advocates collaborative enquiry as a form of teacher professional development.

This action research study intends to build connections between teachers’ practical concerns and relevant research. It explores what role evidence-informed practice can play in teachers’ busy work-lives and how to minimise the theory-practice divide between third and second level. It sheds light on the boundary space between practical and research concerns, knowledge and discourses, particularly on teachers’ perceptions of and engagement with different forms

of knowledge about and for teaching. Insights into teachers' perceptions of and engagement with pedagogical research can inform and support researchers and CPD stakeholders in creating material and avenues that enhance practitioner-researcher exchange to build evidence-informed practice and lessen the hierarchy between teachers and researchers (Zeichner 2010).

This study will contribute to (i) a better understanding of current provision and practices of CPD for teachers of modern languages in Ireland and internationally, (ii) a deeper insight into language teachers' needs, expectations, perceptions with regard to CPD, as well as (iii) constructive suggestions in terms of developing and supporting collaborative enquiry-based research as an integral part of CPD to further the professional learning of modern language teachers.

1.4 Personal Influences in Writing a Doctoral Thesis

*[T]he centrality of 'I' in action research is key to its nature and its potency.
(McAteer 2013, p.18)*

Due to the centrality of 'I', I want to reflect on my own story: why I started this enquiry and what motivated me to work collaboratively with second level teachers of modern languages.

My journey into the world of modern language teaching in Ireland started nearly ten years ago, in 2008, when I took up a post as Applied Language Teacher at the National University of Ireland in Galway. After having taught in the United States, France and Spain I had to adjust to a new education system.

What I remember most is my astonishment about second year students who were often unable to speak to me in German - even after 6 years of formal instruction at secondary school and one year at third level. Students struggled with the communicative approach the course book (level B1+) suggested, also with the grammar and authentic material used. I needed to make my teaching more transparent. I found myself explaining again and again that active learning methodologies, like for instance partner or group-work, are not a waste of time but a good way to learn to speak a language, that the rote learning students had employed to prepare for their Leaving Certificate is counterproductive if one does not understand what is mechanically recited.

After noticing the phenomenon (students' low level of language skills), I soon began to search for reasons. Possible reasons I considered were i) that teachers of German did not embrace the communicative approach when teaching, ii) that there is no formal subject-specific continuous

professional development teachers have to take part in, iii) that the way Irish is being taught, especially at post-primary level, thwarts any other formal instruction of languages, and iv) that English lessons lack a strong focus on grammar and syntax which makes it more difficult to understand other languages and their syntaxes.

Instead of examining these reasons, I much preferred to take action and ask myself what could be done to augment students' language skills. As the teacher is the most important factor when it comes to student learning, I wanted to learn more about the professional life of teachers of German in Irish secondary schools and so I joined the committee of the German Teachers' Association of Ireland, first as their third level link, then as their chair person. My role involved the planning and delivery of professional development activities and conferences for German teachers in Ireland. I soon suspected that the way teachers learnt after their initial education was ineffective. Conferences consisted of a topical key-note speech followed by several workshops on methods for the modern language classroom. While teachers left conferences with useful material, I wondered: What did they learn? Does professional learning - in a nutshell - mean to receive a handful of worksheets?

Hence, my aspiration was, and continues to be, to enhance modern language teachers' professional learning and development. Feeling that the ad hoc model of one day workshops was insufficient to bring about change, I began to search for more effective and sustainable approaches to CPD for language teachers. The critical, reflective and developmental approach of action/practitioner research attracted me and ignited a deeper exploration of teacher professional development which, ultimately, led to my own action research journey.

Chapter 2

Teacher Professional Development – Research, Policy and Practice

As mentioned in the Introduction, teacher learning has been defined as a long-term commitment spanning from initial, induction to in-service teacher education (Teaching Council 2011). The terms in-service training and CPD are usually distinguished in the literature (Scheerens 2010). The latter is ongoing and occurs in the school, while in-service training is ad-hoc and can be off school ground (e.g. in education centres, universities). During this collaborative enquiry, professional learning happened in and outside the classroom of the teacher, as well as on and off the school ground. To make it easier for the reader, I will use the acronym CPD as an encompassing term to define all professional learning activities belonging to this study.

In chapter 2.1, I will first introduce a framework that combines different interplaying angles which constitute effective CPD. These angles refer to effectiveness of the teacher, the teaching, the school and the education system. The emphasis on effectiveness gives way to discuss different themes and theories in the literature that contribute to a holistic view on teacher CPD. Chapter 2.2 then specifically targets teacher research as a form of continuous professional development for teachers at post-primary level. Successes of teacher research as well as barriers will be discussed by scrutinising more closely the pillars of teacher research: reflective practice, collaboration and evidence-informed practice. Chapter 2.3 gives an overview of Irish teacher and action research studies and demonstrates the gap this study fills as the first collaborative action research study initiated with a group of modern language teachers.

2.1 A Continuous Professional Development Framework

As the overall aim of this study is to enhance the quality of modern language education, I will start this chapter with a conceptual framework that focuses on effectiveness. After all, the questions that should be asked when designing, planning or implementing CPD initiatives are: What works?, How does it work?, Why does it work? and Who does it work for? Research literature and policy documents cited in the following are predominantly focusing on modern language teachers and/or the Irish context to lay a foundation for following chapters, especially chapter 6 where data gathered in the study is being discussed.

The model chosen to start off tackling the vast field of teacher CPD has been developed by Scheerens et al. (2010) in their response to *Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environments: First results from TALIS* (OECD 2009).

Shiel, Perkins and Gilleece (2009) also evaluated the TALIS data set, but specifically wrote about the Irish outcomes. All three publications (OECD 2009; Shiel et al. 2009; Scheerens 2010) resemble the last extensive data set on CPD for Irish post-primary teachers and will feature throughout this chapter. Outcomes from the next TALIS study (OECD 2013) will be acknowledged, however, Ireland was not among the participating countries and will not be featured in the TALIS study in 2018 either.¹

The aforementioned model includes different layers that will be elaborated on in the following chapters. CPD measures resulting from each layer will be highlighted in boxes throughout the chapters.

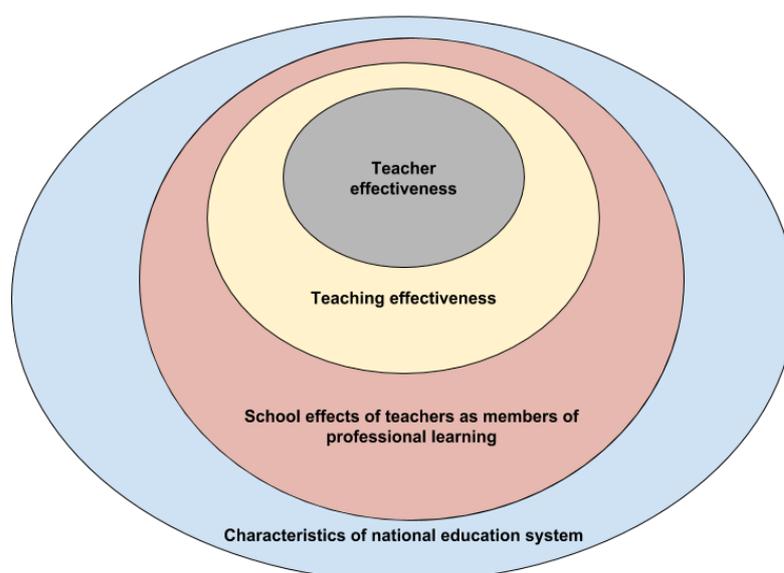


Figure 2.1: Factors for effective CPD. Adapted from Scheerens et al. 2010, p.20

At the core of the model stands teacher effectiveness. Here beliefs, attitudes and job satisfaction play a role. How can CPD measures positively influence these factors? After all, teacher effectiveness is seen as the ‘main driver of the variation in student learning at school’ (Barber & Mourshed 2007, p.12). The second layer concerns teaching effectiveness: Which

¹ <http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/participantsinthetalissurvey2018.htm> [28/01/2017]

methods, teaching and learning strategies are employed in the classroom. The distinction between teacher and teaching effectiveness is pivotal because ‘what teachers *are* influences what teachers *do*; what teachers *do*, in turn, influences what, and how much, students learn’ (Anderson 2004, p.22, italics in original).

Level three targets teachers’ cooperative work in their school context and ‘their contribution to effective structures and climates of schooling’ (Scheerens 2010, p.20). The fourth layer encompasses national educational settings. Here I will discuss former and recent policies and their impact on teacher CPD.

2.1.1 Teacher Effectiveness

Teachers’ personal characteristics have surprisingly minimal impact on student achievement. For example, an introverted flexible teacher can get as good results as an extroverted inflexible teacher. Rivkin et al. therefore measured effects other than personal characteristics of teachers. They concluded that ‘measurable characteristics such as teacher experience, education, and even test scores of teachers explain little of the true variation in quality (Rivkin et al. 2005, pp.419–420).

Recently, however, there is new interest in teacher characteristics, but more so in certain characteristics that ‘are closer to learnable competencies than to personality characteristics, although they are clearly linked to them’ (Scheerens 2010, p.25). Anderson lists twelve characteristics under four clusters: professionalism (commitment, confidence, trustworthiness, respect), thinking/reasoning (analytical and conceptual thinking), expectations (drive for improvement, information seeking, initiative) and leadership (flexibility, accountability, a passion for learning) (Anderson 2004, p.21). She points out, however, that

the influence of teacher characteristics on teacher effectiveness is not direct. Rather, it is moderated or mediated by their effect on the way in which teachers organize their classrooms and operate within them. (ibid., p.22)

One of the characteristics - confidence - relates to the term self-efficacy, ‘a future-oriented belief about the level of competence a person expects he or she will display in a given situation’ (Scheerens 2010, p.28). Research has shown that the level of teachers’ self-efficacy is linked to their attitude towards CPD initiatives and ability to positively change their teaching practice to improve students’ learning (Opfer 2016). Irish teachers’ level of self-efficacy is ‘well above’

average in the 2009 TALIS study (Shiel et al. 2009, p.10). It is interesting to note, however, that a higher self-efficacy is usually attributed to teachers who work collaboratively. Here, Irish teachers clearly lag behind other countries. While teachers in Ireland collaborate on administrative and coordinating matters, they rarely collaborate professionally (Shiel et al. 2009) despite the evidence that

teachers improve their job satisfaction and self-efficacy when working together. Furthermore, ‘to successfully implement innovative, student-centred, and collaborative learning methods proficient collaboration among the teaching staff is required’ (Vangrieken et al. 2015, p.18).

In their review on teacher collaboration, Vangrieken et al. mentioned benefits of teacher collaboration for teachers, students and the school alike with collaboration being most beneficial on the teacher level (ibid.).

A successful collaboration is only possible if certain personal characteristics of the teacher, such as commitment and a willingness to work in teams, exists (ibid.). Working together in teams is usually easier realised within the same school and bears more advantages than non-school-embedded CPD (Vangrieken 2015; Opfer 2016). However, the majority of teachers, according to TALIS data from 2013, attends non-school-embedded CPD (Opfer 2016). What counts as school and non-school-embedded CPD is listed below.

School-embedded CPD	Non-school-embedded CPD
Participation in a network of teachers	Courses and workshops
Individual or collaborative research	Education conferences or seminars
Mentoring and coaching	In-service training courses in business premises
Observing other teachers' classes and provide feedback	Qualification programme (e.g. a degree programme)

Working with teachers to ensure common standards for assessing student progress	
Taking part in collaborative professional learning	

Table 2.1: School and non-school embedded CPD. Table based on Opfer 2016, pp.12-13

School-embedded CPD, e.g. a network of teachers, collaborative learning, observation, mentoring and coaching, is more effective as a means for teacher CPD since

‘higher levels of participation in school embedded professional development are associated with higher levels of reported impacts on teaching knowledge and practice’ (Opfer 2016, p.17). TALIS data from 2013 furthermore suggests that school-based professional development increases teacher self-efficacy (Barrera-Pedemonte 2016).

However, the TALIS data also conveys that too much co-operation among teachers on school level can lead to insecurities on side of the individual teacher and make them ‘less assured’ (Opfer 2016, p.24). It is argued that co-operation and instructional leadership need to be balanced as only ‘[t]eachers in balanced, collaborative schools report both the highest participation in school embedded professional development and the highest impact levels’ (ibid., p.29). Balanced, collaborative schools cater for teachers to work together over time looking at problems in their teaching practice.

While risk-taking (Le Fevre 2014) is not mentioned in these reports on TALIS data, such balanced, collaborative schools need to embrace the notion of risk-taking if they want to spark critical enquiry.

‘[I]ncreasing teachers’ willingness to risk-take when changing teaching practices is necessary in order to bring about effective educational change.’ (Le Fevre 2014, p.63)

Le Fevre points out that the most important variable for embracing risk-taking is trust among teachers, administrative staff and professional developers. If the level of risk is too high, teachers are not likely to take part in deep professional learning.

A risk-taking culture is, for example, necessary when new teaching methods, programmes, syllabi etc. initiated by state, universities or schools have to be implemented. The belief system teachers form during their professional career often challenges an implementation, as can be seen at the moment with the Irish Junior Cycle reform (see chapter 2.1.4). Le Fevre states that '[c]hanging teacher beliefs is an essential, yet difficult, aspect of educational improvement' (2014, p.57). Any change is accompanied by messiness because '[c]hange is rapid and nonlinear' (Fullan 2004, p.39). It is thus understandable that change almost always comes hand in hand with fear and uncertainty. Capobianco and Ní Ríordáin found in their research on preservice teachers embarking on an action research study that the teachers are 'faced with a myriad of concerns, questions, and dilemmas'. Just like in-service teachers, they wonder about their students' knowledge, how to cover the vast content in a short period, plus 'their own intellectual and social authority' (Capobianco & Ní Ríordáin 2015, p.582). The authors came to the conclusion that a collaborative action research approach is helpful when addressing teacher uncertainty as it

heightened preservice teachers' awareness of their role in enacting change; becoming agents of change in the classroom for their students, other teachers, and the school at large, as well as for themselves. (ibid., p.595)

To become enactors of change, teachers need to embrace a culture of change in which change 'can be understood, and perhaps led, but it cannot be fully controlled' (Fullan 2004, p.42). In another study by Capobianco (2007), science teachers used a collaborative action research approach to investigate feminist pedagogy in science teaching. Capobianco made the point that

'a culture where dissent or resistance is seen as a potential source of new ideas and breakthroughs [is preferable]. We need to seek diversity of teachers, ideas, and experiences [...]' (Capobianco 2007, p.28).

Hence, teachers' ability to face and accept messiness and contradicting views, to be willing to risk-take and challenge own beliefs is essential in becoming effective teachers. What can be achieved is to unfold the tensions between teacher beliefs and practices which brings forth 'the multifaceted and often messy relationship between what teachers *do* and what they *believe*' (Devine et al. 2013, p.85, italics in original).

This short chapter has only touched on the subjects of teacher beliefs, learnable characteristics and risk-taking. As a conclusion, it can be stated that personal characteristics are less important than learnable ones. It became clear that Irish teachers have a high sense of self-efficacy, but this belief is not necessarily based on or strengthened through professional collaboration which is only marginally implemented. Teachers' high level of self-efficacy may be partly explained by a positive student-teacher relationship (see chapter 7.2.2).

While this chapter looked more closely at teacher effectiveness, the next chapter investigates factors for teaching effectiveness. Teacher effectiveness is concerned with teachers' belief system and characteristics; teaching effectiveness on the other side aims at propelling student achievement by teachers' actions.

2.1.2 Teaching Effectiveness

Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) plays a crucial role in teaching effectiveness. Research provides the evidence that having a high degree of PCK, knowing what to teach and how, translates directly to increased student achievement (König et al. 2016).

It is worth mentioning here, that language teaching is highly different from teaching other subjects, especially mathematics and science (König et al. 2016; Brown 2009). Next to subject and pedagogical knowledge is the focus on the language which the teacher has to master him/herself first. König et al. (2016) list further skills which teachers of languages need to possess:

- Use the language as content and medium
- Give feedback to students' utterances in the modern language
- Focus on oral and written competencies
- Have language (learning) awareness and intercultural competencies
- Be experts in the methodology of language teaching and learning
- Create situations for authentic learning

This gives language teaching a different focus. Whereas teachers of mathematics or science use ‘paradigmatic knowledge’, the language teaching domain pursues ‘narrative ways of knowledge, which has implications for conceptualizing the teacher’s PCK in this subject’ (König et al. 2016, p.322).

Research addressing PCK often approached the subject cognitively and left out situational contexts (Depaepe et al. 2013). However, ‘factors such as time, syllabus, and students [e.g. their attitude and level] impact on teachers’ lesson preparation’ (Sanchez & Borg 2014, p.46). Context is hereby not objective: even teachers working in the same institution/school can react differently in the same setting. Sanchez and Borg found contrasts in their study with two teachers of English as a Foreign Language who employed their native language when explaining grammar. One teacher challenged her students with discussions regarding similarities and differences between their mother tongue and English, while the other teacher used her mother tongue to make grammar explanations easier and quicker (ibid.).

CPD for language teachers can build on such research to demonstrate various ways - in this example - to teach English grammar to second language learners. Furthermore, it can ‘stimulate teachers to reflect on their own approach to teaching grammar and on their rationales for it [leading to] case-based reflective practice’ (Sanchez & Borg 2013, p.52).

‘[R]esearchers agree that there is no single, well-defined best way of teaching’ (OECD 2009, p.97). This statement from an earlier TALIS study (*Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environments - First Results from TALIS*) reveals that teaching highly depends on context, as well as culture or educational policy. The comparative TALIS study shows preferences of teaching practices in each country.

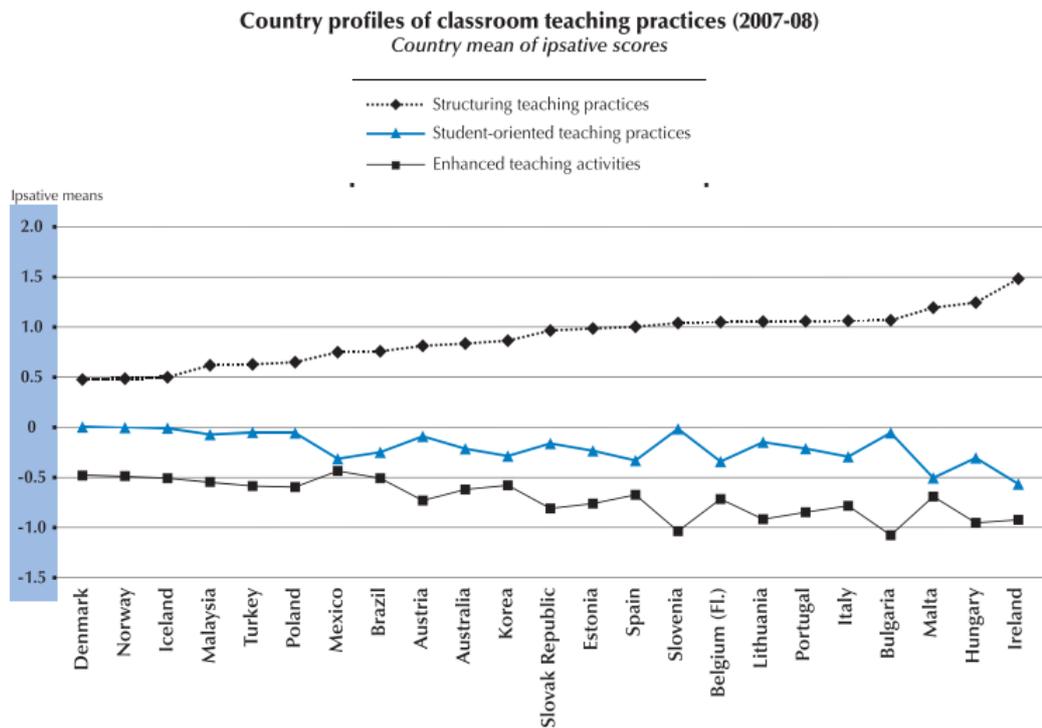


Figure 2.2: Country profiles of classroom teaching practices, OECD 2009, p.98

Ireland has the highest preference for structured teaching practices, such as checking on homework, exercise books and attendance, recapitulating content of previous lessons and monitoring understanding. Student-oriented practices are not deployed as often as for instance in Scandinavian countries where lessons are more student-centred (even though Scandinavian countries use structured teaching practices only slightly more than student-centred ones) looking at abilities of students and acting accordingly. ‘[T]he TALIS results suggest that more use might be made of student-oriented practices and enhanced activities’ (OECD 2009, p.99), meaning for example the use of debate, projects or essays.

Student-centred activities ‘allow students to take responsibility and to self-organise and they help develop a broad spectrum of skills that will be helpful for students’ future professional lives’ (OECD 2009, p.100).

Since teaching effectiveness is dependent on approaches used in the classroom, it is of interest that Irish students ‘clearly favour active learning approaches’ but that this might change during exam-driven years in school.

[F]or some students, particularly high-aspiring middle-class students, these views change as they approach the terminal high stakes exam, with many showing a strong preference for a more narrowly focused approach to exam preparation. (Smyth & Banks 2012, p.283)

Teachers in this study seconded that view. In one of the interviews, a French teacher explained how she would usually aim to speak in the target language: “I was good maybe up to the mock exams when the pressure of the exams made me go back to English.” She is clearly blaming the high stakes exams for lower secondary, the Junior Certificate, and for upper secondary schooling, the Leaving Certificate.

But once the exam time is coming in third year and sixth year, we revert to our old habits. Learn that essay by heart. Make sure what the changes are [verb conjugation] so we go back to spoon-feeding. We can blame the exam. (M(2))

Teachers are under high pressure: the results of the Leaving Certificate decide which courses at university can be studied. The ‘level of education achieved is [therefore] highly predictive of later life-chances, with higher quality employment and pay levels’ (Smyth & Banks 2012, p.288). Students also experience the different teaching approaches during exam-driven years: ‘students were more likely to see third year as ‘not a fun year’, one which lacked the kinds of approaches which engaged them in learning’ (ibid., p.300). Teaching effectiveness is clearly linked to student outcomes: the better the outcome, the more effective the teaching is deemed. However, as seen above, this can involve teaching methods less preferred by students, teachers and educational researchers. Changes are being made at the moment regarding Junior Cycle and Junior Certificate (see chapter 2.1.4) to improve students’ learning experience. To successfully implement changes, teacher and teaching effectiveness need to be addressed since the change happening

involves more than learning new knowledge and skills. It requires that teachers understand both the limitations of the current emphasis and the new ways of deciding what knowledge is valued. (Timperley 2008, p.18)

Changes in classroom teaching also need to be communicated to students as the following study by Brown (2009) shows. In his study on effective modern language teaching, Brown found that teachers embraced the communicative approach to modern language teaching but

students ‘prefer[red] to have formal grammar instruction take precedence over communicative exchanges in the L2 [second language] classroom’ (Brown 2009, p.53). Research in the field of second language acquisition is more and more concerned with students’ ‘beliefs and perceptions [of] effective L2 acquisition’ (ibid.). Yet student-oriented and communicative approaches to language teaching are the sine qua non. This is supported by empirical studies.

‘Teachers may need to help students understand some empirically proven principles of L2 learning (e.g., the importance of output, interaction, and negotiation of meaning) to justify exercises without a grammar focus or assignments graded for communicative effectiveness rather than for grammatical accuracy’ (Brown 2009, p.54).

Brown speculates that students’ focus on grammar stems from the manner in which students are usually assessed: ‘multiple-choice, true–false, and matching formats [...] rather than open-ended responses’ (Brown 2009, p.57). The scenario in Brown’s study seems similar to the exam-driven years in Irish classrooms: students preferring a preparation for the exam that is lacking student-oriented teaching methods. However, the Junior Cycle reform is introducing different forms of assessment, e.g. project work, to address this issue.

Current assessment practice at the end of Junior Cycle in Ireland is out of line with best practice in many countries [...]. There is increasing international evidence to show that the learning experience is narrowed if an assessment system is restricted to assessing students through external examinations and testing. (DES 2013, p.3)

Due to the fact that methodologies and theories about teaching are affected by change, perceptions on what constitutes effective teaching need to be constantly negotiated in the classroom. To positively influence (modern language) teaching, Brown suggests that teachers enquire into their classrooms and hear their students’ opinion regarding their learning experiences. That way ‘teachers will become researchers who desire to understand their own and their students’ perspectives on L2 teaching better’ (Brown 2009, p.58).

The next step is to look at school effectiveness: what do schools do and what should they do to support teachers, and by this ameliorate the teaching and learning situation. After all, for deep pedagogical change to happen, there needs to be ‘deep support and deep leadership’ on side of the school (Devine et al. 2013, p.84).

2.1.3 School Effectiveness

Hargreaves suggests that teaching has never been as challenging as it is today and that it needs to be backed-up by CPD to support teachers in their professional life-cycle. Referring to the fast development of the knowledge society, teachers need to focus on

higher-order thinking skills, metacognition (thinking about thinking), constructivist approaches to learning and understanding, brain-based learning, cooperative learning strategies, multiple intelligences and different “habits of mind”, employing a wide range of assessment techniques, and using computer-based and other information technology that enables students to gain access to information independently. (Hargreaves 2003, p.24)

Schools play a central role in supporting teachers develop the skills listed above.

The school is emerging as the key agency within the education system for improving student learning, which implies that schools need to have more responsibility – and accountability – for teacher selection, working conditions, and development. (OECD 2005, p.14)

In *Teaching in the Knowledge Society*, Hargreaves dismisses the way in which ‘schools and teachers have been squeezed into the tunnel vision of test scores, achievement targets, and league tables of accountability’ (Hargreaves 2003, p.1) and rejects the ‘compulsive obsession of standardization’ (ibid., p.2).

Schools in his opinion should be learning organisations, with a spirit of community where everyone sees and works on the ‘big picture’ (ibid.). The school’s profile is one of collaboration, discussion and enquiry.

The reality, however, is that ‘[r]egressive policies and bureaucracy are stifling the release of intellectual capital in [...] schools’ (ibid., p.151).

In Levin’s *How to change 5000 schools*, educational change was implemented with regards to literacy and numeracy in Ontario, Canada, with ‘the intent [...] to embed professional learning

in the ongoing work of teachers and schools' (Levin 2010, p.316). Considering that 'ordering people to do better without engaging their hearts and minds cannot succeed' (ibid., p.742), Levin calls for shared evidence of classroom teaching and learning which would make teachers 'much less subject to arbitrary direction from system managers' (ibid.). The latter statement can be seconded by Sahlberg, referring to the Finnish education system and its rejection of the *global education reform movement*.²

Schools are usually not supporting enquiry-based CPD. Opfer and Pedder, who looked at CPD in schools in England, found that only high-achieving schools paid attention to CPD that is collaborative, longer in duration and coherent in its approach (Opfer & Pedder 2011a). Teachers in low performing schools attend CPD courses that are of short duration and 'report high levels of performance management conditions'. The authors claim 'that performance management and professional learning may be aligned in negative and punitive ways for these teachers' (ibid., p.21) which could be the reason for low academic achievement in these schools.

A significant point is made about the capability of schools to support CPD that is effective for teachers and students. Schools themselves need guidance to offer such support: 'Without both school-level capacity and coherence for teachers' learning, the usefulness of professional development as a mechanism for school improvement is being lost' (ibid., p.22).

Since 2003 Ireland is implementing school self-evaluations which are 'more focused on capacity building for self-evaluation and professional development', which look at 'many forms and sources of data and knowledge, and not just quantified student attainment data' (McNamara et al. 2011, p.64).

The *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines* by the DES emphasise that school self-evaluations shall be seen as a tool to empower schools and not restrict them. They state that evidence needs to be gathered through collaboration among school leaders, administrators and teachers, in consultation with students and their parents and that this leads to school improvement (DES 2012).

In their comparative study on school self-evaluation in Ireland and Iceland, McNamara et al. (2011) concluded that it is not shown yet if Irish school self-evaluation is - in terms of empowerment of teachers and professional growth - successful. Whereas the Icelandic way of school self-evaluation shows success. The reason could be the latter's participant-orientation: both administrators and teachers work on the evaluation after receiving guidance from experts.

² Which implies a standardisation of education, a focus on literacy and numeracy and consequential accountability systems (school performance) (Sahlberg 2007).

While in Ireland, school self-evaluation is controlled by the DES, '[t]he emphasis [in Iceland] has from the beginning been on student-centred accountability' (ibid., p.75). Schools look at their own questions in order to improve rather than using pre-defined standards. Noteworthy is that all Icelandic schools use action research. The school climate can be characterised as supportive: teachers feel they are part of the team and thus feel they do make an impact.

At the moment, Irish-based school self-evaluations face problems of data evaluation and of using the right data to answer particular questions which could lead to educational change. As can be concluded from McNamara et al.'s study: leaving the evaluation process mostly in the hands of the school, without calling on outside institutions, lessens the success of such initiatives.

What school leaders can do is to strengthen

internal school conditions to promote teachers' professional development [which] is considered an important prerequisite for addressing a continuous stream of changes in their environments (e.g. demographic changes, large-scale educational innovations, socio-cultural renewal). (Scheerens et al. 2010, p.32)

Hence, teachers need a climate of support and trust so they are able to engage in teaching and learning wholeheartedly. It is furthermore not only schools giving support to their staff to continuously develop, but in the same way schools themselves needing support.

The following chapter portrays national policies on teacher CPD regarding their aims and their realisation.

2.1.4 The National Education System and its Impact on Teacher CPD

The fourth layer of the framework (see p.10) considers the national educational system and how it influences teacher CPD. In this chapter, I focus on former and current policies regarding the Irish context.

In the 20th century CPD was either only marginally mentioned or ignored by the government (Coolahan 2007). A turning point came with the OECD review from the year 1991. Of the three I's, initial education, induction, in-service training, the OECD stressed that more attention should be paid to induction and in-service training, envisioning the establishment of

a body that would help teachers and educators with the organisation and provision of services (OECD 1991). This is the starting point of the Teaching Council that was established in 2006.

The 1990s were rich in offering educational policies and conventions. Strategies for a better education in Ireland were revealed in the 1992 *Green Paper*, which resulted in an in-career development unit. A convention in 1993 ‘supported the policy proposal of the Green Paper which viewed the teaching career as a continuum involving the 3 I’s’ (Coolahan 2007, p.11). Policies from this period include a *White Paper on Education* (1995), an *Education Act* (1998), a *White Paper on Early Childhood Education* (1999) and an *Education Welfare Act* (2000). Between 1994 and 1999, 40 million pounds were spent on research and legislative procedures for in-service education (Coolahan 2007). The economic situation at the time in Ireland was helpful in putting those plans into action. The *White Paper* entitled *Charting our Education Future*, is a conglomerate of the *Green Paper*, of results of the national convention on education and of the OECD’s 1991 country report on Ireland. With regards to in-service training, the Department of Education preferred a more receiver-driven CPD - meaning teachers’ needs are the pillar of all provision of CPD and not its providers’ needs.

However, when the *Primary Working Group* handed in its recommendations with the title *Preparing Teachers for the 21st Century*, only one of the 61 recommendations dealt with in-service training. It seemed as if results from previous policies, conventions, symposiums and seminars were not considered and ‘an opportunity for follow-through on such reports was lost, and valuable time was wasted in the process’ (Coolahan 2007, p.20).

In 2009, a report commissioned by the Teaching Council was published that targeted a nine-country cross-national analysis of teacher professional development. The opening lines call for a ‘need to develop comprehensive policies for the continuum of teacher education to meet the challenges of globalisation, sustainable development and the knowledge society’ (Conway et al. 2009, p.xii). This report, in turn, informed the Teaching Council’s *Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education* which emphasises that all teachers are lifelong learners, but also professionals who need to share their knowledge (Teaching Council 2011). The shift is visible in more current Irish educational policies concerning the professional development of teachers, where measures have been taken to tackle the challenges by fostering self-directed professionalism and the teacher voice.

Cosán, for example, (Irish for ‘path’) is the Teaching Council’s proposal for a framework for teacher professional learning. Using a bottom-up approach inviting stakeholder contributions via online surveys and face-to-face consultations led to the formulation of core values in a recent policy document published by the Teaching Council (2016). CPD should be about professional autonomy, flexibility, impact, relevance and quality, accessibility and

acknowledgment. It is now envisaged that Cosán will be implemented from 2020. It would result in a fundamental change for CPD in Ireland: CPD would become mandatory. However, the Teaching Council's proposal to make CPD mandatory with an introduction of a credit system, linked to teacher registration, did result in negative feedback and opposition from teachers (Humphreys 2015).

Molfeasa (Irish for 'hub of wisdom/knowledge/learning') on the other hand, including the Teaching Council as an active collaborator together with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the Centre for Effective Services (CES), is planned to be the place where teachers search, access and share (action) research and furthermore connect with researchers and teachers. The hub is not yet activated: issues with tenderers arose and alternative routes to create such a space for professional learning are being sought (www.molfeasa.ie).

Both Cosán and Molfeasa, while still under development, show the overall direction of i) accrediting several ways of teacher learning, ii) supporting teachers on their journeys, and iii) trying to bridge the gap between practice and research. The Teaching Council states in their *Cosán. Framework for Teachers' Learning*:

Professional learning occurs at both a formal and an informal level. [...] teachers' feedback emphasised informal learning processes as being particularly valuable [...]. (2016, p.11)

Cosán would also

respect the professionalism of teachers and allow them to exercise autonomy in identifying, and engaging in, the types of professional learning opportunities that benefit them and their students most. (2016, p.6)

A policy change which is more indirectly connected to CPD is a reform of the Junior Cycle. Junior Cycle comprises the first three years in post-primary school. It is followed by a further three years in Senior Cycle. From September 2017, the Junior Cycle reform will affect the teaching and learning of modern languages. The new curriculum emphasises the importance of a communicative approach to language teaching and the introduction of portfolios as part

of classroom-based assessment.³ The introduction of the *Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)* is another significant development. According to the NCCA, the reform necessitates wide-ranging changes which may, ‘present challenges to existing teachers who are required to considerably deepen their professional knowledge, skills and competencies’ (NCCA 2011, p.18). TALIS results for Ireland support that this shift will be challenging since teachers prefer structured processes like checking homework and exercise books or recapping on earlier lessons to student-oriented strategies (Shiel et al. 2009).

While teachers first welcomed a change of the Junior Cycle curriculum, they now fear that classroom-based assessment will lead to bias and impact student-teacher relationships negatively. They also criticise a lack of clarity concerning subjects like ‘Wellbeing’ (ASTI 2017). Ireland’s largest teacher union, the Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI), opposes the Junior Cycle reform. At its annual conference in April 2017, Professor Mooney Simmie voiced her opinion about the Junior Cycle reform in her keynote address:

I showed that the Junior Cycle reform arises from the epistemic dominance of the OECD as it seeks to (re)calibrate the curriculum offered in Ireland into a narrower emphasis on English, Science and Maths for standardised testing in PISA. (Mooney Simmie 2017, p.3)

Besides this concern, the ASTI strongly opposes that its members have to assess their own students. Therefore, ASTI members are not allowed to engage in CPD preparing them for the new curriculum or cover for teacher colleagues receiving training (O’Brien 2017).

The situation has been and continues to be difficult. The aims of these reforms and initiatives - Cosán, Molfeasa and the Junior Cycle reform - are noble and point towards a direction supported by international research, namely teacher collaboration, reflective practice, enquiry and connecting practice with research-based knowledge (Caena 2011; Cordingley 2016), but also a focus on key skills, e.g. problem-solving and creativity (OECD 2005) which are lacking among Irish school leavers (Hyland 2011). However, the movements firstly require approval from the teacher community before ‘deep structural pedagogical change’ can happen (Alexander in Devine et al. 2013, p.84).

The following chapter will highlight a model for teacher CPD that includes the four layers of teacher, teaching, school and educational system effectiveness. It will also point at and discuss further research that targets teacher research as an avenue for professional development.

³ <http://www.juniorcycle.ie/Curriculum/Subjects/Modern-Foreign-Languages/MFL> [19/04/2017]

2.1.5 Model for Effective CPD

Different models of teacher professional learning exist. One model, *The Flexible Model of Professionalism*, is described the following way: it focuses on ‘the shared aspects of teachers’ technical cultures’ concluding that ‘these cultures of collaboration have sometimes turned out to be rather weak, with teachers exchanging resources and ‘tricks of the trade’ rather than scrutinizing practice together’ (Hargreaves & Goodson 1996, p.10). This description resonates with my own experience as president of the *German Teachers’ Association of Ireland*. On one occasion, teachers’ participation in two very different workshops; one exploring the *10 best websites for using music in the classroom* and the other *Issues related to the implementation of the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference)*; provided a striking example of teachers’ preference for tricks over critical discussion: While extra chairs were needed for the first workshop exploring websites (some attendees were even standing), the second workshop attracted no more than three teachers. Teachers appeared to be content with one-shot-models of CPD.

However, extensive research proved that one-shot models of CPD do not lead to expected teacher learning and higher student achievement (OECD 2005; Conway 2009; Musset 2010; Banks & Smyth 2010; Opfer 2016). Feiman-Nemser uses shattering words when describing traditional attempts of professional teacher learning which ‘do not help teachers bring new knowledge to bear on practice or generate new knowledge in practice’ (Feiman-Nemser 2001, p.1041). In a similar critique of non-school-embedded professional development initiatives, Schwille et al. conclude that the

natural environment for enhancing a teacher’s skills and knowledge is the classroom itself, and not the less authentic meeting or conference room in which in-service education has more traditionally taken place. (Schwille et al. 2007, p.106)

A move away from *The Flexible Model of Professionalism* began with teachers becoming active agents in the design of their professional development (OECD 2005).

[T]he most effective forms of professional development seem to be those that focus on clearly articulated priorities, providing ongoing school-based support to classroom teachers, deal with subject matter content as well as suitable instructional strategies and classroom management techniques and create opportunities for teachers to observe, experience and try new teaching methods. (ibid., p.129)

It is more fruitful for teachers to investigate questions and concerns that come up in their professional life cycle than for teachers to attend single, not coherent or transferable professional development events (Glenn et al. 2012).

Because of this changed perception on teacher CPD, successful teacher and ultimately student learning includes teacher beliefs and practices (as seen in chapters 2.1.1 and 2.1.2) which interact with school beliefs and norms (see chapter 2.1.3) and ‘how both together may affect the activities and impacts of activities on teacher practices and student learning’ (Opfer 2016, p.11). Opfer developed a conceptual framework for CPD that includes these different angles and emphasises the teacher as active agent.

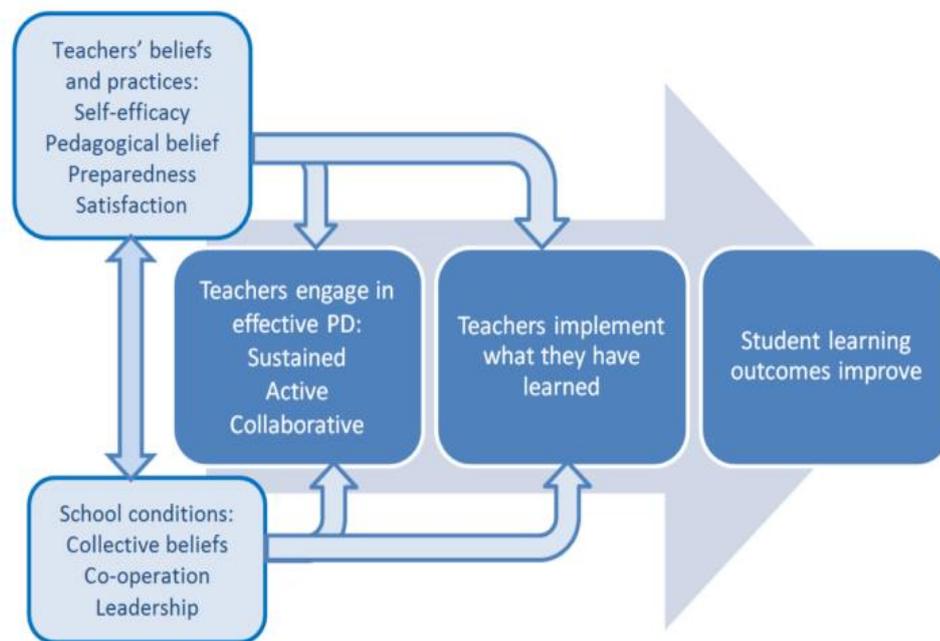


Figure 2.3: Full conceptual model of teacher professional development impact, Opfer 2016, p.11

Opfer’s (2016) conceptual model is based on TALIS 2013 data as well as research literature on effective CPD. The analyses show that teachers with moderate beliefs regarding their preparedness, satisfaction etc. will more likely gain from CPD initiatives. If the level is (very) low or (very) high, teachers learn less likely from professional development activities. The task for schools is to cater for co-operation among teachers and to offer ‘instructionally focused leadership’ (ibid., p.29). Instructionally-focused leadership refers to schools considering the learning of students as well as staff by looking at improvements in instruction and then student learning. Finally, effective CPD ‘activities may include teacher-initiated research projects, teacher networks, observation of colleagues, and mentoring and coaching’ (ibid., p.30).

The shift from the *Flexible Model of Professionalism* towards a model of teacher CPD as seen above recognises the complexity of teacher professional learning (Hargreaves & Goodson 1996; Opfer & Pedder 2011b; Cochran-Smith et al. 2014). This has led to a wide range of approaches to CPD.

Practitioner research is one approach to CPD that combines reflective practice, collaboration, enquiry and research. This form of CPD ‘simply means that the research is done by individuals themselves into their own practices’ (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead 1996, pp.7-8). In the following, I will more closely outline teacher research as a form of practitioner research.

2.2 Teacher Research

Be patient toward all that is unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. (Rainer Maria Rilke)

Over four decades ago, Stenhouse’s (1975) call for teachers becoming researchers was rooted in the belief that teachers have ample choice for enquiring into their own classrooms where they are ‘surrounded by rich research opportunities’ (Stenhouse 1981, p.110). Teacher research is thereby one of many approaches to practitioner research. A recent publication by Herr and Anderson (2015) illustrates the rapid development in the field of “practitioner-owned” research. The authors distinguish between various types: action research, participatory action research (PAR), action science, collaborative action research, cooperative enquiry, educative research, appreciative enquiry, self-study, emancipatory practice, community-based participatory research, teacher research, feminist action research - to name a few. The list seems to lengthen as new forms of practitioner-owned enquiry are being introduced constantly. Figure 2.4 below provides an overview of the methodological movements relevant to this study.

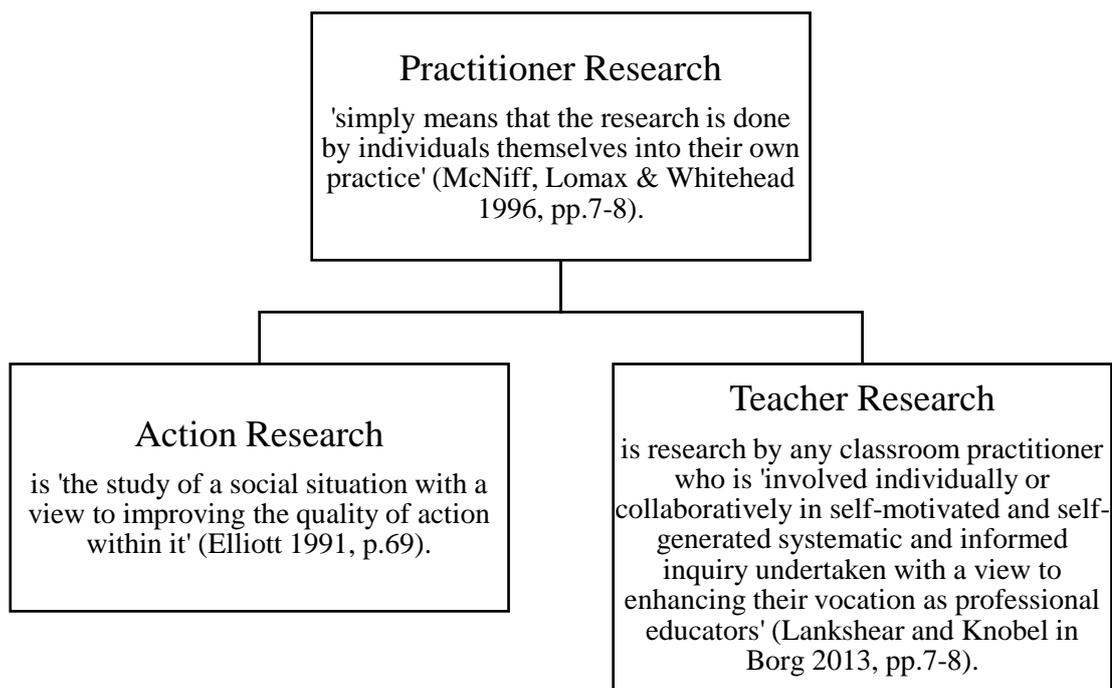


Figure 2.4: Methodological movements relevant to this study

As mentioned in the Introduction, practitioner research is an umbrella term for action and teacher research. I will speak more specifically about action research as the methodology of this Ph.D. in chapter 3.3. The reason to distinguish between action and teacher research were laid out before (see p.4). In the following, I turn to theoretical concepts paving the way to teacher research.

McNiff and Whitehead state that practitioner research is a ‘process of learning from experience, a dialectical interplay between practice, reflection and learning’ (2002, p.13). Hence, reflection is one pillar for teachers becoming/being researchers (chapter 2.2.1). Teachers reflect on their teaching, their students’ learning but also on beliefs in order to amend their practice.

Teachers learning collaboratively (chapter 2.2.2) is the second pillar of teacher research in this study. A study by Vangrieken et al. (2015) has provided evidence that collaborative learning resonates not only to a worldwide trend in society but has a positive impact on teacher and student learning.

At last, research in teacher research makes the vital contribution for the teacher to look forward by asking questions about current practices (Postholm 2009), thus improving their ‘reflective and interpreting stance towards their teaching, including reflection on the aims of education and the personal development of their pupils’ (Leeman & Wardekker 2014). This way,

research informs and undergirds reflection and collaboration as will be discussed in chapter 2.2.3.

I will first look more closely at reflective practice in teacher education, its advantages and possible challenges.

2.2.1 Reflective Practice

Reflection has developed a variety of meanings as the bandwagon has travelled through the world of practice. (Loughran 2002, p.33)

In 1910, Dewey postulated that reflective thought signifies that ‘the ground or basis for a belief is deliberately sought and its adequacy to support the belief examined. This process is called reflective thought; it alone is truly educative in value [...]’ (Dewey 1910). This connects to Opfer’s model for teacher CPD (see p.27) in which teachers’ beliefs serve as a springboard for professional learning. Schön (1987), extending on Dewey’s work, introduced three ways of reflective practice: reflection-on-action, reflection-in-action and reflection-for-action. Teachers would use reflection-on-action after a lesson. Reflection-in-action means that the reflection happens during the teaching or the action itself. Reflection-for-action on the other side includes a planning step before the next action takes place.

Scholars do agree that reflective practice is vital for the improvement of teaching and learning (Schön 1987; Altrichter et al. 2000; Loughran 2002; Korthagen 2004; Postholm 2008; Marcos Mena et al. 2011). However, while reflection is considered crucial for teacher learning, ‘there is no clarity on what reflection is’ (Clarà 2015, p.261). Clarà wonders why reflection is such a messy field, why, even with assistance, it is difficult to make teachers reflect, despite the strong theoretical foundations developed by Dewey and Schön (ibid.).

Several reasons can be listed. Clarà would claim, by quoting Dewey, that we cannot prescribe how to think reflectively since it is such an individual process (Clarà 2015). This hints at the complexity of reflective practice and its uniqueness.

A further aspect is that reflection can be reduced to technical reflection while the purpose of reflective practice was and is to support teachers in being independent thinkers rather than ‘implementing others’ knowledge in practice’. In some contexts, technical reflection is used

as a means of increasing teachers’ efficiency in delivering the curriculum, rather than, for example, building problem-solving, and self-evaluation capacities and

understandings of the effects on teaching and learning of broader social and policy contexts. (Leitch & Day 2000, p.182)

The view of the teacher as technician (Reid & O'Donoghue 2004; Hodkinson 2006; King 2016) needs a transformation in order to see the teacher holistically, including personal feelings and thoughts. Addressing teachers' beliefs and values counterbalances the technical approach to reflective practice. A study by Glenn et al. with Irish teachers demonstrated, however, the difficulty in expressing core educational values and 'how these values were lived out daily in [...] professional practice' (2012, p.9). One participant said:

Often in the telling comes something previously not articulated. It was fascinating to watch the others speak aloud their concerns and then speak their way into possible solutions to their own concerns. This is a powerful message to other teachers and researchers. The answers may come – from within you or from the group. (ibid., p.20)

Gleeson states that '[t]he professional knowledge base of teachers is grounded in their beliefs and values and these must be challenged in order for deep change to happen' (Gleeson 2012, p.11). Reflective practice can be the avenue to

facilitate a stepping back, a reading of our situated selves as if it were a text to be critically interrogated and interpreted within the broader social, political, and historical contexts that shape our thoughts and actions and constitute our world. (Pithouse et al. 2009, p.45)

Including a historical, social and political context to reflective practice, aids the reflective practitioner to become an *effective* reflective practitioner (Leitch & Day 2000). It means that the narrow, technical approach is substituted with a broader approach in which the teacher can truly reflect on attitudes, values and beliefs.

Seeing action research as a 'day-to-day reflection', teachers can 'concentrate for a specific period of time on issues that deserve close scrutiny' (Altrichter et al. 2000, p.153). Furthermore, action research

involves reflecting on the experience of practice (a process of critical discernment), deciding whether the practice was in line with your espoused values base, and then

deciding on future action as a result of the reflection. (McNiff & Whitehead 2002, p.18)

Action research and reflective practice are thus tightly linked. However, Day makes clear that teachers need support in becoming reflective practitioners. In 1993, he remarked that the widths and scope of reflection in teacher learning are not appropriately put into practice and that the subject is under-researched. He argues that

teachers will need active, planned and skilled challenge and support if they are to move from planning at the level of action (descriptive self-reflection) to the kind of practical theorising and conscious ethical justification (analytical reflection) which others suggest are necessary conditions for healthy professional self-critical, self-reflecting communities. (Day 1993, p.88)

This corresponds to the earlier point regarding reflective practitioners (using descriptive self-reflection) and effective reflective practitioners (using analytical reflection).

With regards to reflective practice in action research, it is important to acknowledge that the reflective practice undertaken in action research follows a continuum: 'Teachers may reflect in differing ways at different times' (Leitch & Day 2000, p.183). As current research shows, leading teachers towards an emancipatory stance through analytic reflective practice seems problematic. Mena Marcos and Tillema reviewed 50 studies published between 1999 and 2006 which promote reflection for teacher learning. Their conclusion was that

teachers may take the ideas on reflection presented to them as if they represented valid practices, embedded in real experiences and accompanied by evidenced appraisals. (Mena Marcos & Tillema 2006, p.33)

A way out of this situation is to pay more attention to the emotional dimension of teachers and their 'continuing inner debate between the personal and the professional, the emotional and the cognitive' (Day & Leitch 2001, p.414). Therefore, research literature on teachers' emotional labour needs to find its position in CPD since a 'disturbing neglect of the emotional dimension in the increasingly rationalized world of educational reform' is prevalent (Hargreaves 2000, p.811).

Furthermore, to make reflective practice not just a lip-service (Day 1993), authentic conversations within groups of teachers can help untangle beliefs and values held by teachers

in relation to their teaching realities. McArdle and Coutts (2010) argue, for example, that the Dewey-ian concept of reflection needs to be re-conceptualised in order to meet teacher needs. They base their work on reflective practice within *Communities of Practice* (CoP) because ‘shared reflection in a social setting involving both challenge and support is seen as a means of making reflection work better as a basis for CPD’ (McArdle & Coutts 2010, p.205).

The importance of a group or community shall be therefore addressed in the next chapter.

2.2.2 Collaboration

This chapter looks at concepts for teacher collaboration and its advantages for teacher learning. Challenges and barriers to teacher collaboration will also be discussed.

In their review of 82 studies on teacher collaboration, Vangrieken et al. came to the conclusion that the concepts concerning teacher collaboration are usually ill-defined and messy. Their definition of the term *collaboration* is kept quite broad to include the different forms of collaboration:

[...] collaboration can be defined as joint interaction in the group in all activities that are needed to perform a shared task. This concept is not static and uniform but different types of collaboration can occur with varying depths. (2015, p.23)

Hence, various concepts for teacher collaboration exist, as well as differing terminology. A professional community of practice, for example, is one way to promote professional learning that impacts on students’ learning outcomes (Timperley et al. 2007, p.xxvii). While Timperley et al. call it a professional community of practice, King (2016) describes it as a PLC, Professional Learning Community and Wenger (2000) labels it as a CoP, Community of Practice.⁴

Timperley et al. name two conditions for effective professional communities: participants ‘process new understandings and their implications for teaching [and analyse] the impact of teaching on student learning’ (Timperley et al. 2007, p.xxx).

King, by citing Bolam, refers to eight characteristics of PLCs: ‘shared values and vision; collective responsibility for students’ learning; collaboration focused on learning; individual

⁴ While this study was collaborative, it did not entail a professional community or PLC as these are based within one school. I also do not label our collaboration as a CoP. However, it shares characteristics with these forms of collaboration.

and collective professional learning; reflective professional enquiry; openness, networks and partnerships; inclusive membership; and mutual trust, respect and support' (Bolam in King 2016, p.579). PLCs are usually to be found within the school 'gathering all (or a large part) of the teachers of the school in a collaborative culture' (Vangrieken et al. 2015, p.24). Another form of collaboration are CoPs which 'can be perceived as the building blocks of PLCs' (ibid.).

Wenger names three elements of CoPs. Participants 'collectively develop [...] understanding of what their community is about, [build upon] mutual engagement [and] produce [...] a shared repertoire' (e.g. artifacts, stories, tools, styles) (Wenger 2000, p.229).

The diverse forms of collaboration can be structured in various ways. Teacher collaboration can be organised, for example, within-grade or cross-grade, disciplinary (same subject) and interdisciplinary (across subjects), temporary or longer lasting with fixed groups or more loosely assembled groups of teachers (Vangrieken et al. 2015).

An important distinction can be made by looking at the depth of teacher collaboration. In his case study, Havnes (2009, p.164) investigated teachers' utterances during their collaborative meetings. He discovered four levels of depth in teacher team talk:

- Preserving individualism: renegotiating individual autonomy and personal responsibility
- Coordination: assuring the social organisation of work
- Cooperation: creating a shared object or enterprise
- Sharing: clarifying pedagogical motives

In order to build a strong collaborative network, cooperation and a sharing culture are essential (ibid.). However, the research literature shows a 'lack of such forms of deep-level collaboration' (Vangrieken et al. 2015, p.27).

Timperley critiques this as well by saying that professional communities are not explicit about teacher and student learning.

They typically do little more than say that there were opportunities for discussion and interaction, and report that improved collaboration occurred. Indeed, the purpose of the communities in many of the studies did not seem to extend much beyond this limited function. (Timperley et al. 2007, p.201)

This highlights the importance for a clear focus on teacher learning and the improvement of student outcomes as unfocused collaboration can result in 'a sharing of 'war stories'' (ibid., p.204) rather than educational improvement.

In a Danish study, Plauborg (2009) named further hindering factors for deep collaborative learning. Teachers used collaborative meetings to discuss ‘tricks of the trade’ which ‘is a barrier to gaining a more critical and distanced view of practice, which would enable the development of a genuinely investigative approach to practice’ (Plauborg 2009, p.33). Also, the author warns that simply grouping teachers into teams does not necessarily lead to development.

In their review on teacher collaboration studies, Vangrieken et al. discovered other reasons for a resistance to effective collaboration. Firstly, ‘touching teachers’ underlying beliefs’ can be risky as it can lead to disagreement and conflict and second, a higher level of collaboration requires interdependence ‘which may conflict with teachers’ focus on autonomy’ (2015, p.27).

The resulting question hence is: what factors help teachers working collaboratively and gaining a deeper understanding of their practice resulting in more effective development? Plauborg’s result was that collaborative networks need i) a focus, ii) give teachers the possibility to observe each other and iii) then discuss and evaluate the observation (Plauborg 2009).

Furthermore, collaboration needs to be sustained over a longer period of time in order to arrive at meaningful development. Kennedy found in her study with Scottish teachers that only teachers who were given enough time could collaborate looking at ‘issues of context, values and action which are more likely to result in dynamic, progressive and potentially transformative practice’ (Kennedy 2011, p.33). She looked at 32 out of 501 interview responses in which teachers were asked which CPD activity, that they attended, they deem as successful. These 32 respondents explicitly mentioned collaboration with other teachers. The evidently small number can be explained by the fact that ‘collaborative learning is not valued by the system as much as other more conventional forms of learning’ (ibid., p.36). Among the 32 responses, Kennedy also found barriers towards strong collaboration. Interviewees mentioned the difficulty to find time to collaborate, a shared topic to enquire into, a preference of face-to-face collaboration over e-collaboration/e-learning, as well as a preference of informal learning over formal learning (Kennedy 2011). Furthermore, the author suggests ‘that teachers do not necessarily have a clear notion of what constitutes collaborative CPD’ (ibid., p.39).

A way forward to support school teachers’ collaboration, but also to mutually learn from the processes in teacher networks, is to create *landscapes of professional practice* (Wenger 1998; Wenger-Trayner et al. 2014). While Wenger and his conceptualisation of CoPs was mentioned before, in his seminal book from 1998 he also spoke about *landscapes of professional practice*. The latter offers a broader idea of CoPs, as diverse CoPs come together to investigate their

journeys and the boundaries experienced along the way (Wenger-Trayner et al. 2014). The following is an example of how such a landscape comes to life.

By the time Debbie and Lisa, two child-minders, reached the workshop venue they had turned back twice. Their worries about how they would engage with researchers, inspectors and teachers in their field, and the feeling that they wouldn't have much to contribute to the workshop process, were overwhelming. Perhaps it was our fault? As workshop organizers we obviously hadn't made it clear that it was precisely this set of concerns that made their contribution so important. (ibid.)

Creating a landscape of professional practice means to endorse practice-based learning - but from different angles. For a teacher CPD scenario, this would mean that not only teachers share their stories, but also researchers, inspectors, policy-makers etc. Each story will, according to Wenger-Trayner et al., unveil tensions due to the complexity of each journey and boundary experiences. Articulated tensions then lead to further conversations (Wenger-Trayner et al. 2014).

The experienced boundaries, despite the negative connotation, are something rather positive since '[t]hey connect communities and they offer learning opportunities' (Wenger 2000, p.233). Learning opportunities emerge because participants are 'being exposed to a foreign competency' and encounter *otherness*:

a chance to explore the edge of your competence, learn something entirely new, revisit your little truths, and perhaps expand your horizon. (ibid.)

However, the tension can also lead to problems if both communities are too far removed. Wenger exemplifies it in the following way: 'Sit for lunch by a group of high-energy particle physicists and you know about boundary' (Wenger 2000, p.232). Even though the *landscapes of professional practice* consist of different stakeholders, these different stakeholders should still be affiliated within the same field of practice.

Bruce together with five university colleagues investigated into the otherness by working with 61 teachers in a two-year collaborative action research study from which 14 case studies were generated. Teachers enquired into a subject of their choice, while the researchers worked on the school sites to 'gain insights into the types and value of collaboration' (Bruce et al. 2011, p.433). The theory of *landscapes of professional practice* fits well into the scenario of this research as everyone involved 'reflect[ed] on students, student learning and teaching as well

as [...] effective data collection and analysis strategies for classroom-based research' (ibid., p.443). Their empirical research conducted in Ontario, Canada, emphasises a range of benefits (sense of ownership teachers gained, higher commitment, increased confidence and self-efficacy, shifts in teaching perspectives and practices) as well as barriers. The barriers lie in the full time-table of professionals, geographic distances which make more regular meetings difficult to achieve and an initial lack of familiarity among group members (Bruce et al. 2011). The research team, however, overcame these barriers by implementing the following factors which they discovered through collaboration:

time to engage in professional discourse; engagement in observations of classroom practice; shared commitment, trust, and accountability; openness to university researcher support; and teacher researcher decision-making power [...]. (ibid., p.444)

Highlighting 'time to engage in professional discourse', a more academic notion, and classroom observations and resulting 'shared commitments' hints at the creation of a hybrid space. Hybrid or third spaces (Zeichner 2010) are similar to *landscapes of professional learning*, however, they are distinctly concerning schools and universities and the aim to bridge the theory-practice divide.

Third spaces involve a rejection of binaries such as practitioner and academic knowledge and theory and practice and involve the integration of what are often seen as competing discourses in new ways [...]. (Zeichner 2010, p.92)

The next chapter discusses the role of evidence-informedness in teacher education and teachers' experiences of and with otherness, meaning (academic) research.

2.2.3 Building on Evidence

Teachers engaging in evidence-informed practice was one goal of this study because

[n]either the evidence-informed nor the collaborative aspects of inquiry are, alone, sufficient in efforts to improve teaching practice in ways that also improve students' learning across broad-ranging and important educational outcomes (Sinnema et al. 2011, p.247)

For collaborative action research, supporting teachers in becoming evidence-informed is an essential step in order to create the aforementioned hybrid space. As Sinnema et al. aptly state: neither collaboration nor evidence-informed practice on its own are sufficient. It is therefore not surprising that there is a movement towards more collaboration and evidence-based or evidence-informed practice in all spheres of education. Both terms, evidence-informed and evidence-based practice, can be found in the literature. Regarding research from the UK, the terminology changed from evidence-based to evidence-informed practice as it appears as the less conflicting term (Hall 2009). Latter will be hence used throughout this chapter.

A seminal lecture on *Teaching as a Research-based Profession* was given by Hargreaves in 1996. There, he listed similarities between the teaching and medical profession: both are people-centred professions and both require years to master them. Hargreaves wants teachers to use educational terminology learnt during their training and to base their teaching on research. He calls for more collaboration among stakeholders, for an inclusion of teachers in processes and for research that is actually reaching through to and can be utilised in the classroom. This would help in transforming teachers into experts.

Expertise means not just having relevant experience and knowledge but having demonstrable competence and clear evidence to justify doing things in one way rather than another. (Hargreaves 1996)

His lecture provoked responses by authors with differing opinions on evidence in the teaching profession. Leitch and Day, for example, found Hargreaves statement problematic since

the model which [David Hargreaves] presents implicitly is one involving ‘technical’ reflection as a means of increasing teachers’ efficiency in delivering the curriculum, rather than, for example, building problem-solving, and self-evaluation capacities and understandings of the effects on teaching and learning of broader social and policy contexts. (Leitch & Day 2000, p.182)

Elliott also responded to Hargreaves’ lecture by referring back to Stenhouse’s initial call for research-based teaching. Hargreaves, in his view, defines research as the basis for practice which stands opposite to Stenhouse’s view that ‘practice is a basis for research’. By saying ‘using research means doing research’, Stenhouse catapults the process into the centre (Elliott 2001, p.572). Whereas Hargreaves centres his attention on the outcome.

Hattie's ground-breaking publication *Visible Learning* (2009) also looks at the outcome since over 52.000 studies were scrutinised to look at evidence on academic achievement of school children. Hattie investigated exclusively quantitative studies which can be seen as a limit (Terhart 2011). His vision of learning and teaching, however, combined with the meta-analyses had a powerful impact across the educational landscape (CUREE 2012; Barber & Day 2014).

Hattie requests 'to replace 'presentism', conservatism, and individualism with the longer-term school effects of those teachers who are 'evidence-informed' and who take collective responsibility for the success of our schools' (Hattie 2012, p.169).

He advocates strongly a visible learning approach summarised in his key statement *know thy impact*. His core message is that teachers become evaluators of their own classroom when using evidence-informed methods (Hattie 2012). Hattie describes his vision of teachers as *positive change agents*:

- i) Teachers share their experiences with colleagues, critique each other and plan lessons jointly.
- ii) An efficacious method is to establish data teams where teachers evaluate gathered material in a constructive way.
- iii) Hattie furthermore calls for evidence-in-action where teaching methods themselves become of secondary interest. The evidence for how good or bad a method is, is more important.

Another advocate for evidence-informed teaching is Geoff Petty who says

we do what journalists are taught to do: use multiple sources of evidence. If a method, strategy or other variable is recommended by qualitative research, has a high effect size, and is used by teachers who get exceptional value added, then it is worth a try in our own classrooms. Especially if it might fix a problem [...]. (Petty 2015)

Evidence, which the teacher can gather, can be either referred back to their own enquiry ('a bespoke, tailored resolution') or to research literature (without the 'risk of re-inventing the wheel') (Hall 2009, p.672). A scenario for evidence-informed practice and teacher research can be as follows:

Teachers [...] would engag[e] in professional inquiry in their classrooms, relat[e] this to the experience of others and research literature and policy documents through a wider inquiry, which would then inform the development and focus of the next cycle of classroom inquiry. (ibid., p.673)

Engaging in evidence-informed practice requires time on the part of the teachers. Darling-Hammond (in Hattie 2012, p.169) states that teachers who make an impact and make their students achieve well, commit 15 to 25 hours per week to action research and observation, to cooperatively plan lessons and analyse student learning with a critical stance.

By comparing the teaching hours of teachers in Ireland and Finland (one of the countries demonstrating a high level of performance in PISA⁵) shows, however, stark differences: primary teachers in Finland devote 677 hours per year to teaching, while Irish primary teachers use 1036 hours to instruct children. Respectively, secondary teachers in Finland spend 550 hours teaching, Irish secondary school teachers 735 hours.⁶ Given that Irish teachers spend more time in the classroom compared to other nations, and given the increased workload associated with evaluations and accountability measures (Conway & Murphy 2013), the chance for teachers to devote regular time to reflective and evidence-informed practice and/or collaborative enquiry is, likely, very limited.

Yet, evidence-informed practice is becoming part of teachers' lives.

[E]ducational policy in the UK, in common with that in the USA and Australia has in recent years been characterised by a drive to engage classroom teachers more fully both with and in educational research and thus to make teaching an evidence-based profession. (Borg 2007, p.731)

Ireland can be added to this list, as the Teaching Council's *Research Strategy* (2015, p.1) states: 'Research by and for teachers is essential to support their learning and practice as professionals.'

However, bridging the theory and practice divide and develop evidence-informed practice comes with its own challenges.

⁵ <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-overview.pdf> [28/04/2017]

⁶ <http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/48631419.pdf> [03/02/2017]

Bridging this gap involves bringing together discourses of both those who have researched effective teaching, in an academic sense, and those who seek, from a practitioner's perspective, to teach in ways that improve learning for students. (Sinnema et al. 2011, p.248)

Academic research is often seen by teachers as not relevant, applicable or accessible (ibid.).

Another challenge, but also a benefit, are the different discourses inherent to schools and universities.

It seemed that for these partnerships to work well it was most important that both sets of institutions acknowledged and valued the distinct but complementary contributions they each could make to the research process. (McLaughlin & Black-Hawkins 2007, p.334)

Sinnema et al. in their study with primary and post-primary teachers produced a synthesis of academic research articles about effective teaching that corresponds to student outcomes and thus targeted 'fitness of research for practitioner purposes' (2011, p.248). As a result, teachers made shifts supported by research evidence. Teachers in the study also attended a postgraduate course aiding them at becoming practitioner researchers. Due to the course, they 'developed a greater capacity to learn in and from data generated in their everyday practice' (2011, p.257). Hence, teachers' engagement in and with research, as well as their quest for evidence, could be strengthened by a team of academic researchers which promotes this form of collaborative enquiry.

The *Champion Teachers* project (Rebolledo et al. 2016) in Chile similarly shows positive effects of teachers collaborating with outside-school mentors in an action research study. In the British Council's project, teachers' view regarding research changed.

Researching in order to understand a given situation was, then, seen as key – as an important preliminary to new action, but also, potentially, as a sufficient end in itself. (ibid., p.6)

Implementing an engagement in and with research into teacher CPD can help to minimise the theory-practice divide in teacher education. The next quote strengthens this belief giving reference to the modern language classroom.

The body of literature on innovative methods in foreign language teacher education is huge and constantly growing, classroom reality seems to have remained largely unaffected [...]. (Benitt 2014, p.20)

As being evidence-informed, and teaching correspondingly, is a promising way to improve student learning (Timperley et al. 2007; Hall 2009; Petty 2009; Hattie 2012), this study embraces the notion of making research accessible for teachers, furthering their engagement in and with research to ultimately make their enquiry more rigorous and robust.

In the next chapter, I give an overview of teacher research in the Irish context to show more clearly the necessity for this research project and its focus on reflective practice, collaborative enquiry and evidence-informed practice.

2.3 Overview of Irish Teacher Research

The body of literature on teacher research in Ireland is limited. Several studies can be found on Master and Ph.D. level. At Ph.D. level, most studies concern primary school teachers' action research projects, e.g. Sullivan (2006): *A Living Theory of a Practice of Social Justice: Realising the Right of Traveller Children to Educational Equality*, McDonagh (2006): *My Living Theory of Learning to Teach for Social Justice*, Glenn (2006): *Working with collaborative projects: my living theory of a holistic educational practice* or Roche (2007): *Towards a living theory of caring pedagogy: interrogating my practice to nurture a critical, emancipatory and just community of enquiry*. These Ph.D. theses use the living theory approach (Whitehead 1989) and give a narrative account of a single teacher's critical enquiry into their primary classrooms.

Next to Ph.D. theses, Master of Education theses frequently use an action research approach. The impetus in these studies comes again from teachers enquiring into their specific educational context.

In 1994, McNiff and Collins published a book entitled *A new approach to in-career development for teachers in Ireland*. Teachers across different disciplines used an action research approach to enquire into their classroom practice and published their reflections and findings in the book.

What differentiates my study from these studies and publications is that a group of teachers, all teachers of modern languages, enquired individually but also together into their classrooms with my outside support. All teachers had their individual questions and issues, yet, the

collaborative element of teachers sharing their learning on their action research journeys was instrumental to this study. Their teacher research guided my action research. Furthermore, in contrast to the aforementioned theses, participating teachers took part without obtaining any form of accreditation in the form of a Master's or Ph.D.

Similar to my study, Glenn et al. (2012) carried out a self-study action research project with teachers coming from primary, post-primary and third level. While their study focused on educational values across disciplines and sectors, this research study focused on post-primary teachers of modern languages exclusively. This way a higher emphasis was being put on the teaching and learning of modern languages in Ireland and modern language teacher CPD.

In general, developments in the promotion of teacher research can be seen by the Teaching Council's plan to implement Cosán (see chapter 2.1.4). Addressing the complexity of teacher CPD, the Teaching Council envisages CPD to be collaborative, including professional conversations and mentoring, to include reflective practice and scholarly enquiry (Teaching Council 2016).

Changes have been made to include these elements into several initial teacher education programmes and during induction, with the long-term goal of introducing them to teacher CPD (Teaching Council 2011).

The Professional Master of Education at the National University of Ireland Galway, for example, states on their website the importance of enquiry practice and collaboration.

In recognition of the varied and changing roles for the teacher in today's schools, there is also a concern to develop skills in collegiality, team-work, inquiry based practice and whole-school evaluation [...].⁷

The National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) furthermore strengthens professional conversations between Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) and Professional Support Teams (PST) within schools.⁸ NQTs are also required to keep a portfolio and by that generate evidence of their learning and teaching.

⁷ http://www.nuigalway.ie/faculties_departments/education/ite/pme/pme.html [29/04/2017]

⁸ <http://teacherinduction.ie/en/> [29/04/2017]

[The] process of portfolio-based learning enables the NQT to reflect on their professional learning, and identify and plan for areas in which they may need further support or guidance. (Teaching Council 2016, p.5)

During initial teacher education and induction, lifelong learning is embraced to make students accustomed to looking back and reflecting but also looking forward, enquiring and planning for changes. Those skills are crucial throughout a teacher's career.

Cosán can have a great effect on teacher CPD. The implementation of the framework is planned for 2020.⁹ This qualitative study offers a first insight into collaborative action research and teachers' reactions, successes and challenges towards and with reflective practice, collaboration and evidence-informed practice.

2.4 Summary

Chapter two conceptualised effective ways of CPD by looking at teacher and teaching effectiveness, new approaches to teacher professional development as well as contextual issues interconnected with and impacting on both. Collaboration, school-embedded activities, school support and teachers as active agents are factors defining effective teacher CPD. This corresponds to Desimone's five core characteristics of professional development that show positive effects on teacher and likewise student learning: i) content focus, ii) active learning, iii) coherence, iv) duration, and v) collective participation (Desimone 2009, p.183). In other words, CPD should be subject-related, lead to active learning on the part of the teachers, be aligned with teacher beliefs and knowledge, be long-term and based on collaboration.

While not much research regarding CPD for language teachers and its effects on student achievement can be found, it needs to be acknowledged that the language classroom is an important place for CPD. Research stemming from other subjects might not be able to correspond to the narrative ways of knowledge present in modern language teaching and teacher learning (see p.15).

Practitioner research is seen as a means to address the research gap for modern language CPD by building on reflective practice, collaborative enquiry and evidence-informed practice.

⁹ <http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/Teacher-Education/Continuing-Professional-Development/> [30/04/2017]

Instead of Hargreaves' appeal to transform teachers into experts (see p.38), I saw this collaborative action research project as a form of building on several strands of expertise and learning from each others' perspectives.

After laying the contextual foundation of this research, the following chapter makes more explicit the methodological framework by considering this study's paradigm, methodology and methods.

Chapter 3

Methodological Framework

Action researchers are proposing to document what can seem like a moving train where they are both passengers as well as part of the train crew. Much as with a train ride, researchers are capturing the process as well as narrating an ultimate destination. (Herr & Anderson 2015, p.90)

When I explored action research as a methodology at the beginning of my journey, I struggled with questions related to “the paradigm”. The *Oxford Dictionary* would define a paradigm as ‘[a] world view underlying the theories and methodology of a particular scientific subject’.¹⁰ From my readings, it appeared unclear whether action research was perhaps itself a paradigm that, as proposed by Pine ‘reflects the principle that reality is constructed through individual and collective conceptualizations and definitions of a particular situation requiring a wide spectrum of research methodologies’ (Pine 2009, p.30). However, Somekh (1995) calls action research a methodology; Dick (2002) a family of methodologies and Koshy et al. (2011) a method. Carr points out that action research is neither a methodology nor a paradigm but ‘[r]ather [...] nothing other than a post-modern manifestation of the pre-modern Aristotelian tradition of practical philosophy’ (Carr 2006, p.433).

After much reading, searching and philosophical discussions, I settled in a pragmatist-participatory paradigm (chapter 3.2). My methodology is action research (chapter 3.3) and my methods for data collection entail amongst others interviews, observations and reflective writings (chapter 3.4).

Furthermore, strategies from grounded theory and narrative enquiry helped me in analysing the gathered data (chapter 3.5). Because the traditional research criteria of validity, reliability and objectivity need to be adapted for this qualitative action research study, I will discuss criteria that guarantee research quality in this study and demonstrate how I apply them (chapter 3.6).

First, however, I need to make clear what my philosophical and theoretical assumptions are that support my choice in using action research. Chapter 3.1 outlines my ontological and epistemological beliefs underpinning this research.

¹⁰ <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/paradigm> [04/03/2017]

3.1 Ontological and Epistemological Foundations

What guided me throughout the research process were epistemological and ontological beliefs. Ontology raises questions regarding the known world and how we see it (subjectively or objectively). Epistemology asks about the relationship between the researcher and the world (or the research subject) and what we know about it. With methodology, a researcher wants to find the best way to gain more knowledge about that world (Denzin & Lincoln 2008). Creswell adds to this axiological (What is the role of values?) and rhetorical (What is the language of research?) assumptions (Creswell 2007). The following adapted table gives an overview of the different assumptions underpinning this study with their characteristics and implications for practice. I added a fourth column which shows how I apply these assumptions in this study.

Assumptions	Characteristics	Implications for practice	Aims of this study
Ontological	Reality is subjective and multiple.	Researcher uses quotes and themes in the words of participants and provides evidence of different perspectives.	Teachers' voices are as important as my voice. Their reality is based in the school context. Working within their reality to improve their teaching is the aim.
Epistemo-logical	Researcher attempts to lessen the distance between himself or herself and the subject being researched.	Researcher collaborates, spends time in the field with participants, and becomes an "insider".	Instead of being solely the provider of CPD, I observe teachers, address with them issues during the enquiry and let them co-create the study.

Methodo-logical	Researcher uses inductive logic, studies the topic within its context, and uses an emerging design.	Researcher works with particulars (details) before generalisations, describes in detail the context of the study, and continually revises questions from experiences in the field.	A constant iterative enquiry leads me to new questions which lead to further actions.
Axiological	Researcher acknowledges that research is value-laden and that biases are present.	Researcher openly discusses values that shape the narrative and includes his or her own interpretation in conjunction with the interpretations of the participants.	Both participants and myself write reflectively throughout the enquiry project. Values and biases are addressed during interviews and group meetings as well.
Rhetorical	Researcher writes in a literary, informal style using the personal voice and uses qualitative terms and limited definitions.	Researcher uses an engaging style of narrative, may use the first-person pronoun, and employs the language of qualitative research.	The centrality of 'I' as mentioned before needs to shine through at all times. Writing narratively about participants also helps to lessen the distance between the reader and the teachers in this study.

Table 3.1: Philosophical assumptions with implications for practice. Table adapted from Creswell 2007, p.17

I next need to investigate the concrete worldview or the paradigm underlying this research that fits my epistemological and ontological beliefs.

3.2 A Pragmatist-Participatory Paradigm

‘[M]ultiple theoretical paradigms’ have been suggested for qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln 2008, p.8) which increases richness and possibilities but can also make it feel as if one is looking through an opaque glass. Education borrows methodologies, for instance, from psychology and sociology, it uses traditional (e.g. positivism, empiricism) and non-traditional paradigms (e.g. interpretivism, subjectivism, constructivism) and mixes them to best suit the research field in such a way that Guba and Lincoln speak about ‘interbreeding’ and Geertz about the ‘blurring of genres’ (Guba & Lincoln in Denzin & Lincoln 2008, p.256).

Denzin and Lincoln, in their 2000 edition of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, acknowledged that

[i]ndeed, the various paradigms are beginning to “interbreed” such that two theorists previously thought to be in irreconcilable conflict may now appear, under a different theoretical rubric, to be informing one another’s argument. [...] Consequently, to argue that it is paradigms that are in contention is probably less useful than to probe where and how they exhibit differences, controversies, and contradictions. (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p.164)

Because of similarities to the participatory/advocacy paradigm, I do position my research within this paradigm, but also within a pragmatist worldview. On their own neither paradigm represent and reflect my study and worldview completely. A combination of both - namely a pragmatist-participatory paradigm - captures more reliably my philosophical approach. Hence, I do take advantage of the freedom to interbreed paradigms and would argue that there is no overall best paradigm. With the next table, I want to illustrate which aspects of pragmatism and of a participatory/advocacy paradigm apply and do not apply to this research.

	Pragmatism		Participatory/Advocacy
In this study	I am first and foremost guided by my research question and context and I take the freedom to choose and mix methods, techniques, and procedures of research that	In this study	I focus on bringing about <i>change</i> in teaching and learning practices.

	best meet my needs and purposes.		
	I am not committed to any one system of philosophy or reality.		I use a dialectical, emancipatory and collaborative approach. It is enquiry completed “with” others rather than “on” or “to” others. I engage the participants to be active collaborators in this study.
	I do not see the world as one absolute unity. Truth is what works at the time; it is not based on dualism between reality independent of the mind or within the mind.		the “voice” of the participants becomes heard throughout the research process.
	I will focus on the practical implications of the research, and will emphasize the importance of conducting research that best addresses the research problem.		
This study does not intend to	use a mixed method approach which is often the case when employing the pragmatist worldview.	This study does not intend to	unshackle people from constraints of irrational and unjust structures that limit self-development and self-determination.
			create a political debate or discussion leading to change.
			advance an action agenda for change.
			help individuals to free themselves from constraints found in the media, in language, in work procedures, and in the relationship of power in educational settings.

Table 3.2: Characteristics of a pragmatist-participatory world view. Adapted from Creswell 2007, pp.21

While many aspects of the participatory/advocacy paradigm refer to the way I see my research, it adopts a rather political stance. However, I do not need to free or unshackle modern language teachers, but rather work together with them towards a different way of professional learning. There is the momentum of igniting change, but it is a lower-key version compared to other research founded within this paradigm. My aim is to empower teachers to reinvent practices and improve them, to speak about their educational values and how these might stand in contrast to their practice. Because the participants could make an impact on the progress and content of this study, it is crucial to include a participatory philosophy. In participatory research, ‘stakeholders and researchers together co-create knowledge that is realistic and pragmatically useful and is rooted in local understandings’ (Hawkins 2015, p.467). To ‘embrace participatory approaches to adult learning and development’ means to cater for ‘inclusion, democracy, and respect for local knowledge emanating from lived experience of the specific context and culture’ (Wood & McAteer 2017, p.2).

Pragmatism adds to this as it

situates learning and knowing as active social practices of constructing and enacting truths, and sees the human condition as one of engaging in inquiry to continually make sense of the world, a view particularly suited to Action Research inquiry. (Stark 2014, p.89)

As mentioned before, it is not the intention of this research to find or generate one truth. Rather, I aimed to engage in an ongoing dialogue embedded in a specific, complex, dynamic and changing context. Rosiek states that pragmatism assumes an ‘ontology of the future’ (Rosiek 2013, p.692). This means that an inherent constant reflection of our realities leads to questions - new questions, evolving questions.

This means that what we know is tentative or fallible for it has been created in particular circumstances to meet particular ends and to express particular values. (Hammond 2013, p.607)

Authors of mixed methods studies point out pragmatism’s advantages (see for example Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004; Heinz 2011), as do authors committed purely to qualitative research (Flanagan 2015). Some authors argue that pragmatism’s contribution to qualitative research is ‘largely underutilized’ (Klenke 2008, p.26). *Utilizing* a pragmatist philosophy agrees with the action research approach taken in this study. The advantages of pragmatism

for action researchers are to pose questions about our realities and to challenge us to consider and examine the consequences from our research.

In summary, after much searching and scrutinising, I built the philosophical foundation for this study on the pillars of pragmatist and participatory approaches to create a mixed pragmatist-participatory paradigm.

3.3 Action Research as Methodology

Action research does not treat people as objects for research but encourages people to work together as knowing subjects and agents of change and improvement. (Kemmis & McTaggart 1988, p.22)

This quote by Kemmis and McTaggart illustrates the reason why action research is my own methodology and why I find the methodology beneficial for modern language teachers' professional development. From being a provider of top-down CPD models where teachers only received information and tips and tricks for the classroom, I wanted to cater for a collaboration that leads to sustainable CPD rather than quick fixes. Action research might not lead to an immediate solution. The immanent ongoing, nonlinear process it entails, however, seems appropriate for teacher professional learning – which is equally ongoing and nonlinear.

In the following, I would like to give a more extensive account of action research as my research methodology.

After a general introduction to action research (chapter 3.3.1), I will name key elements of educational action research that will be employed in my study (chapter 3.3.2), as well as two specific action research models: one framing my own action research, the other the teachers' action research (chapter 3.3.3).

3.3.1 Brief Overview of Influential Scholars

The next table provides an overview of scholars and ideas that informed and most significantly impacted on my understanding of and approach to action research.

Name	Main idea	View on theory and practice	Products of action research	Influential quotes
Lewin 1940s	professional researcher carries out projects with a certain group	more technical, positivist approach (Somekh 1995)	‘Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice.’ (Lewin 1946, p.35)	‘[P]rogress will depend largely on [...] deeper insight into the laws which govern social science.’ (Lewin 1945, p.35)
Stenhouse 1970s	teachers research their own practice with the help of an external researcher who initiates the focus for the research	research is a contributing factor to practice (regarding curriculum development)	‘[R]esearch becomes part of a community of critical discourse. But perhaps too much research is published to the world, too little to the village.’ (Stenhouse 1981, p.111)	‘The basic argument for placing teachers at the heart of the educational research process may be simply stated. Teachers are in charge of classrooms.’ (Stenhouse 1981, p.109)
Elliott late 1970s	teacher as researcher with their own initial concern	reciprocal relationship between theory and practice	practical wisdom; situational understanding; Not a ‘process of private ‘navel gazing’ or personal ‘therapy’ (Elliott 2015, p.15).	‘[T]eaching is an ethical practice, rather than simply a making activity.’ (Elliott 2015, p.6)
Schön 1980s	Reflection-in-action Reflection-on-action	Distance to technical rationality; new epistemology based on practitioner’s reflection	‘[...] generation of actionable knowledge in the form of models or prototypes that can be carried over [...]’ (Schön 1995, p.34).	‘We should think about practice as a setting not only for the application of knowledge but for its generation.’ (Schön 1995, p.29)

Carr & Kemmis 1980s	becoming critical within a group	‘[A]ction research can bridge the gap between research and practice’ (Carr & Kemmis 1986, p.188). communities of teacher researchers who develop educational knowledge	to bring about change; including external conditions	‘The problems of education are not simply problems of achieving known ends; they are problems of acting <i>educationally</i> in social situations which typically involve competing values and complex interactions between different people [...]’ (Carr & Kemmis 1986, p.180, italics in original).
Somekh 1990s	AR is learning situated in working experience	‘Action researchers who read are enriching their experience, and a productive part of that reading will be the work of other action researchers’ (Somekh 1995, p.352).	‘[F]indings of action research are fed back directly into practice with the aim of bringing about change’ (Somekh 1995, p. 341). practical wisdom, situational understanding; oral and written reports	‘My first experience was of the power of action research to transform my understanding of my work as a teacher; and of how it enabled me to give my students more empowering and engaging experiences of learning [...]’ (Somekh 2006, pp.9-10).
Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1990s	teachers develop <i>inquiry as stance</i> ; knowledge needed by teachers should not	Teachers ‘theorize practice as part of practice itself’ (Cochran-	‘We have proposed four categories as a working typology of teacher research: teachers' journals, brief and book-length essays, oral inquiry processes,	‘The term inquiry as stance [signifies] the idea of inquiry as perspectival and conceptual [...] as a worldview and a habit of mind [...] that links

	solely come from outside researchers	Smith & Lytle 2015); challenge to university culture; conceptual blurring of theory and practice	and classroom studies' (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1990, p.3).	individuals to larger groups and social movements [...] (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2015).
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Table 3.3: Overview of influential scholars in the field of action research

The table highlights a more technical approach to action research under Lewin in which the outside researcher played a crucial role. Stenhouse then placed the focus onto processes in the classroom. His aim was to improve curricular-related issues and questions. In Elliot's adaptation of action research, teachers start out with their own issue or problem which can reside outside curricular-related topics. A new epistemology was created with Schön's view of action research highlighting the importance of reflective practice, thus clearly distancing himself from a technical approach to action research. Carr and Kemmis bring another dimension into action research as a methodology of change. They see action researchers as able and responsible to ignite change in society should they encounter injustice or inequality. Somekh speaks about the empowerment she experienced as a teacher action researcher. Her principles of action research will be discussed in the next chapter. Finally, Cochran-Smith and Lytle, also two former teachers, coined the phrase "inquiry as stance". Teachers adopt an enquiry stance throughout their career and are able to theorise about their own practise without having to enter a differing academic discourse.

This very brief overview of the most influential scholars and their approaches points at impulses for my work. The reading of their work made me come to conclusions of how to view and approach action research. Keywords stemming from the above are: the researcher as an outsider participant, classroom enquiry, reflective practice, change and transformation, empowerment and teacher professional discourse. I associated these foundational readings with my study but explicitly chose Somekh's eight methodological principles of action research and give next a reason why her principles resonated most with my understanding of action research in this study.

3.3.2 Somekh's Eight Methodological Principles of Action Research

Somekh's principles of action research guided my overall approach on the action research journey. They mirror the expectations and goals I set for the project. Her professional background also resonates with my own and my participants': Somekh was a teacher first, but through her interest and dedicated work in action research became Professor of Educational Research at Manchester Metropolitan University. She accompanied many school-based action research projects across the world and in the UK. Hence, she combines a teacher-researcher perspective with action research principles that are practice-approved. In the next part I will explain these principles.

The first principle assumes that AR integrates action and research.

Somekh (2006) describes a holistic view in which action is just as important as an engagement in and with research.

Support for this statement comes from several researchers. Dick (2002) proposes that it does not matter how much action or how much research is involved. He argues that the relative weight of action and research cannot and should not be specified in a sound action research project. Rather the aim is to gain enough knowledge to act with awareness and understanding regarding an issue discovered in class. Nonetheless, Dick emphasises that it is pivotal for both parts to meet quality criteria; research should not become the neglected stepchild (Dick 2002).

Others state that '[w]ithout an effective synthesis [of action and research], action research would remain a strange outsider in the world of research' (Blichfeldt & Andersen 2006). Pine also concludes after working for several years with teacher researchers, that a review of existing literature in the area of study is essential (Pine 2009, p.249).

Somekh's second principle says that action research is conducted by a collaborative partnership of researchers and participants.

The collaboration can be between university teachers and school teachers, between school teachers and their students, or, as in my case, between a doctoral student and modern language teachers, as well as between the modern language teachers and their students. A critical issue is the issue of power relations, particularly when a teacher conducts research with/about a class (students and/or minors) (see chapter 4.5). An ethical conduct of research is key and the research aim needs to be transparent to all involved.

The third principle states that action research means a development of knowledge and understanding that is unique.

The positionality of myself as the researcher and my participants regarding being insider(s) and outsider(s) can be confusing at first sight but produces knowledge that ‘gives access to kinds of knowledge and understanding that are not accessible for traditional researchers coming from outside’ (Somekh 2006, p.7).

Knowledge that is created is distinct to the research setting (Herr and Anderson 2015). The outsider(s) gain(s) insight through working with the insider(s).

Principle number four embraces a vision for social transformation and social justice for all.

Researchers are committed to investigating issues or problems in their very own context and work life. They ‘construct themselves as agents able to access the mechanisms of power in a social group or institution and influence the nature and direction of change’ (Somekh 2006, p.7). Accessing the mechanisms of power can be accomplished by reporting on the research carried out. This can happen during internal school in-service days, workshops, conferences or publication via blogs, journals etc. Change can happen because teachers can act upon the evidence they collected in their cycles. However, Somekh warns that we should not approach action research naively, thinking we can change the world in a heartbeat. ‘[But action research] orients [teachers] to move the change process forward as positively as possible while increasing understanding of whatever limitations may arise’ (ibid.).

Principle number five names reflexivity as a key element in action research.

‘The self of the researcher can be best understood as intermeshed with others through webs of interpersonal and professional relationships that co-construct the researcher’s identity’ (Somekh 2006, p.7). Somekh’s view on reflexivity adds to the definition of dialectical interplay mentioned in chapter 2.2.1. Reflexivity is central in untangling webs of personal and professional relationships.

Somekh’s sixth principle declares that existing knowledge should be consumed critically.

Teachers as researchers will read widely to see which knowledge already exists about a certain topic but will not blindly implement teaching methods or strategies without doing their part as researchers before, during and after an enquiry cycle - meaning to reflect, collect and analyse data (Somekh 2006).

Principle number seven asserts that action research generates powerful learning.

[B]ecause of the focus on their practice, action research also necessarily involves powerful personal-professional learning for the participant-researchers about the impact of their own assumptions and practices on work outcomes and relationships with colleagues. (Somekh 2006, p.8)

This statement corresponds with the importance of critically reflecting and discussing teacher beliefs and practices in a CPD setting (see chapter 2.1.1).

Lastly, Somekh emphasises that action research locates the enquiry in an understanding of broader historical, political and ideological contexts.

Combining insider and outsider knowledge, for example knowledge from school teachers and university lecturers, can lead to an understanding of different sides and perspectives. Collaboration leads to a ‘broader perspective, not necessarily because outsiders bring specialist knowledge but because insiders are necessarily constrained in their analysis of the larger framework in which the site of study is located by being enmeshed in its institutional culture and assumptions’ (Somekh 2006, p.8).

The table below combines Somekh’s principles and their application for this research study.

Somekh’s principles	Achievement goals for this research study
<i>AR integrates action and research.</i>	My aim to bridge the gap between third level research and second level reality is therefore an aspect that can be tackled with action research. The picture of teachers not only engaged in research (reading relevant literature) but also with research (data gathering and analysis) emerges.
<i>AR is conducted by a collaborative partnership of researchers and participants.</i>	Since I am affiliated with the School of Education in the National University of Ireland Galway and the leading researcher of the study, a partnership with teachers of modern languages in secondary schools was established.
<i>AR means a development of knowledge and understanding that is unique.</i>	In my case, the relationship is reciprocal: While I am the insider for action research methodology, the teachers are the insiders of their work environment. We are both insiders and outsiders. A collaboration opens up a dialogue through which the researcher

	and participants learn from each other and become aware of aspects relating to professional learning.
<i>AR embraces a vision for social transformation and social justice for all.</i>	In this research study, teachers come together during group meetings to share their enquiry journey, talk about their beliefs and teaching practices. It gives them the chance to explore issues more deeply with the help of group members, myself and an engagement with research literature. I will also support them in looking at avenues to publish outcomes of their enquiry to inform a wider audience about (pressing) issues in modern language classrooms.
<i>Reflexivity is a key element in action research.</i>	Reflexivity helps me as researcher to become aware of role conflicts during the collaboration with the teachers in this study. I reflect on my own teaching philosophy and values to see how they influence the collaboration. Teachers on the other hand, also write reflectively to come to terms with their own educational values.
<i>Existing knowledge should be consumed critically.</i>	For example, before a teacher in this study uses a new method to present vocabulary, the teacher needs to look critically at existing research and test the claims made by the new method against his/her own data collected and analysed.
<i>AR generates powerful learning.</i>	The aim of this collaboration is to find different avenues to teacher learning than the one-off workshops and conferences which are prevalent in the landscape of modern language teacher CPD in Ireland. If and how powerful learning happens will be investigated from my own and my participants' perspective.
<i>AR locates the enquiry in an understanding of broader historical, political and ideological contexts.</i>	I as the outsider in this research project adopt a macro and a micro view. With a micro view, I look at improving teaching practice together with teachers within their classrooms. A macro view includes all layers surrounding teacher effectiveness, namely teaching and school effectiveness and the national educational context (see chapter 2.1).

Table 3.4: Somekh's principles in relation to this study's aspirations

Next, I will introduce two models of action research. One model refers to my own action research cycles (Zuber-Skerritt & Perry 2002) and the other to the teachers' (Altrichter et al. 2000). Latter is followed by a closer look at the strategies I implemented in the work with the participants of this study.

3.3.3 Two Models for Action Research

The first model for action research specifically aims at the action research Ph.D. or Master's thesis. Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002) state that the Ph.D. student as action researcher pursues two goals: to understand the situation in a group but to also contribute knowledge to a wider academic community about this group. The thesis action research project consists of a workgroup (in my case my supervisor and exchanges with fellow Ph.D. students) and aims at 'fulfilling the conventional requirements of theses' (ibid., p.175). The cycles of thesis research, the core action research project and the thesis writing are visualised in figure 3.1 below.

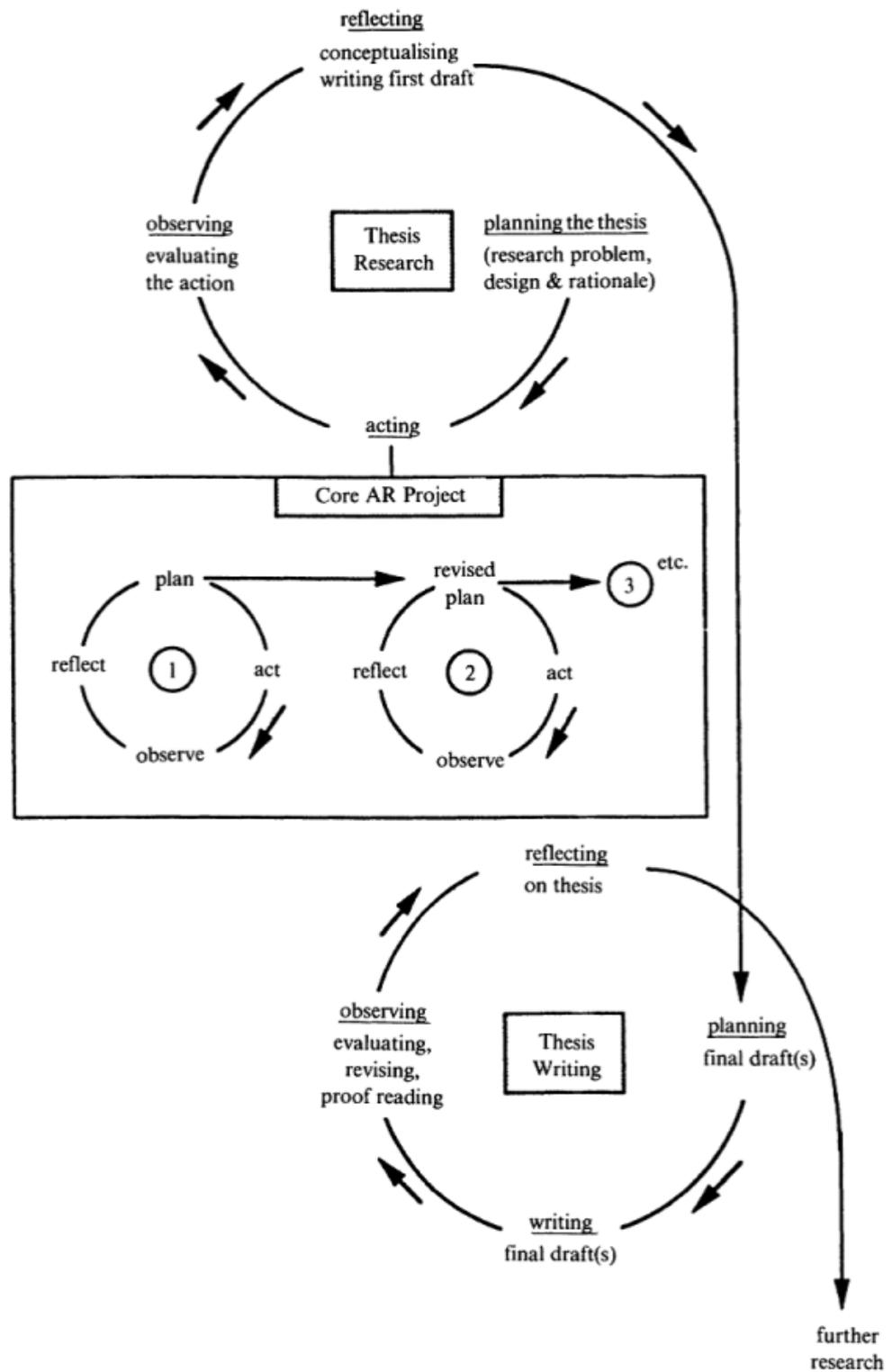


Figure 3.1: Relationship between thesis research, core action research and thesis writing, Zuber-Skerritt & Perry 2002, p.177

In the first meeting with the teachers, I used Altrichter et al.'s action research model because it presents teachers with a clear and comprehensive explanation of what action research is and

frees them from possible fears when entering the field of research. In their handbook, Altrichter et al. wrote reassuring passages such as:

The key to being a good researcher is not, however, just a matter of acquiring skills; it is important to understand the research process as an art to be continuously perfected rather than a set of procedures that can be applied unproblematically. There is never one clear, right answer to matters relating to human behaviour, and research into social situations always involves uncovering the unexpected. To be a good action researcher you need to learn how to reflect on what you do, speculate on the possible implications of every situation, and generate theories to be tested in action. (Altrichter et al. 2008, p.8)

With the model, I had a visual support while explaining the action research concept and teachers a guideline on how to carry out action/teacher research. Rather than making explicit the spiral character of action research, Altrichter et al.'s model describes clear steps.

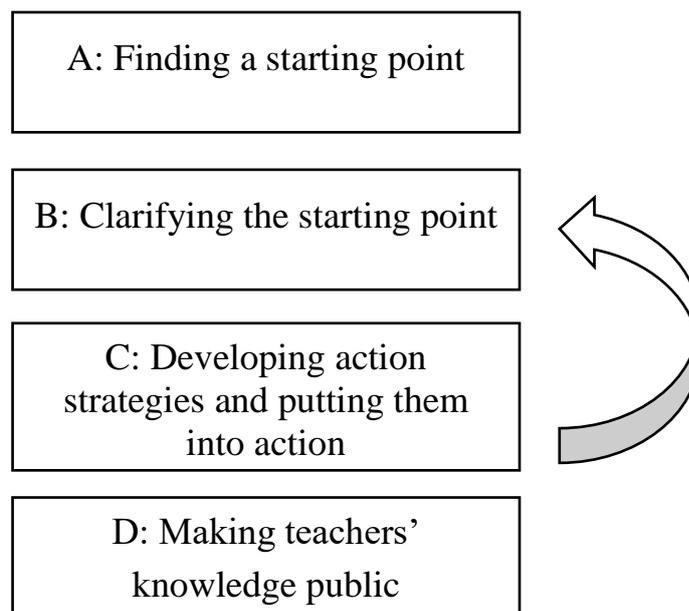


Figure 3.2: Altrichter et al.'s (2000) action research model

Somekh finds Altrichter et al.'s diagram most useful as '[i]t has the advantage that it does not create an artificial divide between data collection, data analysis and interpretation, but incorporates some aspects of all of these in at least three of the four stages [...]' (Somekh 1995, p.343).

I combined the model with Altrichter et al.'s nine steps from their book *Teachers Investigate Their Work* (2008). I picked these steps because Altrichter et al. identified them through their work with teachers. Hence, they are tested in the field, they concern teachers and are neither incomprehensible, theory-laden or over-burdening for novice (teacher) researchers. It is important to emphasise that the steps are not to be understood as sequences but rather as interrelating procedures (Altrichter et al. 2009, p.8).

- 1) Identify a research group
- 2) Identify collaborating research partners
- 3) Keep a record of research activities
- 4) Decide on the starting point for your research and begin investigating
- 5) Clarify starting point
- 6) Collect data systematically
- 7) Analyse data
- 8) Develop action strategies and put them into practice
- 9) Make your research public

During the first meeting with teachers, I connected these nine steps with the model above. I made clear that we were taking step 1 and 2: we had found our research group and collaborating research partners. During the same meeting, I showed teachers possible ways to write reflectively as one avenue to record their research activity. We also discussed starting points/issues they would like to investigate.

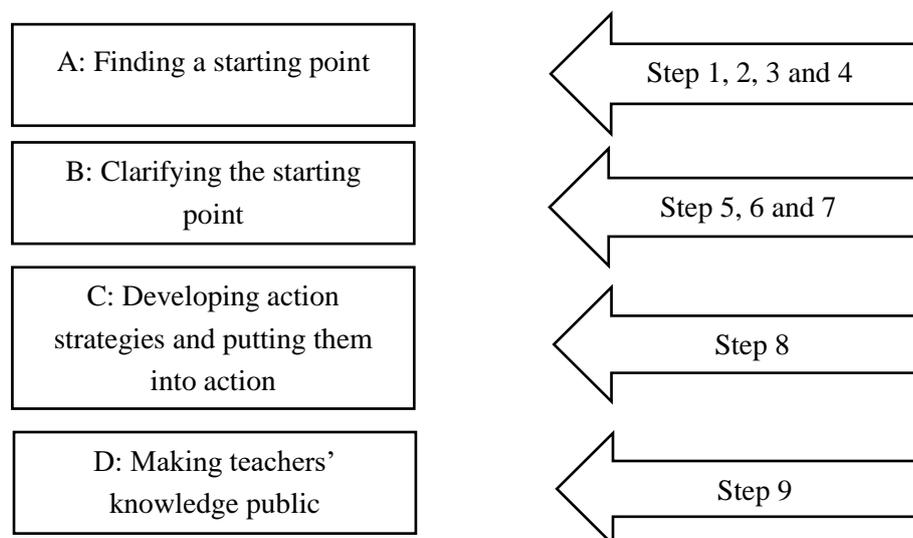


Figure 3.3: Action research model combined with nine steps of doing action research (Altrichter et al. 2000; 2008)

Having spoken about principles of action research that guided me in my work with the teachers and having shown the action research model directing the steps teachers were encouraged to follow throughout their investigations, I now turn to the methods I used to collect data concerning teachers' enquiries.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

After identifying my research need (How to support teachers enquiring into their modern language classrooms), I had to find appropriate methods that would assist the investigation. I had to keep the following aspects in mind when choosing the methods for data collection:

- The school year is busy. Ideally, methods are used which do not interfere too much with teachers' timetables.
- There will be an ongoing interaction between the teachers and myself as they are active participants in the research process and influence that process.
- I not only collect data but create spaces for participants to reflect and discuss professional learning.
- I do research with the participants, not on them.

I believe that the methods chosen helped in understanding teachers' classrooms and their professional learning needs to then give appropriate support for their professional learning throughout the year.

The next sub-chapters depict the different procedures I used to gain data throughout the action research process (see figure 3.4). Each method will be discussed in terms of their general features, strengths and weaknesses.

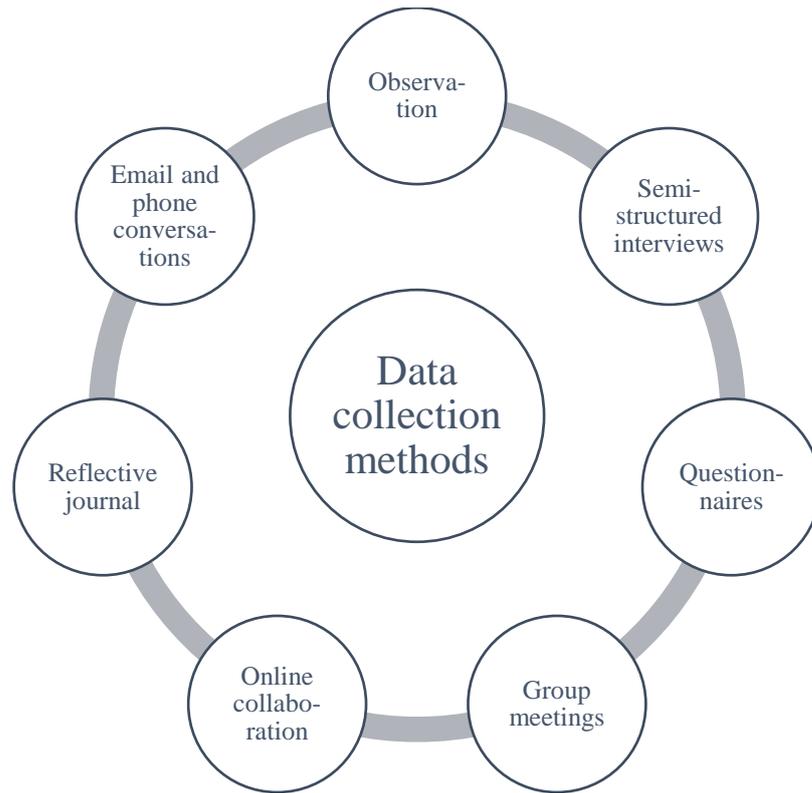


Figure 3.4: Visual overview of data collection methods

I used these methods at different stages during the school year. The following chart shows a timeline of the research project with key stages that comprise of the methods observation, interview, group meetings, questionnaires and the overall participation rate. The methods online collaboration, email and phone conversations and reflective writing were methods used throughout the year. Each stage will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.3.

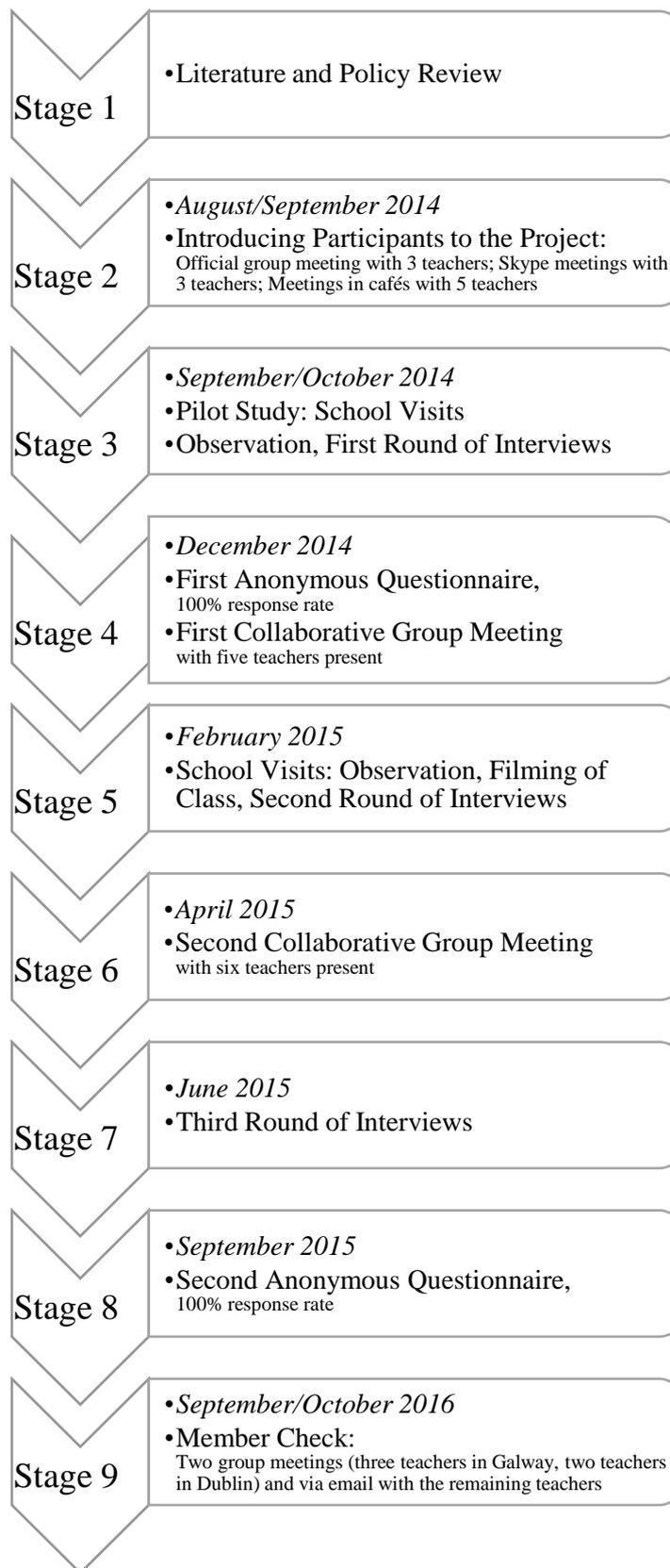


Figure 3.5: Time frame of study with different stages

3.4.1 Reflective Journal Writing

When talking about the reflective journal (from researcher and teachers), it is important to begin with what it means to be a reflective teacher and what constitutes fruitful reflection in general. In chapter 2.2.1, I wrote about fruitful reflective practice as reflection on teachers' own practices including a critical examination of beliefs and values. I will now look briefly at ways to reflect. There are different options: writing a journal, a blog or simply thinking. Clarà states that

[a]lthough there is broad agreement that reflection is crucial for teacher education and teaching improvement and change, there is also, at the same time, similarly broad agreement that there is no clarity on what reflection is. (Clarà 2015, p.261)

Reflective writing was chosen as a method for data collection as it 'can promote and demonstrate reflective thinking' (McClanahan 2008, p.107). The participants in this study were introduced to Altrichter, Posch & Somekh's (2000) guide for reflective journal writing (see appendix A). Teachers were asked to write about feelings, reactions, interpretations, reflections, ideas and explanations, to describe situations and interpret situations in a balanced manner. Throughout the project I recognised and respected the personal nature of reflective practice. I therefore made it voluntary for teachers to share their reflective writing with me. Because reflective writing is personal, I did not prescribe how it is to be done, when and where. I believe that teachers can only be given recommendations. I did not want to put them under pressure or encourage them to write things I might like to hear. This is a common problem wherever reflective writing is used as a tool for assessment (Hobbs 2007).

Becoming a reflective writer myself, I found that I adapted my own recommendations given to the teachers to fit my personal liking. I did not follow precisely Altrichter et al.'s guideline for reflective writing. The same happened to participants in the study. None of the teachers used the guidelines but each found their own way of reflecting, either by thinking, talking or writing. Chapter 6.3.1 will scrutinise the topic of reflective writing/practice more deeply.

3.4.2 Online Collaboration

Before the study took off, I started working on a wiki using the free software PBworks. The wiki was our

collaborative online space where knowledge is presented, edited and accepted by those creating the wiki in a style that is open, accessible and responsive to change. (Morley 2012, p.261)

This allowed the teachers to be contributors rather than recipients (ibid.). Even though I was the main administrator of the site, teachers were invited to create the wiki with me. The main site appeared like this:

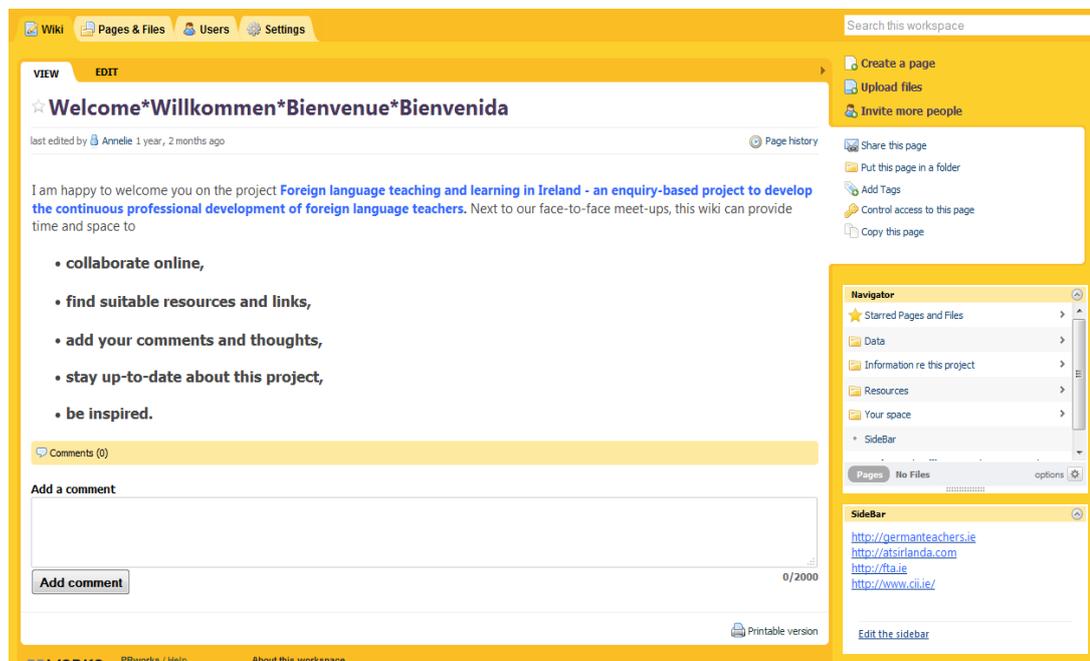


Image 3.1: Welcome page on PBworks

Technology supported ‘many new opportunities and capabilities for data collection and documentation, theory and analysis’ (Fischer et al. 2016, p.613). Technology, in this case the online software PBworks, had an impact on i) communication, ii) representation and iii) storage:

- i) ‘to gather, disseminate and exchange information’,
- ii) ‘to describe, model and visualise information’ and
- iii) ‘to retain and retrieve information’ (ibid.)

I invited participating teachers to log on and to use this site as a tool for the exchange of ideas, to upload content, to see what the other teachers are working on and to stay in touch (i).

I created folders entitled data (how to collect data, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups), information regarding this project (newspaper articles, updates on meetings), resources (Bloom's taxonomy, differentiation, new approaches, target language use, journal articles, websites on foreign language teaching) and one folder with the name 'your space' (ii). Here, teachers were asked to upload their research question, material they found important and material I uploaded into their folder as well. PBworks has a comment option which made leaving opinions, ideas or general notes after reading for example an article, possible (i).

The website had options to keep the project organised and transparent to everybody. I wrote down all the school visit and group meeting dates. Teachers were able to retrieve sample consent forms and project information (iii).

The strength of online collaboration, especially for this study, was that teachers living in different counties throughout Ireland could stay connected with each other and with me. A weakness, however, lies with the uptake of the offer to collaborate online. This will be further discussed in chapter 6.1.3.

3.4.3 Semi-structured Interviews

Another data collection tool for this study was the semi-structured interviews I conducted with the modern language teachers (see interview schedule on p.65). Semi-structured means that I did prepare questions beforehand but that the interviewee's responses could lead to additional questions or to the decision to leave some out. Conducting the interviews was crucial as they allowed for a 'detailed insight into the research issues from the perspective of the study participants themselves' (Hennink 2010, p.109).

Usually, I met the teachers face-to-face for interviews right after observing their teaching. In one case, time did not permit a meeting and the teacher sent her answers to my questions via email.

Kvale suggested ten qualities an interviewer has to have in order to carry out sound interviews.

1. Knowledgeable: Has an extensive knowledge of the interview theme without attempting to shine with his or her knowledge.

2. Structuring: Introduces the purpose of the interview, outlines in passing and rounds off the interview in a structuring manner.
3. Clear: Poses clear, simple and short questions.
4. Gentle: Allows participants to finish what they are saying, etc.
5. Sensitive: Engages in active listening, trying to get a hold of the fine nuances.
6. Open: Hears which aspects of the interview topic are important for the participant.
7. Steering: Is persistently aware of what he or she wants to know more about.
8. Critical: Does not take everything at face value, but continually tests the reliability and validity of the participant's statements.
9. Remembering: Retains what was said earlier and perhaps asks later for elaboration.
10. Interpreting: Manages throughout to clarify and extend the meanings of the interviewee's statements, which may then be confirmed or disconfirmed by the interviewee

(Kvale in Brinkmann 2007, p.137)

Before meeting the teachers, I went through each interview with my critical friend/supervisor to make sure the structure makes sense, the questions are clear and open-ended. While I was trying to use active listening skills, I was nervous during the first round of interviews and unnecessarily rushed through questions which could have been extended. I was so occupied with following my script and listening to what was said, that the latter was not explored enough. I have to admit that I still found it difficult during the third round of interviews to interpret answers right in the moment and 'clarify and extend the meanings [...] of the statements' (Kvale in Brinkmann 2007, p.137). Kvale also mentions the asymmetry that plays a role in interviewer-interviewee relationship. He speaks of faked friendships and exploitation of trust (Kvale 2006). While I did not fake friendliness towards the participants, I was aware of the fact that steering through an interview is different from a normal conversation: I was collecting data. Regarding the qualities remembering (9) and interpreting (10), I felt relieved to have three interview rounds in total and a final member check. Since it was not easy 'to understand the world from the subjects' points of view and to unfold the meaning of their lived world' (Kvale 2006, p.481) on the spot, I could clarify and extend certain aspects through follow-up questions at a later stage.

While I did gain 'access to the 'real' and 'authentic' perceptions, sentiments and accounts' of teachers (May 1996, p.190), I also realised that being an interviewer is based on a skill set that is gradually learned.

3.4.4 Questionnaires

Questionnaires are a popular form of data collection, ‘perhaps because it appears easy’ (Pawar 2004, p.21). The difficulty lies however in the construction of the questions. Questions need to be asked which ideally lead to answers that further my investigation, clarify certain aspects and give an insight regarding teachers’ research progress. Foddy (cf. Pawar 2004) named six general guidelines for the construction of questions. They can be described the following way:

- Define the topic of the questionnaire.
- Tell participants the aim of the questionnaire.
- Use a normal language. Avoid abstract words and academic lingo.
- Make the questions relevant to the participants.
- Do not ask biased questions. Aim for balance.
- Questions should not be too complex, e.g. ask one question at a time, lessen the amount of ‘meaningful’ words.

Keeping these guidelines in mind and going through the content of the questionnaires with my critical friend before sending them to all participants, reassured me that the questions were adequate. I sent out two questionnaires: one was a pre-meeting questionnaire before the meeting in December took place and the other was sent out at the beginning of the following school year (2015/2016) to see if teachers still wanted to enquire about their teaching and students’ learning. Questionnaires helped me to get in between opinions when it was not possible to see the teacher face-to-face. Pawar furthermore adds that ‘the data obtained [...] are easy to analyse and produce quick results’ (Pawar 2004, p.28). A disadvantage is that answers are usually short and that there is no option (other than an email or phone call) to ask something in return.

3.4.5 Classroom Observation

I also observed teachers in their classrooms. The observations’ aim was to see the teacher in his or her professional habitat, to see if and how they targeted their research question in the classroom and for the researcher to gain a holistic view on modern language teaching in Irish secondary schools. This form of data collection leads to ‘thick descriptions’ by situating the researched in their ‘local frameworks’ (Hennink et al. 2010, p.170). Since the focus of the study was the enquiry into modern language teaching methods, it was crucial to experience

lessons taught by the research participants and to use them as a basis and context for the interview following the observation. I agree, however, with the authors stating:

The act of observing may sound simple; however, it involves conducting multiple tasks. During an observation you are systematically watching, listening, questioning and recording people's behaviours, expressions and interactions [...]. (ibid.)

Multiple actions took place during the observations and I wondered at times if I noted and interpreted situations and contexts appropriately. The interviews following the observations gave opportunity to clarify, car journeys home time to further reflect and later extend my notes from the classroom observations with these reflections.

One lesson was recorded and the video was sent to the teachers along with a few questions. The recording was not used for data analysis itself but was rather included as an option for teachers who were interested in observing themselves. I hoped to learn more about teachers' reactions to and perceptions of classroom recordings as reflective enquiry tools and prompted the teachers who asked me to record their teaching and who subsequently watched the recording to share their experiences and thoughts with me during interviews, specifically their thoughts on student involvement, questions that came up after watching the clip, thoughts regarding their classroom practice and benefits of lesson recordings for professional development.

I was aware of the fact that observation can cause resistance on the part of the teachers when it feeds into an audit culture or if it is 'an issue of appraisal' (Lawson 2011, p.320). However, my aim was to see the classroom as a whole and the teacher (if possible) showcasing his/her new approach to teaching.

3.4.6 Group Meetings

I consciously use the term *group meeting* instead of focus group, as these meetings consisted of a mix of different data collection methods. A 'well-conducted [group meeting] can uncover unique perspectives on the study issues due to the group environment' (Hennink 2010, p.166). There were four major group meetings organised; the first half-day meeting in August 2014 served mostly as an introduction to action research and to get to know each other. The second and third full-day meeting in December 2014 and April 2015 consisted of activities and group discussions around the teachers' enquiry and educational values. These group discussions were

rather unplanned and emerged organically during our group meetings. The final meeting in September 2015 was dedicated to member checking and the presentation of my findings. During member check, I also invited teachers to share their opinions regarding the findings I presented to them. Compared to group meetings two and three, there was a clear outline of points to discuss during member check. Group meetings, hence, included the following data collection methods (cf. Pawar 2004):

- Group interviews (member check)
- Group discussions (talk freely about certain topics; participants interact with each other)
- Brainstorming sessions (teaching methods, tips and tricks)

All group meetings depended highly on the atmosphere in the group. I had to make sure that teachers felt that they could talk openly, that they did not feel restricted or that certain teachers took over the conversation. During the group interviews and discussions, I was much more a moderator and facilitator than an interviewer (Punch & Oancea 2014). I gave teachers the chance to ‘drive and direct [the meetings] with the purpose of heightening their own awareness of the issues associated with improving their [...] teaching’ (Capobianco & Feldman 2009, p.191). Teachers in this study used the offer to engage in productive conversations during our meetings which will be further discussed in chapter 6.1.2.

3.4.7 Email and Phone Conversations

Emails and phone calls also contributed data to the project as “an obvious medium, in some ways, for initiating a conversation” (Sapsford & Victor 2006, p.132).

In this study, emails usually dealt with making arrangements for meetings, sending articles or websites (especially to teachers that did not log onto PBworks on a regular basis) and were basically a tool to bring the study back into teachers’ minds. In one instance, where a teacher had no time after the observation for interview, I send the interview questions by email. I also used text messages to send out reminders before a school visit took place.

Email conversations provide a window to showcase my struggles to keep the collaboration “going” amidst teachers’ full timetables. The tone in my emails ranges from being apologetical to being upbeat even when I personally did feel rather insecure about the process of our collaboration. One phone conversation with a teacher and a talk with my critical friend about it, revealed furthermore that the research project was not a priority for teachers the way it was

a priority for me. Chapter 6.2 will give a more detailed account regarding emails and phone conversations.

3.4.8 Connecting Research Questions and Data

The following table illustrates how the different types of data relate to the core research questions of this thesis:

Research questions	Methods
i) How can I support teachers of modern languages to develop an enquiry practice and work collaboratively to enhance their teaching and their students' learning?	Emails and phone calls, my own reflective journal, online collaboration, group meetings, questionnaires
ii) What happens when teachers enquire into their classrooms and work collaboratively?	Observation, teachers' reflective journals, online collaboration, group meetings
iii) Which factors propel or impede teacher collaborative enquiry as a form of CPD?	Semi-structured interviews, questionnaires
iv) To what extent can collaborative and enquiry-based classroom research enhance teaching practice and student learning in the modern language classroom?	Semi-structured interviews, observation, reflective journal

Table 3.5: Research questions in relation to methods for data collection

Each question is, hence, connected to several methods. Having the data gathered through these methods, the next step is to scrutinise which analysis procedures can support the generation of data findings. Chapter 3.5 will throw light onto two different procedures I used.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedures

Bazeley described the researcher engaged in data analysis as *the bricoleur with a computer* who 'will gather whatever data is at hand, experimenting and exploring to find answers to the

questions he or she has set' (Bazeley 1999, p.279). It is important to point out that I am a bricoleur (with computer, pen and paper). Denzin and Lincoln, in their introduction to *The Landscape of Qualitative Research*, describe the qualitative researcher as '*bricoleur*, or maker of quilts' (Denzin & Lincoln 2008, p.5, italics in original). The researcher's goal - metaphorically speaking as quilt maker - is to gain the best insight into a certain area by deploying the most suited methods. My main tools for exploration are strategies from grounded theory and narrative enquiry. I use strategies rather than employing "pure" grounded theory and narrative enquiry methods. The specific methods I am employing are outlined, together with a brief overview of their theoretical underpinnings, in the next chapters.

3.5.1 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory's founding fathers are Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser who published their book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* in 1967. Their innovative approach promised to generate theory from the data instead of verifying existing theory with data. They proposed to consult relevant literature only after data analysis so as not to interfere with theory-building grounded in the data. Their work formed the departure for other scholars working within grounded theory who adapted and changed certain aspects (Locke 2001; Charmaz 2014; Strauss & Corbin 2015). Strauss and Glaser position grounded theory under a 'positivist position with objectivist underpinnings, thereby endorsing both a realist ontology and positivist epistemology' (Butterfield 2009, p.316). Charmaz's *Constructivist Grounded Theory* approach acknowledges, though, that 'reality is multiple, processual and constructed' (Charmaz 2014, p.13) and that in this reality the researcher is present. Charmaz's approach

begins with inductive data, invokes iterative strategies of going back and forth between data and analysis, uses comparative methods and keeps you interacting and involved with your data and emerging analysis. (ibid., p.1)

Before data sets can be compared with one another, the groundwork in data analysis needs to be done. In grounded theory, the researcher starts out with an **open or line-by-line coding**, where notes are taken (in the grammatical form of the gerund) about what is said in the text. Everything is considered important. **Selective coding** is the second step: all initial codes are grouped into key categories. The last step is **theoretical coding**: the categories are compared and related to each other and actual theory building happens (Urquhart 2013, p.10). Emerging theories can then be correlated to existing theories - enriching or contradicting them.

Here is the point where my approach splits from grounded theory: I did not develop theory about one phenomenon with grounded theory. Rather I explored the research process, engaged in complex interaction throughout and aimed at understanding the complexity of teaching and learning modern languages and of teachers enquiring into that field. Grounded theory studies usually look at more narrowly defined phenomena, e.g. a transgender identity study in which the author identified six themes within the category ‘navigating identity’ (Austin 2016) or a grounded theory study about domestic violence in shelters with three emerging categories: managing shelter shock, letting go of being the hero, and balancing advocate roles (Merchant & Whiting 2015).

To understand action research processes, the following strategies borrowed from grounded theory helped me analyse data gathered within the different cycles.

1) Line-by-line coding

After transcribing all material, I went through each line of the transcripts as openly as possible. I took either lines, sentences or segments of data and gave each a name in the form of a gerund. I started examining interesting and important codes to start what Birks and Mills (2015) call intermediate coding. I looked out for relationships which could lead to a higher-level code or what it is then called: a category.

2) Constant comparison

Having the codes of, e.g. interview cycle one, I compared statements within one interview but also between different interviews to see where I found agreements and disagreements.

3) Building categories

Through constant comparison of earlier codes and first categories, I started building main categories. While in grounded theory one major concept or category evolves which includes sub-categories (Birks & Mills 2015), I defined several categories stemming from my data.

4) Memo writing

‘Memos chart, record, and detail a major analytic phase of your journey’ (Charmaz 2014, p.162). I wrote memos about my data, codes and categories throughout the study. What puzzled me, where did I think gaps existed, what did I need to bring up during a next interview, which questions arose - all these aspects were considered during memo writing.

I used these grounded theory strategies to guarantee a deep analysis of the data. I also started using the NVivo software which helps researchers employing a grounded theory approach to organize their data. However, I found that while NVivo was a useful tool for saving my data, I preferred working with data by writing by hand first on the margin of transcripts, then by

making mind-maps on A3-sized paper pinned to my walls and later by drafting tables that brought together interview statements and codes, short memos and categories. I did this for each individual participant. Only after having all these handwritten documents in front of me did I start typing. Exactly how all these processes were applied can be seen in the chapter on data analysis.

That a grounded theory approach can help action researchers is widely discussed in the research literature (Dick 2003; Butterfield 2009; Hayes 2014). Since action research is iterative and data is collected and analysed in several stages (see chapter 3.3.3), with data gathered in one cycle informing the next cycle, theoretical assumptions emerge at each stage, similar to the cyclical action research approach. In contrast to action research, grounded theory approaches are, however, not usually participative as the 'action tends to be someone else's responsibility' (Dick 2003, p.2).

I also made use of strategies from narrative enquiry. While grounded theory gave me the tools to work on common themes and relationships among these, narrative writing allowed me to relate to and understand my participants – the teacher researchers – and to make their voices heard.

3.5.2 Narrative Enquiry

With the use of narration teachers' voices became more authentic and easier to relate to. I spent a whole school year working closely with seven teachers on their enquiry. I saw their work environment, heard about their worries, successes and doubts, observed their interaction with students and observed them during our group meetings. I chose the path of writing narratives about each individual participant to provide a window into their individual worlds of teaching, learning and researching.

I hoped that readers of these stories might find their own voices within them; that they might find certain aspects puzzling and worth talking about. Bruner gives the best reason for processing and writing up research findings as stories:

[W]e organize our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative stories [...]. [...] Unlike the constructions generated by logical and scientific procedures that can be weeded out by falsification, narrative constructions can only achieve "verisimilitude." Narratives, then, are a version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention and "narrative necessity" rather than by empirical verification and logical requiredness [...]. (Bruner 1991, pp.4–5)

Narratives tell about experiences, feelings and thoughts and therefore give a comprehensive account of the participants' rich professional lives. However, I am aware that I could only capture a moment of their professional life and cannot assume that the story will be "true" a month, a year or a decade after; because people change their beliefs, thoughts and actions. Writing the accounts of others can thus only ever hope to achieve verisimilitude. This, however, raises questions about the validity of narrative texts. Kohler Riessman describes four ways on how to approach validation in narratives. First, there is **persuasiveness** (Is the interpretation reasonable and convincing?), second, **correspondence** (Does the researcher take work back to the individuals and groups studied?), third, **coherence** (Does the narrative make sense in the context it is presented?) and last, **pragmatic use** (Is the researcher's work accepted by the wider academic audience?) (Kohler Riessman 1993; Waller et al. 2016).

My first motivation to use stories about my participants is to represent their experiences via engaging stories that (hopefully) draw the reader into them, make the reader ponder, stop and rethink their own beliefs regarding teaching (a modern language). But it is not only the experiences of the participants but also my own that 'frame[s] the entire research process, from situating the researcher within the research puzzle, to living in the field, to composing field and research texts' (Clandinin & Murphy 2009, p.601). This goes hand in hand with the ontological point made in this study: reality is subjective and multiple. It is teachers' reality, it is my interpretation of their reality and their involvement with that interpretation. Narratives also help me to restructure findings after employing grounded theory strategies and later, to represent the amalgamated findings in an engaging fashion.

Narrative or story forms of representation are also used as ways of representing results or findings in various qualitative and quantitative methodologies and are increasingly seen as an effective approach to knowledge translation and knowledge mobilization. (Caine et al. 2013, p.575)

Writing these narratives was less straightforward than using grounded theory strategies. It meant revisiting data, rethinking and rediscovering. This technique aimed 'to make things more complicated, to help you be surprised, seeing your data records in a new way' (Richards 2015, p.185).

What I tried to achieve is to write readable and enjoyable narratives which will have a higher impact on the reader than for example an instruction or user manual on something technical. I imagine the reader of my teacher narratives to develop an emotional involvement in the story,

and therefore “experience” the teacher’s story, react to it and act upon it. This is the translation and mobilisation that Caine et al. (2013) are referring to.

Another reason to write narratives about participating teachers is to broaden the largely unexamined teacher culture and add to teachers’ body of knowledge.

Information about what teachers have known and have learned in the classroom provides an obvious body of wisdom, but one that is largely ignored, considered merely anecdotal or dismissed as impressionistic. (Meier Vosberg 2008, p.40)

Yet Caine et al. exemplify plausibly that writing stories about the teachers only scratches the surface of narrative enquiry. They argue that

[n]arrative inquiry is both the phenomenon under study and the methodology for its study. Narrative inquiry is how we understand human experience. It carries with it a view of the phenomenon of experience. We live storied lives in storied landscapes. (Caine, Estefan & Clandinin 2013, p.584)

While I do want to tell my participants’ stories, I have to make clear that I have not employed a pure narrative methodology. I do use narration as a tool to analyse, process and to talk about research findings. Writing up results of this action research study in story-form ‘can be a source of valuable reflective learning for the writer, and a vicarious experience for the reader’ (Moon & Fowler 2008, p.234).

Narrative enquiry with the chosen methods of broadening, burrowing and restorying (Connelly & Clandinin 1990) is also suitable because of its similarities to action research: both mean to enter an enquiry that unfolds experiences through dialogue and that initiates change or as mentioned earlier, knowledge translation and mobilisation.

The three core strategies proposed by Connelly and Clandinin - broadening, burrowing and restorying - guided me during the writing process. **Broadening** gives the contextual background to each participant. It is a generalisation whereas the narrative investigates a person’s characteristics, values, way of life, the social climate etc. I write about external factors influencing the teachers’ teaching and show the complexity of their teaching life. However, Connelly and Clandinin say that a ‘rule of thumb is to avoid making such generalizations and to concentrate on the event [...]’ (1990, p.11). Concentrating on the event or process refers to **burrowing**. Here, the ‘emotional, moral and aesthetic’ (ibid.) dimension of the event is to be

examined. That way, the authors suggest, an event can be reconstructed within the narrative showing the lived experience of the person at the time the event occurred. Burrowing is also the moment to look at my encounter with the participants of this study and my personal sense-making of these encounters. **Restorying** then brings to the surface the progresses and changes teachers made during the enquiry. While restorying, the researcher asks about ‘the meaning of the event’ and how to create a ‘new story of self which changes the meaning of the event, its description, and its significance for the larger life story the person might be trying to live’ (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, p.11). Restorying can also be seen as the ‘creation of further meaning’ which is never finished.

[A]nyone who has written a narrative knows that it, like life, is a continual unfolding where the narrative insights of today are the chronological events of tomorrow.
(ibid., p.9)

Thus, employing these strategies ‘transformed the field-based texts into research texts’ (Oh et al. 2013, p.249) which were then shared with each individual participant to give them the option of making changes or adding aspects they deemed important.

In the data analysis chapter, I will demonstrate more clearly how the writing of teacher narratives influenced my enquiry process and outcomes of this study. After all, strategies from grounded theory and narrative enquiry made it possible to ‘develop meaning out of, and some sense of order in, the material [I] studied’ (Chase 2005, p. 657).

Last but not least, after addressing my paradigm, methodology, data collection and data analysis procedures, I will discuss issues of research quality.

3.6 Method-appropriate Criteria to Ensure Research Quality

The three research quality criteria under the rationalistic paradigm are known as (external and internal) validity, reliability and objectivity. These have to be modified or even dismissed when doing research under a naturalistic paradigm. Qualitative researchers certainly aim to produce reliable data, but rather than validation, they generate a ‘subtle realism’, with the aim of ‘presenting reality, not reproducing it’ (Flick 2009, p.388). An objective reality cannot exist. Instead of objective, positivist research criteria, Lincoln and Guba propose ‘method-appropriate criteria’ (ibid., p.392). They identified parallel criteria for carrying out qualitative research. Appropriate criteria under a naturalistic paradigm, they argue, are credibility,

transferability, dependability and confirmability instead of validity, reliability and objectivity. I, as a researcher, have to ask myself: How can I ensure that ‘a different team of evaluators might not arrive at entirely different conclusions and recommendations, operating perhaps from a different set of values’ (Schwandt et al. 2007, p.16). In order to make my research trustworthy, those four criteria need to be met. Lincoln and Guba (Lincoln & Guba 1985) list several methods to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These methods shall be described now since they directly relate to the design of this study and its research instruments. How the criteria are met within this study will be highlighted in the following table.

Criteria	Meaning	Application to this study
<i>Credibility</i> Prolonged engagement	To build up trust and to fully understand the context the subject is working in	To get a deep insight, I worked with the teachers on the topic of enquiry-based learning and teaching for a whole school year. Further contact after the study will be encouraged by sending out emails and inviting them to our member check.
<i>Credibility</i> Persistent observation	To reach depth	This also led to several possibilities to observe teachers in their natural habitat. I observed each teacher three times throughout the school year.
<i>Credibility</i> Triangulation	Using different methods of data collection that come logically	I collected and analysed various qualitative data: observation notes, interviews, reflective journals by teachers and myself, an online collaboration tool, recorded group meetings and emails.
<i>Credibility</i> Peer debriefing	To question the researcher about his or her values, beliefs, theories	Critical friends were my supervisor and fellow PhD candidates in education. I had regular meetings with my supervisor where we could discuss in-depth the research process, questions, findings and next steps.
<i>Credibility</i> Negative or deviant case analysis	‘Where patterns and trends have been identified, our understanding of those patterns and trends is	This is not really an instrument in action research. However, emerging data findings are always checked against literature findings and therefore identify patterns or negative cases.

	increased by considering the instances and cases that do not fit within the pattern' (Patton 1999, p.1192).	
Credibility Referential adequacy	To keep some data as raw data that can be a point of reference for the analysed data	I am keeping some audio and all video recordings as raw, not analysed data that can be tested against the analysed data stemming from observations, interviews, etc.
Credibility Member-checking	To demonstrate the analysed data to the members of the study aiming to receive their consent	The field study officially finished with the last interviews in June 2015. I will send transcribed interviews and the narrative to the teachers. Another group meeting is planned for the new school year of 2016/2017 where I present findings to the teachers and ask them for their opinion.
Transferability Thick descriptions	A term coming from ethnography and its detailed descriptions of field experiences, suggests that working hypotheses arising from those descriptions can be better applied and compared to other contexts	Even though I do not employ ethnographic methods, I describe classroom situations, interview settings and my own thoughts in detail. I include where we meet for the interview, the mood and atmosphere, what went well and what did not go so well during the interview. Regarding the classroom observation, I take notes throughout the lesson to give detailed feedback to the teacher afterwards if wanted.
Dependability Inquiry audit	To provide an audit trail that makes all analysed and raw data accessible	All data is saved in a so-called "cloud". I use Google drive and an email address especially set up for this research. The account is not only secured by a password but also by a code that is sent to me via mobile phone whenever I access my account from a new device. To store data, I use NVivo, Google drive and a password protected account on box.com as back-up.
Confirmability Confirmability audit	'[...] the additional step of verifying (or warranting) that each finding can be	The narratives on teachers for example can be traced back to the interviews, their nodes and themes via NVivo.

	appropriately traced back through analysis steps to original data, and that interpretations of data clusters are reasonable and meaningful [...]’ (Guba & Lincoln 1982, p.248).	
Confirmability Triangulation	To bring in different perspectives to make the research more robust and rich	My own, the teachers’ and my supervisor’s perspectives combined with literature findings make the research many-faceted.
Confirmability Reflexivity	Employed by the researcher to unveil their own biases, values and assumptions	Action research cannot be carried out without reflexivity. Reflexivity is at the core of every action research project. I wrote my own reflexive journal and had critical friends to talk to.

Table 3.6: Research quality criteria (Guba & Lincoln 1985) in relation to this research

What needs to be added, however, are criteria specifically aimed at practitioner research. Anderson and Herr’s criteria for practitioners involved with action research were posed nearly 20 years ago, but still remain salient (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler 2007; McNiff 2013). I am going to introduce three criteria that are more relevant to my own and teachers’ enquiries. *Process validity* reminds us that the questions we ask should correspond with the way we investigate them which results in ‘ongoing learning of the individual or system’ (Anderson & Herr 1999, p.16). This last quote very much hints at the cyclical, iterative character of action research. *Democratic validity* suggests that the enquiry takes into consideration not only the teacher but also students, parents, colleagues or school administration - depending on the purpose of the enquiry. *Catalytic validity* is the criteria that demonstrates change leading to improvement for people involved.

Process, democratic and catalytic validity are all criteria that can cement trustworthiness in practitioner research. I take these and Lincoln and Guba’s criteria as pillars to guarantee the trustworthiness and quality of my research project.

3.7 Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the research paradigm, methodology and strategies laying the foundation for the following chapters. With my ontological and epistemological stance (that there is no one truth and that I want to lessen the distance between the researched and myself, the researcher), I also drew attention to different criteria needed when assessing the quality of an action research project.

It should be emphasised at this stage that John Dewey brings all the aforementioned aspects together. Dewey was one of the thinkers shaping pragmatism; he influenced action research; he guided Anselm Strauss' thinking (one of the pioneers of grounded theory), and last but not least: Clandinin and Connelly's work on narrative enquiry was also influenced by John Dewey. It is with this notion of interconnectedness that I would like to move on to chapter four which turns from the theoretical underpinning for the study to the practical dimension looking at the research questions, participants, procedures, the researcher's role and ethical issues within this collaborative action research study.

Chapter 4

The Study

Firstly, the research questions and sub-questions and the interconnectedness of the teachers' and Ph.D. research will be described and discussed. I then introduce the participants of this study (chapter 4.2) and outline the structure of the school year (chapter 4.3). The very distinct role I fulfil as the researcher of the study will be examined (chapter 4.4) as well as ethical concerns and processes (chapter 4.5).

4.1 Central Question and Themes

The **central question** reads: *How can I support teachers of modern languages to develop an enquiry-based practice and work collaboratively in order to enhance their teaching and their students' learning?*

The “action” part of my research focused on exploring and providing motivation, support and structure for teachers to engage in systematic and collaborative enquiry in their professional practice. During this work, my enquiry explored how teachers understand their practice, what motivates them to engage in critical enquiry, how they approach their enquiry and what topics they want to explore, how they respond to and how useful they find different strategies and supports, and how they rate the feasibility and manageability of carrying out action research in their professional practice. The first question refers to the more introspective side and my own action research cycle: I needed to make amendments to the study while being in the field. Applying Whitehead's question ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’ (Whitehead 2009, p.109) to my own enquiry, I developed sub-questions such as:

What helpful support can I offer to teachers?

Which aha-moments am I experiencing during my support-giving? and

How do these aha-moments shape my view about teacher CPD?

What did I learn?

The **second question** is purposefully broad. It supported me in capturing the unpredictable experiences that shaped the course of this study; experiences ranging from wonderings and challenges over doubts and contradictions to successes and growth.

What happens when teachers enquire into their classrooms and work collaboratively?

Within this broad question, various sub-questions emerged and helped to provide structure to the enquiry:

How can the collaboration 'researcher - teacher' and 'teacher - teacher' be characterised?

What are participating teachers' experiences and perceptions of the collaborative enquiry project?

How did teachers enquire? How did they, for example, engage in/with research?

What are the outcomes of teachers' enquiries?

What benefits and/or challenges do teachers see when carrying out collaborative teacher research?

What did teachers learn?

The **third question** looks closer at factors affecting teacher learning.

Which factors propel or impede teacher collaborative enquiry as a form of CPD?

The **fourth question** brings together the two starting points: teacher research and my own research plus the factors influencing teacher learning.

To what extent can collaborative and enquiry-based classroom research enhance teaching practice and student learning in the modern language classroom?

Based on my learning from this action research I hope to ultimately forward recommendations as regards incorporating collaborative enquiry into modern language classrooms and CPD programmes for language teachers.

Collaboration between the teachers and myself was a pivotal aspect of this study. Research evidence shows clearly that collaboration is crucial for teacher and teaching effectiveness (chapter 2.1.1 and 2.1.2). Hence, I investigated if moments of sharing problems and issues, of talking through them, listening to suggestions etc. pave the way to positive changes in teachers' classrooms.

The next figure demonstrates the interwovenness of the classroom research cycles, teachers' collaboration with each other and with me and my own action research cycle.

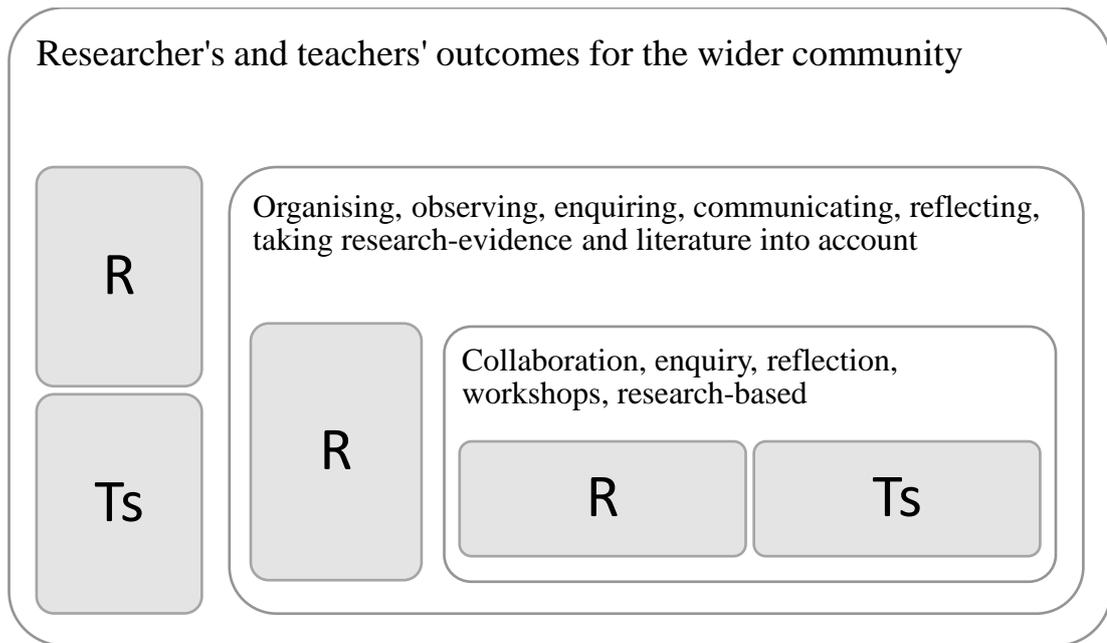


Figure 4.1: Interwovenness of teacher and lead researcher action research

At the core lies the collaboration between me (R) and the teachers (Ts). I deliberately chose not to place myself in the middle since I did not see myself as the one knowing (see also p.136). My role as the lead researcher in this study will be further discussed in chapter 4.4. The next layer represents my actions and reflections throughout the process of leading this study. Finally, the outside layer contains what will be communicated to the outside world - by me and by the teachers, e.g. the final thesis, journal articles, blog entries, teacher workshops, professional conversations etc.

The key research questions from above can be linked to the different layers.

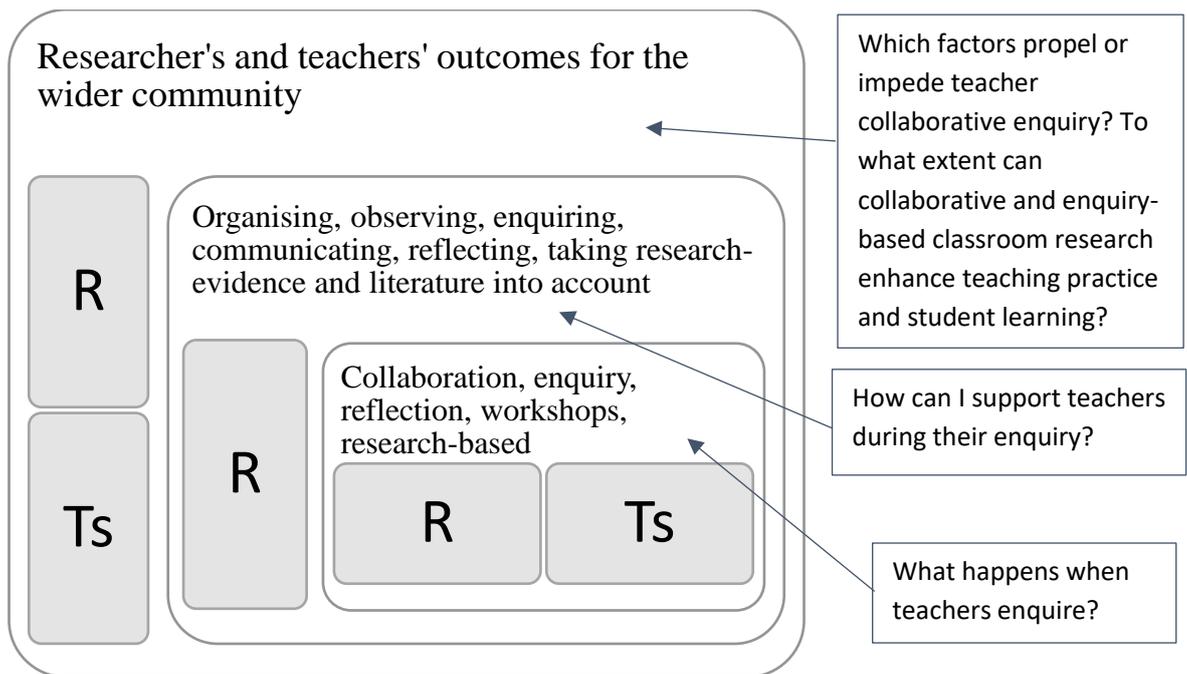


Figure 4.2: Teacher and lead researcher action research in relation to research questions

In order to answer these questions, I worked with seven modern language teachers during a whole school year (2014/2015) on a project that comprised collaboration, critical enquiry and reflection with a focus on teaching methods. How our collaborative group came into existence shall be explained now. I will also introduce the teachers who took part.

4.2 Study Participants

I started to make my research study public at the end of March 2014 by setting up my own Twitter account through which I connected with modern language groups across Ireland. In order to reach as many modern language teachers in Ireland as possible, I not only made the project public with the German Teachers' Association of Ireland (@gdiireland), but also connected and contacted the French (@ftaire) and Spanish (@atsirlanda) Teacher Associations, the Post-Primary Languages Initiative (@languages_ie) and Language Teachers Ireland (@langteachersire). I also posted the leaflet onto my private Facebook page. I did not recruit Japanese, Russian and Italian teachers as I have no command of these languages and thought that classroom observation could be impeded by this fact. Furthermore, I got in touch with secondary teachers that I personally knew, sent them leaflets (see appendix B) via email or mail and asked them to distribute the these among their language teaching colleagues. Thus, I used purposive sampling in which I located individuals or groups who share the same

characteristic (Johnson & Christensen 2012), namely modern language teachers in Irish secondary schools. In addition, snowball sampling helped me find further participants as I asked interested teachers to ‘identify one or two additional people who meet certain characteristics and may be willing to participate’ (ibid., p.231).

I tried to spread the word about the upcoming research study as widely as possible. In short, interested teachers of German, Spanish and French living in Ireland that replied to me signalling interest in the study became part of my initial sample.

At first, fifteen teachers were interested in taking part. Eleven German, two French, one Spanish and one Chinese teacher(s) contacted me and apart from three, I met them all individually to give them more information about the project. The three teachers I did not meet cancelled their participation due to reasons listed below. A further five teachers that I did meet dropped out before the study began or before the end of the year 2014 was reached.

The reasons were personal:

- one teacher was expecting a baby in February 2015 and knew she could not commit herself full-time to the study;
- another teacher had to take care of a severely ill family member and dropped out in December;

and professional:

- one teacher was given fewer German hours but needed to sign up for training in special needs education which made her withdraw from this project;
- one teacher had to teach three exam groups and felt that she could not give the project the necessary attention;
- another teacher did not have a position in a school at the beginning of the school year;
- two newly qualified teachers were encouraged not to take part by senior members of staff and therefore did not commence the project.

The group that stayed until the end of the school year 2014/2015 consisted of four German, two French and one Chinese teacher(s) located in Co. Galway, Co. Limerick, Co. Westmeath, Co. Dublin and Co. Offaly. Since Chinese is taught through English with an emphasis on culture, I felt able to work with this teacher. Figure 4.3 shows the geographic distances between the different locations where teachers worked which weighed in on planning group meetings.



Figure 4.3: Map of Ireland with locations where participants taught

The seven teachers taught in co-educational (boy and girl) and single sex (all girls) schools. The classes they focused on during their action research projects were first year German, Transition Year¹¹ Chinese, Transition Year German and fifth year French and German. The following table gives further information about the participating teachers regarding their gender, age, the subjects they teach, their teaching experience in years and in what type of school they are currently employed.

Name/ Pseudonym	Sex	Age category	Subjects	Experience teaching ¹²	School
Olwyn	f	20-30	German, Spanish	6 years +	All-girls voluntary school, ca. 400 students

¹¹ An optional one-year programme after the Junior Certificate in Irish post-primary schools.

¹² Up to September 2016

Jacinta	f	20-30	French, German, C.S.P.E., S.P.H.E.	7 years +	Co-educational, ca. 900 students
Rachel	f	20-30	German, Geography	6 years +	Co-educational, ca. 800 students
Brian	m	20-30	German, History	3 years +	Co-educational, ca. 750 students
Marie	f	40-50	French	13 years +	Co-educational, ca. 700 students
Ciara	f	40-50	French, Spanish, Chinese	17 years +	Co-educational, ca. 700 students
Mary	f	50-60	German, History, C.S.P.E.	30 years +	All-girls voluntary school, ca. 400 students

Table 4.1: Overview of participants

After having introduced these seven teachers, I turn to the concrete plans I made for the school year of 2014/2015 regarding the study.

4.3 Research Study Design

How I planned the school year, regarding the times for meetings, observations, interviews and online collaboration, was like painting on a blank canvas. I discussed a template with my supervisor and took her and participants' suggestions and wishes of when and where to meet into consideration. I also needed to consider the school year's holidays and exam times. Figure 3.5 (see p.66) showed the timeframe, the methods used and the participation rate. A detailed description of each stage follows.

This project received furthermore 1000,- € in funding from *Blackrock Education Centre* under a scheme called *Innovation Fund Project*. With the funding I could pay for teachers' travel expenses, catering and material.

While stage 1 concerned my first cycle of thesis research (see p.61), **stage 2** relates to the introduction to the study.

Only three teachers could make it on the day of the introductory workshop to Galway. Hence, I introduced the other teachers individually to the project, talking to five teachers face-to-face in cafés or their school and to three via Skype. After introducing myself, I let the teachers introduce themselves by answering the following questions: Where are you from? Why did you become a teacher? What makes a teacher successful? The last question led to a list from a United States-based teacher website.¹³ From that list, I highlighted that successful teachers are risk-takers, reflective, seek out a mentor, adapt to student needs, welcome change and never stop learning. These were then discussed in light of previously mentioned skills/items by the teachers. Most importantly, these skills refer directly to action research which was then introduced to all in the form of a starter kit: I explained and we discussed how to write reflectively, how to find a starting point and what counts as data.

Stage 3: Individual meetings

With the teachers that received an introduction, signed the consent form and let their students sign their consent form, I started the first round of classroom visits in which I observed them and talked to them afterwards about their initial research question or concern.

Stage 4: First collaborative group meeting

This stage was accompanied by one questionnaire that was sent out before our first collaborative meeting (see appendix G). I asked teachers, among other questions, about their overall impression of the project so far and what they expected from our first collaborative meeting. We held the meeting in *Athlone Education Centre*. The premises were ideal because of its central location. It could be easily reached for teachers coming from the East and West. Unfortunately, Jacinta and Brian cancelled their attendance a few days before. I went ahead with five teachers on the day. We talked about their individual journeys as teacher researchers so far. We discussed in greater detail than in August ways to gather data. Two teachers, Marie and Olwyn shared insights into their teaching practice. Marie demonstrated how the flipped classroom can support teaching which was related to her research question, while Olwyn

¹³ <http://www.teachthought.com/pedagogy/25-things-successful-teachers-do-differently/> [03/05/2017]

described a teacher resource website specifically targeted at modern language teachers and how she shares her own resources on that website.

Stage 5: Individual meetings

This meeting was followed by another in-class observation where I wanted to see - and afterward in the interview explore - how the teachers were progressing with their investigation or what they found challenging with regard to engaging in enquiry-based practice. If teachers permitted, I filmed their class and sent them the video via email or mail accompanied by a short questionnaire for them to evaluate the lesson (see appendix H).

Stage 6: Second collaborative group meetings

The second collaborative meeting in April 2015 considered the feedback I received from our first meeting about the content participants would like to engage with. I also looked at our interviews and teacher expressions about meaningful CPD.

During the meeting, we dealt with the enquiry-based project and the participants' school year. I also organised a *TeachMeet* where teachers shared methods, tips and tricks of classroom teaching. This time, the meeting was held in Galway. Since I had enough funding for participants' travel, I could offer teachers coming from Co. Dublin or Co. Westmeath an overnight stay. All teachers beside Olwyn could attend.

Stage 7: Individual meetings

At the end of the school year 2014/2015, I met all participants individually again to discuss the project and their results, hear about their impressions and suggestions. Two teachers were interviewed together. Marie and Ciara both travelled to Galway from Co. Limerick (due to other commitments) but arrived late. Instead of having two shorter interview sessions with each of them, I decided to interview them at the same time.

Stage 8: Second questionnaire

A second questionnaire was sent to teachers at the beginning of the next school year (2015/2016) (see appendix I). The second questionnaire explored if this study had a sustainable effect on teachers, if they would still enquire into their classrooms, reflect, read evidence-informed material and talk to other teachers about teaching.

Stage 9: Member check

Furthermore, a member check was carried out in September/October 2016. Here, I presented participants with key findings (see appendix J) and discussed these with them. The member

check was planned for September 3rd 2016 for all participants in Galway. Even though that date was agreed on using a Doodle poll, four out of seven teachers cancelled their attendance:

- Olwyn went to a festival that day,
- Marie and Ciara had too many obligations with the start of the new school year,
- Mary did not name a reason but knew that I arranged meeting Olwyn on a different date and asked to join that meeting.

Since the remaining three teachers would have needed to travel from Co. Offaly, Co. Dublin and Co. Westmeath to Galway, I decided to hold three smaller group meetings. I met Olwyn, Mary and Rachel in Galway and Jacinta and Brian in Dublin. It proved challenging to find a time to meet with Marie and Ciara. They asked me to send the findings via email which I agreed to do. Marie wrote apologetically in an email: “Even though we think we prepare enough during the summer, when school starts, school starts with a BANG!”

The study design took teachers’ private and work commitments into consideration. I was always flexible, eager to involve all teachers at all times. However, by making room and catering bookings, the group meetings could not be easily moved and hence did not always accommodate all participants. Organising my own schedule, including seminars, workshops and conferences to attend, with seven full-time teacher schedules was one aspect of my role as the leading researcher in the study. The next chapter will explore the lead researcher’s role generally, while chapter 6.1.1 will draw attention to the struggle I experienced with regard to finding my role in the study.

4.4 The Researcher’s Role

The features of an action research study (see chapter 3.3) made it clear from the start that participants and myself as the lead researcher are equal. I did not carry out research *on or about* but *with* the teachers.

I treated teachers as equal partners in this study giving them the opportunity to co-create the research project. Even though I was not one of them, I got closer to their everyday work reality through observation, in-depth interviews and collaborative meetings. I had therefore access to an insider perspective since the participants are insider (teacher) researchers (Zeni 1998; Anderson & Herr 1999). Even though Anderson and Herr state that the distinction of insider and outsider is overstated, the terms are ‘useful in calling attention to the unique problems

entailed by each' (1999, p.15).¹⁴ Having an outsider perspective as academic researcher gave me the chance to remain critical and analytical while accessing an insider perspective.

Being too close to the culture or situation can make it difficult to obtain the necessary analytic distance. (Olin et al. 2016, p.426)

Staying with the two different terms, insider and outsider, I also need to address the issue of whether my researcher perspective led to asymmetric power relations. Brinkmann points out that the researcher, for example in an interview setting, has the scientific know-how, is in control of the interview process, 'fakes' a conversation to find an aspect of interest to him or her, 'fakes' friendship to get to the core of participants' opinions and feelings and 'uphold[s] a monopoly of interpretation over the subjects' statements, and can interpret and report what the subjects really meant' (Brinkmann 2007, p.129). All these statements are not as relevant in my study since teachers in this study were not 'powerless'. They actively co-created the study, they received the transcripts of the interviews and narrative stories; they were able to make amendments, clarify aspects and request that I leave out certain information. These aspects were crucial since 'practitioner participation in the design and processes of the research is more likely to lead to lasting change' (Day 1993, p.817). It is the democratic collaborative process that makes this study less asymmetric or fake. Furthermore, teachers took part on a voluntary basis without any pressure to fulfil regulations linked to a (credit-bearing) academic programme.

Foucault, however, would argue that there are always power relations at play and as for '[a]bsent power relations, there can be no subjects [...], for we are always formed (and form ourselves) in networks of different strategies, projects and techniques' (Brinkmann 2007, p.130). Here, I would argue, that the forming process is reciprocal. It is the teachers' action research cycles informing my own action research cycles. It is my input on classroom research supporting teachers to become teacher researchers. It is therefore, constant, yet complex, learning on both sides. What makes the collaboration complex are the different cultures (university researcher and school teachers) and each individual's beliefs and assumptions feeding into the research process.

As leading researcher in this study, I saw my role as that of a provider, supporter, listener and action researcher. The importance of being able to listen to teachers' needs, which partially led to letting go of my research agenda, was truly a learning curve for me (see chapter 7.1.3).

¹⁴ This relates to the different validity criteria they introduce for teacher researchers (see chapter 3.6).

I became aware that time is needed in *becoming* a qualitative researcher and that this new role is ‘constructed over time’ (Dinkelman et al. 2006, p.6). That usually untold story (ibid.) will be narrated in chapter 6.1.1.

The next chapter addresses ethical issues, specifically about me conducting sound research with teachers and them conducting research with their own students.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

As mentioned before, participation was voluntary. In the consent form, teachers were made aware of the fact that they could withdraw at any time from the project without providing reasons or explanations. I also assured them that this action research project is treated confidentially and that only my supervisor and myself have access to teachers’ records (reflective writings, interview transcripts, narratives). All teachers bar one were given pseudonyms. Ciara expressed the wish to keep her own name. Locations were kept unchanged, however, school names and exact locations were not mentioned.

All data was stored in a cloud. I used Google Drive as the main storage and box.com as back-up. Both clouds could only be accessed by me. During an NVivo workshop in the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) in NUI Galway, the safety of storing data in clouds was emphasised. Other bodies, like the University of Sheffield, also advise students to store sensitive data in clouds.¹⁵ Hence, I felt this form of storage guaranteed safety for the data gathered throughout the project.

The advantage of clouds is that all data can be accessed from any location, however preferably from the researcher’s own device. Furthermore, all forms of data can be securely stored, including interview recordings as well as videos recorded in the classrooms.

Because teachers conducted action research in their classrooms, further ethical issues needed to be addressed at the beginning of the project. Not only did teachers receive information and consent forms (appendices C and D), they also handed out consent forms to their principals (appendix E) and to the parents since their students were under 18 years old (appendix F). All teachers focused on one class only, hence up to 27 parents per enquiry needed to be informed about the research project.

¹⁵ <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/library/rdm/storage> [03/05/2017]

Conducting research with children in schools raises further questions. All teachers registered with the Teaching Council are familiar with the *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* which is a

guiding compass as teachers seek to steer an ethical and respectful course through their career in teaching and to uphold the honour and dignity of the teaching profession. (The Teaching Council 2012, p.3)

Thus, teachers are naturally required to act ethically towards any student. As a teacher researcher, however, they also need to act ethically concerning their research. Zeni acknowledges that as long as teachers collect data in the form of documentation on student learning and reflective writing, no ethical dilemma arises. However, as soon as this research is shared with a wider audience through collaboration or presentations, the former 'equanimity' is lost (Zeni 1998, p.11). Issues of power, ownership and responsibility inevitably emerge.

When teachers conduct research, they have to follow certain guidelines, e.g. making all participants (their students) and their parents, aware of the research project and the role students' play in it (Baumfield et al. 2008). In case of publishing their outcomes, they need to 'give participants the right to confidentiality and to anonymity' (ibid., p.33) just as I gave that right to the teachers in this study.

Another factor teachers need to consider when doing research in their classrooms is to report back to students what their findings were (Baumfield et al. 2008). Cain supports this by stating that any improvements made by teachers need to be evaluated by students. 'If they do not, what they perceive as an improvement might be perceived quite differently by the students' (Cain 2011, p.12). Giving students a voice during the research process is an important step to guard ethical guidelines when conducting research (BERA 2011). Zeni sees the teacher as researcher scenario the following way:

As teacher researchers, our primary responsibility is to our students. We need to balance the demands of our research with our other professional demands. This issue becomes far less troublesome when classroom inquiry becomes an intrinsic part of how we teach, and when students take an active role in our research – and their own. (Zeni 1998, p.16)

When classroom enquiry becomes an intrinsic part, this calls for teacher research ethics to become an integral part of teaching. This has been discussed in the literature:

ethicality cannot be divorced from quality in practitioner research any more than it can be divorced from quality in professional practice. (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler 2007, p.209)

Mockler states that research ethics furthermore add to the ethics of classroom practice, or the 'everyday ethics' (Mockler 2013, p.146). Even though research ethics and classroom ethics are different, and usually come along with distinctions made between theory and practice, academic practitioner research and practitioner (teacher) research, 'big research' and 'small-scale research' (Saunders 2007, p.72), the aforementioned 'inquiry as a stance' concept (see p.54) can guide teacher researchers in adapting research ethics into their classroom 'everyday ethics' (Mockler 2013). Mockler names 'informed consent, avoiding harm, student voice, power dynamics within the classroom, and teacher judgement' as factors to conduct ethically sound research in the classroom context (ibid., p.153).

Given that the Teaching Council in Ireland envisages teachers carrying out classroom-based research and adopting an enquiry as stance orientation, guidelines like Mockler's need to be included not only in the *Research Strategy* (Teaching Council 2015) but also in the *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* (Teaching Council 2012).

4.6 Summary

This chapter focused the attention on the practicalities of this research project and the persons involved. The research questions and themes were addressed first as they were the steering guidelines throughout. I then introduced the seven participants of this study and outlined the plan for school visits, interviews and group meetings in a comprehensive overview as seen in figure 4.4. The role I play as the lead researcher had to be discussed as well and referred back to the interconnectedness of my action research cycles, the teacher researchers' enquiries and the research questions asked (see figure 4.2). Lastly, I concentrated on ethical concerns as ethicality is one aspect to guarantee 'quality for any practitioner research project' (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler 2007, p.203).

The theoretical framework (chapter 3) and the practicalities (chapter 4) pave the way to the next chapters. Chapter 5 focuses on the processes of data analysis first, before chapter 6 reveals this study's research findings.

Chapter 5

Data Analysis

5.1 Introduction

Coming to the point of finally presenting findings is a rather difficult process. Making sense and seeing a bigger picture, to me, was at times a daunting, sometimes exciting, never completely satisfying exercise. The amount of data at hand (see table 5.1) made me feel like the bricoleur mentioned earlier working on a bigger-sized, colourful quilt made from many different fabrics and patterns, stitched together with care to bring order into the messiness. As good quilt-makers do, a step away from the work-in-progress was often necessary to plan ahead, to divert or return. Many metaphors come to mind when thinking about the process of data analysis and the final step of *telling the story*.

Data source	Data type	Quantity	Volume
Semi-structured interviews	Audio files transcribed into text files	19 20 (one interview by writing)	11 hours 27 minutes Approx. 106,400 words
Narratives	Text files	7	Approx. 19,800 words
Group interviews (member check)	Audio files transcribed into text files	2 2	1 hour 32 minutes Approx. 13,800 words
Reflections by teachers	Text files (one in form of a blog)	5	Approx. 10,000 words

Online questionnaire	Text file	2	Approx. 3,500 words
Filming of class and questionnaire	Video	7	n/a (raw data)
	Text file	3	Approx. 1,600 words
Filming of last meeting	Video	1	n/a (raw data)
Notes during class observation, field notes and memos	Handwritten notes	n/a	n/a
My own ongoing reflections	Handwritten	n/a	n/a
Notes during class observation, field notes and memos	Handwritten notes	n/a	n/a
Filming of class and questionnaire	Video	7	n/a (raw data)
	Text file	3	Approx. 1,600 words
Filming of last meeting	Video	1	n/a (raw data)

Table 5.1: Overview of data collected

The table lists the data source and its data types (transcribed text, handwritten text, audio and video), how often these types occur and into how many words they were transcribed. Some data is listed as raw data. Raw data, while not necessarily impacting on the data analysis, has to be made apparent to meet the criteria on research quality (see chapter 3.6).

Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014, pp.12) see qualitative data analysis as ‘three concurrent flows of activity: (1) data condensation, (2) data display, and (3) conclusion drawing/verification.’ The authors do not favour the word ‘reduction’ when it comes to data

analysis. Condensation is rather the process that happens within the analysis, by finding categories, themes and a story to tell. In AR, the condensation process is ongoing. After each interview cycle and the transcription process, the most interesting aspects, but also challenging, puzzling and missing items, informed the following cycle.

Where possible, my data displays will entail mind-maps and tables to ‘assemble organized information into an immediately accessible, compact form’ (ibid., p.13) and to visualise central constructs in the study. Data is also written up narratively and will feature throughout in form of vignettes. Vignettes allow you, the reader, to stop and think about your own context, draw lines, see similarities or differences, which hopefully enable you to enrich your understanding regarding your own context.

Miles, Huberman and Saldaña’s last activity, conclusion drawing, always needs to be accompanied by verifying the conclusions. Verification can simply mean to check field notes again or to give an emerging code a second thought. Because of the collaborative nature of this study, thorough verification was sought by discussions with a critical friend in form of my supervisor and through face-to-face member checks with the participants and the sharing of transcripts and narratives with them. My supervisor helped me to refine my codes and categories by asking for more details, by questioning my rationale or by simply reminding me to look at my research questions again. That collaborative second look gave me a chance to rethink and reorder.

The next flowchart gives a comprehensive overview over the processes involved to present data findings.

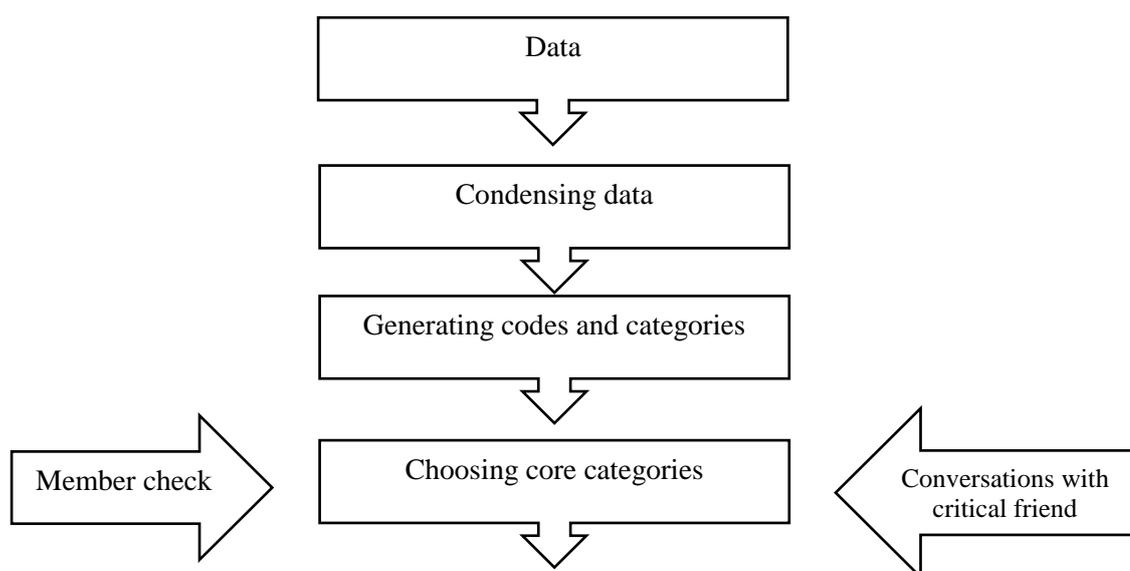


Figure 5.1: Process of data analysis

The process of data analysis, the aforementioned condensation process, was helped by applying a complexity lens. While throughout this dissertation complexity was mentioned (the complexity of teaching and classrooms, professional learning, reflective practice, teacher research journeys and our collaborative action research), I firstly want to highlight more strongly the need and contribution of complexity theory to an action research study like this.

5.2 Applying a Complexity Lens

A connection between complexity theory and action research is not new and has been made before (Sumara & Davis 1997; Davis & Sumara 2005; Phelps & Hase 2002; Klehr 2012; Cochran-Smith et al. 2014; Wood & Butt 2014).

Complexity, it is argued, can provide a valuable theoretical underpinning for action research. Furthermore, action research provides a valid methodological approach to the study of complexity. (Phelps & Hase 2002, p.507)

In fact, looking at characteristics of complexity theory and action research, several similarities become visible (cf. Wood & Butt 2014).

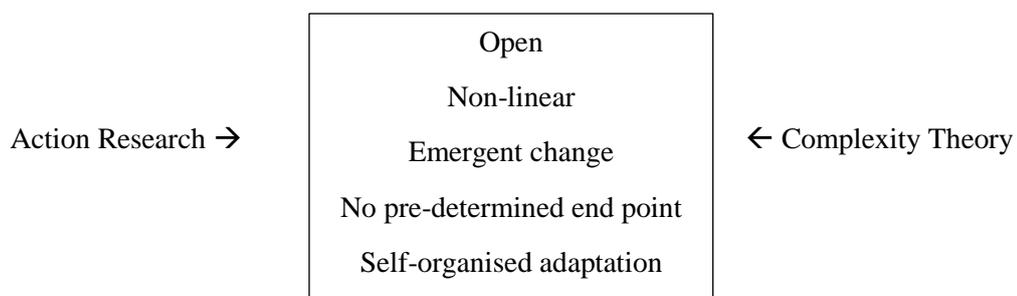


Figure 5.2: Similarities between Action Research and Complexity Theory

I make the conscious shift here to speak about applying a complexity lens instead of complexity theory. From a pragmatist's point of view, I make use of complexity without imposing the whole theoretical framework onto this work.

Combining my action research study with a complexity lens allows me to look at the group of teachers and myself as a learning and, therefore, complex system. Instead of simplifying

matters arising, I complexify them (Stanley 2009, p.1), instead of describing our system as complicated, I describe it as complex.

One big idea that complexity theories offer teacher education research is the fundamental distinction between complicated and complex systems (Cochran-Smith et al. 2014, p.106).

Cochran-Smith et al. demand that teaching and learning ‘need to be regarded as complex’ (ibid.). Furthermore, looking at ‘*how things work*’ rather than ‘*how things are*’, is the pivotal contribution of complexity thinking to action research (Cochran-Smith et al. 2014, p.108, italics in original).

Comparing our collaborative action research network to a complex system (see chapter 6.4.1.1) can indeed make an understanding of dynamics and processes easier. The components of our system - the teacher, the lead researcher, the school, the classroom, the students, the curriculum etc. - evolve and change in a non-linear and unpredictable way. Complex systems like ours ‘can vary dramatically [...] to the next’ complex system (Davis et al. 2012, p.375). Even within our collaborative network, I could see how different school contexts catered for different professional learning opportunities. While Marie and Ciara’s school encouraged enquiry-based learning and teaching and collaboration among staff, Rachel and Brian were disappointed that not enough team-work and sharing of knowledge existed in their schools. A complexity lens helps recognising the richness of teachers’ work-lives and the context they are situated in. Throughout my journey, that lens has begun to guide me to a more unconventional way of thinking; away from ‘cause-effect patterns and generalizable findings’ (Larsen-Freeman 2012, p.211) towards investigating teacher research and teachers’ teaching and learning context holistically.

5.3 Process of Data Analysis

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the codes and categories that emerged from the data and second, of the categories/themes I chose to explore deeper. While complexity theory supported my data analysis as a theoretical framework, grounded theory (see p.105) and narrative analysis strategies (see p.111) helped me to condense the amount of data, display data, find themes and categories and discuss the outcomes with participating teachers and my

supervisor. The mud-map strategy (see p.115) was a further tool to condense data to core themes which present original knowledge.

5.3.1 Grounded Theory Strategies

Firstly, I started out with line-by-line coding. I took all transcribed material and coded it by underlining key terms and restating key terms.

Interview passage	<i>Line-by-line coding</i>
<p>A1: Is your research question still concerned with AfL.</p> <p>C1: It's more, not just specifically AfL. It'll be more about lifelong learning, focusing on the independent learner and giving them the skills and building their confidence of doing that. That's what I want to do. That's why I'm doing the Chinese. Get them to see taking on something new can be daunting but can be possible depending on your attitude towards it. It's hard but it's fun you know. It's to get them to believe that from a young age. So that's really where I'm still going with it and hoping to do with it. Certainly today, it worked really well. and from what they said it seems to be that's where it's going.</p> <p>A2: They enjoyed it.</p> <p>C2: Yeah, whether it can be maintained - this is only the fourth time I had them for the full period. And the group I have now I only have them for a certain amount of time because then they are going to rotate. So, what I try to do - keeping that in mind - I said to them I gave them a list of all the things we could do. And they decided on their top three. And so, what we are doing in this module is what they want to do. One of the things was the food. So that's why you saw today that we are halfway through it. And that's what I'm learning with the resources that I have that it takes a few classes to get through. There is so much information. It's so rich. All</p>	<p><i>Mentioning in first meeting her interest in AfL</i></p> <p><i>Focusing on independent learning</i></p> <p><i>Giving students the skills to become independent</i></p> <p><i>Building their confidence</i></p> <p><i>Leading by example</i></p> <p><i>Taking on something new/ teaching Chinese to show students to take on sth. new is possible</i></p> <p><i>Getting students to believe in that, shaping their attitude</i></p> <p><i>Showing it's hard but it's fun</i></p> <p><i>Trying to maintain that attitude throughout the course</i></p> <p><i>Letting student choose the topics</i></p> <p><i>Students taking control over their own learning</i></p> <p><i>Learning on side of teacher</i></p> <p><i>Getting adjusted to new teaching material</i></p> <p><i>Finding material easy to use</i></p>

<p>the bits they (Confucius Institute) put into it, it's phenomenal. It's really easy to use.</p> <p>So yeah, I want them to take control over their learning. And I think it has helped because they know it's what they've chosen so they are into it. The next group could be totally different regarding what they want to do.</p> <p>Apart from the general introduction to China, it's kind of them leading the way. And that's what I'm trying to go with. It's so totally different to how we usually run a class 'cause we have the syllabus and the curriculum. And even though you do try to bring it to life as much as you can</p> <p>A3: Autonomous too</p> <p>C3: So hopefully from that perspective it's proving to be something a little bit more different and would feed into the whole idea of TY because that's what you are hopefully creating.</p> <p>A4: So if you bring down your question would it be How can I make my students more autonomous.</p> <p>C4: Yeah, in that sense. And I think I want to bring in how you can develop a love for learning. They get so bored in school in certain ways that maybe the desire to learn is beaten out of them to a certain extent. Particularly when it's an exam-driven year. So I would be hoping that an insight like this will be totally different and will remind them in the future and come back to enjoying learning and loving it. So maybe I might tweak it slightly to incorporate that as well. Maybe (laughs).</p>	<p><i>Knowing each class is different</i></p> <p><i>Students leading the way</i></p> <p><i>Having a different teaching style/different content</i></p> <p><i>Trying to bring in more life in other classes but finding that difficult</i></p> <p><i>Feeding into the idea of TY</i></p> <p><i>Research question: How can I develop a love for learning among my students?</i></p> <p><i>Students getting bored in school; having no desire to learn esp. In exam-driven years</i></p> <p><i>Hoping that this course proves something. different to them</i></p> <p><i>Wanting her students to enjoy and love learning</i></p>
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Table 5.2: Example of line-by-line coding

Second, I put the codes into themes by doing mind-maps for each participant (see image 5.1). This reduced the line-by-line coding into broader categories. This was the point when I started to compare each mind-map systematically. I also revisited the transcribed text to rethink or rephrase certain aspects.

<p>Not being secretive about the CPD she is involved in towards colleagues “They don’t feel threatened by me.” C2, 49</p> <p>Colleagues know that C is always doing something</p> <p>They mentioned to her they would hate me coming into their class</p> <p>Saying it would be better to have CPD during school time where all language teachers could meet, have a speaker and share resources</p> <p>“the future has to be more collaborative practice” C3, 39</p> <p>CPD courses bring her back into the loop</p> <p>Some of them not being good though, feeling insulted by the tasks</p> <p>Real CPD is sharing resources, applying material for differentiation, AfL</p> <p>Wrong to force teachers to do CPD, they have to want to do it</p> <p>Use scaffolding just like you would with a child</p> <p>Doing a M.Ed took her out of her comfort zone and made her look at everything</p> <p>Saying all language teachers in schools should share resources → making them stronger as a group</p>	<p>To not be looked at suspiciously</p> <p>What is different about C? Why isn’t she afraid or hating me coming in?</p> <p>Not giving up free time</p> <p>Staying up to date</p> <p>What makes good and relevant CPD?</p> <p>→ answer: is it all about getting material?</p> <p>Interesting to compare teacher CPD to the way one teaches children</p>	<p>VIEWS RE CPD</p> <p>OPINIONS BY OTHERS</p> <p>VIEWS RE CPD</p> <p>REAL CPD</p> <p>REAL CPD</p> <p>VIEWS RE CPD</p> <p>OUT OF COMFORT ZONE</p> <p>TEAM WORK</p>
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Table 5.3: Second categorisation including first emerging categories

Throughout this process, memoing was crucial to develop my own thoughts regarding the data which I could then discuss with my supervisor. If a statement from an interview or observations from field study were worth pursuing, I generated further questions for participants in either next interviews or in the questionnaire after the enquiry. Speaking metaphorically, the data was the solid ground and the act of memoing took me a step up a tree

so I could distance myself and provide room for critical thought. Memos usually contained short statements of surprise, disbelief, confirmation or questions as above but also longer free-written thoughts about data.

Because teachers that took part in this study agreed in the first place to be observed by me they didn't have any objection to being observed. They found, however, that many of their colleagues didn't want to have anyone else in class. Reason for this could be that teaching is a lonely profession and that many teachers are not yet truly collaborative and observe other colleagues and be observed by them.

Is this related to trust? Is trust missing in the first place to observe each other? Would NQTs be more open to observations since they are used to it from university? Could they bring in a new generation or would many of them also tend to "mind their own business"?

Having all the mind-maps and tables at hand, I combined all categories under main headings. A selection of categories (with explanation) under the main heading CPD, is listed in the box below:

OBSERVATION: Views related to being observed and observing other teachers

SHARING RESOURCES: CPD means to share material with colleagues, to get ideas, something that has been tried and tested by teachers

VIEWS RE CPD: The status quo of CPD and opinions about it

REAL CPD: What CPD should be about

EXPERIENCES W/ CPD: Courses or workshops teachers attended and their opinion about them

OPINIONS OF OTHERS: What colleagues in school said about them taking part in the study

TEAM WORK: Advantages of language teachers working as a team

OUT OF COMFORT ZONE: Feeling positively different when doing CPD

QUESTIONING OWN TEACHING: CPD makes teacher look more closely at what he/she is doing

IDEAS FOR THIS STUDY: Giving me ideas of what to implement

VIEWS RE MANDATORY CPD: Plans by the government to make CPD mandatory and how it is being seen

SMALL PROJECTS: More doable, easier, oversee-able etc. to work on small scale projects than doing long-term study as in an M.Ed.

TIME RESTRICTIONS: Having not enough time as a reason to not engage fully in different aspects of CPD

GIVING FEEDBACK: In case of observing other teachers, it can be difficult to give feedback to them because constructive feedback might be seen as negative feedback

I condensed the categories yet again to gain a better overview. Staying with the main heading CPD, the condensed version is listed below:

- Views/Opinions re CPD
- Real CPD
- Experiences w/ CPD
- Views re mandatory CPD
- Small projects
- Subject-specific CPD
- Croke Park
- Online CPD
- Gains from doing CPD
- Doing Master's studies
- Reasons for CPD
- Research-based CPD

This condensed version was an attempt to summarise data even more. However, the disadvantage of this strategy is that the themes above on their own are too general and therefore less significant. Afterwards, I knew that 69 categories emerged that can be bundled under 9 thematic headings:

- CPD
- Enquiry/Teacher Research
- Sharing resources
- Opinions of other teachers
- Teaching
- Time restrictions
- Initial Teacher Education
- Student-teacher relationship
- School context

Before coming to the point of finding core themes, I needed to find a way to show the full scope and potential of the initial categories. Another strategy assisted me during this process: writing narratives about each participant.

5.3.2 Narrative Enquiry Strategies

Since I spent a whole school year collaborating on action research projects with first 8, then 7 teachers, I saw at first hand their particular work environment, heard about their worries, successes and doubts, observed and supported their enquiry process. The subtle nuances could be heard by writing narratives about each teacher. I chose this path to provide a window into teachers' work life and their professional learning needs.

I had to organise data anew to focus on one teacher at a time with all the material in front of me. I gave that teacher his or her voice with the narrative which is written as a third person narrative. Of course, I am still the narrator and influence the flow and direction of the narrative. My overarching directive for writing was to think about what is important to the teachers. I looked at issues arising in the data: what is interesting, compelling or coming too short? The procedure can be visualised the following way:

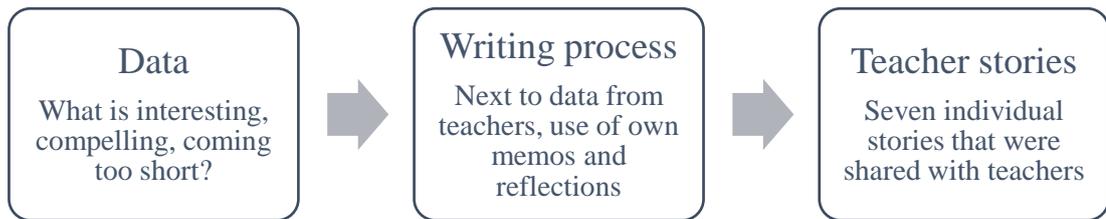


Figure 5.3: Procedure of writing teacher stories

One reflective note from my journal hints at my inability to start the narrative writing process.

27/10/2015

Found article by Johnson & Golombek on teacher narratives to get an idea on how to structure my writing.

Have everything printed off and in front of me to start writing Ciara's story

Will it be an interesting story?

Typical writer's block for a couple of days now - the white document in front of me

I was conscious that I was not writing about myself and unsure how I felt about having the 'power' to recount teachers' experiences during their enquiry. I felt relieved about the fact that they would check their narrative and could ask for amendments.

I did not only write about the enquiries. There was so much more to be found in the data. Student-teacher relationships, relationships to colleagues, teaching experiences, opinions about CPD or about being a modern language teacher. Many aspects needed to be combined and voiced, at times critically, as I felt they were as important to the teachers as the enquiry itself. Writing narratively gave me the opportunity to reveal a holistic picture of the enquiring teacher and his/her professional life.

After I had all stories completed, I shared them with my critical friend to hear her opinion. She mentioned that the core of the Ph.D. study, the enquiry led by teachers, is coming too short. The comment by my critical friend started a second cycle of going back to the data and filter out data specifically concerned with the enquiry.

This started first doubts about the success of my study since I did not seem to be able to extract substantial amounts of data specifically on the teachers' enquiries. Terminology like enquiry, practitioner research or research literature was mostly brought up by me. I needed to spot the

subtleties in which teachers talked about their enquiry. What I expected from the results - a clear account on teacher research - was shaped by my background in academia. Teachers' research was, however, less systematic: it was hard to extract cycles, reflective practice was done mostly by thinking not writing and data was not triangulated. One core theme had to be concerned with the enquiry teachers engaged in, their expectations, experiences, challenges etc., but also my own enquiry on how to support the teachers.

Another theme emerging was based on the fact that during interviews, teachers gave (long) accounts on particular students. Because they are at the heart of teachers' work, they became more dominant in the narrative. I realised that teachers told me about their students in everyday language rather than speaking about them in terms of data and findings. This interview extract shows on the one side my aim to get information about the enquiry process, on the other side, the teacher's observations about one of her students.

A(2)8: The last time I was in you did the questionnaire with them, right? What were the results of the questionnaire.

M(2)8: The results were that they are very visual, all the weaker ones are very very visual. Two of the very good girls they are more on the balanced, they can learn through anything. You know, they have the concentration. One of the girls, in fairness, I don't think she was writing the answers to the questions at all. She has a very low attention span.

A(2)9: So you think the questionnaire was too difficult.

M(2)9: Well, I wrote out the questions, so they understood it. But she has no patience, the same child. I said, Isabel¹⁶, you understand what that question is.

A(2)10: I remember Isabel.

M(2)10: But Isabel is going to be a challenge. Already she can be very...she says things without thinking. She's not a bad child. She said to me I should not be doing German because I don't do Irish. You know, she has learning difficulties. But I said to her, you know Isabel, if you were born in Germany you'd speak fluent German. And she says: Would I, teacher? And I says, yes you would. And she says: I didn't know that. So I tell her it just means you have to work a little harder. But it doesn't mean why you wouldn't be able to learn a language. It's kind of carrot and stick with Isabel.

A(2)11: Maybe it's also a day to day basis. Sometimes better sometimes worse with her?

M(2)11: I saw her one day now. They are not allowed to have Coke in the school and she had a big litre bottle of Coke and she was drowning it down. And then she is as high as a kite and can't sit still.

¹⁶ Name changed.

M(2)12: [...] the principal, has banned that stuff from school. But they come in with it now. If we catch them with it we can take it off them. You know the child I'm talking about. She is not the type of person you would take on.

A(2)13: Ok. But coming back to the questionnaire. You found out the differences, what they like, what they don't like.

Teachers' relationships to students, their caring attitude and personalised teaching, became apparent and I found it important to pursue and reflect this in teachers' narratives. I tried to bring into the stories as much detail as possible. About the same teacher from the interview above, I wrote:

Students feel in many other classes that they are not cut out for school and learning, which triggers aggression. Mary always tries to be fair to them and tries not to take things personally. However, she admits that

"I have my own baggage as well. I mean you are trying always to be a role model. But some of them complain. And they treat you disrespectfully and usually [...] you can react. It doesn't happen in this German class because they are little dotes. I love them."

"If you didn't have them on board, God help you."

But when she has them on board and when they learn, the reward to Mary is actually higher than teaching any other class.

While the broad theme of student-teacher relationship was unfolded while coding and finding categories, it became even more central in the teacher narratives. Strategies for narrative analysis were discussed in chapter 3.4.2 and supported my writing process. Broadening or giving context was an integral part to all narratives.

Rachel is also very active outside the classroom. She is involved in facilitating CPD for German teachers, she became Head of German in her school, she started an online ICT and Chinese course - all in the same year. Next to that there are extracurricular activities, parent-teacher meetings, she had an inspection from the Department of Education and each year the school carries out a SSE. Taking part in this project is an avenue for Rachel to meet like-minded people, to share ideas, resources and thoughts and to see

"we all have the same struggle with time and everything else but we all want the same kind of thing."

An example of burrowing can be seen in the following extract from Ciara's narrative.

Ciara mentioned how much she craved for grammar rules in the Chinese lessons she attended. When she put up her hand in one of the classes to ask for a rule, the teacher replied: "There are no rules." Learning rather happens due to repetition of patterns and recognising sounds. Ciara could see that students

"find it from that point of view much easier to pick up. They are not looking for a way to remember. They just go with it. So, it's retraining myself and to allow myself to not have a rule."

That was a crucial moment: to struggle and to find ways to come to terms with learning a new language. And furthermore, to have in the back of her mind that in a couple weeks, she will be teaching it without having reached proficiency. She was afraid of students asking specific questions and not having the answer to it. From an outsider perspective, this is great: as teachers, we always think we have to have answers. However, this new teaching situation, while making Ciara insecure, gave her a fresh outlook on teaching and learning a language.

Lastly, I show an example for restorying which signals the changes teachers made.

Marie stressed that her weak point is being a native speaker of French and hence finding it hard sometimes to step into her students' shoes to understand their struggles. She also thinks that she is "not good at grammar" but wants to put a strong emphasis on grammar in her lessons. She worked on that issue by

"[going] to basics, start from basics to slightly harder. And those steps. I know from previous years and even last year, I went too fast and then I was losing them."

Marie finds that there is a learning curve her students and herself are on, regarding them becoming independent learners, and herself to guide them without overburdening them.

After broadening, burrowing and restorying, I needed to find a strategy to gain an overview regarding all the findings, from applying grounded theory and narrative enquiry methods. The question remained which core themes to choose for a detailed analysis. The next chapter will briefly introduce the 'mud-map' and talk about its potential.

5.3.3 Mud-map Strategy

Having the results from applying grounded theory and narrative enquiry strategies in front of me, I started creating a so-called mud-map, a strategy described in the book *How to write a*

better thesis.¹⁷ Onto the mud-map I wrote all first outcomes, statements and interesting facts concerning the question “What happens when teachers do teacher research?” I also took the results from the member check into consideration as the member check was validating the provisional findings (see appendix J) I chose to discuss with the teachers. The following image shows my mud-map.

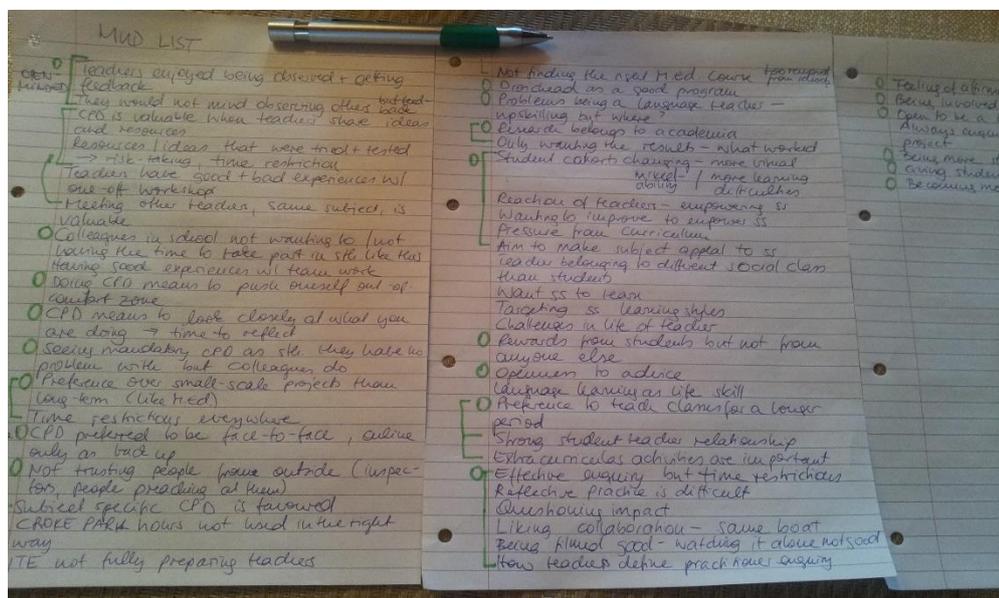


Image 5.2: Mud-map of themes and categories from grounded theory, narrative enquiry and member check

I pondered about the questions “What did I learn about the subject?” and “What are original research findings?” By going over the mud-map several times, by connecting different points, finding headings and merging further statements under these headings and discussing them with my supervisor, core themes and categories became clearer.

Chapter 6 will depict these core themes and categories stemming from using the different strategies (chapter 5.3.1-5.3.3). An outline on the structure of chapter 6 will follow next.

5.4 Structure of Data Findings

The following chapters include an analysis of my own (chapter 6.1) and my participants’ action/teacher research journeys (chapter 6.3) with reference being made to literature findings.

¹⁷ <https://thesiswhisperer.com/2016/04/20/the-difficult-discussion-chapter/> [08/01/2018]

Chapter 6.2 investigates the boundary space and interactions taking place when a university researcher collaborates with teachers in post-primary schools.

The result is a bricolage ‘in order to maintain theoretical coherence and epistemological innovation’ (Kincheloe & Berry 2004, pp.1–2). Bricolage symbolises the complexity of the research journeys and contexts in this study. I see myself as the bricoleur that guides through the most interesting aspects and findings stemming from a year-long collaboration with modern language teachers.

As it is an action research dissertation, Herr and Anderson state that knowledge (or in Somekh’s words: practical wisdom) generation is only one part of the dissertation. Methodological matters encountered and transformations undergone during the study are just as significant (Herr & Anderson 2015, p.128).

The following chapters are based on the core themes which correspond to my research question and sub-questions, methodological matters and transformations, and categories that emerged from the ground up, the data at hand.

Core themes	Chapter	Research question and sub-questions
<p><i>Struggling to find my role</i></p> <p><i>Co-creating the study with the teachers</i></p> <p><i>Giving support: Collaborating online</i></p> <p><i>Bridging the gap – but how?</i></p>	<p>Chapter 6.1</p> <p>My own research cycle</p>	<p><i>Research question 1:</i></p> <p>How can I support teachers of modern languages to develop an enquiry practice and work collaboratively to enhance their teaching and their students’ learning?</p> <p><i>Sub-questions:</i></p> <p>How can I best support teachers?</p> <p>Which aha-moments am I experiencing during my support-giving?</p> <p>How do these aha-moments shape my view about teacher CPD?</p>
<p><i>Experiencing cross-boundaries and accepting a self-organising system</i></p>	<p>Chapter 6.2</p> <p>Interaction in the cross-boundary space</p>	<p>What is the outcome of the collaboration between ‘researcher - teacher’ and ‘teacher - teacher’?</p>

<p><i>Engagement in research</i></p> <p><i>Arriving at a research question</i></p> <p><i>Perceptions, choices and experiences with research methods</i></p> <p><i>Challenges concerning data collection and analysis</i></p>	<p>Chapter 6.3</p> <p>Inside teacher research</p>	<p><i>Research question 2:</i></p> <p>What happens when teachers enquire into their classrooms and work collaboratively?</p> <p><i>Sub-questions:</i></p> <p>What are participating teachers' experiences and perceptions of the collaborative enquiry project?</p> <p>How did teachers enquire? How did they, for example, engage in/with research?</p> <p>What did teachers learn?</p>
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Table 5.4: Summary of content of chapters 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 in relation to research questions

Chapter 6.4 highlights the individual outcomes of all teachers' action research journeys. The chapter will give a flavour of impeding and propelling factors concerning teacher research (research question 3). Only two teachers' journeys, Marie's and Brian's, can be described in more detail. The narratives of each teacher can be found in appendix K.

Chapter 6.5 investigates research question 4: *To what extent can collaborative and enquiry-based classroom research enhance teaching practice and student learning in the modern language classroom?* The chapter focuses on the need of helping teachers create local knowledge and voice fundamental questions concerning their practice and their students' learning.

Firstly, I discuss themes and categories stemming from my action research journey and critical reflections in the following chapter 6.1.

Chapter 6

Data Findings

6.1 My Action Research Journey

This chapter explores answers to the question *How can I support teachers of modern languages to develop collaborative enquiry-based practice to enhance their teaching and their students' learning?*

I will present my side of the story; my experience of trying to build a collaborative action research community of modern language teachers in Ireland.

Just like (trainee) teachers (Farrell 2008; Finch 2010), I experienced several unplanned incidents which triggered reflection and, ultimately, influenced the direction of the enquiry. To me, a number of incidents were eye-opening; they 'interrupt[ed] (or highlight[ed]) the taken for granted ways of [my] thinking' (Farrell 2008, p.3) and changed my understanding of teacher CPD.

From early on in the enquiry I felt challenged by and struggled to follow the guidelines I had chosen for designing and conducting the collaborative action research (cf. Altrichter et al. 2000; 2008). Many experiences and situations made me wonder whether the participating teachers shared my commitment to developing research-based decision making; whether they were as interested as I was in bridging the second-third level gap. At times, I felt as if teachers showed no interest in collecting different types of data for the purpose of triangulation, in writing about their issues reflectively or in disseminating their findings. Indeed, I often felt that action research was not the central motivator for their participation. Why were teachers taking part? What were their expectations? And how did these relate to my own motivations and plans?

The next chapters explore a selection of specific critical incidents I experienced during the course of the study and examine how they have shaped the study itself as well as my understanding.

The first incident looks at my struggle in finding my role in this study. It is related to my own positionality as a cultural stranger (O'Sullivan 1992), as a former CPD provider who wanted to push outside-the-box thinking and myself as a university lecturer who did not fully understand the work context of second-level teachers.

6.1.1 Struggling to Find My Role

I struggled with recurring role conflict incidents early in my enquiry when teachers' questions after my first classroom observations made me feel that they enjoyed getting feedback on their teaching more than talking about their teacher research. I began to wonder how teachers saw me and what they expected from me and this study. My open-ended questions, for example, "How do you think that lesson went?", were a good starting point to make the participants reflect on their class but there were many instances when my participants turned to me asking: "So, how do *you* think that lesson went?" or "What would *you* do in this situation?" I was not prepared for this. Planning to be a co-researcher and helping them with their enquiry was my idea of what the study would be about. I did not intend to provide feedback on their teaching similar to a teacher educator or inspector that gives a one-to-one feedback entailing ideas for change. I had envisaged that teachers would identify problems and ideas themselves, engage with relevant literature, take action and observe and reflect on the action. I was alarmed that the action research cycle might be disrupted or not carried out correctly if we were to minimize the process to quick fixes.

Hobbs and Kubanyiova attest that nothing really prepares the novice researcher for 'painful realities' (2008, p.495). In my case, I did not see myself as the one *knowing*. Scott et al. wrote that

researchers may experience role conflict to the extent that they perceive a discrepancy between the self-presentational work of demonstrating competence and the embarrassingly messy lived experience of managing fieldwork. (Scott et al. 2012, p.718)

Into my diary, I wrote:

I think I need a leadership workshop. [...] I have the feeling that teachers look out for more guidance and decisiveness from my part. But I'm just not sure if that is me. They are professionals, too. I need to come to terms with feeling/being a professional.

Instead of pushing myself into the role I thought I had to play (be confident, be assertive, be on top of things), I had ample choice to talk to my supervisor and write reflectively about my feelings of doubt and insecurity as the leading researcher in the study. Being open helped me to become more comfortable. Using reflexivity as 'personal self-supervision' (Berger 2015,

p.222) in the form of regular reflective journal writing made me aware of my own biases and thought processes.

From analysing my written reflections from that initial stage of my study and through discussions of my role conflict dilemma with my supervisor, I began to notice my eagerness to please teachers. With that eagerness came a determination not to jeopardize the study by making my participants feel negatively judged. An example can be seen in the interview held after observing Jacinta's class. During her lesson, I noted down a few issues that caught my attention: she jumped right into the main task without any warm-up, she did not introduce new vocabulary before listening to the song and did not explain what she was about to do. Also, she mainly chose students sitting in the front of the classroom to answer her questions and did not write down new vocabulary on the board. Jacinta asked me after the observation: "But you liked the class, yes?" (J(1)17). I felt uneasy to respond. This was due to the unexpectedly short answers offered by Jacinta during the interview. My plan to use open-ended questions to invite her to halt, think and deepen her reflections was not working. I felt irritated, my confidence diminished, I doubted if Jacinta liked me. This added to my decision not to share all my critical comments regarding her lesson. Instead I said:

A(1)18: Yes, I was impressed. They were working so well. The tasks were really nice, well put. What I thought - but I think it's difficult to do - to write down words? But I think they knew the words. They didn't need the spelling

J(1)18: You see, it's not my room and it's difficult to switch and it takes a lot of time to set up and sometimes you just want to go.

I even weakened my only critical comment, that she did not make new vocabulary more explicit, by saying "it's difficult to do" and "they knew the words". In fact, I neither thought the students knew the words nor that it was difficult to use the board. I tried to overcome the situation of being asked for feedback but feeling intimidated to give my honest opinion by saying: "It was maybe just my own question. Because I thought: So how would you spell this now?" (A(1)19).

I was also acutely aware of (and influenced by) the need to build trusting relationships with and among my participants.

Given that many current educational change efforts emphasize teachers having conversations and sharing their practice, there is a need to construct safe contexts in which teachers have a sense of relational trust. (Le Fevre 2014, p.63)

Being the person that creates safe contexts and relational trust was not always easy to accomplish. I firstly needed to feel safe myself.

As the study progressed, positive feedback and continued commitment from the teachers (only one of initially eight teachers leaving the study for personal reasons) made me feel more competent and confident in leading the study. I began to feel more myself when I worked with the teachers and grew into my role of facilitator, constant learner and adaptor.

I realised that especially NQTs and teachers with only a few years of teaching experience (Jacinta, Brian, Rachel and Olwyn) asked directly for feedback after classroom observations.

O(2)115: Can I ask you, if we still have time, if you have time...

A(2)116: Oh yes.

O(2)116: Can I get your feedback for my class?

This ties in with the frequent observations NQTs had during their pre-service education and them valuing the outside support given.

I also allowed time for teachers to share ideas and resources at our meetings. When I asked them what they expected from the meeting in December, answers were similar to the one given next:

To gain ideas on teaching methods which tie in with good classroom management and having pupils in a mixed ability able participate to their own ability. Talking with practicing teachers provides a chance to gain tried and tested ideas.

I came to understand that I needed to listen and partially let go of my agenda. I needed to tune in and hear what was being said but also what was not being said. Why, for example, there was more interest in hearing feedback on the classes than talking about reflective writing? Why were the terms action/practitioner research, data collection and analysis not brought up or used in conversation or in writing by any of the participants? Was it because this language was deemed too academic?

As I grew into my role and in confidence, I started to use Altrichter et al.'s *Teachers Investigate Their Work* (2000) as a flexible guide rather than a rigid blueprint, allowing our collaborative experiences and my participants' expectations, needs and motivation to shape and create our journey.

Owning the study started when I noticed how excited students were that a researcher from university had come to see their class. In one of Mary's classes, students wrote onto the board "Happy birthday and Hello Annli" because it was Mary's birthday and she told them I was coming to observe the class. One student proudly showed me her copy which was full of mind-maps and pictures with German vocabulary. I felt I was being taken seriously as a researcher but also as someone teachers could trust and share their professional life with.

Finding my role, though, was a constant development. Further into the study, I still caught myself making mistakes, e.g. talking too much about my opinion during interviews. I picked up on the issue in my reflective journal.

After listening several times to the interview, I noticed I brought in too much about myself. My opinion on things, which didn't really matter.

I took the next interview as a chance to improve on that issue and not speak about my personal opinion unless the teacher had asked me.

I learned that working together with the teachers and finding out what their needs are, meant to listen more actively to what they are saying. That corresponds with my journal entries about interviewing:

I found the interview went well. What I thought I didn't do so well in the interview with Brian I changed (e.g. I didn't talk about personal things.) (February 2015 after interview with Mary)

Also, while I usually stuck to my prepared question outline, I felt more at ease during the second and third interview round and let teachers develop on interesting statements by asking them further questions.

I asked a few more ad hoc questions in between and towards the end. (February 2015 after interview with Rachel)

If I had not felt safe and appreciated by the teachers, my role conflict could have impeded the development of the study. However, by feeling safe, I had the capacity to listen, was able to

react to the needs and wishes of my participants and let them co-create the study. The next chapter will look more closely at my reflection on that collaboration.

6.1.2 Co-creating the Study with Teachers

“Hopefully, I won't be hearing someone preaching to me!” (Mary)

Throughout the study, I had to remind myself that

[a]ction research is not something you can do because each project is continually evolving and changing and because one could only fully engage in action research in an open, inquiring, democratic society—one which action research practitioners are continually aspiring to create. (Reason 2006, p.189)

From the start, I had a clear outline that I communicated to teachers. Leaflets informed them about what the study entailed. Also, a first informal meeting with each interested participant and the consent form summarised the purpose of the study. Reflective writing, improvement of teaching methods through practitioner research and data collection and analysis were all mentioned. The seven teachers reported to take part:

[t]o improve my teaching methodologies and to try keep the subject alive!

One referred more to research and reflective practice by saying:

I thought it would be good to challenge myself to do something more research directed...force myself to ask/understand why I did something etc....REFLECT! Aaaagh...

We spent about two hours during the first group meeting talking about what action research meant and which possible questions/issues they could raise. All participants were attentive, but it was only after the workshop when we went for coffee that I noticed their much higher engagement when talking about their teaching contexts, language learning software they are using or language competitions their students take part in. In advance of our second group

meeting, I asked teachers via a Google questionnaire *What do you expect from the meeting on Saturday?*

Responses ranged from hearing about issues other teachers enquire into, to

[l]ots of exchange, and suggestions, ideas etc... motivation!

I have no idea whatsoever - hopefully, I won't be hearing someone preaching to me!

Would like to have a few quiet chats with people who have experience in the classroom and get a few "tips".

Because teachers requested ideas and resources, I dedicated half the time at the second meeting towards the action research project, talking about data collection and analysis, but also gave room for an exchange on teaching methods and tools. One teacher showed her use of a software she uses in her classroom and the other teacher gave an example lesson using the flipped classroom method. I noted into my diary that I saw a change during the second half of the workshop: teachers were more active and engaged compared to the part I facilitated. During the first part, I did not just deliver top-down information to the teachers but asked them to talk about their journey so far. We focused on questions/issues they raised about their classrooms and how they proceeded in getting information from their students by doing surveys or questionnaires. I then talked to them about sound research and the triangulation of data. Teachers were more at the recipient end during this talk and I was not sure what they were really thinking. Did it matter to them? Was it too boring? Too far removed from their daily routine?

The feedback from the workshop was very good - but for the wrong reason. Teachers said it was nice to meet peers, chat about concerns and issues and hear about the software and the flipped classroom. How to carry out action research was not mentioned at all. The feedback gave me a mixed feeling. Action research itself seemed to come up short which made me apprehensive. Teachers enjoyed very much having professional conversations, sharing stories from their classrooms and talking about their school context. I had to realise that while I was one-hundred percent dedicated to the research project my participants might rank it as less important than all the other needs they have.

The experiences from the meeting in December and another class observation/interview cycle made me change my approach for our last meeting in April 2015. I realised that teachers talked about their pedagogical struggles and their quest to improve their students' learning experience in normal terms, meaning in a conversational manner rather than using research-related terms

suiting our study. Hence, I did not leave out the action research cycle but instead approached the workshop in a more relaxed and conversational way which also signalled my boosted confidence as leading researcher.

I asked the teachers to draw two lines into a graph resembling their school year and their action research cycle. The lines would go up and down depending on how well, or in their view, how badly something went. They then talked about their school year and participation in this study. All of them said how well the year started off and how high their aspirations were but that during the year too many extra duties were added (getting a Green School status, exams and corrections, organising exchange trips, eTwinning, musicals, other competitions) that left them overwhelmed and made them feel tired.

In that last meeting, I invited more storytelling that gave participants the possibility to revisit their own educational values. I still brought up different questions regarding the literature they read, the actions they took and what they observed. However, I did not want to appear as a teacher that brings them back on track all the time. I did let them wander and go from one theme to the next. If they wanted to contribute something they were free to do that at any time. This meant, however, that when I was raising the question of whether the literature I posted to them was helpful, answers and discussions were completely unrelated to the research literature. Instead of insisting on getting an answer from my participants, I much preferred allowing them to find their own flow. I listened, understood, focused and posed a question if I needed to. Twenty minutes after I asked the question about research literature, we came back to the topic. Mary said:

I don't know about the literature. You know, you can't beat experience. You know what works. You know what doesn't work. You get a feeling for them.

And with pointing at our table and our discussion:

This is brilliant. This is really good. This is so much better than reading something. Like you telling me about your songs, about websites, and... You know we are learning from that. And it's real.

This was a statement I cherished so much because it showed me that I did right in letting teachers co-guide the way in developing a new approach for professional learning. While I had to accept that action research was not carried out in its details (see chapter 6.3), all teachers

bar one stayed with the enquiry despite a hectic and demanding work-life. Without the co-creational aspect in the study, I am certain this enquiry would not have lasted with all seven teachers for a whole school year and beyond. During our “member-check” meeting I addressed the aspect of teachers co-creating this study.

Finding	Comments
<p>By letting teachers shape the course of the study, sharing ideas and resources was more dominant than action research.</p>	<p><i>Absolutely. Writing and collecting data is time consuming. Meeting up with teachers is also a form of gathering data - but much more enjoyable than working alone.</i></p> <p><i>I agree with that I think. But I think that's what is maybe needed more. To share ideas and resources rather than doing actual research. It's good to bounce ideas off people. Especially when you teach the same subjects and are like-minded and I thought that was more useful to me more so than like reflective writing. I mean it was useful too but sharing ideas and resources were more of use to me.</i></p> <p><i>I thought so too. When you give them two minutes, teachers almost immediately went on about what are you doing in this class, which book do you use and I found that very useful. Because that's always what's on my mind.</i></p>

Table 6.1: Finding from member check regarding co-creation of study

Meeting with other teachers and sharing resources are clearly prioritised by teachers. That resource sharing is even seen as a form of data gathering, changes the approach to action research. It is problematic, however, if resource sharing does not lead to changes in the classroom. This would bring us back to one-shot models that I aimed at leaving behind. Teachers' preferred content for our workshops needed to be taken seriously. Even at one member check, teachers appeared to 'hijack' the purpose of the meeting. While I had prepared to go through the findings and discuss them they started to speak about a song for the German classroom. One teacher took out her phone, played the song and explained how she was using the song in her classes. Another teacher quote from the member check reads: “even after today's meeting I'm going home with two new ideas” signals that satisfaction with this project was linked to the exchange of tips and tricks for the classroom.

6.1.3 Collaborating Online

“You can’t beat the one-on-one, having a human being in front of you.”

(Mary)

Along the way of the study and the school year, I was testing out different avenues as to how best to support teachers. I set up a PBworks website, described in chapter 3.4.2, as a web-tool for collaboration.

At the beginning, most of the teachers signed up on PBworks and visited the site regularly. One teacher did not sign up because she did not feel IT-literate enough. Others complained in our second interview that PBworks was too difficult to use. I thought it was too late to change the website, but I sent all participants a manual on how to work with PBworks. The amount of times teachers logged in was trackable and I noticed that it diminished with the progression of the study. The only times they did log in, was after I uploaded (reading) material and let them know that I did so.

Three out of seven teachers used the comment section. One teacher followed my appeal to upload any material they gathered concerning their research question and to introduce themselves briefly with their research question. The online support also offered resources applicable for all languages and resources specific to each modern language.

I had to accept that our online collaboration was one-sided and led by me and, therefore, not collaborative. Even though online collaboration was deemed as “helpful”, all teachers preferred face-to-face meetings because “you can’t beat the one-on-one, having a human being in front of you”. Online experiences they made prior to the study resulted often in “box-ticking” exercises. During the second interview cycle, teachers explained that they found the material I uploaded either i) not relevant to the Irish context, ii) not novel, iii) too academic, or iv) too ideal and hence not trustworthy. Only one teacher commented on the literature I posted, confirming that he tested one or two strategies that he discovered in the article in his classroom.

Research has shown that any form of online professional development should be clearly linked to teachers’ needs in the classroom (Teräs 2016). While the material was linked to each individual teacher regarding their research question, the envisaged collaborative aspect did not materialise. Indeed, only one teacher commented on another teacher’s entry. Marie was the only teacher following my request to introduce the research question briefly. Ciara replied to Marie’s entry the following way:

at 10:28 pm on November 5, 2014

You are blazing a trail Marie....I am simply trailing! Well done! It sounds like it is really going well. Would love to give it [flipped classroom] a go myself at some point!

I replied as well to keep the momentum going:

at 8:25 pm on November 12, 2014

I'll talk briefly about the Flipped Classroom at a workshop on Differentiation. I think it's a great tool for learners and teachers. Very impressed by your work, Marie! And Ciara, you are blazing as well!

Marie replied at 9:18 pm on November 12, 2014:

Great!! I am hoping to do something else than Grammar now... taking a break from grammar ... any suggestions?

I replied to Marie with several suggestions for websites focusing on vocabulary for beginners French. Unfortunately, this was one out of only two times teachers used the commenting box on PBworks.

Ciara and Marie work in the same school. During an interview with both of them, scheduled together due to time constraints, I noticed how frank and critical they could be in the presence of the other. This experience made me wonder whether a stronger familiarity among group members could be a crucial aspect for successful online CPD.

In another interview, Rachel spoke in favour of an online CPD course she recently attended without having ever met the other teachers on the course.

And I actually did the online ICT for modern languages course. So that was five weeks and there is a lot of good ideas there. I still need, I've created a list but I still need to actually start, what's the word, experimenting. (R(3)44)

Getting resources from peers made the ICT course successful. An actual implementation, however, did not happen. Teräs would argue that an 'interplay of long-term implementation and reflection on the experience' (Teräs 2016, p.270) would heighten the online learning experience. While teachers are made to feel secure by adding interesting ideas and resources to their list the question remains of whether courses like the one mentioned above have an

impact on their professional practice? How are, for example, changes teachers implement subsequently supported?

During a member check, I asked my participants to comment on my finding that *teachers enjoy meeting up with like-minded colleagues from different schools. Face-to-face meetings/courses are favoured over online meetings/courses. Online CPD is oftentimes seen as “ticking boxes” and not too beneficial.*

Jacinta and Brian discussed the finding the following way:

J: I do think that meeting face to face is probably the best but it would have to be with like-minded people. You know sometimes you do CPD and it's not...I've been to CPD where I haven't really gained anything from it [...]. People who are sharing resources is always better than someone lecturing you. I did do an online course, ICT in the MFL classroom and I thought that one was really good [...].

A: What made the difference between the two?

J: The first one had stuff I haven't seen before so I felt like I got something out of it that I can use whereas the other one I kind of knew the stuff already. I just found myself clicking through the slides. Whereas the ICT one I went and I saw something different. So, I think there can be some online but talking things through with a person face to face is probably better. But that online course had a forum and you had to contribute to it.

A: And then you go out and every teacher has a folder.

J: Yes, you had to say something about the course and then add a few things in each section of the course. You were probably forced to get on with the course otherwise you don't get the accreditation but I thought it was useful to do that as well.

B: I think the small approaches is a good idea. There is just so much in teaching. So, I'm trying to take it bit by bit, that's the best approach. The face to face meetings they are generally favoured. Face to face meetings have their own problems. They sometimes miss clear outcomes. Sometimes certain dominant personalities would thrive in an environment like that. Then not much is achieved. Like with meetings some people just...

A: ...took over?

J: They like to hear their own voices too much. So, it's kind of difficult to actually achieve a lot within a time frame, you know?

The discussion shows that face-to-face meetings can be problematic as well but are usually favoured. The interesting fact that the ICT course, which was mentioned before by Rachel, was successful seems not only to be rooted in teachers getting ideas but also getting active - even if this part was “forced”. It seems that Jacinta appreciated and benefitted from “being forced”. Contributing content in an online environment in order to receive accreditation, as

was the case with the ICT online course, seems to be a promising way. However, ‘fully accommodating [teachers] will keep them in their comfort zone and not allow them to cross boundaries, be empowered and grow professionally and personally’ (Teräs 2016, p.271). My way to tease teachers out of their comfort zone was to offer research literature, advice on data collection based on School-Self-Evaluation recommendations (DES 2012) and an invitation to them to share their enquiry with a group of other modern language teachers. Unfortunately, teachers did not become active enough on our portal. While this study was carried out mostly through face-to-face interaction, an important asset, online or e-collaboration, could be explored further.

The last critical incident investigates another aspect of boundary crossing. It reflects on my attempt to ingrain research-based knowledge into teacher CPD.

6.1.4 Bridging the Gap - but how?

“Getting advice from people who don’t know your classroom, it’s really, it’s a hard one.” (Olwyn)

The leaflet I distributed to recruit teacher participants stated that this project aimed to bring second and third level, teaching in post-primary schools and research at universities, closer. Through research-based knowledge and by acquiring research skills, I envisaged teachers enriching their professional practice and enquiry journeys. Back in the 1990s, McKernan ‘identified time and organisational factors and a lack of research skills as impediments to action research and knowledge-in-practice in [...] Ireland’ (in Gleeson 2012, p.13). Through critical engagement with research literature, academic and non-academic, and my support throughout the enquiry, I had hoped to bridge the gap.

After my participants had their research questions written down, I searched for and distributed relevant material. While I found this process very enjoyable and educative for myself, I began to realise that my appreciation for theory did not seem to resonate with the teachers’ work life and interests. I had envisaged them reading the material I sent them, commenting on it, uploading their own, reading relevant literature uploaded by other teachers and commenting on that literature as well. While they did read the research literature I sent to them, it became clear during the last interview cycle that they wanted material to be relevant (which I thought the materials I sent were), that it should preferably be tailored to the Irish education context and not include too much theory but rather highlight the findings. One teacher said that she “does not need the pros and cons, the theory behind it, she needs to know if it worked or not”.

Material that was “done and tested” by other teachers was seen as much more valuable than any reading I offered to them. One teacher said that third level should “come down a bit”, other teachers did not fully trust “[g]etting advice from people who don’t know your classroom”, saying that “it’s really, it’s a hard one”. Even inspectors are perceived as outsiders: “I really don’t want to hear from someone who has only taught two years and is telling me what I should do!”. Academic language is also, according to the teachers, too “flowery” and academic publications were not perceived to be as useful or practical as for example a workshop or a conversation with other teachers.

When you are looking at mixed-ability like we did with the project this year, mixed-ability in the classroom. There is a certain amount of theory I read. But for secondary school teachers I think it’s the practice that’s really important. You don’t need to know why such and such a thing was researched and findings and possibilities. (C(3)128)

Teachers emphasised that what is needed are ideas for the classroom:

I think it might take you about 10 minutes to properly read through an article and think about how you could apply it to a lesson. Whereas I think in three minutes a German teacher could give me a quick idea on an activity she used in class and that worked really well and then I could go away and try it. (B(3)65)

In the OECD study *Governing Education in a Complex World*, Cordingley suggests that the worlds of practice-based and research-based knowledge have to come together in order to make students’ learning more fruitful. She gives an example: while *Assessment for Learning* (AfL) is a widely-researched method, ‘probably 20% of the full potential of AfL is actually deployed by the teachers trying to use it’. She furthermore concludes that ‘use of research and harnessing research-based knowledge as a tool for improving practice and capacity building is not, as yet, an established art form’ (Cordingley 2016, p.142).

The Irish Teaching Council embraces the idea of research-based knowledge for practice. The Teaching Council suggests that successful professional development should be

seeking to create the space and time in which teachers as professionals develop the answers themselves, informed by research, supported by parents, pupils and researchers, and open to learning from others. (Ó Ruairc 2014, p.17)

For this reason, '[t]eachers and researchers need to connect with each other' (ibid., p.18). This is a call also voiced by Zeichner who said that 'academic and practitioner knowledge and knowledge that exists in communities [should] come together in new less hierarchical ways in the service of teacher learning' (Zeichner 2010, p.89) which becomes a hybrid space. The above quotes clearly back the notion of teaching as a research-informed practice. The conclusion regarding this study's attempt to bridge the gap is that

bringing research into teacher CPD and cater for a critical involvement with it, [...] is an aspirational goal that is not easily, and perhaps not initially or in every context, achievable. (Eberhardt & Heinz 2017, p.48)

The last quote signals that it is a gradual development towards a hybrid space. In this study, teachers got familiar with action research, reflective practice and critical enquiry but put a higher emphasis on collecting data from each other in the form of resources and ideas for the modern language classroom. Supporting teachers towards a systematic enquiry but also learning about teachers' actual needs would entail crossing boundaries from both sides - from the teacher's and researcher's perspective. The concept of boundaries can be explained as follows:

The gap might be described in terms of boundaries between two communities of practice, not profiting from one another's expertise because of certain boundaries between the two communities. (Bakx et al. 2016, p.76)

What all of the four critical incidents have in common, is the dependency on interaction in the cross-boundary space. Hence, I put the two communities of practice, the one of teachers and the researcher, in relation to another. In the following chapter, I look at the interaction between the two communities and specifically analyse the communication coming from my side.

6.2 Interaction in the Cross-boundary Space

"A person is a person through other persons." (Desmond Tutu)

Interaction shaped the network in this study tremendously. I was dependent on my research participants to be able to carry out research with them over a whole school year. My

participants, on the other hand, relied on me to guide them through their enquiry. The interaction of different stakeholders ‘helps a system to go beyond, to grow’ (Larsen-Freeman 2012, p.207). This interaction comes with challenges. Another way of looking at the teachers and the researcher - at the community of practice on this side and the other - is to think of complex systems as mentioned in chapter 5.2.

As seen in chapter 6.1.2, the focus teachers approached the study with was different. This led to tensions on my side: when teachers’ interest and enthusiasm seemed to fade a few months into the study as they became more and more occupied with mock exams and corrections, school exchanges etc., I needed to rethink my approach to this study. Factors impeding our interaction were the minimal engagement in our online workspace and the fact that participants were spread out over the country. Casual meetings or brief chats were - in most cases - not feasible. I was dependent on email communication. The tone in my emails was always positive and empathetic, even though my true feelings often reflected despair, failure and pessimism. Already in October, only one month into the project, I wrote into my diary:

What should be the next steps? What can I do to keep all teachers active and on board? How can I contribute something worthwhile to their daily professional life? Their lives are busy and full.

In a pre-questionnaire before our meeting in December, I asked teachers why they participated in this study. Nearly all mentioned upskilling in teaching methods. Inviting them to share their impressions of the project so far, allowed me to discover that my participants were just as self-critical as I was.

I am way behind on everything so am feeling that I am not at all where I could be or should be. The PBworks forum always has new posts and articles and/or links that look really interesting but I haven't been able to devote any time to any of it yet...this is no reflection on the project just on my lack of time to contribute. Sorry.

It is difficult to always find time to reflect on the ideas in the articles which is needed to consider their practical implications. A more systematic approach by me could lead to very positive results. For this I should have analysed and got feedback on the effect of changes I make to my lessons.

I took comfort out of the fact that teachers felt similar. Looking at the language in the feedback, teachers use words like “could”, “should” or “sorry” when speaking about their enquiry which signal missed opportunities and regrets. This feedback demonstrated how problematic it is for teachers to cross their boundary. “It looks interesting but I haven’t been able to devote any time [...]” and “a more systematic approach by me” are clear indicators that teachers would have liked to enter a hybrid space.

One question in the questionnaire focused on teachers’ expectations of our meeting in December. Six teachers replied in total. Three out of six mentioned their wish to hear about ideas and resources. Three also mentioned meeting other teachers and hearing from them. Again, to my surprise, three also referred to the study by saying: “having a proper talk about the study”, to see “how people are faring. I am sure their insights will be both intriguing and motivational” and “[t]o make clear the objectives. Not sure where I can go now with my research.” That “the study”, “my research” and “objectives” were mentioned, encouraged me: while there was a clear emphasis from teachers on teaching material, the enquiry was important to them as well.

Still, teachers did not seem to find the time to actively engage in the enquiry. In an email a week before the meeting took place, I emphasised that there is no need to feel pressured or guilty for not having accomplished reading and researching a lot. I also stepped up to my role as leader of the research study by being decisive on the content of the meeting.

Dear all,

[...]

The meeting is very much a meet & greet in a relaxed atmosphere. We are looking at where we are, how the journey is going for you and what could possible next steps involve.

Have a wonderful weekend and 1st of Advent.

Annelie

The responses in the pre-questionnaire showed that my feeling of despair is mostly caused by my devotion to the project which involved ongoing questioning of approaches and adaptations. As a facilitator, I needed to consider keeping my participants active, engaged but also happy. Sending out emails that mirrored shortcomings seemed the wrong approach. Chan and Clarke’s study about a collaborative school-university action research project in Hong Kong picks up the same issue where the university researcher was ‘struggling over how to support

the teachers without going so far as to tell them what they “should” do’ (Chan & Clarke 2014, p.6).

With reference to the abovementioned systems, it is no wonder that these tensions arose. One system being that of busy language teachers, and the other system that of a full-time academic researcher, meeting to form a complex system. I could not just steer this study into the direction I foresaw for it but rather indulge in a process of self-organisation. To me, this self-organisation meant that one action led to the next action influenced by the interaction between all. Seeing ‘self-organization [as] the spontaneous creation of more complex order’ (Larsen-Freeman 2012, p.207) helps to address the tensions along the way.

Letting the study self-organise its way was a gradual development. On my side, that progress was influenced in negotiating ‘an ambivalent identity as caring teacher versus proactive leader’ (Chan & Clarke 2014, p.7). While the tone of my emails was always soft, reassuring and, I hoped, motivating to keep going, I secretly wondered if that tone was also a *carte blanche* for teachers not investing more time in their enquiry. I struggled between giving gentle pushes and accepting teachers’ busy work schedule and a possible neglect of their research. The new year’s email read:

Dear all,

I wish you a successful, happy and healthy 2015! I hope you had a nice break.

Now that we are back, I'd like to take the opportunity to come and see you in your class and for an interview afterwards.

If you could pick a day and time that suits you, I'd be very grateful.

I will be in touch again about details. Don't worry at all if you have the feeling that not much happened regarding the project. We are just starting :)

Hope you are all well and no one caught a flu.

See you soon!

Annelie

The *We are just starting* line carries the notion of reassurance. However, in my mind we were in the middle of the project and progress seemed slow. I needed to ask myself which identity - the one of the caring teacher or pro-active leader - I wanted to embody. Teaching was the bread and butter of my life before my Ph.D. study commenced and certainly helped in retaining an empathetic stance towards the teaching world throughout. Becoming a group leader was a process that made me feel out of my comfort zone: I did not have answers; I could only give

suggestions based on personal beliefs and listen actively to teachers' needs. I needed to juggle the multiple identities I had in this study: the identity of an action researcher, of a university researcher and the identity of a teacher.

[T]he meaning of human being – identity – is a complex and ongoing process of becoming, shaped through dialectical interaction between disparate elements – social and individual, linguistic and material, conscious and unconscious – that comprise the self. (Chan & Clarke 2014, p.4)

As described in chapter 6.1.1, I clearly found it difficult to find my role, also due to a lack of experience as an action researcher, as a university researcher and as a secondary school teacher. In Chan and Clarke's study, the facilitator of a *Collaborative Action Research* project was 'drawing on the identity resources of a caring teacher educator and a democratic facilitator to mitigate the authoritative identity of an expert researcher' (ibid., p.6). While I did not see myself as the expert researcher, I can identify being a caring teacher educator and democratic facilitator. Furthermore, I mitigated my outsider position by becoming part of the teachers' action research process.

Instead of looking at disappointments, I was struck by how much the teachers in this study cared for their students - something I did not experience as such in my own culture. Furthermore, teachers were open-minded, able to reflect and interested in anything that can be helpful for their classrooms. (Eberhardt & Heinz 2017, p.49)

Because teachers and I co-created the research project, it was my duty to fully grant them their own perspectives and approaches – even if these disagreed with what action research is supposed to consist of. Shosh and McAteer reaffirm this by saying 'teachers develop their own processes for reflecting on, interrogating, and changing their practice. [...] In supporting them, we as tutors must also be part of that process' (Shosh & McAteer 2016, p.15).

Another aspect that helped me in my newly acclaimed boundary space was the realisation that devoting time to action research is an individual matter. McTaggart et al. also came to the conclusion that '*[n]ew theoretical ideas are hard to come by in the busy life of a school*' (1997, p.130, italics in original). I needed to lower my expectations and face the reality of teachers' work schedules while constantly asking myself "How do I improve what I am doing?" (Whitehead 2009).

I also accepted that teachers in this study were content to take part and willingly interacted with me and each other. They cherished, for example, the observation plus feedback on their teaching which had been a rare or non-existent experience after their initial teacher education. What gave teachers an overarching satisfaction, however, was interacting as a group as Rachel pointed out during our member check meeting.

[...] I loved taking part in the research with you, and I think it helped me to look at my teaching, to reflect and to change certain things. And now, even that we stopped the research, I still think when I come out of a class, okay, what did I not like about this class, what did I...and then I try and write it down or I have to add a power-point, or simple things you have to change or you have to allocate more time to that or to explain the rules more carefully. But what I loved most about engaging in this was the opportunity to meet other teachers outside my school and to share ideas.

The interaction taking place between myself and the teachers formed my understanding of action research: it is a learning system where all parts influence each other and constantly move forward while using reflection as a guard to steer in the right direction. The tensions I experienced definitely led to a transformation of my beliefs regarding teacher CPD, specifically teacher research.

The following chapters 6.3 to 6.4 will consider the research journeys participants took highlighting their transformations. They give a close-up view on challenges, successes and emerging questions related to teacher research. Some aspects coincide with my own action research journey which is inevitable in a collaborative enquiry. However, the teachers' voices will feature more dominantly in the next part.

6.3 Inside Teacher Research

The following chapters focus on the experiences of the participating teachers. The question of how they experienced the research process and what challenges and successes they encountered along the way will be explored. Chapter 6.3.1 gives an account of teachers' engagement in research including the journey to arrive at a research question (6.3.1.1), the research methods used and not used to collect data (6.3.1.2) and teachers' ways of analysing data (6.3.1.3). Chapter 6.4 investigates a so far unanswered question: what was the outcome of teachers' enquiries and our collaboration? What changed? I further examine changes in teachers' practices due to teacher research (6.4.1) and outcomes regarding our collaboration

(6.4.2). Throughout I will add examples from international studies targeting teachers as researchers and school-university partnerships to further illuminate the process of teacher research.

Five broad thematic areas emerged during data analysis that will be targeted in the next chapters.



Figure 6.1: Broad thematic areas for chapter 6.3 and 6.4

These areas emerged from the mud-map (explained on p.114) that was later transferred into the diagram as can be seen in the figure above. These themes concerning teacher research will be highlighted throughout the next chapters.

6.3.1 Engagement in Research

"[W]e did have to sit down, we did have to write something on a paper, we did have to chat but it wasn't really taken for research." (Brian)

The critical incident in chapter 6.1.4 showed that an engagement *with* research - the reading of relevant literature - was not prioritised by teachers. This chapter outlines the engagement *in* research. Starting out, I demonstrate how teachers arrived at their research question. Later, I show the methods they used or did not use to collect data. Table 6.2 below provides an overview of the research questions posed and methods used by the participating teachers.

Teacher (Pseudonym)	Grade	Research Question	Methods
Marie	5th	How can the Flipped Classroom help my students to become more independent learners?	Reflective blog writing, questionnaire, test results, oral feedback
Jacinta	5th	How can I improve listening comprehension with French songs?	Two tests, observations, journal
Brian	5th	How can I motivate my students to enjoy doing reading exercises and what are good ways to work with texts?	Observation, notes
Ciara	TY	How can I develop a love for learning?	3 teaching cycles with 3 different groups → 3 questionnaires, journal
Olwyn	TY	How can I create a more student-centred and fun Transition Year class but also make sure that basics don't get lost?	Questionnaire, JC grades, notes, observation, vocabulary test
Rachel	2nd	How can I create an active learning environment?	End of year reflective writing, two questionnaires, open discussion, observation
Mary	1st	How can I give my very mixed-level German class a positive experience of learning a language?	Online survey, oral feedback

Table 6.2: Teachers' research questions and research methods

6.3.1.1 Teachers Arriving at their Research Questions

“I knew immediately what I wanted to do.” (Marie)

After presenting initial findings from my study at the *German Academic Exchange Service* third level teacher training in England, one of the attendees remarked that some of the research questions were too broad to be manageable for a teacher research project. The comment made me ponder about the way teachers arrived at their questions. I realised that the act of question posing which is pivotal for any research project, was not prioritised by teachers. It was more important for them to have a starting point, an issue or problem to provide an initial focus for their journey or enquiry than framing their research with a guiding research question.

*[...] if I'm still wondering in December where I'm going I don't think I would have stucked to it. I would have given up. But I knew immediately what I wanted to do. That was okay.
(M(3)179)*

The issues teachers wanted to target were explored during our first informal information meetings. I then asked them during the first round of interviews to formulate a ‘How can I’ question which is common in action research (McNiff & Whitehead 2002). While I found that this form of question-posing helped me to show the action-side of my enquiry, teachers did not seem as keen on having a research question. Hence, I took the lead in formulating the ‘How can I’ question with/for the teachers.

Even though it is accepted in research circles that ‘it is the research question that gives focus, sets boundaries, and provides direction’ (O’Leary 2004, p.28), my engagement with the teacher participants in this study provided ample evidence that teachers were setting boundaries and that their enquiries had direction even though their research areas/questions may appear unusually broad to an academic audience. Ciara’s question “How can I develop a love for learning?” may be seen to lack boundaries and direction. How we arrived at this question after my first visit to the teacher’s classroom, however, is shown below.

C(1)1: [...] It'll be more about lifelong learning, focusing on the independent learner and giving them the skills and building their confidence of doing that. That's what I want to do. That's why I'm doing the Chinese. Get them to see taking on something new can be daunting but can be possible depending on your attitude towards it. It's hard but it's fun you know. It's to get them to believe that from a young age.

[...] And so what we are doing in this module is what they want to do. [...] And I think it has helped because they know it's what they've chosen so they are into it. The next group could be totally different regarding what they want to do. Apart from the general introduction to China, it's kind of them leading the way. And that's what I'm trying to go with. It's so totally different to how we usually run a class 'cause we have the syllabus and the curriculum. And even though you do try to bring it to life as much as you can...

[...] So hopefully from that perspective it's proving to be something a little bit more different and would feed into the whole idea of TY because that's what you are hopefully creating.

A(1)4: So, if you bring down your question would it be 'How can I make my students more autonomous?'

C(1)4: Yeah, in that sense. And I think I want to bring in how you can develop a love for learning. They get so bored in school [...].

This excerpt demonstrates clearly, that the teacher had a focus (do something more motivating with her TY class), set boundaries (having a topic, e.g. food in China, and using newly developed material to support students' learning) and directions (bring back a desire for learning during a not-exam-driven year).

Only one teacher in this study, Olwyn, voiced right at the start of our first interview her research question in an 'How can I'-style.

A(1)1: So, could you repeat your question again?

O(1)1: My critical question that I want to investigate this year is with my TY German class and I want to know how can I as their teacher in this year make German fun relevant to their lives and also contribute to their holistic development and formation.

Olwyn was familiar with action research through her *Postgraduate Diploma in Education*. It could mean that teachers having been exposed to action research methodology during their pre-service training, find it easier to pose a research question in subsequent action research projects. It also reiterates Peters' finding from her study with ten Australian secondary school teachers involved with action research. She experienced that especially for novice teacher researchers 'action research was a difficult process [...] to learn' (Peters 2004, p.545). Hence, a prolonged engagement leads to familiarisation but seemingly also a gradual implementation of action research relevant methods.

An interview excerpt from Jacinta's first interview shows yet another example. Here, however, the room for research question exploration was limited.

A(1)6: Right, maybe then, coming to your research question again - just to have it here, recorded. So, you would use songs to improve listening comprehension. Would you extend your research question? Or is that the one?

J(1)6: Yes, that's the one.

Rachel, on the other side, who joined the project only in November, found it more difficult to arrive at a question. Her research area evolved from looking at one single skill (reading) to a more holistic approach to stimulate active learning among her students.

A(1)23: [...] We talked on Skype in November. You mentioned you would like to look into reading with your second years, then you shifted to listening, right?

R(1)23: But then you remember in December we looked more at active learning in the classroom.

A(1)24: Yes, that's what you mentioned then.

R(1)24: So sometimes I do reading, sometimes I do listening. I do that. I just thought to focus solely on that idea would be hard. So now it's just more not just using the book, and I always use power-points anyway, but just make it a little bit more...because of the double classes...make it a little bit more active. Like that matching, or fill in the blanks - you are keeping them on the same track.

A(1)25: So, you already incorporated something, let's say, after that December meeting. You started to do something differently from then on.

R(1)25: Yes, with the double classes sometimes we do like [...] but I wasn't really doing many card activities [...] Whereas now I'm trying to do a little bit more active [...].

The shift in her research area also shows a shift in her thinking: Rachel noticed that for an active learning environment all skills need to be employed (reading, writing, listening, speaking) and that the focus on one might diminish the importance of the others. While Rachel did not state her research question in an 'How can I' form, I noted down after our interview "How can I create an active learning environment?" Rachel approved of this question after reading her narrative.

A reason why teachers were not too worried about postulating a focused research question but a more general area could lie in their more practice-oriented, less research-oriented, approach. Also, the prevalence of tacit knowledge in teacher professional knowledge influences the practice-orientation. Elliott et al. stated in their research with novice and experienced teachers that much of teachers' 'complex professional knowledge [...] is tacit'. However, tacit

knowledge is 'not easily made explicit' (Elliott et al. 2011, p.85) unless it 'is shared in the stories of experienced teachers' (Krátka 2015, p.837). Could this lead to a clash with a research-focused approach that is based on stating explicitly what the aim of the enquiry is? Teachers combined many aspects concerned with teaching and learning in one single question, e.g. creating a positive learning experience or an active learning environment, bringing in more student-centredness, developing a love of learning or transforming students into independent learners. Only Jacinta's area was more specific by looking at a single skill (listening) throughout the school year and methods to make students improve on that skill. Brian, whose question was more specific as well, enquired about different issues within the year. He not only looked into reading, but also the pros and cons of homework and differentiation.

Tacit knowledge, ergo 'knowledge such as intuitions, apprehensions, or feelings that cannot be stated in the form of language', could be the reason for the generally broad research questions as teachers might 'insist on the opportunity to build upon and expand their tacit knowledge as well' (Guba 1981, p.78). That tacit knowledge is more easily shared in story form would explain teachers' detailed accounts on their teaching and students. Mary told me during the first couple of minutes in our first interview about the ways she taught students about Halloween in an interactive way, about her students' attention span, their preferred learning style, their social background and implications for the classroom.

This also demonstrates a holistic view regarding teaching and learning on side of the participants. Teachers were concerned with the whole process of student learning. The reason why the majority of teachers left their research area quite broad can be seen in the classroom setting which is 'a more holistic system, with large numbers of variables linking together in a non-linear, often unpredictable, fashion' (Wood & Butt 2014, p.694). Thus, teachers tried to make sense of the different variables showing their connectedness. This links into complexity theory (see chapter 5.2) where the whole is bigger than its parts resembling the 'big consequences of little things' (Phelps & Hase 2002, p.507). A reductionist view would not include what is happening within each part (e.g. each student) and how this affects the whole. Teachers are constantly navigating this complex classroom. A broader research area therefore corresponded more with that experienced complexity.

With regard to the research question, this study can be contrasted to an action research study with 26 Dutch teachers. Research questions posed by those participants were of a more technical character, e.g. 'How to make their teaching more effective in terms of exam results? How to motivate pupils for a given topic?' (Leeman & Wardekker 2014, p.54). The overall questions mirrored the pressure teachers experience within their school context (ibid.).

In this study, the questions posed by the participating teachers reveal their student-orientation and a positive student-teacher relationship based on care (see chapter 7.2.2). Teachers' enquiries were aimed at enhancing students' development first, placing their own development second.

[...] it's how to keep these kids on target. Keep the classes interesting and trying not to lose them. If I can get them to the end of First Year and if they come out and can do German and that they don't have negative feelings about it. M(1)15

The care for students seen in this study can be strengthened by Devine et al.'s (2013) Irish-based study asking teachers across twelve primary and secondary schools what 'good' teaching entails. Interestingly, Mary who is quoted above, wanted her students to not have negative feelings about the subject. While Mary's school lost its DEIS¹⁸ status, her aim echoes Devine et al.'s finding within DEIS schools where teachers lowered 'expectations for academic achievement with an attendant emphasis on nurture and care, rather than expectations for academic success' (ibid., p.103). It was more important for Mary that students pass the subject and feel positive about it.

Because teachers told me about their areas of interest explicitly, I was not too worried about my own initiation to formulate their research questions. After all, it is the academic standard I tried to introduce. Pursuing that standard at all costs, I believe, could have led to a disengagement or termination of teachers' enquiry. I noticed soon that academic talk distanced myself from the teachers. At the start of the research process, in which I explained the action research process to teachers, I began to depart from the carefully compiled power-point presentation about action research. Into my reflective journal I wrote:

I pretty soon noticed that going through the slides with Brian would somehow put him off. I used my own words, gave brief summaries of what the research project is about.

Marie had about 45 minutes to stay - so rather than staying too close to the prepared presentation, we talked through what is involved more casually.

To bridge the practice-theory divide, I refrained from the more research-oriented talk, to give teachers the chance to talk about their context and their questions regarding the project. This was the moment for me to gain an insider perspective into this research project in which I saw

¹⁸ Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS).

the teacher as ‘an educational professional who [has] scope for judgement’ (Biesta 2015b, p.75). If teachers did not feel the need to pose a research question, I accepted their stance. This project, after all, wanted to reflect teachers’ approaches to action research.

In the Scottish *Chartered Teacher* programme in which teachers engaged in research it was concluded that teachers’ ‘research has tended towards the modest integration of theory’ because there is only ‘some evidence that their involvement in this module has made them more ‘research-minded’’ (Kirkwood & Christie 2006, p.443). Research-minded means that teachers are

more active in originating research, applying research findings to their own context, and subjecting their work to critical analysis using research tools of various kinds [...]. (ibid.)

This bears similarities to this study, as teachers in this study did not publish their outcomes and only one used research findings strategically to inform her practice. Becoming research-minded was not as important to the participants in this study. What was relevant to them was to adapt or improve on their teaching methods to better motivate students in learning a modern language and heighten their learning experience.

Irish modern language teachers often find themselves promoting a subject of which parents and students, even school administration, do not see the necessity. ‘[S]uccessive reports have highlighted the shortfall in foreign language skills among Irish school leavers and graduates’ (DES 2014, p.7) which can be attributed to ‘the mistaken belief that proficiency in English is enough’ (ibid., p.5). Hence, teachers try to counteract this trend. In this study, teachers voiced several times their aim to make language learning fun.

[T]o build on this whole thing that German is fun. Anything that I can do to sell it to them and not to lose them. (M(1)16)

[Language learning] is hard but it’s fun you know. It’s to get them to believe that from a young age. (C(1)1)

Teachers try to build up students’ self-esteem and confidence especially given the high-stakes exam in the form of the Leaving Certificate in Ireland which leads to stress and anxiety among students (Banks & Smyth 2015).

So, I would like to build their confidence so that they don't see it as a means to an exam but as in learning for a life skill. (R(1)10)

How can I as their teacher make German relevant to their lives and also contribute to their holistic development and formation (O(1)1)

These statements are seconded by Devine et al.'s research on what Irish teachers define as 'good' and effective teaching: 'Evident are holistic constructs of teaching that embrace the personal and social as well as the cognitive and academic [...]' (2013, p.103).

Teachers' research questions in this study speak for their holistic view of teaching and learning with an emphasis on building independency and confidence in students. Starting out as teacher researchers, they preferred describing their research area and context rather than formulating a research question and thus, found their own language.

The next chapter investigates teachers' research methods used to gather data in order to find answers to their research questions. I also examine why a certain method (focus group) was abandoned.

6.3.1.2 Teachers' Perceptions, Choices and Experiences with Different Research Methods

The next table gives an overview of methods used by the participating teachers during this research project:

Notes / Reflective writing	6 out of 7 teachers	Marie, Jacinta, Brian, Ciara, Olwyn, Rachel
Online and hard-copy questionnaires	5	Marie, Ciara, Olwyn, Rachel, Mary
Observing students	4	Jacinta, Brian, Olwyn, Mary
Test results	3	Marie, Jacinta, Olwyn
Oral feedback	3	Marie, Rachel, Mary

Focus group	0	
Peer observation	0	

Table 6.3: Research methods used by teachers

The table lists the different methods for data collection and their frequency. Marie used four different methods to answer her question on how to make her students more independent using the flipped classroom. Rachel wrote a reflective end-of-year essay, observed her classroom, administered two questionnaires and invited students to an open discussion. Mary and Brian used two methods to find an answer to their question. Hence, teachers approached their research questions with different methods and a varying number of methods. Next, I will go through each method and talk about teachers' experiences, perceptions and the implementations of using these methods.

Reflective writing

"I think you do it all the time but you don't maybe articulate it or you wouldn't maybe write it down." (Jacinta)

Writing reflectively was a difficult task for all teachers (see chapter 6.3.1.3), even though the majority of teachers (6 out of 7) used this method. Although I introduced how to write reflectively (see chapter 3.4.1) including thick descriptions, theoretical, methodological and planning notes, teachers found their own approaches and did what "worked" best for them. When McClanahan asked her preservice teachers to write about their personal stories of becoming teachers, she thought the task was fully understood and clear. However, at the end of the module she found out that 'the assignment was essentially meaningless to them' (McClanahan 2008, pp.105–106). Even though no teacher in this study followed the journal writing guide I provided at the start, they made the reflective writing and thinking experience meaningful to them.

One way of reflection was to note down what worked and what did not work. One of Jacinta's entries reads:

mardi, le 9 septembre

Pairwork activity worked well. Students able to work on particular sections together.

Fill in blanks activity was more difficult. I was a bit frustrated as they had read all the lyrics in the ordering activity.

Perhaps words could have been chosen better?

The next journal entry includes the positives and negatives regarding a powerpoint on the topic of food and drink, but also Ciara's critical statements ("a few too many", "I enjoyed the class but maybe not as much [...]"), her feeling about the class ("I was particularly happy") and plans for the next class ("We decided [...]"). She also described how that particular class had finished.

TY Oct 3rd

Food and Drink PPT

Before beginning the new topic (one of the top 3 chosen by the class), we revised Hello. How are you? I'm fine thanks. They had no problem repeating and asked each other the structures.

Then we moved onto food and drink. The power-point included a lot of videos (a few too many I think). But the students got the gist. The information about tea was of particular interest (probably because we drink a bit of it here)! We decided for next class that we would learn how to use chopsticks as they didn't know.

I enjoyed the class but maybe not as much as I thought as I felt it was video heavy. The chopsticks will be an interesting challenge - it will require preparation.

On the way out students had to respond to something I said to them in Chinese. All of them managed this - I was particularly happy with the structures they were able to use having just learned them today!

Teachers approaches to reflective writing varied: from short notes (see Jacinta's example) to Ciara's who was adding more flesh to her reflective journal. She was the teacher who stated as a reason for taking part "forcing" herself to reflect more. Marie was the only teacher who wrote a reflective blog and invited me to comment on her entries. Her writing gave me a constant update about her enquiry and led to an exchange of ideas and thoughts. She wrote six entries during the school year. During the second interview, Marie mentioned that she has always been a good reflector. Besides writing the blog specifically for her enquiry with the flipped classroom, she would constantly think about her classes. The excerpt from that

interview signals, though, that it seems difficult for teachers to stop reflecting and this affects teachers' personal lives.

M(2)60: [...] I'm a good reflector. But that's always been there. I reflect well.

A61: Do you note it or how do you reflect?

M61: Every time. How? I think.

A62: During your drive home, or?

M62: At home in the evening or at the weekend. But I over work. I'm becoming a workaholic. So that's not good either for the family.

A63: What would usually trigger your [...] reflection?

M63: What would trigger my reflection? I replay my lessons in my head. Whether it's the flipped classroom or not or not, okay? A lesson, that took place during the day. I replay it. Usually at night time because I'm insomniac. [laughs] And then something I said, something happened, whether it's discipline or something else and I say, okay, that didn't go down too well. Or else, I'm correcting tests. That's sometimes when I see: that is not understood. So now, I have my fifth year test [...] So I'm going to see if anything went in or not. (Marie, 2nd interview)

The difficulty of switching-off, overworking and becoming a “workaholic” signals the emotional labour that is connected with teaching. This fact was also mentioned by Mary who said

And I think to be honest, my worst critic is myself. [...] I'm constantly thinking, Jesus, I wonder now when she asked me that did I...and I don't mean going over things in a negative way either, but there is very few things that just float off my head. I usually kind of think about things. (M(3)114)

Mary's excerpt speaks about being her own worst critic. Hence, she does not simply make students responsible for certain incidents but contemplates how her behaviour could influence students positively. Borg's account on teacher cognition can shed light onto this phenomenon.

[T]eachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalised, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs. (Borg 2003, p.81)

It is therefore not only the complexity of classroom teaching but also the complexity of teachers' knowledge, thoughts and beliefs. Reflection is essential to untangle incidents from lessons. As Mary and Marie mentioned, they do this reflection by thinking which is a valid form of reflective practice. However,

[r]eflection is not simply a matter of thinking back on actions taken. Everyone, at times, thinks back on situations—sometimes pleased with prior actions, sometimes wishing things had been done differently. Effective teachers look for internal logical consistency and inconsistency between their espoused beliefs (overarching theory) and actions taken. (Corcoran & Leahy 2003, pp.31–32)

Can I make the claim that teachers in this study were effective reflective thinkers? The intensity of reflection obviously depended on the teacher. The intensity could have been deepened if this study had focused more strongly on teacher beliefs. Farrell (2015) states that an awareness of beliefs and of the sources of these beliefs is an essential step for teacher reflection. However, identifying teachers' beliefs was not the main component in this study.

Teacher's overall reflective practice in this study can be categorised twofold: one category contains deep, personal reflection: "I think you can have a deep reflection when you are thinking about people" (Jacinta, member check). This category corresponds with Marie who says she is overworking due to overthinking and Mary who said: "few things just float off my head." The other category targets reflection as a means of rating teaching content, e.g. Jacinta's entry from above: "Pair-work worked well."

Findings from interviews also show that i) the study "forced" teachers to be more reflective and ii) collaboration is helpful in being reflective.

i) Definitely taking part in this study did kind of force me to become more reflective but not in a negative way, in a positive way. (Rachel, member check)

ii) [Reflective practice] requires the ability to collaborate and peer observe, both of which are lacking in the education environment at the moment. (Rachel, member check)

While Mary stated that "teachers become more willing to reflect on their own teaching practice" (Mary, member check), the necessary support system is missing. So far, it depends on teachers' own efforts to reflect in order to change their classroom practice. A positive outlook can be seen in Marie's blog-post from October 2015, after the enquiry project had finished.

Hello blog/Annelie,

*I have not talked to you for a long time, because I could not remember my password... sad.
But I did not stop thinking about teaching!*

What followed was an update on the flipped classroom method. She found out that

[m]y third year and my 6th year are the most receptive to Flipped classroom, weak students especially in 3rd year... why????

This is certainly a question that could lead to further enquiries. It shows that Marie's involvement with and reflection on the flipped classroom did not end after our collaboration.

Questionnaires

"I could recognise every single one of them." (Marie)

Five participating teachers used questionnaires. The range of questionnaire types varied from one research project to the next: Brian and Rachel posed quick questions students wrote down on a piece of paper, Ciara used an online questionnaire (SurveyMonkey), Mary went through a questionnaire with students during class and Marie handed out a questionnaire which students filled in at home (see image 6.1).

Rachel administered two questionnaires which she designed in a simple but effective way:

Yes, I have handed out a sheet where I just wrote: What do you like about the class? What do you dislike about the class? What do you like to see more of? And there was another question...ehm...I forget...there was another fourth question on it. I handed that out at the end of last year before I started this. And I handed it out - it was just coming towards the Christmas holidays - to evaluate the first term. (R(2)40)

Rachel used the feedback she received to incorporate group work on a regular basis.

Ciara who used SurveyMonkey preferred the anonymous online questionnaire. In one of our meetings she explained:

I did SurveyMonkey. Because I certainly got...because the kids could say what they wanted and there was no way that I could know who had done it. And they were, I think, very honest. (C(3)37)

To which point Marie responded:

I didn't do the SurveyMonkey, and I think that's my mistake. I did a paper survey. Because I have only 13 in the class I could recognise every single one of them. (M(3)38)

Ciara and Marie discussed the strengths and weaknesses of anonymous questionnaires. Given that Marie knows which student wrote which answer, raises questions of validity. Students could also be biased because they know their answer is traceable.

23/02/2018

Mrs. Cheryl Gibbins,

I want to provide you with a good learning environment where your French language is flourishing and you are enjoying the class. To do so, I need your input and honest answers in the following survey which looks at the Flipped Classroom: the lessons on videos, Edmodo and Quizlet.

Please be as honest as possible and expand your answers as much as possible. I will publish your answers to the class anonymously.

Student Perceptions of the Flipped Classroom - 5th year 2014/2015 -

1. Rate each item on the scale provided to indicate your agreement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Social Media is an important part of my learning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Video lessons are more engaging than traditional classroom instruction		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
I would not recommend video lessons to a friend				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
I would rather watch a traditional teacher led lesson than a video/PowerPoint lesson					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
I like watching the video lessons		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
I regularly watch the video lessons			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
I revise for exams, re-watching the video lessons		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
I feel that watching the video lesson has helped me to improve my French.			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
I am more motivated to learn French with the video lessons		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
I am more motivated to learn French with Edmodo			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
I regularly check Edmodo for new content				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Edmodo gives me greater opportunities to communicate with other students regarding assignments, tests or lesson content.				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Edmodo is efficient to learn new vocabulary				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
I use Quizlet regularly to recall the vocab.		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			

If you, what are the advantages of the video lessons?

lik from writing

Image 6.1: Marie's questionnaire

They wanted to please me so they went...some of them were more mature about it so they went straight ahead. (M(2)46)

This shows that Marie doubted student answers were honest because students wanted to please her. Her statement also hints at the fact that mature students would be more able to respond to a paper questionnaire or something similar where authorship can be obvious.

Observation

“Is it okay if I just kind of have a table?” (Olwyn)

I need to address a mistake I made during interviews when it came to using observation as a method for data collection. In table 6.3, four teachers are listed who observed students. During the third round of interviews I said to these four teachers that they used observation as a tool for data gathering. The following is an example from the interview with Brian.

A(3)4: And in terms of data collection. You said you observed them. So you kind of saw motivation went up. [...]

B4: That was kind of one observation I suppose. A more thorough observation would be to actually look at their grades.

I based my statement on previous interviews held with the teachers and their descriptions about their enquiry process. For these four teachers, I found more evidence for using observation. However, I assume had I mentioned to all teachers that one form of their data was based on observation, no teacher would have opposed it since it is inherent to all teachers to observe their cohort.

It is assumed that observing and listening to students will enable teachers respond better to students' learning needs and facilitate teachers' ability to make informed instructional decisions. (Even & Wallach 2004, p.484)

Teachers in this study made sure they knew their students, their hobbies and backgrounds. Brian for example did an exercise where students were assigned a task on the basis of personal questions: Who can drive a tractor? Who plays football?

The following excerpt shows Olwyn's concerns with regard to observation during instruction:

O(1)16: I guess my concern is the collection of data. Is it okay if I just kind of have a table with all the students in it. Is it okay if I do it as a rubric. As in like six would be very high and one very low. So and do it by week and look at three different aspects of motivation [...]?

O20: And just jot it down. Base that on observation, on tests and on projects. And as well I can work with my language assistant. She'll be able to kind of see, does she agree with this. [...]

O21: I think a rubric is the best way. And then, I can use that rubric if I have them in 5th year as well to say student x didn't really like working alone, she preferred it when she was in a group. Then I can use all of that to help her get on with the exams. We need to do more project, we need to do more group work because student A needs it. Or I need to give more homework this week because student X is motivated and she'll work at home this week.

A22: But then you would give homework to everybody.

O22: Of course, yeah. But sometimes if student X is very motivated in a particular week you can give her a few extra. [...] But does the rubric work for you?

Based on her ongoing observation, Olwyn wanted to rate students' motivation regarding aspects like single, pair or group work, homework, projects and tests. She planned a needs-analysis for each student which seemed very hard to accomplish. At the end of the year, Olwyn said she never did implement such a rubric. This shows that informal observation during class time and the implementation of such a rubric is problematic. Olwyn sensed the complexity and therefore asked "Is it okay?" She also mentioned getting help from her language assistant to give her a second opinion which highlights the importance of another perspective when analysing data.

Even and Wallach also pointed out that 'it is unrealistic to expect an 'accurate' teacher understanding of what students are saying and doing' (2004, p.493). What teachers hear and observe in classes is always influenced by their beliefs and knowledge. To make more accurately informed decisions, teachers can only 'learn to value and aim to understand their students' conceptions and ways of thinking' (ibid.).

Test results

"I'm going to see if anything went in or not." (Marie)

Marie, Jacinta and Olwyn all said they used test results as a source to judge on the success of their enquiry. Test results were not as straightforward to connect to the enquiry as thought.

I do think the listening comprehension got better. I don't know can I say it was specifically due to the songs 'cause they also have more contact with French this year and they also got to learn more vocabulary as well. (J(3)29)

Students in Jacinta's fifth year had another contact hour and since most grammar aspects were covered in years before, the focus was on vocabulary. Hence, Jacinta was not certain if it was her songs or the other two aspects which made the impact. But she gathered results specifically for listening comprehension. Students had several aural tests throughout the year.

I have results for the listening specifically and it seems to have gone up. (J(3)5)

Olwyn on the other hand noticed that her end of year test did not cater for all student levels (ordinary and higher level). Results would have been better if she had given different options for answers in the vocabulary test.

So, if I was to do that test again, I even said this to [the language assistant] then I would have to come up with two: one with just the word for those who wanted that and one where every word would be put in a sentence. And the word in bold and what it means. (O(3)32)

When Marie wrote a test with her fifth years after employing the flipped classroom, she thought students were doing well in the test. She suggested she would "actually attach the test to the questionnaire because I had two pieces of essays to write. So, I'm going to see if anything went in or not" (M(2)63).

Hence, three issues came up when using test results: it cannot be stated one-hundred percent that a better test result is solely due to changes in the teaching method and the enquiry. Other factors might weigh in. Second, the design of the test became part of the enquiry and presumably led to changes in following tests. Thirdly, testing is seen as a form of assessment to check "if anything went in or not". It can be a moment of triumph or defeat for the teacher. The strong emphasis on exam-focused years and exam results has an impact on teachers (and students). No teacher attempted the enquiry during an exam year (3rd or 6th year) which leads me to speculate that changing a teaching method during these years is seen as too risky. However, when a teaching method proved successful, e.g. the flipped classroom in Marie's case, the method was then implemented in an exam-driven year.

Oral feedback

“They came up with some crazy ideas.” (Rachel)

Marie, Mary and Rachel all stated that they invited oral feedback from their students. Rachel first found out through a questionnaire that her students would like to learn more actively. Twice during the school year, she put a mind-map up on the board and invited students to tell her what they specifically would like to do in class.

Just to see what ideas they had. And they came up with some crazy ideas but at the same time... (R(2)14)

When I asked Rachel how she handled these “crazy ideas” she said “I try and sway them towards something that is manageable” (R(2)18). This was an interesting comment: while inviting student voice, the classroom itself did not become democratic in a sense that all ideas are implemented. A classroom based on democratic decision-making on all parts, is not fully achievable due to curricular requirements.

The teacher’s role imposes a responsibility to take a strategic view of students’ needs, situating them in the wider institutional and societal contexts. (Cain 2011, p.11)

Mary also sees a problem in “letting [students] loose” on feedback. In her school, teachers had to hand out feedback forms to the students but Mary preferred to talk with the students about their feedback.

We have to do feedback forms from students. Now, letting them loose on feedback forms is not a good idea. So, I might, I said to [language assistant], we might sit down and have a focus group. (M(1)23)

Mary put emphasis on the fact that outsiders reading the feedback form would get a wrong impression of her class. She felt the need to act as an interpreter “because very often what they say isn’t totally what they mean” (M(2)33). From observing Mary’s first year class, I can understand her worry. Mary’s class was challenging but she cared very much about each single student. That care goes as far as interpreting her students’ feedback to an outside world. It also

shows that she understands her students. Mary mentioned that she can see younger teachers struggle teaching her cohort.

For a young teacher it's very hard [...]. You know. You have to let them know, I hear you and I am interested in you. But we are doing German now. We are going on. (M(2)18)

The significance of teachers valuing their students' ways of thinking, is visible in Mary's quote.

Lastly, Marie also invited oral feedback. She asked her students for example after each new video in her flipped classroom how they liked the video, what could be improved and what they found unclear. In the two classes which I observed, Marie invited me at the end of the lesson to ask students some questions. Into my journal, I wrote that the first time, I was completely unprepared to be involved and asked a few random questions, e.g. How do you like learning French? What do you find easy/not so easy? The second time, students put up their thumb if they agreed with my question, e.g. Do you find it useful to watch videos at home about French grammar? Do you think you understood the topic well after today's lesson? Would you like to learn with the flipped classroom in other subjects as well?

Olwyn who taught a TY class did not explicitly state that she used oral feedback as a form of data collection. However, she mentioned that students "very often they tell you anyway. They will just tell you." (O(3)18). She refers to students telling her what they liked or disliked.

In general, teachers were open to invite oral student feedback but also took student feedback in with caution. Knowing their student cohort helped them to interpret the feedback the right way and then make informed decisions on their teaching.

Focus groups with students

"I don't like my classes to be a circus." (Mary)

No participant in this study used focus groups as a form of data gathering. While this fact alone would not have worried me, I found the explanations teachers gave for not using the method highly interesting and investigated the issues around focus groups in secondary classrooms.

Marie and Ciara, for example, discussed focus groups and why they would not favour using this method.

M(3)37: And that's the problem with the focus group. They'd [students] be biased.

C(3)38: And you'd be inclined to pick people who are going to participate. Not even because they would want to participate, you are not going to necessarily get the cross section then.

Mary was also hesitant and sceptical about this method. She did not mention students being biased but rather students not being able to respond in a constructive manner.

[I]f, for example, if I did a focus group discussion with that gang that I have, it would have to be interpreted by someone who understands the gang because to read through what point was she making there because very often what they say isn't totally what they mean. I'd like my classes, it would be great fun. But I don't like my classes to be a circus. You know what I'm saying. And if someone like [student name] would like... it would be games nonstop. But I have to put the balance you know so. (M(2)33)

Sparked by this comment, I asked all teachers if they would consider a focus group discussion in their classrooms. Responses were:

Students aren't actually in the habit of thinking about their learning so much. They are more in a habit of coming to class and it's just doing what they are told and following instruction. It's kind of a change of perspective for them to have them actually get to think about how they learn. It's a good idea but it's not necessarily something they are used to do. That's what I consider the teacher's job. (B(3)6)

Brian's view signals his scepticism about students being autonomous and critical enough. It is the teacher's responsibility to monitor learning processes and progresses and it would require a shift in thinking on both sides - for teachers to hand parts of the responsibility over to students and for students to claim that responsibility. The changes to the Junior Cycle mentioned in chapter 2.1.4 show, though, that educational goals are shifting. Learning will be differently assessed within the new Junior Cycle. Teachers are asked to share 'learning goals with students, [help] students to recognise the standards they are aiming for [and] [let] students [assess] their own learning' (DES 2013, p.11). This is what is stated on paper. How long and how much effort it will take on the side of the teachers and students to achieve these goals is a matter of examining/adapting beliefs like Brian's above that students are not able to think about their learning.

Nonetheless, giving students a voice to speak about their learning has ‘the particular potential [...] to operate as a catalyst for teacher professional learning’ (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith 2015, p.604). Giving students that voice during focus group discussions could be one way. Further problems, however, were reported. Olwyn did not think students could be biased or not able to think critically about their learning, but that some of her students would not want to mix with non-friends.

I think if I was to do a focus group like that I would have to pick five students who are alike and talk to them and then another five students who are alike. I don't think I can mix them in one focus group. Because very often, the high-achievers are not friends with the low-achievers. And if I was to do a small focus group like that, it would create maybe tension. Or, you know what I mean like it could be [...] I think it would be a good idea to talk to them alone. (O(3)18)

Olwyn's cautious thought expresses her concern that in her all-girls school, friendship-ties could propel or hinder student involvement in such an open democratic form.

Marie and Ciara embraced the idea of focus group discussions in their school. In an email (February 2016), Marie informed me:

More recent news, Ciara and I have engaged into a new study for the school with 8 other teachers for the school, we are looking at the way our students learn best, and have organised Focus Groups of students, 2nd year, TY and 5th year, asking also what teaching style they preferred.

In parallel, 28/52 teachers, are doing peer observation in class, the idea is to share the best practices we have in our school, and make them “public” to our staff instead of getting always someone from outside.

The aim is to give info to staff on how the students learn best in the classroom, and the strategies that work well in the class. (Marie, email conversation)

This signals that Marie and Ciara made the shift from being sceptical about focus groups first but then implementing the method after the research project had finished. A reason could be that they are working with eight teachers collaboratively. It is more comforting to them to know other teachers are trying something new as well. All teachers work on the same project which makes it easier to talk about successes and challenges collaboratively. Creating safe spaces (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith 2015) for enquiring teachers who invite student

participation in their research, needs to be a school-wide effort. These safe spaces would minimise the risks teachers anticipated in the examples above regarding focus groups.

That teachers like Ciara and Marie use focus groups now, also makes me speculate why my simple question of whether teachers would consider doing a focus group and explaining what it means, did not lead to an uptake of the method. If however, a school-wide project invites teachers to collaborate and investigate with such a method, it has more impact.

Peer observation

“I wouldn’t mind observing other teachers if they didn’t mind.” (Olwyn)

It was not possible to carry out peer observation during the project. Firstly, due to geographical distances, secondly, for the teachers working in the same schools (Ciara and Marie / Olwyn and Mary), due to time-table issues. However, when talking about peer observation during interviews, all teachers embraced this form of collaboration and learning. Olwyn’s story shows, however, that other peers/colleagues can be more reluctant.

O(2)95: I wouldn’t mind observing other teachers if they didn’t mind that I was there. [...] When I was doing my Dip[loma] I would ask: Do you mind if I sit in on this lesson? And they were like: Oh, today I’m not really doing anything, so don’t come today because they were not prepared that day. So come another day. Or I tell you when you can go. Do you know? I don’t mind at all ever who is in my classroom.

A(2)96: You are very open about it.

O(2)96: I am very open about it. Very open. [...] We had to do it this year in school, it was compulsory. We had to do our assessment.

A(2)98: At the beginning, right?

O(2)98: Yes, at the beginning of the year. And one of the elderly member of staff, she said, pretend you were in my lesson. She said this is what I’m doing today and she said write it out. And I never sat in her class and I wrote it out and I gave it to the principal. Because she was that against having someone in her classroom. [...] No she said, why would I bother.

Peer observation is not yet normal practice in Irish schools: ‘Relative to the corresponding TALIS country averages, proportionately fewer teachers in Ireland participate in mentoring and peer observation than is the case in other countries (18% vs. 35%)’ (Gilleece et al. 2008, p.xx). After our enquiry project, Olwyn took a year off to travel first and then teach German

in England. She mentioned during our member check that peer observation is common practice in England.

O: It happened maybe five or six times a week that the head or the deputy head, or one of my line managers, or one other teacher would just come in for a few minutes and would sit down at the back of a class. And you never know day to day who could come into your class. Everyone in England was used to it. Nobody said anything about it. It was just common practice. I think if that was to happen here...

M: Oh my God...

O: Everyone would get scared, very upset. Especially the older teachers, not even the older ones but those who have been teaching the longest.

Given the frequency of the visits, observation became the norm while in the Irish context observation was described to me as “drive-by shootings” since these visits are highly irregular and shortly announced beforehand. In general, teachers’ reaction is to be scared and upset. Olwyn’s experience from England shows, however, that peer observation is a valid form of teacher learning. Even more so, Olwyn mentioned that finally someone recognised the work she was doing and made her feel acknowledged. Feedback she received was constructive and therefore worthwhile getting.

O: I loved it because it was mostly positive. It was nice to get [feedback]. I thought there was a lot more recognition for hard work done over there than we get here.

The way to introduce more peer observation in Ireland is firstly to rule out time-table issues (“I definitely think that the time-table is a problem because let’s say for example languages, they are normally all at the same time.” (Rachel)) and secondly to increase the frequency of observations and constructive feedback to demonstrate support rather than punishment. Furthermore, newly qualified teachers are well used to observation and report missing being evaluated.

Next, I will look at the challenges around teachers’ data collection and analysis.

6.3.1.3 Challenges Concerning Data Collection and Analysis

“Does this work for you?” (Olwyn)

Not too much emphasis could be placed on an in-depth data analysis carried out together with teachers due to time restrictions. The valuable time after the observation was used to interview teachers. What became obvious, though, is that teachers need support when designing their data collection tools and when planning and implementing the analysis of their data. Olwyn’s issue for example showed the difficulty about the implementation of a rubric to observe students (see p.154). Olwyn shared her insecurities with me (“Is it okay?” “Does this work for you?”). Other teachers did not voice as much their feeling of insecurity about the research methods, but brought up different issues surrounding an implementation of data collection and analysis in the classroom.

One problem was that collecting data eats up teaching time. Rachel found that in a lesson with a length of 35 minutes and a certain amount of learning goals, each teaching minute is valuable.

The biggest problem for teachers is like, oh I have a full lesson planned on this and if I give them a questionnaire or a focus group, that’s going to take 10 minutes away. I cannot afford to lose time because I need to get this topic covered. (Rachel, member check)

Especially during exam-driven years, the content teachers need to cover to prepare the students sufficiently is quite vast. Lessons in Irish secondary schools usually last 35 or 40 minutes, double lessons are an exception. Including roll call and homework correction, teachers experience pressure to impart grammar, vocabulary etc. in a short amount of time. In the same instance, however, Rachel sees the advantages of spending valuable teaching time hearing students’ opinions.

So, you know, today I had lots to do with my Leaving Cert German because we were talking about when they were in TY. It did naturally eat up some of my class time. So, I didn’t get all I wanted to get done today which has a knock-on effect. But then I have more ideas for my TY classes. So, it wasn’t time lost for me but maybe time lost for them? (Rachel, member check)

Rachel thinks that students did not learn enough content relating to their preparation for the Leaving Certificate during that class. They spoke about their experiences during Transition Year which gave Rachel new ideas. That students’ reflections on their TY could help them for

their last year in school was not mentioned. Due to the exam pressure, I suspect that teachers would shy away from data gathering methods that would last too long in relation to their lesson time. Hence, teachers adapt data collection and analysis to fit into their work context. The next quote comes from Rachel again who thinks

it's lovely to start off with a questionnaire at the beginning of the term, and a questionnaire at the end of term. And it's not, I don't put them onto an excel sheet and analyse it that way. But they do kind of inform my teaching for the next term. (Rachel, member check)

Her quote also states that she would not analyse using a computer. This could take up too much time in the busy work-life of teachers. Jacinta also mentioned that she herself and teachers in her school involved with SSE tried not to “put unnecessary pressure on ourselves to collect a massive amount of data” (member check). This can relate back to teachers’ valuing tacit knowledge over hard facts. It would also involve extra work which teachers might feel is being unnoticed. Marie and Ciara talked about a program called *Forbairt*¹⁹ during our last interview. After I mentioned that data collection is for teachers’ own sake to be better informed about their classes, Ciara said:

C(3)175: This is what they are promoting in schools with the Forbairt program, that's what they are trying to get schools to do. But how many people volunteered out of our staff?

M(3)175: Forbairt? Nobody.

C(3)176: We were asked for volunteers.

Reasons for not taking up this position as a volunteer in *Forbairt* could include, beside the amount of extra work involved, other extracurricular commitments which can be quite extensive (see chapter 6.1.2). Ciara and Marie were not surprised at the fact that no other teacher volunteered. Which I think raises the question why teachers took part in this study even though it meant having an extra commitment (teachers’ answers listed in chapter 6.1.2). Another reason to not take part in a data-driven project can be seen in Brian’s comment who thought he is not organised enough to work with data.

¹⁹ <http://pdst.ie/Forbairt/Postprimary> [29/05/2017]

Even if I really wanted to I would be just bad at organisation, organising myself at systematically gathering data. (Brian, member check)

While this is his personal statement which was not iterated by other participants, it is showing that he sees his first responsibility in teaching and places less emphasis on data collection.

Another interesting point was raised before: that a teacher has to know his/her class well enough to interpret the data. Olwyn remembered an instance during her Spanish class where she asked her class in a humorous way “Are we ready to go ‘being at the doctor’?” The class responded:

No, we are not ready being at the doctor. And I said okay, some more classes then going over the body parts.

I commented that Olwyn has to trust her class to be honest about their statement that they need extra repetition. Olwyn remarked that she can ask her students such a question “because I am established. New teachers, I don’t think they would get away with that. You need time to build up double trust”. Data collection and analysis needing double trust means that students trust the teacher (the teacher knows their learning needs and makes informed decisions) and that the teacher trusts the students to speak truthfully about their learning progression. It hints at the fact that new teachers could not immediately support their decision-making with student feedback. Only after they have established a safe space and trust would this be possible.

A last aspect concerning challenges for data collection and analysis is specifically looking at this study and my collaboration with teachers. The subheading “Does this rubric work for you?” started to make me wonder at the time how much teachers did for me.

Teachers in this study wanted to help me and the research project by collecting data in different ways. After an interview with Rachel, she asked me if she should write more details into her journal. I replied that it is also an outcome if she does not find the time to do so. She asked me then if it would be better for my study if she wrote more to which I replied yes because it would give me a better insight. She then produced the end-of-year reflective writing on top of her general notes about each lesson.

When asking Marie what she thought about the focus on research in this study, she answered

It is important for you, I understand, to collect data, and for us as well to collect data. I think it's difficult to be able to do it all the time. So, I mean I'm glad that you came because it forced me to do that. M(3)73

Teachers saw firstly that data collection is something I have to do but saw the limits of collecting data within their work context. Also, as the example from Brian's interview shows, teachers do collect data all the time but do not call it data collection.

A(3)72: [...] And maybe this whole part of data, I mean data always sounds a bit airy-fairy, but to look at grades, to look at real impact [...]

B(3)72: Yeah, that's true. But, again, teachers do that. They do look at the leaving cert grades and why do so many do the pass level. [...] But then again to have a more structured approach, we did have to sit down, we did have to write something on a paper, we did have to chat but it wasn't really taken for research.

I noticed I forced a more structured approach to data collection onto teachers. Since the study was voluntary, some teachers did more with regards to data collection, some less. Having someone at their side, however, seemed crucial: enquiry "requires structure (questions/mentor etc). Not having direction can result in a meaningless or ineffective enquiry" (Ciara, 2nd interview).

It is interesting to note that only one teacher, Olwyn, mentioned data collection and analysis in her definition of practitioner enquiry. She was the teacher who was familiar with action research.

Ok, it's looking at a problem. Not even a problem but an issue. Something that you notice is affecting teaching and learning. Ehm, looking at it and writing down about the issue and then trying to implement ways kind of to change the issue by collecting data and by analysing the data. O(3)113

In summary, a structured approach to data collection is welcomed if the benefits are visible. Transcripts of interviews and meetings with teachers where their action research was discussed show that academic terminology was rarely used by the teachers. Even though I stressed what is meant by collecting data (reflective writing, observation etc.), teachers might have had different preconceived ideas about data similar to the school professionals in Clayton et al.'s research.

There was a commonly expressed perception [...] that ‘data’ needed to be highly systematic, preferably numeric and useable for statistical testing. The idea that research could be exploratory, tentative and may even ‘prove nothing’ was far from understood. (Clayton et al. 2008, p.78)

Data could be seen as ‘performance data’ that shapes the ‘understanding of what research is and ought to be represented as a significant barrier to the take up of action research by practitioners’ (Clayton 2008, p.78).

If and (if so) how teachers’ practice changed/improved shall be discussed in the next chapter which describes outcomes of enquiries conducted by teacher researchers.

6.4 Outcome of Enquiry

“Time spent on these areas really pays dividends when it comes to student engagement.” (Ciara)

All teachers in this study enquired into their classrooms by looking at their teaching methods in order to support students’ learning processes, improve their language learning experiences and find out about their attitudes towards the subject. The following questions guided me in looking at outcomes of teacher research: In which ways did teachers’ understanding of teaching and learning and professional practice transform as a result of critical collaborative enquiry? Which processes accompanied the change? How was change reflected on by the teacher and perceived by the students?

Before giving a snapshot on each teacher’s journey and emerging themes, I would like to portray two teachers in more detail. Unfortunately, not all teachers can be given that deserved attention but their complete narratives can be found in the appendices.

The two teachers I chose to portray approached the research project in different ways: Marie more systematically by writing a blog and reading research literature; and Brian who mainly took part to have a person come to his class, give advice and exchange ideas with a group of teachers about teaching German. In the following chapter, I draw on the narratives I wrote about the two teachers and add further information about emerging themes.

I remember writing both narratives. I thought Marie gained something more from taking part because she followed the action research methodology. On the other side, I felt that I let Brian down because I did not offer him tips and tricks for the classroom - something he expected from the study. I start out with Marie’s journey.

6.4.1. Marie, French Teacher

“[Students] think we are gods and goddesses and we are not.”

Marie set out to enquire about the Flipped Classroom and if using the method can help in making her students more independent. Flipping the classroom meant to Marie to “flip her life” as she wrote in her blog. She introduced this rather new method to find a solution to her problem: she wants all her students to be motivated language learners.

“I think that motivation is what makes a student excel in a subject at school... Motivation to get good grades, motivation to learn because one loves the subject, motivation to please the teacher/parents. Motivation to achieve one's dream and access a course etc... Each individual student must find his/her own motivation to work at a subject.”

Flipping a classroom means that students do a certain amount of work outside the classroom and come into the next lesson with a certain amount of background knowledge on a topic that is going to be dealt with that day.

This is the beginning of Marie's narrative. It speaks about motivation as the root of any successful learning endeavour. Besides motivating her students for French, she also wants to make them independent learners which would have a knock-on effect in other subjects. The FC can propel autonomous learning because part of the learning is done outside school. Marie sent her students videos explaining French grammar rules which students watched at home. After each video, Marie asked her students for feedback on video content and handout. Because of the feedback, she varied the length of the handout and instead of sending videos via YouTube, she started doing her own educational videos because students had indicated that they preferred to hear her voice and also because she knew her target group best. She also found out that the video and handout alone were not sufficient for a successful learning experience. Marie hence offered students extra material, more links to related websites or accompanying handouts.

Half-way through the school year and her FC project, Marie did a questionnaire with her students. The feedback was positive but still, Marie said, the method needs improvement. What Marie took into consideration after reviewing the questionnaires was to give students more than one way to find information, to use cognates more often and very simple examples. Marie also said that

“[n]ow, I'm kind of obsessed with the Flipped Classroom. But is there another way to make them independent learners?”

Marie is constantly reviewing and then adapting the FC method. All in all, she definitely sees an improvement in participation after introducing the FC.

“I have student X that [...] would not talk much in class. Now I remember, the passé composé, she was the first one to come in and ask me a question. That was big for her to do it.”

She also started to let the students become the teachers and explain rules to one another. Even though this is a strategy that takes some time, especially for more shy and introverted students, she does encourage them to do that.

Marie knew her students very well: who is shy or who would like to explain a rule in front of the class. While being empathetic, Marie also pushed students who she thought can do better. “In French, what we aim at is none of the ordinary level should get As and Bs. That means they should be in higher level.” (M(3)72)

Marie put a lot of energy and time into the enquiry. She connected with other teachers throughout Ireland using the FC method, she uploaded reading material to our PBworks website, gathered data and analysed it critically and she wrote a very detailed blog containing deep reflections. She was my ‘A’-student when it came to this research project. I would describe her as a passionate but also restless teacher. Even though the enquiry helped her to think more about and, ultimately, to improve her approach to teaching grammar, she stated in our third interview:

M(3)180: I’m not finished.

C(3)181: You won’t have solved it. You probably never will solve it.

M(3)181: That’s the thing. But I think that we all need to think about it. The classroom is one thing. But the independence, self-efficacy of the student this is not solved. And I know you [addressing me] have the same problem when they are arriving first year in college. Because I saw my own daughter struggling with that. To be an independent learner. So, if we don’t tackle it at secondary school...

I agree wholeheartedly with Marie because I know the struggles I experienced teaching first year German at university (see chapter 1.4). Could it be that we are both cultural strangers (O’Sullivan 1992) bringing an outsider perspective with us to an educational system that does not put enough emphasis on autonomous and independent learning? Even though this seems to be changing with the new Junior Cycle, the last year of schooling still means for Marie to revert back to “old habits” and “spoon-feeding”. This clashes with her teaching philosophy as she does not want to be a “sage on stage”.

Interestingly, Marie competes with the other French teacher in school but finds it a “healthy competition”. Marie does not feel intimidated by competition: “I think for us as teachers it means we can’t really sit at our backsides” (M(3)76). Hence, Marie’s motivation is not only goaded by making students independent, but also by leading them to good grades.

Throughout the study, Marie was very self-critical and reflective. At times, the enquiry unfolded more questions which led to uncertainty for Marie: Did the changes she made have an impact? Is flipping the classroom the right method? Are there other ways to promote students’ independence?

Would they have learned better in the classroom instead of Flipped Classroom? I don’t know. (M(2)46)

Even though Marie said she found herself getting “obsessed” about the FC and even though she could see positive results, an uncertainty was accompanying each interview with her. In an action research study with preservice teachers, Capobianco and Ní Ríordáin also stated teachers’ constant feeling of uncertainty.

Preservice teachers, like inservice teachers, are frequently unsure of their students’ knowledge and understanding, the effects of their instructional strategies, the most appropriate content to cover in their limited time with students, and ultimately their own intellectual and social authority. (2015, p.582)

While Marie came across as a very confident teacher, these moments of self-doubt were visible. Changing a teaching method is not a simple equation that results in an immediate, unequivocal, positive or negative outcome. Marie’s experiences during her enquiry showed that the conscious and reflective process of change associated with action research can evoke emotional reactions of self-doubt and uncertainty. Teaching requires a constant shift and assessment to make it purposeful and effective for the moment. I make again the point that teaching is complex. Conveying this fact to teachers could help them during initial and in-service training to accept daily doubts and insecurities.

That Marie felt that she could open up and share her doubts and uncertainty is a first important step. When I asked her what she enjoyed during the first meeting in December, she said:

M(2)71: It's good as well to see that other teachers are questioning their teaching. Because although we do complain here in the staff room, I can't teach so and so or she doesn't get through or whoever... we won't say I can't teach. I am failing in that. You don't have that here. And at least that day we had: I'm not good at. You know that is good to hear that. To question.

A(2)72: To not blame the student but look at yourself.

M(2)72: Yes, and I think it's necessary as a teacher to do that all the time. You do need to question yourself. So that was good on that part.

What this enquiry evoked was the awareness that other teachers are just as critical about their teaching. While Marie experienced competition with her co-teacher regarding grades which pushed her to do her best, action research allowed her to step back, look at herself and raise questions she could not raise in the staff room.

In summary, several themes became apparent from Marie's enquiry. The most intriguing are visualised below.

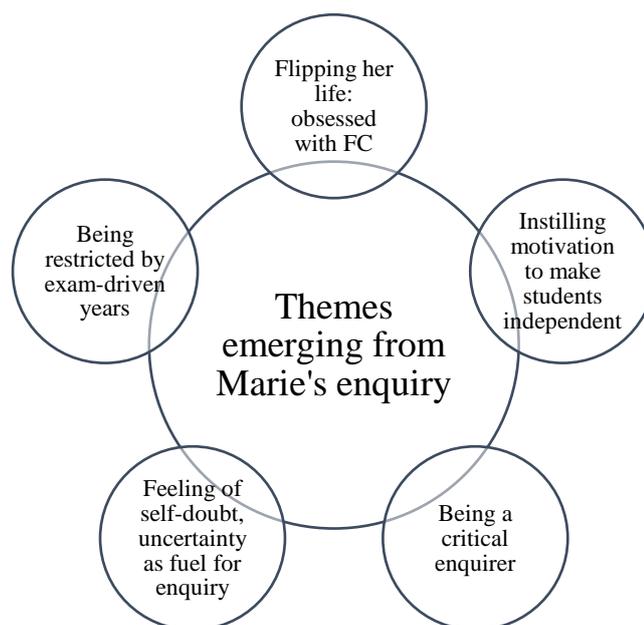


Figure 6.2: Themes emerging from Marie's enquiry

What I found interesting was the contradiction between trying to make students independent while still having to teach exam-driven years by “spoon-feeding” them. It signals the pressure teachers experience. Also, Marie was until the end critical about the impact of her FC method. She seemed to find it hard to acknowledge improvement, however, by not seeing her enquiry as successful, she engaged in further cycles. The effect is that Marie constantly feels uncertain,

even though it is a ‘positive’ uncertainty that keeps her going with her investigation. Seeing that other teachers are in the same boat, meaning also questioning their teaching, was an important outcome for Marie from this study.

6.4.2 Brian, German Teacher

“The project definitely got me thinking more.”

After I introduced the collaborative project to Brian via Skype, I noted down that I felt his participation was based on his wish to do me a favour as a former student of mine. He asked me during the Skype call how much work was involved and how my work would be affected if he did not put in as much effort due to time constraints. He took part in the *Droichead* programme²⁰ and expected a similar collaboration from this project. Brian mostly wanted feedback on his teaching, which is a crucial aspect in *Droichead*. Before teaching in his present school, he was a Newly Qualified Teacher in a school where he found it difficult to cope with student discipline.

So I did a lot last year through that Droichead program. And just in general trying to get these classes to learn something. (B(2)38)

What I noticed was that Brian spoke differently than other participants about “these” classes. He would use less descriptions about single students, not telling me about their learning preferences, their background etc. This led me to think that as an NQT, Brian might be more occupied handling discipline, teaching content and learning outcomes. Compared to other participants, he approached his teaching in a more technical way: if you do x, it will lead to z. He was not too much interested in applying research literature and methods for data collection. What he wanted was to know what works and what does not work.

[T]he main aspect for me like anything that gets you talking about teaching and gets you thinking: well that worked well, that didn't work well. (B(2)41)

²⁰ <http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/Teacher-Education/Droichead/> [06/06/2017]

Nevertheless, Brian changed aspects of his teaching that were influenced by research literature, our talks and meeting other teachers involved in this study.

[The project] definitely got me thinking more and I was more open to trying out a few different ideas. I think it did change my practice in that I wasn't just plotting along with the same practices but looking for new ideas. (B(3)9)

Brian got new ideas about the reading of texts in class. To see if these new methods made an impact was to observe his students and ask students for their opinions. While he noticed that his new methods were positively received, he also admitted that

a more thorough observation would be to actually look at their grades. I just give them a similar standard of text after I've tried out a certain methodology maybe a few months. Which I didn't do but that would probably be for the good approach to getting feedback. (B(3)4)

Brian mentioned that he did not just “plod along with the same practices”. This quote shows that it could be quite easy for teachers not engaged in collaborative enquiry to carry on with the same practices without engaging with their cohort. It also shows that NQTs need further engagement with critical thinking and reflection after their preservice training. The business of school-life, however, rather impedes this. Brian said in his first year of teaching he went from 12 hours preservice teaching to a full time-table in a disadvantaged school. He said “I was very inexperienced”. *Droichead* supported him during this time. When I asked him if he was happier now in his second year in the new school, he answered:

I'm reasonably, you know, reasonably happy. I'm definitely more happy than I was last year. It's hard to know really whether I can imagine if in 20 years' time I still be teaching the numbers 1 - 10. (B(2)10)

This sparked my interest. Could Brian see himself teaching until retirement?

B(2)16: Teaching is - there are not really many places you can go. There's a few that might want to be vice principal or even principal. But if you look at the amount of schools and the amount of teachers it's actually only few that make it. Apart from that you kind of get a permanent job, that's kind of it, really. [laughs]

A17: Would you strive for that even - to become vice principal - maybe go on.

B17: Ya, I'm not sure, maybe. It's just kind of other areas in the private sector. You start off in one place and you start thinking I wouldn't really mind 10 years from now to be looking into that or looking into move on to that. Whereas in teaching there are not really so many doors open.

While I did not investigate further what drew Brian into the teaching profession, I sensed a negative outlook on the teaching career ("still be teaching the numbers 1-10"). Brian also mentioned not having been prepared well enough during his pre-service training: "[Lecturers] weren't in touch with what happens in schools. What actually works, what you need" (B(3)64). That the what-works-mentality is already existent during pre-service training was an interesting finding that would need further attention. Also, that teachers in this study aged between 20-30, including Olwyn and Jacinta, were not sure if the teaching profession is a lifelong career. Especially Brian's and Olwyn's experiences convey the message of not being prepared enough (regarding teaching material) and therefore being overwhelmed by the teaching reality.

After these conversations, I understood better that Brian's outlook for this project was to get support in the form of resources and tips. He did not mind so much becoming a teacher researcher but needed help to find answers to his questions. His enquiry journey shows that he has many questions in relation to teaching. In his narrative, his difficulty to find a focus is targeted.

In his enquiry, Brian found it difficult to focus on only one aspect. It appeared to him that many areas needed his attention and he said his approach "could be more systematic".

"It's just hard. You have to kind of think where should I put the focus on. More focus onto correcting students' copies, more focus into evaluating how I'm teaching, more focus into my power-points, more focus into resources."

He found it very useful to be filmed in one class and to evaluate that class by watching the video. His narrative picks up on the topic:

The video [...] gave him food for thought. He said he was astonished about how much and how fast he was speaking.

"I could make the lesson more effective by speaking less, slower and more directed. While the different stages of the lesson were clear in my mind, I didn't feel they were made clear to the pupils."

It was interesting for him to see the lesson from the students' perspective. Brian sees room for improvement in several areas. He wondered: How can I pose questions in a more

effective way and how can I integrate more deeper level questioning? How do I make my students speak more in the target language? And how do I make all students take part and overcome their reluctance in answering questions? All questions seem interwoven, too: Students do not respond enough to his questions which can have several reasons: motivation and fear of making mistakes, Brian's question-strategies and the amount of teacher talk. Overall, his opinion on being filmed in class is

“While I found it quite uncomfortable watching myself teach, I found it very beneficial and it is something I would be open to repeating for the sake of seeing an improvement.”

All these issues around students not responding is yet another enquiry Brian wants to carry out. His jumpiness between different topics for enquiries (reading, homework, differentiation, teacher talk etc.) is a sign that he would need a more systematic approach but also more time to deeply engage with one enquiry issue at a time.

Even though Brian might not see himself as a teacher for a lifetime, his involvement with those questions shows his commitment. In Day et al.'s study with Australian and English teachers and their commitment towards the profession, the researchers found that '[t]he teachers associated commitment with consistently working hard and setting high standards' (Day et al. 2005, p.574). Brian's hard work and quest to improve on his teaching is an indicator of his 'commitment to pupils' learning and achievement' (ibid., p.575). To sustain his commitment would mean to engage him in further critical conversations and thinking processes. However, in his school "when I talk to the other teachers, they have great ideas but it's kind of ... the doors are not really open so much" (B(2)32).

6.4.3 Rachel, German Teacher

“It opened up the classroom.”

Rachel's narrated portrait shows how a teacher came to an 'understanding [of] learning events in terms of co-participation, co-emergence, and co-implication' (Davis & Sumara 2010, p.859) by introducing more student voice.

Rachel's first step after [doing a] survey was to look at the language levels and the seating plan and match weaker and stronger students with each other so that the stronger student can support the weaker one. Or she separated two very chatty students and asked them to sit next to a more quiet student.

“This definitely made a difference. Firstly, they were not so giddy but I also felt the weaker students made more of an effort when they saw the stronger students making an effort.”

Having a different seating plan led to the desired outcome that i) her class was more disciplined and ii) weaker students needed less of her attention. The latter aspect ties in with Rachel’s reflection on her constant feeling of exhaustion after classes. She found ways to overcome that feeling as well.

Rachel often felt tired after classes. She felt guilty when she was not constantly walking around. When there was a moment of silence, she jumped to the next task. When her students were doing something quietly, she could not focus and her mind started racing about when to finish that task and start the next one. After reflecting on that, she changed the class layout. Instead of having students sit in rows she would put them together to facilitate group work ‘to give them more authority’.

“This immediately made a difference. It opened up the classroom to group work and the students at the back of the room were now fully involved in everything. The students all commented on how they loved the layout and it helped change the atmosphere to make it more conducive to learning.”

Rachel opened up her classroom to become more democratic which essentially helped her make her teaching more sustainable. The link between teacher exhaustion and student voice is of interest here. While before, Rachel’s teaching was fast-paced, covering the book rather than giving students time to engage with and understand material, she realised that by introducing more active learning approaches, including pair and group work, her students learned better.

6.4.4 Olwyn, German Teacher

“I really don’t know how I could have done the year any better.”

Olwyn who taught for the first time a TY class with high aspirations, felt defeated at the end of the enquiry. Due to students’ repeated absenteeism, she could not finish her module on fairy-tales and receive feedback from students. Olwyn would still say that the outcome of the enquiry was successful.

[I]f I wasn't doing this research project I wouldn't have put as much work into it maybe. I was motivated the whole year to keep them motivated. It wasn't a success though, because they didn't learn a lot of German. (O(3)2)

Olwyn mentioned right at the start of the school year that TY is the year students take not very seriously with a negative effect on their language skills. “TY - that is the year where they forget a lot of their language. And then in 5th year, it's like starting again. I do not want that to happen” (O(1)29). Olwyn was determined to have a productive TY where students remain engaged in learning. Keeping students motivated meant offering longer lasting modules which Olwyn tried to make as interactive as possible. For the first time, she had the chance to offer project-work which is difficult to plan in years other than TY. Unfortunately, while the school year was successful for her own enquiry, it was not leading to a desired outcome regarding her students' language learning.

6.4.5 Ciara, Chinese Teacher

“I have worked hard on creating a safe and creative learning environment.”

Ciara enjoyed teaching TY as she preferred the student-orientation and having no exam pressure. Cooperating with her students on teaching content, being more creative and creating a safe learning space took time. “But I find that the time spent on these areas really pays dividends when it comes to student engagement.” (C(2))

“I'd say if I did have to teach them to an exam, I don't think we'd be enjoying ourselves to be honest with you” (C(1)27). Ciara learned Chinese only weeks before she was going to teach basic Chinese to students. Being herself in the position of the learner made her teaching more sequential. Also, teaching more about cultural aspects than the language made the experience for both, teacher and students, more agreeable. “I'd say it would be much worse if I'd be only concentrating on the language thing” (C(1)12). That students directed their own learning was a “big departure from [her] normal language classes” (C(2) by email) that are constrained by syllabus requirements. Because there were no grades involved, Ciara found that her students enjoyed this language learning experience much more while “immediately when you have an exam you'll have people who jump ship straight away” (C(3)9).

Ciara's example also shows that TY gives teachers room to experiment which they might find difficult to do in other years where the syllabus and exams are guiding their actions.

6.4.6 Jacinta, French Teacher

“I kind of gave up with them.”

Jacinta used contemporary French music in her classes to prepare students for the aural exams. She wanted to heighten student motivation and interest in a modern language even though it was an exam-oriented year. She measured her success not only in an improvement of student motivation and grades, but also in the following way:

That group there they would have a lot of their brothers and sisters in second year and they would say my brother was playing that song all last night. And I would be like Yes! That is exactly what I wanted. (J1)11)

Hence, also unplanned data or feedback plays a role during the enquiry. Jacinta used modern French songs as a reward for the students. In classes, where she found the songs were not appreciated - even though they improved listening skills with other cohorts - she would revert back to “normal” teaching.

Jacinta would find that it is hard to introduce something new like French songs to classes that she did not teach from the start. There are particular groups that would moan and say no learning takes place when they listen to songs and they much rather work with the book. The result is that Jacinta is “not overly enthusiastic about doing songs with them. [...] they don’t appreciate anything. I kind of gave up with them because they don’t do any work ever. They are lazy [...].”

This also hints at the fact that teachers prefer teaching a group over a longer period of time. It shows that students get used to a certain teaching style to which they attribute learning. “Giving up” on a class is, however, a strong statement. Jacinta could have chosen this class as her enquiry site to come to the roots of this student disengagement. Interestingly, all teachers picked classes that were conducive to their enquiry project. No class was classified as difficult, “lazy” or uncooperative. Enquiring about such classes and their dynamics could be deemed as too complex, while investigating on teaching methods for improving listening skills is more comprehensive.

6.4.7 Mary, German Teacher

“I wouldn’t have done it any other way.”

Mary was less interested in this project’s action *research* approach. In our last interview she said she “wouldn’t have done it any other way. Whether I would have taken part in this or not” (M(3)11). She said that she did not change anything due to the project but rather because she would enquire, reflect, talk to critical friends, read books and try different methods to reach through to her student cohort anyway. Her enquiry was less focused, less systematic, but she started out with the issue to keep her high mixed-ability class motivated throughout the school year. “You are talking about kids who really struggle to pass, but they have passed” the end of year test (M(3)13). Mary showed these students that she did not want to “crush” them with a test but rather celebrate their learning throughout the year and make them feel proud.

Oh they all love [German]. They actually tell me. Like they came in with flowers and chocolates and favourite teacher and the nicest teacher in the school and all this. (M(3)7)

Mary’s commitment to teaching is based on care. To cite again from Day et al.’s study: ‘For many of these teachers there was no mind/body or work/life dichotomy when they discussed their commitment’ (2005, p.575). Mary mentioned how she does not mind staying longer hours in school, that she is part of nearly every school committee and that she is a mentor to a disadvantaged child in school. She even said that students have her phone number and would call her after their exams. There is a very personal student-teacher relationship which is Mary’s approach to handle her often challenging classes: “it’s like Beirut sometimes. I’m trying to keep the bold ones quiet and help the good ones. They are all mixed-ability. That’s a job in itself (M(1)60).”

After sending Mary the narrative about her, she replied with a longer email telling me how a certain student with a Traveller background from her class is doing. Mary’s care for her students reminds one of a mother. Olwyn, who is teaching in the same school, said students “wouldn’t go to me crying and upset. Because I’m not the one that offers like kind of like a warm cuddle person. I’m the one who is fun” (O(2)(144). Day et al. spoke in their study about core values of professional identities. It is fair to argue that Mary’s care goes beyond her duties as a teacher.

Their care about their students represented an expression of their personal beliefs and emotional commitment which went beyond the contractual obligation of caring for [...]. (ibid, p.573)

I remember that I found Mary's enquiry harder to follow. I tried to get answers about her data collection, about the research literature I shared with her etc., but did not consider as much the tacit knowledge that she shared with me in form of stories. A last quote which sums up Mary's personality quite well ends the portraits given about individual participants.

But you know, what you put into something you will get out. If you put in a bit of effort into what you are doing, you get so much more out. [...] Like there is nothing better than to bounce into school and be full of biz. (M(3)104)

In conclusion, all teachers in this study changed their practice based on their initial concerns about their students' learning, their students' perceptions about the language and their experiences. They did enquire in different ways, thus, the outcomes of their enquiries and the proof for their impact vary. However, it shows that different engagement levels of enquiry exist which researchers need to acknowledge.

I will next highlight the outcomes of the collaboration between the seven teacher researchers and myself.

6.5 Outcomes for the Collaboration of Teacher Researchers

"Leave the research to the Ph.D. students." (Rachel)

Without giving the collaborative part in this study a title like *Community of Practice* (CoP) (Wenger 2000) or *Professional Learning Community* (PLC) (King 2016), I still can refer to these theoretical frameworks of teacher collaboration in order to define ours (see chapter 2.2.2). I class it as a network of individuals with a common search for meaning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1993). Practitioner research goes hand in hand with such a network as it

opens the door to professional formation and (real) development, contributes to local knowledge production, stimulates teachers' curiosity about learning, and fosters dynamic, collaborative learning communities. (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith 2015, p.612)

A collaborative learning community existed prior to this research in one of the schools where teachers of modern languages discussed “how best to teach a certain group and what kind of methodologies” (Mary, member check). The main goal was to “built up a lot of resources.” Olwyn who taught in the same school added “I think we helped each other a lot.” The difference to the approach in this study is that a collaborative engagement with research literature and data collection/analysis was a central element. Mary’s project in her school was about subject-specific teaching in which teachers of modern languages engaged with each other to produce resources.

School-based networks, however, do not work all the time. As Jacinta stated, they often only consider “books, grades, exams and resources” and are seen as not “overly productive”. Rachel agreed that these networks function better outside school to “discuss what’s good in your school and implement it.”

By having shared interests and values, teachers can successfully participate in such a community. Peer-to-peer learning is thereby stressed as most effective.

It’s best for me to talk to other teachers that are in the same job as you. If you have any troubles or difficulties that they can point you in the right direction, they have strategies they have implemented that work or didn’t work. (Olwyn, member check)

My outside help was recognised: “I mean you got all of us together and you inspired us” (Mary, member check), but research was seen as belonging to my part solely: “I just want to see what worked. And what didn’t work. And that’s it.” To which statement Rachel replied: “And leave the research to the Ph.D. students.” Olwyn however can see that research, or an outside perspective, is necessary for teachers as well.

The teaching and learning of modern languages [...] is becoming even more irrelevant in secondary schools. So where is the research on that? That’s going to be important. We are going to need to read up on it and find out. It’s not something I would do day to day but it needs to be done.

There is an expectation that research should help secondary school teachers. While being informed about research belongs to teachers’ professional learning needs, teachers were hesitant about research-production within their context. Mary did a Master of Education, Ciara and Marie were considering a Master’s when their children are older, given that they find a Master’s degree worthwhile pursuing.

The professional learning needs of this group entailed sharing ideas and resources but also sharing their professional context and their thoughts about the educational landscape. While all this corresponds to elements of CoPs and PLCs, one distinction has to be made. We did not ‘challenge [...] problematic beliefs and test [...] the efficacy of competing ideas’ during these meetings (Timperley et al. 2007, p.203).

Timperley et al. found out that ‘participation on its own [is] not associated with change’ (ibid., p.xxvii). The teacher-researcher collaboration was thus essential. During these micro-collaborative sessions in school, teachers could voice beliefs that might have been un-voiced during group meetings. Giving support within the school context also echoes Cordingley’s appeal that

the collection of evidence about how pupils are responding to new approaches and refining schemes of work and lesson plans to take account of such responses, needs to take place in school settings. (Cordingley 2015, p.248)

It was conducive to this study to get to know the teacher’s classroom context and see them teach. Visiting the schools gave me a flavour of the teacher’s overall work environment. I met each participants’ principal (only in Brian’s school I did not meet him/her). Ciara and Marie’s school principal praised them for taking part in this study. I was also introduced to other staff members, had lunch or tea with teachers after our interview. All this adds to the research and paves the way to a holistic understanding of the teachers. It made me realise that my approach to this school-university partnership was too academic.

A case-study in the UK looking at school-university partnerships and their challenges, summarised that

the majority of teacher-researchers [...] did not usually see their primary purpose as contributing to more than their own knowledge and understanding of their own practice in their own classrooms. (McLaughlin & Black-Hawkins 2007, p.330)

Teacher researchers in this study also did not necessarily want to contribute to knowledge about modern language teaching outside their classrooms or collaborative group. Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s call for the creation of local knowledge is thus still apt. This local knowledge comes from teachers’ collaborative enquiries.

The image of knowledge here is not narrow or technical, nor is the goal of inquiry taken to be production of "findings" but rather the raising of fundamental questions about curriculum, teachers' roles, and the ends as well as the means of schooling. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1999, p.274)

During one member check, Rachel spoke of “our research”: “But now our research should be more focused on why this works and why this doesn’t and then changing things.” Teacher research raised different fundamental questions through the school-based support (teacher-researcher) but also out of school collaboration (teachers-researcher). They broadly fit into three areas.

Curriculum	Teacher’s role	Schooling
Pressure during exam-driven years; Transition Year’s student absenteeism; Importance of modern languages	Not wanting to spoon-feed students but make them independent; Teacher as lifelong learner; Making students lifelong learners	Mixed-ability teaching; More responsibility to students for their own learning; Need for support from school management

Table 6.4: Fundamental questions raised during collaboration

These are the issues teachers deal with and deem as research-worthy. Teachers, for example, have to find ways to teach mixed-ability classes, to make their students independent learners and to make students and school administration see the importance of modern languages and fight the ‘English is enough-attitude’ (see p.146). What they describe as their needs with regards to these questions are practical ideas and an exchange with “like-minded people”. Having these issues as constant companions shows yet again the complexity teachers deal with. Olwyn’s critical question regarding the threat to modern language teaching was “So where is the research on that?” Hence, all these pressing topics need further investigation within networks that ideally are supported by outsiders to offer new understandings and avenues to deal with them.

Cochran-Smith et al. demand that teaching and learning ‘need to be regarded as complex’ and not complicated (2014, p.107). That means to look at ‘*how things work*’ rather than ‘*how things*

are' (ibid., p.108, italics in original) which is the pivotal contribution of complexity thinking to action research.

6.6 Summary

Chapters 6.1 and 6.2 looked exclusively at my action research journey and the critical incidents experienced along the way. I supported teachers during a whole school year as an action researcher who tried to overcome boundaries and provide a democratic approach in designing this study.

As mentioned in the Introduction, while I was responsible for organising CPD for the *German Teachers' Association of Ireland*, I tried to push outsider knowledge onto conference participants. As a result of my engagement with this study, I began to question and abandon my previously top-down approach providing research-informed knowledge. I treated teachers' practitioner knowledge as equally important and catered for a space to share it.

I crossed a boundary in order to enter the aforementioned hybrid space involving research and practice by adopting a holistic approach to this study. Crossing my own boundary, that of a Ph.D. student, third level lecturer and CPD provider, made me consider the complexity of teachers' work-life and their professional learning.

Chapters 6.3 and 6.4 focused more on the teachers in this study. In chapter 6.3, I presented data regarding teachers' overall engagement in research. I considered their perceptions, choices and experiences with different research methods (reflective writing, questionnaires, observing students, test results and oral feedback), but also explored why focus groups and peer observation were not among the used methods to collect data. All in all, five out of seven teachers triangulated their data and all teachers incorporated student voice as a source for data. Thus, I can counter the critique that 'classroom research has in the past often been done badly, mainly because of unarticulated procedures of analysis' (Hopkins 2014, p.153). Teachers did articulate data collection procedures in their own way but did not necessarily use academic jargon. Chapter 6.4 targeted the outcome of each teacher's year-long enquiry. Two teachers, Marie and Brian, were portrayed more explicitly to show their distinctive transformation that was shaped by our collaborative network.

Lastly, chapter 6.5 contained findings regarding the outcome of our collaboration. It became apparent that teachers enjoyed the peer-to-peer learning approach and that I as mentor, facilitator and supporter enhanced teachers' critical collaborative enquiry by helping them to a more systematic approach to transform their teaching.

The following Data Discussion chapter points – on the ground of chapter 6 – highlights and discusses the original contributions of this study to the field of teacher CPD.

Chapter 7

Data discussion

It's about taking flight. (Pat Thomson)

The dissertation process can be described as a young albatross having long practised to fly and then being ready to take off. The findings are at hand; what follows next is their discussion in the light of existing research and theories, of new knowledge that can be claimed and its significance.

This study is the first Irish collaborative action research study with modern language teachers in post-primary schools. Particularly unique is that participants took part not to gain academic or professional credit, but to improve their practice and collaborate with other like-minded teachers. Findings can inform policy-makers, teacher CPD providers and stakeholders in designing and implementing CPD initiatives that see teacher research as an avenue for professional learning.

In the following chapters, I discuss relevant findings presented in the previous chapters. A special focus will thereby lie on unexpected and intriguing outcomes from the year-long collaboration with teachers of modern languages.

In chapter 7.1, findings regarding my own experiences and growth of knowledge will be examined. As lead researcher and facilitator of teacher CPD, I found scaffolding, storytelling, active listening and democratic collaboration crucial to carry out sound action research.

Key categories concerning teachers' practitioner research will then be discussed in chapter 7.2. They comprise a practice-oriented approach to CPD, different levels of engagement exhibited in this research study and teachers' fundamental care about their students. These categories are far from being a complete list to provide teachers of modern languages with effective CPD. They are rather a consequence of employing a complexity lens to this study.

The next chapters will depict outcomes of this study which bring out the complexity and the constant learning of our system.

7.1 Key Findings of my Action Research Journey

My role during the collaborative journey was to organise and plan group meetings, observe and film teachers in their classrooms, evaluate together with them their teaching and give structure to their individual enquiries. The following figure gives an overview of core categories from my own, the lead researcher's part that I want to discuss in more detail.

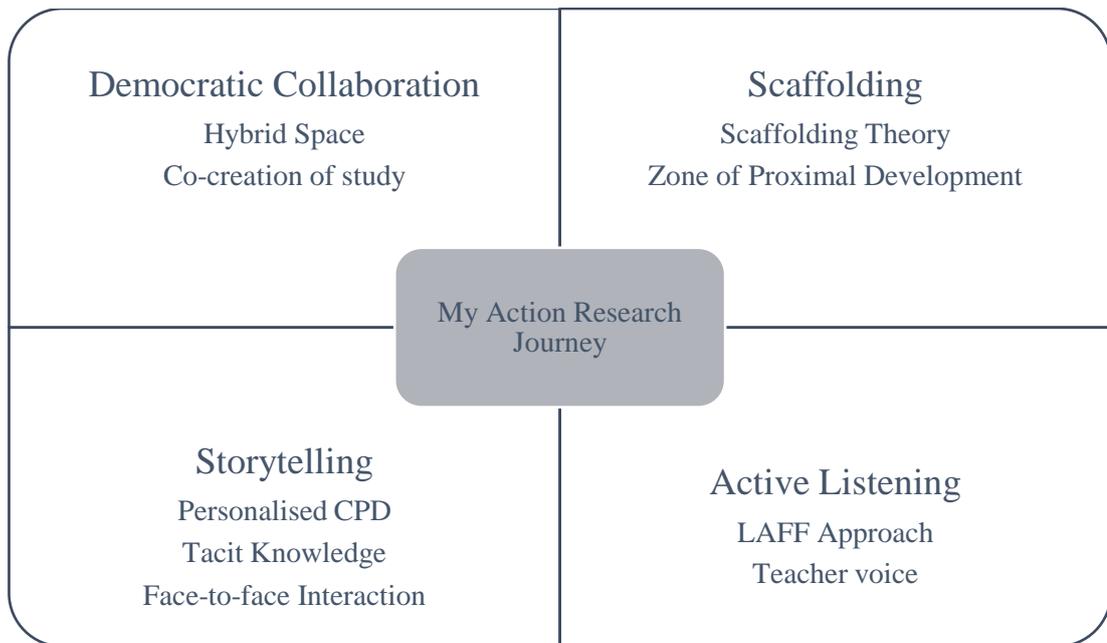


Figure 7.1: Key findings from lead researcher's action research

The categories scaffolding, storytelling, active listening and democratic collaboration are close to the centre of my journey. Underneath each category, concepts and theories are listed that support these key categories.

The need for scaffolding became apparent when for example the nine steps to action research (see chapter 3.3.3) were not completely followed and endorsed by teachers. Teachers were less interested in posing research questions, not all teachers triangulated their data, read research literature or made their enquiries public (the exception is Marie since she wrote a publicly accessible blog). This made me wonder how to scaffold a collaborative action research study involving teachers and a university researcher (see chapter 6.1.4, Bridging the Gap – but how?) so that it is more conducive to the professional and personal context of the partaking teachers.

By looking at the interaction between teachers and myself during collaborative meetings and interviews, I noticed the importance of storytelling and face-to-face interaction (see chapter

6.1.3, Collaborating Online). I approached our interactions with the main goal of gaining an insight into teachers' enquiry processes. Teachers, however, used the space to talk about their beliefs and feelings about teaching and being a teacher, about their students, colleagues and the difficulty of reaching a work-life balance - in short, they addressed topics that revealed more than just the processes and outcomes of their enquiry (see chapter 6.4, Outcome of Enquiry). Being open to these insights and complexities underpinning teacher research demonstrate the holistic approach taken in this research.

Furthermore, an emphasis was put on a joint co-creation of this study (see chapter 6.1.2, Co-creating the Study with Teachers) which resonates with the concept of democratic collaboration. Teachers' distinct voices were heard and deemed as significant. While their voices changed my initial plans for the study, I came to understand the complex processes of action and teacher research and the role an outside researcher can play (see chapter 6.1.1, Struggling to Find my Role).

7.1.1 Scaffolding

“How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.” (Mary)

After introducing action research to the teachers in our first meeting at the start of the project in August 2014, I believed that action research as a methodology was understood and teachers were ready to start implementing it with my support throughout the year. My critical moments (see chapter 6.1) showed, however, that action research cannot be easily implemented. Even though manuals for action researchers make action research appear to be a straightforward process, its complexity becomes apparent in practice.

Research findings from this study strongly suggest that a scaffolded approach to teacher learning, specifically during support-giving for teacher researchers, is key to the development of a collaborative action research practice. Although I introduced teachers to action research with a scaffolded approach (following the nine steps by Altrichter et al.) and supported them progressively, I would argue that more scaffolding needs to occur to respond to the demands teachers face in classrooms and schools. Scaffolding corresponds to Vygotsky's *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) in which the expert-outsider guides the learning from what teachers are able to do to 'a proximal level that they might attain' (Warford 2011, p.252). As the expert-outsider in our collaboration, I assumed one workshop aimed at explaining action research would be enough. I was proven wrong, especially when I received a phone call from one teacher asking mid-way through the project what its name was (see chapter 3.4.7). I could

have been more persistent in transmitting action research as a methodology. However, I was aware that this would result in a top-down approach in which I deliver (academic) knowledge. Consequently, I chose a practice-oriented approach to introduce teachers to action research which included them as partners on a joint journey but also guided them to the next proximal level.

Various supports that I have developed and findings with regard to the supports needed are advocated by research in the area of andragogy, which is the study of methods used in adult education. The following four principles of andragogy correspond to my research findings. The first principle states that teachers come in with prior knowledge. Their ‘experience [should be used] as a base for scaffolding new knowledge’ (Hagen & Park 2016, p.176). When I asked teachers before our first collaborative meeting what they expected, answers showed their preference to learn and hear from each other rather than someone “preaching at them” (see chapter 6.1.2). During the meeting, new knowledge was not only presented by me but also by teachers for teachers. The latter led to more active participation and approval, as was described in my critical learning incident (see chapter 6.1.2).

The next principle, that content needs to be relevant, corresponds to this incident. Teachers have a ‘strong belief in learning in those areas that will help them to effectively cope with real-life situations and problems’ (Hagen & Park 2016, p.178). Because teachers co-created this study, their wish to exchange resources and ideas for the classroom within the group was taken seriously by me. Findings showed furthermore that advice coming from non-teachers is less trusted. Brian mentioned, for example, how recommendations from outsiders would cause more work rather than helping to reduce teachers’ workload. Hence, I made sure to give teachers enough space to share knowledge with each other, e.g. by organising a *TeachMeet* at our second collaborative meeting.

The third principle states that contents should be instantly applicable:

adults regard learning as a process for improving their ability and competence to deal with practical problems they currently have. Thus, most adults have a desire to be able to apply knowledge and skills they learn today to living more effectively tomorrow. (ibid., p.180)

Thus, teachers’ preferences for hands-on advice on how something works in the classroom and teachers showcasing teaching methods were an important feature in our workshops. The related theme emerging from the gathered data is *real CPD*. Data from our workshops as well as from teacher interviews and email communications point towards teachers’ strong interest

and appreciation of CPD that involves an exchange of (tried and tested) material with colleagues.

A prerequisite for effective teacher collaboration is that teachers are willing and committed to take part which links to the last principle of andragogy. Adult learning is self-directed as adult learners ‘fill multiple roles within their lives and [...] make choices about their education as a part of those roles’ (Hagen & Park, p.174). Partaking teachers entered this study voluntarily to i) meet other like-minded modern language teachers but also ii) to enquire with an outsider’s help into their classroom. While teachers’ interest in exchanging resources was strong, they appreciated having someone in class to observe and/or film a lesson and later talk about their enquiry and evaluate their teaching. This aspect propelled our network from resource-sharing-sessions to collaborative action research.

Categories stemming from my grounded theory analysis support a collaborative action research practice - *being pushed out of their comfort zone, being a learner again, and doing small-scale projects*. All themes fuel the need for scaffolding with the support of an expert-outsider. Mary, for example, verbalised the need to be pushed out of her comfort zone as a main driver to take part in this study. Ciara spoke about the advantages of becoming a learner again and to learn in a structured way by having tasks, deadlines, meetings etc. which were planned into our year-long collaboration. All teachers agreed during member check with the finding that smaller projects are more manageable than long-term projects like a postgraduate course at university.

Consistent with the *Zone of Proximal Development*, it is not so much about big jumps, e.g. attending a credit-bearing course or publishing an article in a journal, but rather guidance and support towards the next proximal level. The final step in action research, to make the resulting teacher knowledge public, was not a priority or achievement goal for participating teachers. After the project officially ended, I sent teachers an email to enquire if they were interested in publishing their research journey with my help in *The Journal of Teacher Action Research*.²¹ None of the teachers responded besides Marie. She replied that not having enough time is a critical issue prohibiting any form of publication. Another issue could be that a journal article does not necessarily lead to sharing teacher knowledge in their closer network of colleagues at school and in teacher associations. Sharing knowledge at a local level, as seen during our collaborative meetings, seems to be valued more. An example for sharing knowledge at a local level can be seen in Marie and Olwyn showcasing a teaching method/software during our first collaborative meeting. In a wider sense, they were making their enquiry public and fulfilled the last step (Altrichter et al. 2008). When investigating teacher researchers’ journeys after

²¹ <http://www.practicalteacherresearch.com/> [26/05/2017]

submitting their Master's thesis, Shosh and McAteer pointed out that teachers making their findings public in a day-to-day life 'is not the norm' (Shosh & McAteer 2016, p.15). During their Master's studies several avenues existed to share their knowledge which became scarce afterwards. Here, *ResearchMeets*, that the Irish Teaching Council envisages to run annually, can be an avenue for school teachers to make their knowledge public.

In conclusion, our collaborative action research network adhered to principles of andragogy and considered each individual's zone of proximal development. While teacher collaboration in the form of sharing resources is a preferred way of gaining new knowledge, teachers welcomed being pushed out of their comfort zone in order to learn professionally. Hereby, the expert-outsider, critical friend or mentor is essential in guiding and supporting the teacher along their journey.

7.1.2 Storytelling

[T]alk can make a crucial difference for teachers' agency.
(Biesta et al. 2017, p.52)

Findings in this thesis point towards the potential of storytelling as part of collaborative action research. However, I underestimated the power of storytelling as a means of expressing beliefs, values and unspoken issues. A reason is that storytelling is still 'an underexploited resource in teacher learning' (Savvidou 2010, p.660). Given that the traditional Irish culture is a culture of storytelling, 'valuing the oral over the written' (Toomey in Friedman 2007, p.1), a higher emphasis could be placed on oral narrations of teacher realities. These are a window to rich classroom contexts that can be otherwise hard to grasp.

Incorporating more orality can furthermore counter the problematic issue of reflective writing (see chapter 6.3.1.2). Research with pre-service students supports the latter claim: Thompson Long discovered during her doctorate the advantage of digital storytelling as a means of improving pre-service teachers' reflection. While students usually saw reflective writing 'as one more assignment' (Thompson Long 2014, p.12), combining the reflective process with storytelling and technology, augmented students' motivation to reflect and deepened their reflection (ibid.).

Marie, who wrote six blog entries²² during the project about her enquiry and one more at the beginning of the next school year, used a personal and engaging writing style about her

²² <http://flippedfrogs.blogspot.ie/?zx=24effe9404fb6c2c> [08/06/2017]

experiences implementing the flipped classroom method. Her blog entries are an honest account of her successes and challenges along the way. By making her blog entries public, Marie shared her enquiry with an audience, specifically with other teachers interested in flipping the classroom, but also with me in order to receive advice and feedback regarding her enquiry. Hence, Marie's storytelling was dialogic; it furthermore gave me a chance to zoom in on her enquiry besides visiting her classroom and interviewing her. I could add a different perspective to her enquiry or give a next impulse.

Sharing their reflective writing with me was entirely based on each teacher's decision. Brian, Rachel, Ciara and Jacinta shared their notes with me at the end of our collaboration. Olwyn and Mary both stopped writing reflectively shortly after the beginning of the project. I could observe that the writing started off well for some but diminished throughout the year or that only quick entries of what went well and what did not were made.

With dialogic storytelling lead researchers/critical friends can react to teachers' insights, feelings and experiences which can boost teachers' motivation to write. In her study with 12 English language lecturers, Savvidou (2010) made use of dialogic storytelling in which teachers responded to digital stories from their colleagues with their own stories. Stories were not an individual construction but rather existed within the concept of 'addressivity' (Bakhtin in Savvidou 2010, p.651) which 'entail[s] the articulation of personal perspective in relation to others and in relation to knowledge' (Haworth 1999, p.99). Addressivity hence means that teachers respond to other teachers' utterances and therefore react to 'otherness' which creates an eminent learning opportunity (ibid.).

Trust and familiarity among group members were essential to let teachers react to each other and to that otherness. I could especially observe the advantages of familiarity in Ciara and Marie's last interview where both felt at ease to express opinions and contradict each other. Their living contradictions (Whitehead 1993) became apparent in relation to their discontent about curricular requirements and grading. Marie's aim was to make students independent learners but she felt she had to revert back to spoon-feeding them during exam-driven years. Ciara found there is too much pressure on students and teachers to achieve top grades. She told the story about a student who struggled to pass but achieved a D which to her was the best grade she helped a student achieve in her career as a teacher. Both teachers collaboratively reflected on their values and the negation of their values during the last interview which deepened their reflection (Moon 2004) and my understanding of their context.

For emotional closeness and relational trust (Le Fevre 2014) to be established in collaborative action research projects, real-time interaction is a must, as findings in this study show. Teachers favoured face-to-face over online collaboration, as well as having someone observe

them in their classroom and talk about their teaching and enquiry after the observation. This finding is supported by a blended-learning study in the field of nursing in the UK, where it became apparent that face-to-face sessions created a community of enquiry (Glogowska et al. 2011). That community feeling is less tangible in an online space. Because development and change towards the better lies at the heart of action/teacher research, the following quote is very apt.

Scientists are finding the most important action is happening not online, but in our hearts, in our minds and in our neural systems - in other words: in the real world.
(Keller & Fay 2012, p.3)

Storytelling also invites teachers to share tacit knowledge which represents a vast part of teacher professional knowledge that is, however, usually unexpressed (Elliott et al. 2011; Krátká 2015). With storytelling, I would argue teachers were able to voice their tacit or implicit knowledge. By making certain topics explicit, teachers could develop plans for action which Schön calls the process of framing and reframing (Thompson Long 2014). Themes arising in the data capture how teachers evaluated and dealt with situations, e.g. teaching mixed-ability classes, finding avenues to differentiate, reacting to more visual students or teaching a modern language as a life skill rather than a subject. In addition, framing and reframing processes ‘can enable people to construct and reconstruct themselves and their world, to make a different sense of their experience’ (Day & Leitch 2001, p.406). The quote stems from research highlighting the importance of narrative, written or spoken, with the focus on emotions in teachers’ professional lives. Day and Leitch argue that the interaction between the cognitive and emotional, or rather the inner debates, can be made clear through stories. After analysing teachers’ stories and renderings in this study, I found that emotions played a crucial role, specifically the emotional labour teachers invest in their students. The theme of teachers’ fundamental care about their students’ personal and academic development became apparent through their stories and will be discussed further in chapter 7.2.2.

Moreover, my storytelling in the form of writing narratives about the teachers gave me the chance to share stories with them enhancing the dialogue about this project and their enquiry. Mary for example commented on her narrative:

I liked your narrative because it gave a good flavour about our challenges and what we hope to achieve. (Mary, email conversation)

The narratives also showed that each teacher encountered issues related to them, their students, their context. No issue or problem they enquired into was the same which highlights contextual differences and complexities.

Hence, I see storytelling as a way forward in teacher CPD to propel reflective practice, to unravel beliefs and values that are more difficult to express or contradict practice, to share knowledge about teachers' professional practice and gain a deep insight into classroom realities.

My findings furthermore show that a precondition for storytelling can be seen in the ability to actively listen to what is being said. Active listening shall be addressed next.

7.1.3 Active Listening

The art of conversation lies in listening. (Malcom Forbes)

Active listening is another core category from my analysis. I mentioned how difficult it was not to rush through interviews at the beginning of the project but to actively listen to what has been said and react to what has been said rather than sticking to my sheet of prepared questions (see chapter 3.4.3). It is not surprising that active listening is one of the ten qualities an interviewer should possess (see Kvale in Brinkmann 2007).

I also reflected on my mistake of bringing in my opinions in an interview with Brian (see chapter 6.1.1). I became more aware of my role as interviewer and gradually improved during the process.

Intuitively I started using active listening as a concept as 'an important first step to establishing effective two-way communication and successful collaboration' (McNaughton & Vostal 2010, p.252). The acronym LAFF (Listen, Ask questions, Focus on issues, Find a first step) represents several stages to demonstrate active listening skills (ibid.). In one interview, for example, Rachel told me about her constant feeling of tiredness, saying that she seems to be doing all the work in the classroom. I listened to her issue but instead of making a suggestion I asked her "So how could you change that?" (A(2)58). Rachel made the plan to give her students more time to fulfil tasks and provide room for more group work. As a consequence, she felt less exhausted (see p.175). She arrived at her action points (changing the classroom layout, planning for more group work and time for students to fulfil tasks) herself. With active listening, I found a way to support teachers without putting my view onto them. It also increased my understanding of teachers' actual needs and contexts.

Active listening also involves hearing what is not said. I realised that teachers used academic terminology less frequently, for example, “practitioner enquiry”, “action research”, “research” or “research literature”. I acted on this issue by using these phrases less frequently as well so as not to estrange teachers from this study and increase the distance between us. In retrospect, I believe that this may have been a mistake. As can be seen in Bleach’s (2014) action research study with early childhood care and education practitioners, many of her participants were unfamiliar with the language and the concepts used during the CPD initiative. However, by creating a safe environment, the study ‘had increased the confidence of participants and had given them a greater sense of themselves as professionals’ (Bleach 2014, p.193). The early childhood practitioners felt more comfortable with professional language which helped diminish the theory-practice divide (ibid.). My use of lay rather than academic terms unnecessarily cocooned teachers. Interestingly, storytelling can help untangle the issue of using professional language. It is therefore important ‘to hold the complexity of the concept intact but provide sufficient support or scaffolding to enable meaning-making to occur’ (Alterio & McDrury 2002). With regards to our collaborative action research project, I could have exposed teachers more frequently to the stories of teacher researchers. I did so only at the start of the project by handing out the writing of a German teacher in an Irish secondary school whose research question asked: “How can I create in my mixed ability German class a disciplined and relaxed environment conducive to the learning and enjoyment of the language?” (McNiff & Collins 1994). The text was a fitting example since it targeted a German post-primary classroom in Ireland. However, with regard to the quote by Alterio and Drudy, I should have offered ‘scaffolding to enable meaning making’. Instead of handing out the text for teachers to read at home, we could have had a professional conversation about it.

Besides the aspect of academic language, active listening in this study meant to listen to what matters to teachers during interviews and our group meetings. This, it can be argued, comes as another detriment of the research side in this study. I sensed from Marie’s statement that the collected data is important to me and Rachel’s question about collecting more data for me (see p.165), that teachers positioned me as the outside researcher they produce data for. Both teachers positioned themselves as helpers for my research but also brought up the issue of not having enough time to enquire profoundly. Brian on the other side pointed at the amount of data teachers collect without calling the process research. Teachers’ resistance with regard to data collection could stem from their fear that more work would be added to their busy schedule and these concerns need to be taken seriously when planning and implementing action research as a form of teacher CPD in the Irish context.

In contrast, I did observe teachers’ gradual construction of a teacher-researcher-identity (see chapter 6.3.1.2). They reconsidered research questions, wrote reflectively, they did collect

data, read relevant literature and talked about results from the enquiry. However, they would not call themselves teacher researchers or tell their colleagues that they do action research. The reasons could be manifold: the terminology comes from an outside source, it is not (yet) commonly used in CPD in Ireland, I used the terminology less frequently and thereby diminished exposure, or perhaps it was that teachers did not want to stand out among their colleagues as researchers, which is an academic concept and could clash with their identity as practitioners.

Yet, teachers in this study were natural enquirers without being given a label. They were committed and motivated to improve on their teaching, and open to have an outsider help them make their enquiry more systematic. Therefore, I can make the claim that teachers shifted their position. Those shifts happened differently for each individual (see chapter 6.4). Through active listening, teachers' development can be taken into account and supported more easily when teachers are given a voice in the process.

Teachers' voices are fundamental as can be seen in Borg's study (2012) on school-based communities of practice in New South Wales, Australia. Borg claims that usually the expert voice not the teacher voice is heard. In her longitudinal study with nine school teachers, she as researcher 'was seeking understanding of a phenomenon in which [she] was involved' (Borg 2012, p.304). In my case, I wanted to understand the process of teacher enquiry, its constraints and enablers, but also hear about the issues close to teachers' hearts.

I believe actively listening to teachers' voices is a stepping stone to 'improving [teachers'] educational practice' (Bakx et al. 2016, p.77) but also to furthering researchers' understanding of second level language teaching and learning.

That exchange between teachers and researchers leads to the next section on democratic collaboration.

7.1.4 Democratic Collaboration

"It's more on a level playing field when you are in the position where you want to discuss and criticise and improve." (Ciara)

I have shown how teachers shaped this study (see chapter 6.1.2) and how I needed to adapt the course of the study in order to meet teachers' expectations. Democratic collaboration in this study meant first of all building trusting relationships that then would lead to mutual learning.

I saw my role in our democratic network in a similar way as these Scandinavian-based action researchers:

as a researcher-facilitator, the attention should be directed firstly towards what the teachers or school leaders bring to the collaboration and also at how to use these experiences and knowledge in the best way for everyone (including the academic action researchers) to learn more. (Olin et al. 2016, p.432)

I agree that teachers' expectations, wishes and goals for our collaborative network should be at the centre. However, it is important to stress that every voice in this study is heard - mine included. I not only asked what are the appropriate support systems for teacher research, but also how can the gap between second and third level be narrowed.

I learned and came to acknowledge that there were differences in approaches to this action research project which supports the claim that we are a system that constantly learns (see chapter 5.2).

Findings indicated, for example, that teachers critiqued and distanced themselves from the use of academic language and research. They appeared to imagine a clear boundary between second and third level, positioning themselves firmly in the practitioner space.

Instead of pushing academic knowledge onto teachers, I came to understand that they have their own professional language. The complexity of teaching and learning is by its very nature difficult to put into language, as well as the prevalent tacit knowledge in teacher professional knowledge. A study by Lindqvist and Nordänger (2010) found that teachers use metaphors to express their practical knowledge. Looking at data from this study, teachers used plenty metaphors

- to express their view about teaching (“to not be the sage on stage” - Marie),
- to signal the difficulty of high mixed-ability classroom teaching (“It is like Beirut at times.” - Mary),
- to characterise their relationship to their students (“They are like my little nieces.” - Olwyn) or
- hint at the felt time pressure as a teacher (“You are constantly just trying to catch your tail.” - Rachel).

Since ‘metaphors can be used as carriers of practical knowledge’ (ibid., p.56) they informed me about teachers' actual thoughts and worries about classroom teaching. This knowledge

could inform not only teacher educators but be transferred to pre-service and in-service teachers' professional learning.

Besides recognising teachers' own professional language and practical knowledge, I wanted to introduce research-informed knowledge that can inform and transform teaching practice. The process proved to be problematic (see chapter 6.1.4). The reason for this could be that 'research-generated knowledge is said to differ from practitioner knowledge' (Cain 2015, p.491). Practitioner knowledge was generally more valued, as quotes from Brian ("I think it might take you about 10 minutes to properly read through an article [...] Whereas I think in 3 minutes a German teacher could give me a quick idea.") or Rachel ("Leave the research to the Ph.D. students.") showed. However, it also became clear that teachers rely on research findings that can have a practical influence on their teaching. During member check, Olwyn asked for more research on making the teaching and learning of modern languages more relevant again. "We are going to need to read up on it and find out" (see chapter 6.5).

While I do not have the answer on how to close the gap between second and third level, I do believe that democratic collaboration can be an avenue to diminish the distance. The professional language/knowledge barrier should be approached from both sides. As seen in this study, stories (and metaphors) are connected to teachers' practical knowledge and bring across the complexity of teaching. To make research-informed knowledge more relevant for teachers, I came to the conclusion that a discussion of relevant material in a collaborative, trusting and safe space can lead teachers to feel more competent with regards to academic language and educational theories (see Bleach's action research study). In a study on teacher action research projects in England (Cain 2015), the focus was for teachers to read research articles and use them as a basis to design their action research project. The lead researcher wanted to find out if the research articles had any impact. Monthly discussions about teachers' action research projects showed that teachers implemented research-based knowledge by comparing their own experiences with the research findings, using cases to make abstract knowledge contextual and by diffusing 'research knowledge into areas beyond those originally researched' (Cain 2015, p.505). Hence, it seems possible to make research-based knowledge more informing for collaborative action research projects.

Retrospectively, however, I can say that teachers learned as much from me as I learned from them. For a democratic network like ours, Wenger-Trayner's et al. (2014) landscapes of professional practice (see chapter 2.2.2) is worth mentioning again. Learning is rooted in practice - which all teachers in the study emphasised as a must for teacher CPD - but involves the sharing of stories and journeys of different stakeholders or communities of practice. This

leads to boundary experiences which can be challenging yet revealing about the complexities of lived experiences (Wenger-Trayner et al. 2014).

In this study, the focus was on teachers sharing their stories and individual (enquiry) journeys. Hence, I came to understand better the complexity of their lived experience. I valued their different viewpoints and approaches to action research which provided information on how to support teacher researchers in Irish post-primary schools. Part of my role included building a bridge between the two communities, between second and third level and practitioner and academic knowledge. That process is not straightforward as was demonstrated throughout the thesis. Through a democratic discourse though, I argue that within this study trustful relations were built as well as an acknowledgment of each other's work. This can be seen as a foundation for a hybrid space (Zeichner 2010) in which universities and schools can meet on a level playing field and cherish both sides' efforts and values.

7.2 Key Findings of Teacher Researchers' Journeys

It has to be pointed out here again that my own (the lead researcher's) and teachers' experiences and journeys are presented separately only to enhance the clarity, in terms of structure, of this thesis. In reality, the journeys are interwoven due to the high collaborative component.

The most compelling categories from part of the teachers' research journeys include a practice-oriented approach to CPD (see chapter 6.3, Inside Teacher Research), teachers' fundamental care about their students (see chapter 6.4, Outcome of Enquiry) and different levels of engagement (see chapter 6.1.4 and 6.3.1 respectively, Engagement in and with Research) which are illustrated in figure 7.2. These categories show that teachers came from a different perspective to our action research endeavour. Teachers are situated in their practice which leads to their stronger relationship and care for their students. However, that fact also impacts on their engagement with action research, especially the research side of it.

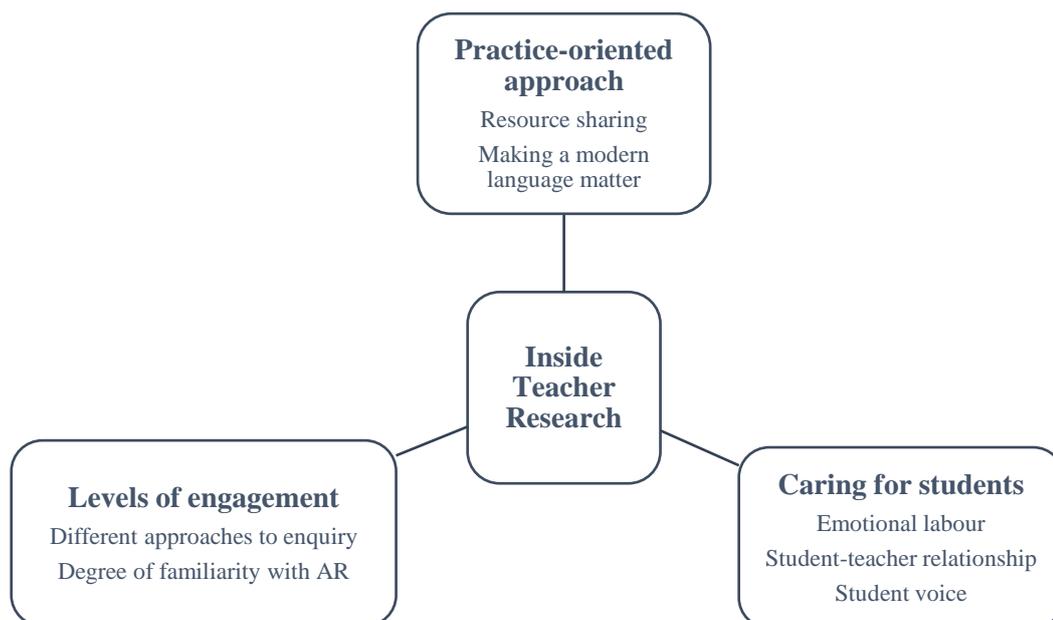


Figure 7.2: Key findings from teacher research journeys

7.2.1 Practice-oriented Approach

*You have important things to say, both in relation to the world of work and relationships, and also in relation to the world of ideas and theories.
(McNiff 2017)*

One striking outcome of the study was the high degree of practice-orientation among participants. The main reasons to partake in this study were to share resources with like-minded colleagues, to improve on language teaching methods and make language learning relevant and fun for students. Further reasons included to become better at reflection or find ways to help students become independent learners (see chapter 6.1.2). Teachers' central quest for resources and ideas shared in a collaborative network could stand in relation to their classrooms becoming more diverse. Teachers mentioned in interviews and during meetings how difficult it is to teach highly mixed-ability classes or how much more preparation it takes to differentiate. It is no wonder then that practice-orientation means first and foremost resource-sharing to make teachers' lives easier. This thirst for tips and tricks clashes with educational research as its 'outcomes [...] are not practice-based and often cannot be used by educational practitioners' (Bakx et al. 2016, p.76). Cain also wrote that 'researchers seldom undertake studies specifically in order to inform practice' (2015, p.491). The way research articles are structured and the academic audience usually targeted in them seem not to

correspond to teachers' needs and lowers their motivation to engage with research-based evidence in form of articles.

Smith says that Gallagher says that...they are all quoting each other and then they are sticking their opinion here. Can they not just clearly state [...]. But I do think that I would like to [read more] if it was more practical. (R(2)118)

Findings in this thesis suggest that teachers prefer practice-based knowledge.

For secondary school teachers I think it's the practice that's really important. You don't need to know why such and such a thing was researched. (C(3)128)

I noticed the gap of applicability and relevance in research articles myself when looking for material to send to teachers. Having in the back of my mind that my cohort preferred practical information, I found it difficult to find suitable reading material. Another reason is that not much is published in the field of teacher research in the modern language classroom that is actually written by teachers. Furthermore, Brian raised the issue of research addressing the Irish context. He prefers reading something that corresponds to his context which seconds the statement made earlier of teachers privileging local knowledge (see chapter 7.1.1).

Findings in this study also show that CPD workshops do not live up to teachers' expectations if they are lecture-centred or too far removed from teachers' needs and realities. It confirms my observations when inviting keynote speakers to conferences of the German Teachers' Association of Ireland that usually received negative feedback from the target audience (see chapter 2.1.5).

All the above corresponds to Hoban and Erickson's conceptual framework which is based on complexity thinking. They speak of three different dimensions and their influences for teacher learning: action setting, personal and sociocultural influences (Hoban & Erickson 2004). The authors claim that if the action setting is based in/connected to the classroom/school, teacher learning will be more profound than in any other setting. The resulting knowing-in-action encompasses the fact that '[o]ur knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing' (Schön 1995, p.29).

The action setting in this study focused on teachers' classrooms. Considering teachers' own classrooms as a start for teacher learning was pivotal in giving context-appropriate advice and

supporting teachers' enquiries. In this collaborative study the combination of advice/support given by me and advice/support given by collaborating teachers seemed effective. As expert-outsider, I could provide material concerning the enquiry, discuss critically with the teacher the process of the enquiry and set new impulses. It was an advantage for me to have a background in teaching and modern language teacher education. Olwyn mentioned, for example, that working together with mentors who are also teaching is more meaningful. In addition to my support, meeting other teachers meant sharing local knowledge that fits teachers' contexts.

Findings in this study show that a practice-oriented approach needs to be collaborative and, if possible, joined by an expert-outsider who can guide but not "preach" and support teachers' exploration of critical issues, underlying beliefs and values. Practice-based action research in our project meant that teachers enquired about what mattered to them and that this enquiry suited their professional work-life.

The investigation of critical problems was the fundamental goal in this study. All teachers agreed during member check that enquiry into their teaching methods is the way forward in teacher CPD but that a support-network is needed. That enquiry is concerned with practical issues and is producing practical knowledge. This study hence offers a window to issues of educational practice in Irish post-primary schools. It was interesting to observe, for example, that the centre line in teachers' enquiries dealt with student-related issues and teachers' care about students' academic and personal development which will be discussed next.

7.2.2 Caring About Students

"I feel like a lot of them were like my little nieces." (Olwyn)

Looking at the participants of this study, I noticed their personal involvement not only with their students' learning but also students' life in general. Hence, I want to scrutinise the impact of teacher-student relationship on teaching and learning in accordance with complexity thinking. Larsen-Freeman explains that complexity thinking 'challenges the idea that context is background to the main action. It sees the context as part of the complex system' (Larsen-Freeman 2012, p.208). Context, in this sense, includes the ethos each school embraces.

To their credit, the majority of [Irish] schools strive to be faithful to their mission statements. These schools go the extra mile to cater for the needs of the total spectrum in ways that are consonant with the noble and emancipating vision

articulated in their mission statement. [...] The culture within these schools is one of acceptance, respect and a sense of family. (Martin 2006, p.71)

The fact that teachers saw school as a community which is highlighted in the last word ‘family’ became apparent during interviews with teachers of this study. Caring about students became a category during my analysis of interviews and narrative writings. Caring about students included the concept of the above-mentioned going the extra mile. Themes belonging to the category are

- having a strong student-teacher relationship,
- doing extra-curricular activities to support these relationships,
- preferring to teach classes over a longer period of time to build up rapport,
- wanting to improve for their students (seen as a motor for CPD),
- wanting to create subject appeal,
- wanting students to improve and
- dealing with changing student cohorts: mixed-ability, learning difficulties, more visual learning types.

Teachers gave up their free time to partake in extracurricular activities with their students. Ciara and Marie, for example, used their free lunch time to play cards with students. To them, the payback from the time spent with the students socially in their free time is supporting a good teacher-student relationship during class time. Olwyn rehearsed with her TY students a musical which let her come to the conclusion: “I feel like a lot of them were like my little nieces, very close with them now altogether” (O(2)105). The study by Martin for the DES summarised this as ‘personalised teaching’. Showing empathy, giving students confidence ‘and the belief that they can achieve their dreams’ (Martin 2006, pp.72-73) leads towards better student outcomes and teacher-student relationships. Ciara’s quote shows, though, that personalised teaching is sometimes in disharmony with the pressure on students and their teachers to achieve good grades.

The expectation is that you should be getting [As]. This is what kills me how teachers are seen - that it's by the grades that you get. (C(3)69)

Teachers like Ciara look carefully at who they are teaching but are discouraged by the result-driven atmosphere in the staff-room and the school. These examples show that context is more

than the 'backdrop' to the action (teaching and learning); it rather is part of the complexity surrounding teaching and learning (Larsen-Freeman 2012, p.208).

The fact that teachers care about their students was also apparent in their enquiries. Their research questions showed a high degree of student-centredness (see chapter 6.3.1.1), as well as their approaches to collecting data (see chapter 6.3.1.2). All teachers included students in their enquiries by asking them for feedback and, in Olwyn and Marie's case, by letting them decide which topics to cover during their TY. Mary, Marie, Ciara and Rachel furthermore shared the feedback with their respective classes and thus made the process transparent. All teachers took the feedback into account and implemented changes: Rachel offered more group work, Mary made power-points and exercises for more visual learners, Brian gave students more time to think after a reading exercise before letting them answer questions etc.

The category caring about students is seconded by Augustyniak's study with Polish immigrant students in Ireland. The study focused on students' judgement of the teaching competence of Irish and Polish teachers. While the Polish students were used to more authoritative teaching methods in their home country, they found Irish teachers to be more relaxed and 'clearly claimed that their teachers in Ireland are first and foremost very nice people' (Augustyniak 2016, p.106). While Augustyniak's study showed the stark contrast between two European education systems, it also highlighted the higher level of empathy and care on side of the Irish teachers which made an integration of Polish students into the Irish education system easier.

Findings also suggest that for some teachers care goes beyond the classroom and the school. A complexity lens supports this: Larsen-Freeman suggests that the 'inside/outside dichotomy' needs to be overcome (2012, p.208). Seeing teaching and learning as what is happening only inside the classroom is not sufficient, rather attaining a 'sense of oneness' (ibid.). The sense of oneness became apparent in Mary's care for her students. As much as she wants them to do well academically, she considers also their emotional learning and wellbeing. Because many of her students come from Traveller communities ("You see the background of the kids is very very important to all of this. The kids that I'm teaching are very different to the kids you would find in [name of other school]."), Mary centres her attention on showing them possibilities. Even though she is at times discouraged by the behaviour of students ("It is like Beirut."), she hopes to have a positive impact on them by employing a growth mindset ("If you were born in Germany you'd speak fluent German. It just means you have to work a little harder. But it doesn't mean why you wouldn't be able to learn a language.").

Overcoming the inside/outside dichotomy comes with a high amount of emotional labour on the part of the teacher. I mentioned this before in two instances referring to Mary's and Marie's constant reflection, over-working and not being able to switch-off. This is seconded in the

research literature: ‘positive relationships with students is perceived to be the most demanding aspect of [teachers’] work’ (Elliott et al. 2011, p.84) or ‘[t]eaching involves significant emotional labour as teachers are moved to act by their emotions, which are at the heart of their teaching’ (McCarthy 2011, p.152). Teachers in this study had the chance to talk about their feelings and emotions which was accredited, for example, by Rachel saying: “It’s a good moment for us to express our feelings. And that might hopefully impact on our future.” Future CPD initiatives need to give teachers a platform in order to express the emotional dimension of their caring work.

Another theme regarding student-teacher relationships that I explored in this study relates to the concept of student voice. Student voice is a rather new concept in the Irish educational landscape (etbi 2016). The Junior Cycle reform should, however, ‘engage students and their teachers, in developing and negotiating learning intentions and success criteria, and in formative assessment conversations, at classroom level’ (etbi 2016, p.43). Findings from this study suggest that the switch from more structured teaching practices (see chapter 2.1.2) towards ‘a culture of co-construction of learning’ (ibid.) is not an easy journey. Teachers distrusted student feedback (see p.157) and did not think that students were able to self-direct their learning. Brian, for example said that students are not used to thinking about their learning and that he considers this to be the “teacher’s job” (see p.159). When I asked teachers if they could imagine implementing focus groups as a research method into their enquiry (see chapter 6.3.1.2), no teacher felt at ease about it. They thought students could be biased, not able to respond in a constructive manner or not wanting to mix with non-friends. This makes me come to the conclusion that teachers care about and support their students, but that less emphasis is put on challenging them towards self-directed learning and a co-construction of learning. This is due to having doubts and/or little experience with student voice. After this project ended, Ciara and Marie wrote to me that they are using focus group discussions as a form of data gathering as part of their school’s collaborative enquiry-based project. It shows that support from the school administration and a community of practice in school are a pathway towards implementing methods that are initially perceived as risky.

To improve further on student-centred teaching, Samarji and Hooley (2015) claim that the switch from lecture-centred to student-centred teaching requires a discourse of ontological and epistemological beliefs. In their study from a third level perspective, their solution is to ensure ‘that practice and theorising of practice occurs “on the spot”’ (Samarji & Hooley 2015, p.9). For the post-primary context, the expert-outsider can yet again help guiding the discourse between practitioner and research-informed knowledge. As explained in chapter 7.1.4, teachers contextualising research-informed knowledge into their practice could raise critical points and deepen the discussion within a democratic collaborative approach.

7.2.3 Levels of Engagement

Sustaining research participants' commitment requires constant effort, sensitivity and reflection on the part of the researcher. (Hobbs & Kubanyiova 2008, p.511)

Teachers in this study showed different levels of engagement during the school year. These different levels are influenced by certain variables which became apparent in the research findings. The following variables have an impact on teachers' commitment to teacher research:

- Emotional exhaustion
- Social climate in schools within teaching staff and between teachers and students
- Teacher collaboration
- Principal leadership

When asking teachers to draw a timeline of their school year and their experience with the project during our second collaborative meeting, most teachers remarked that extracurricular activities, exam preparations and exams made them feel exhausted and less able to pursue their enquiry systematically. Furthermore, the social climate between teachers and students had an enormous impact on teachers' enquiry. After all, all teachers' enquiries targeted student-related issues. Their aim was to improve on their teaching to propel students' learning experiences. The climate in school, definitely in the case of Marie and Ciara' school, was helpful as collaboration among teachers was routine. Marie and Ciara carried on with a systematic enquiry supported by their school administration which signals that an enquiry-oriented leadership by the principal which embraces staff collaboration is beneficial. Collaboration with like-minded colleagues and myself as lead researcher was the main driver for teachers' commitment and participation during the year-long enquiry.

Initially, teachers concentrated on sharing ideas, or "collecting data from each other" as Rachel viewed it in an interview. Because of the collaborative and democratic approach taken in this study, teachers' interest in tried-and-tested material needed to be acknowledged and incorporated to some degree. Studies like this can show, however, a different route to CPD that does not necessarily marginalise a what-works-mentality. Only by letting teachers be active agents, could a change in their practice happen: 'A key feature of [...] transformation is the role of activism on the part of teachers, students, and others to reform existing practices [...]' (Capobianco 2007, p.4).

Next to teachers' wishes in sharing material, I observed a gradual development in the familiarisation with action research and first steps towards building a more systematic enquiry.

By looking at criteria for teacher research (see chapter 3.6) in connection with findings from this thesis, I can say that teachers met the criteria of process, democratic and catalytic validity within their individual enquiries and realms.

The criteria democratic validity was met since teachers granted their students a voice through questionnaires and open classroom discussions. Whether teachers arrived at process validity depended on the individual teacher and his/her teacher research journey. What seemed consistent with all participants was that they gathered all data, good and bad, by ‘embracing [both] as learning opportunities’ (Mills in Pappas & Tucker-Raymond 2011, p.8). Bad data relates in this study to students’ critical input on course content (e.g. too much geography in the introduction to China, not enough material for the French flipped classroom, not enough pair and group work in German etc.). The chapter on outcomes of teachers’ enquiry (6.5) showed that all teachers changed - to varying degrees - aspects of their teaching. Nonetheless, catalytic validity as a criteria for teacher research was reached.

Overall, I observed that each teacher’s research journey was different. This leads me to agree with other action research mentors (Benitt 2015; Rebolledo et al. 2016; Shosh & McAteer 2016) who state that teacher research follows its own processes. As Benitt rightly quotes, the teacher educator must offer learning possibilities for teachers but ‘[j]ust as teachers cannot do the learning for the learners, teacher educators cannot do the learning for preservice or inservice teachers’ (Nunan et al. in Benitt 2015, pp.231-232). What this study did, however, was to create a network of teachers of modern languages who enquired collaboratively into their teaching methods. As Olwyn and Mary stated during our member check, this first step can already be seen as doing the unthinkable:

O: You did the unthinkable, Annelie.

M: You know, actually you did. You got into a very busy stressful job. No, you really got a good group of us together.

While levels of engagement differed, all teachers except for one finished the project (see p.88). Sustaining teachers’ engagement was helped by creating a trusting relationship with and among participants, by creating a hybrid space including the lead researcher and teacher researcher and by showing partaking teachers genuine interest and appreciation for their commitment in this collaborative project. While it was at times emotionally stressful for me as the lead researcher, an acceptance of different levels of engagement is needed when working together with volunteer teacher researchers.

7.3 Summary

This chapter discussed findings stemming from my own action research journey and the teacher researchers' journeys. The metaphor of young albatrosses learning to fly and then taking off is fitting again: we were novice action/teacher researchers whose collaborative network did 'take off' with much learning happening during the process.

This chapter discussed findings that were not the most obvious for me from the start, that were, however, shaped by reflection, distancing myself from the data set and talks with my critical friend. Some of the findings required changes in the development of the project which were part of our complex system and therefore unique. Yet, these findings can inform and support action researchers in their aim to establish a collaborative, democratic community of teacher researchers in other contexts.

The findings concerning the realms of scaffolding, storytelling, active listening, democratic collaboration, a practice-based approach to CPD, caring about students and different levels of engagement are striking and interesting outcomes from the learning system created in this research project. Referring back to complexity thinking, the outcomes are congruent with Hoban's non-linear, synergetic approach to teacher learning (Hoban 2002). My initial aim of following a step-by-step approach to teacher action research could indeed not foresee the complex nature of a collaborative network like ours and the teachers' and lead researcher's learning journeys within that network. The outcomes of this study support the centrality and interconnectedness of the learning dimensions mentioned earlier by Hoban and Erickson (2004), namely the personal (student-oriented themes, storytelling, different levels of engagement), sociocultural (democratic collaboration, active listening) and action setting (practice-based CPD, scaffolding approach). These dimensions are crucial for teacher learning in itself but also in the way they help each other 'dynamically interact' (Hoban & Erickson 2004, p.319).

I will now turn to the concluding chapter in which I address the main research questions, bring to the surface limits of this study and make recommendations for future research and practice.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

It always seems impossible, until it's done. (Nelson Mandela)

This action research study investigated how best to support modern language teachers in Irish secondary schools to enquire collaboratively into their teaching methods.

My research journey began out of puzzlements. As a German language instructor at third level I saw the low language skills of students after years of German language instruction at second level and wondered what went wrong during these years. I also started the journey because of a seemingly big divide between research into effective language teaching and classroom practice (Hattie 2009; Kubanyiova 2012). Because of the prevalence of one-shot-models in teacher CPD in Ireland and its minimal impact on teacher learning (OECD 2005; Conway 2009; Banks & Smyth 2010), I chose a more promising road which sees the teacher as teacher researcher (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1993; 2015; Altrichter et al. 2000; 2008; Borg 2013). The study also addressed the issue of the still lonely teaching profession (Lortie 1975) by creating a network in which teachers share knowledge and ultimately transform practice.

As support-giver in this collaboration, I experienced first-hand the complexity of variables impacting on teacher learning. Examining the variables strengthened my former belief that there are no best-practice approaches and quick fix solutions. The results of this study rather draw attention to the fact that teacher learning that has an effect on student learning is highly contextual, personal and social. This means that a prerequisite for effective teacher CPD is to acknowledge that context is everything, that the 'I' during enquiries is central (McAteer 2013) and that experiencing and dealing with otherness are vital processes for transformation and change (Wenger 1998, Wenger-Trayner et al. 2014).

This qualitative study itself is highly contextual as it targeted a small group of modern language teachers in Irish secondary schools. Being context-bound, however, does not mean that findings from this research are irrelevant to other educational contexts. Educational contexts around the world deal with the same issues with regards to modern language teaching and learning but also the need to equip and develop skills that prepare students for an ever-changing world (Darling-Hammond 2005; Hyland 2011; Marshall 2013). The Junior Cycle reform aims to instil skills like teamwork, creativity or managing information and thinking (NCCA 2011). Regarding this major reform, teachers are even more in need of professional

development. However, teacher CPD is currently a controversial field in Ireland (Humphreys 2015, ASTI 2017).

The volunteer collaborative network established in this study demonstrated, nonetheless, that teachers have a thirst for honing their enquiring techniques and for becoming more knowledgeable and skilful as modern language teachers. Prior to this research no network of post-primary language teachers enquiring collaboratively with a support-giver existed. Hence, the research questions and research aims posed in combination with findings are a first window into subject-specific teacher research in the Irish context. In the following, I will therefore readdress my main research questions with an emphasis on the relevance of findings from this study (chapter 8.1). Chapter 8.2 will then briefly outline limitations and propose possible thematic areas for further research. The last chapter (chapter 8.3) concludes with a reflection on this joint research journey.

8.1 Relevance of Findings

Several research questions were posed at the beginning.

- i) How can I support teachers of modern languages to develop an enquiry practice and work collaboratively to enhance their teaching and their students' learning?
- ii) What happens when teachers enquire into their classrooms and work collaboratively?
- iii) Which factors propel or impede teacher collaborative enquiry as a form of CPD?
- iv) To what extent can collaborative and enquiry-based classroom research enhance teaching practice and student learning in the modern language classroom?

Research question one targeted the support system that is needed for language teachers to carry out teacher research. Firstly, teachers highly appreciated that I visited their classrooms and entered a conversation with them about teaching and learning. Findings from this study make a case for support that focuses on individual stories and contexts. While some theoretical concepts like differentiation or AfL affected all classrooms, teachers approached their enquiries differently regarding pace, input and output. How to give the right support, at the right time and at the right level were questions I encountered and areas in which I developed my practice. What needs to be taken into account to determine the right support, right time and right level, are the contextual, personal and social dimension teachers are situated in and start their learning process from. I came to understand that support should be channelled towards teachers' action setting, their classroom, with a collaborative network and an outside

researcher to join their journey. The right time and level depends on teachers' perceived needs and their goals for a collaborative action research project. Through conversations with the teachers, these aspects must be further elicited.

The research literature on effective teacher learning is scarce (Hoban & Erickson 2004, Timperley et al. 2007, Korthagen 2010). The results of this study draw attention to teacher learning that follows principles of Vygotsky's *Zone of Proximal Development* (see p.188) where a knowledgeable other is needed to help the teacher reach the next level. As the lead researcher, I listened actively to what teachers wanted to gain from their participation and monitored throughout their needs, expectations and questions. All these contributed to the creation of a democratic network which led to a divergence of initial goals on the side of the lead researcher, but ultimately showed that teachers enquire in their own effective way suitable to their personal and professional context.

What support can I offer to teachers? should be furthermore extended to What support do I - as teacher educator - need? This question is rarely discussed (Dinkelman et al. 2006). As a former provider of teacher CPD in Ireland, my view on teacher CPD was rather limited. Becoming a researcher on teacher CPD broadened my view by consciously entering a hybrid space and experiencing boundary issues. I experienced role conflicts as lead researcher and support-giver throughout; I tried bridging the second-third-level divide and came to understand better the needs teachers have and the struggles they undergo in following the call for evidence-informed practice.

As novice researcher I needed support as well to strengthen my confidence and stamina to carry on when secretly doubting at times the impact of the collaborative enquiry. A network of teacher educators or critical friends is pivotal, especially in action research (McNiff & Whitehead 2002) and more specifically for action researchers who are starting out (Capobianco & Ní Ríordáin 2015).

Research question two asked what happens when teachers enquire into their classrooms. Acknowledging the contextual, personal and social influences on teacher learning, the answer can only be that distinct and plentiful processes became visible. Findings contribute new knowledge to the Irish research body: teachers were not engaged in process-product CPD activities but in an interaction of subsystems (teacher, students, lead researcher, learning activities, school etc.). Teachers took risks (Le Fevre 2014) by letting a stranger into their classrooms and by distributing control (Wood & Butt 2014) when promoting and listening to their students' voices. The results of this thesis showed that a truly democratic teaching approach that invites students' self-directed learning is not yet feasible as this process will take time and will require support for teachers.

The fact that teachers feel the dilemma to improve grades rather than skills hints furthermore at a school culture of accountability and performativity (Ball 2003; Wilkins & Wood 2009; Conway & Murphy 2013). Teachers wanting “tried and tested” material feeds into this scenario and was a major reason for teachers to take part in this collaborative enquiry. This is not surprising as ‘desires for predictability and measurement of outcomes [...] oriented so much of 20th century educational research’ (Davis & Sumara 2007, p.56). The significance of this research is however to demonstrate that CPD ‘must be understood in terms of its complex contributions to new, as-yet-unimaginable collective possibilities’ (ibid., p.53). By adopting an organic approach to CPD (Eberhardt & Heinz 2017), our collaborative network moved at its own pace. Along the way, eventualities, successes, but also failures were embraced and voiced by teachers. This is an important step in the context of teacher CPD in Ireland.

Research question three focused on factors propelling or impeding teacher research. What propelled our collaborative enquiry-based project in the first place was that teachers could address their own ‘felt needs [rather than] needs their organizations or society has for them’ (Gravani 2007, p.693). The thesis has contributed to the field of personalised CPD (Hargreaves & Preece 2014; King 2016) in which teachers’ own learning was the focal point. Outcomes show that teachers favour small CPD projects that are manageable, include observation and feedback and democratic collaboration.

This stands in contrast to CPD activities not tailored to teachers’ needs. Teachers reported becoming disengaged and frustrated when someone “preached” at them and when they felt they gave up valuable time without learning a considerable amount of new knowledge.

Another challenge I encountered can be seen in teachers’ engagement with reflection. While I gave examples on how to reflect effectively, teachers’ reflections were in most cases based on short comments on what worked and what did not work. Seeing reflection ‘as a shared and collaborative activity’ (McAteer & Dewhurst 2010, p.33) can help the situation. Sharing can happen with students (ibid.), colleagues in school, a network outside school and/or an outside researcher. Collaborative reflective practice, as seen in Marie’s blog writing, leads to a deeper reflection since comments will be made and questions will be asked.

The same accounts for online CPD. While in this study our online network was mostly fuelled by my contributions, a collaborative approach to online learning can be more powerful. Finding avenues like dialogic, digital storytelling could support both the reflective stance and e-learning (Savvidou 2010).

Research question four asked to what extent collaborative and enquiry-based classroom research enhances teaching practice and student learning in the modern language classroom. All teachers in this study reported that their enquiry was successful - to varying degrees. Olwyn

noticed that due to the enquiry she was more critical about her teaching and her students' TY experience which was a success in itself. However, she battled with the unpredictability of TY which left her dissatisfied. Defining success by improving students' achievement was also not that straightforward. Jacinta said that grades improved from the beginning to the end of the year but she could not determine if this was due solely because of the enquiry or the extra teaching hour or by having a language assistant in class. Different variables are part of and define the teaching and learning process. Yet, collaborative and enquiry-based classroom research had a positive impact on all teachers and their modern language classrooms.

This study wanted to find out how teacher research can be made feasible for teachers in their day-to-day life. Teachers in this study showed self-initiative and self-motivation to enquire into their practice. I believe that they should not experience teacher research as too demanding and pressuring (Allwright 2003), therefore, I made sure not to stifle their enthusiasm by academic standards and conventions. I agree with Borg (2010, p.421) that 'closer relationships' between second and third level can help a more systematic enquiry, as was the case in this study. That link can help to make teaching practice more evidence-informed. Findings in this thesis showed clearly that teachers preferred a more oral and action-oriented form of research. They wanted to hear about teaching methods and strategies for the classroom, explore and try them out. Teachers saw fewer benefits in academic research as it did not address their context, was too time-consuming to read and apply and too "flowery" in its tone. A first step to bridge the gap between second and third level would be to establish communication between (academic) research and teachers. As was discussed in this thesis, collaborative networks could be the right space to discuss practice-oriented articles and their implication for the classroom.

Expert outsiders' or school administrators' tasks are hence to create the environment for enquiry and collaboration and to make capacity building (Sugrue 2011) a goal of teacher research. Each teacher, however, has to be regarded as an educational professional (Biesta 2015a) granting them their own freedom with regard to the approaches they deem suitable and possible for their teacher research.

This study clearly demonstrated that teacher research is a valuable and effective avenue for teacher CPD. Teachers might not have turned immediately into teacher researchers in the sense Altrichter et al. (2000; 2008) propose but they started to use teacher research for their professional learning.

8.2 Limitations of this Study and Directions for Further Research and Practice

Firstly, this small-scale study had a small sample size of participating teachers. Increasing the sample size could have led to different insights. A big milestone of this research project, however, is to have found seven participants who let me into their busy life; ‘an issue which is usually downplayed in [...] research manuals’ (Hobbs & Kubanyiova 2008, p.499). Their collaboration was built upon volunteerism which could raise questions on how to introduce teacher research more widely as an avenue for teacher CPD. By communicating effects and outcomes of teacher research to a wider public, further interest could be sparked. This implies, however, that a support network for teachers interested in teacher research is already in place.

Secondly, a limitation could be seen in my dual role of providing information for teachers and supporting them, but then also enquiring about their research process. I believe that it is vital for any researcher approaching a project like this to have his or her own support network. Conversations with my critical friend helped me to steer this project, but also to question my approach and adapt it in accordance with the democratic network.

Limitations to this study were furthermore posed by the geographic distances between participants which made it, for example, impossible to hold a meeting where all teachers were present. At the first meeting four out of eight, at the second meeting six out of seven teachers could attend. The member check had to be scheduled in two locations to accommodate teachers. If collaborative enquiry-based projects are located within schools or include schools in close proximity, this problem could be circumvented. In addition, school-based collaborations could lead to more regular observations and post-conversations. I could only offer to observe each teacher on two occasions throughout the year, one time including the filming of the lesson. Offering further visits and a joint evaluation of video material could deepen the enquiry. The latter was voiced by several teachers in this study who would have preferred to watch and evaluate the video with a critical friend/expert-outsider.

Another limitation can be seen in the fact that interviews were usually held during teachers’ lunch breaks which at times led to rushed interviews where content could not be explored in more detail. Meeting teachers after their lessons had finished for the day was considerably better, but depended on teachers’ family ties and duties.

Furthermore, the process of data analysis and data discussion can be seen as too subjective. Other researchers might have dealt with data differently and hence could have come to different conclusions. However, by critically engaging with the research literature, by talking through data- and theory-related aspects with my critical friend and by presenting and

discussing findings with the participants, this study ruled out a ‘radical subjectivism’ (Charmaz 2014).

A limitation can be seen in the scarce amount of research literature by teachers for teachers in the field of modern language teaching (in Ireland). The action research journey by a German teacher is, to my knowledge, the only published result of a language teacher enquiry to be found for the Irish context (McNiff & Collins 1994).

Beyond this study, several issues are worth exploring. Firstly, teacher learning needs to be more extensively researched and discussed under principles of andragogy. That way, “painful” moments of teacher CPD (see Mary’s quote Appendix K), in which teachers were taught like students, could be avoided. This would call for specific teacher educator training in andragogy.

Secondly, if schools plan to implement school-based collaborative action research projects, support should also be given to schools (OECD 2005; Opfer & Pedder 2011a). Further research can focus on school-based networks, like the one existing in Marie and Ciara’s school, shining light onto their challenges and successes in enquiring collaboratively.

Another potential research topic could be to explore avenues that heighten teacher involvement with educational theory leading to higher teacher professionalism (Bleach 2014) and an increase in sources for an evidence-informed practice (Petty 2015). While open discussions about theoretical concepts did not occur in this study, other action research studies have shown that when practitioners ‘discuss and analyse both theory and lived experiences’ they challenge existing beliefs and practices (Bleach 2014, p.193).

This calls for research partnerships between schools and universities promoting mutual learning and ‘horizontal expertise’ (Anagnostopoulos et al. 2007). The question is how to sustainably set up these partnerships that need first of all structural shifts as teachers and academics experience time pressure and a high workload in their contexts (McLaughlin & Black-Hawkins 2007).

The distinct profession of modern language teachers could only be touched upon marginally in this thesis. Further research could look into aspects of being a native speaker and hence cultural stranger in the Irish education system. Marie’s French background and educational upbringing could stand in relation to her wish to make students more independent. She was highly frustrated by “spoon-feeding” students in order to prepare them for exams - an aspect other teachers did not voice so directly. Examining other native speakers’ issues in the Irish modern language classroom could lead to a unique contribution and insight leading to a ‘process of cultural mirroring and deconstruction’ (O’Sullivan 1992, p.424).

Furthermore, teachers are urged to use the target language as much as possible to create communicative and authentic learning opportunities for their students (Riordan 2015; DES 2016). The field of language needs for non-native language teachers in Ireland has been explored (Riordan 2013). In accordance with Riordan's thesis, teachers in this study also spoke about the difficulty in keeping up-to-date with the target language and improving their language competency. This is still an unexplored field as no programme specifically aimed at language development for language teachers exists.

Last but not least, this study is a small contribution mirroring the specific requirements for teaching a modern language and makes a case for subject-specific teacher research. Language teaching is different to teaching other subjects as the target language is what is studied plus it is the language of communication (Walsh 2011). It would be enlightening to hear the distinct voices of language teachers across Ireland asking themselves 'How can I improve what I am doing?' (Whitehead 2009, p.109).

8.3 Final Remarks

Coming to an end of writing this thesis leads both to relief but also disquiet. There is surely something I missed writing down or enquiring a bit further. On the other hand, as a pragmatist I am ready to finish this thesis which 'became a constant companion, day to day, hour to hour, for months and years' (Sorrell Dinkins & Merkle Sorrell 2014, p.75).

This collaborative enquiry gave 'access to kinds of knowledge and understanding that are not accessible for traditional researchers coming from outside' (Somekh 2006, p.7). Having zoomed in on the professional learning successes and challenges of seven teachers must, however, lead to further conversations about effective CPD. The joint journey with Mary, Olwyn, Ciara, Marie, Brian, Jacinta and Rachel is not coming to an end - it is rather at a resting place. Possible further collaborations are not unthinkable. For collaborations like ours to continue and for new ones to begin several factors are crucial: interest and continuing engagement, but also time and resources.

Time is the enemy of freedom. Or so it seems to teachers. Time presses down the fulfilment of their wishes. It pushes against the realisation of their wants. Time compounds the problem of innovation and confounds the implementation of change. (Hargreaves 1994, p.32)

To give teachers the opportunity to become change agents, it must be acknowledged that their learning needs are complex and cannot be covered by one-shot-models. A considerable amount of trainee teachers and a small number of practicing teachers currently experience action research in credit-bearing courses during initial and in-service training across Ireland. Funding and resources are key in providing teacher research support to other interested teachers.

With a dialogic approach to teacher CPD, as followed in this research study, genuine interests held by the teachers could be targeted. Furthermore, existing barriers were broken down. If I had, for example, not entered the dialogue, I might still ponder why teachers preferred ready-made handouts as result of a workshop to exchanging critical thoughts about an educational topic.

This study assisted all of us, the teachers and me, to walk less and look more, to take out the speed of our hectic day-to-day life and concentrate on issues close to our heart. There are no better ingredients for effective CPD.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Guide to Reflective Journal Writing

Research Journal

A guide on how to successfully write a research journal

WHY writing journals?

We, as teachers, bring with us the skill to write. Hence, writing a journal is more familiar to us than other research methods.

A journal can be used for much more than reflective writing: unstructured observations, descriptions and interpretations of contexts, conditions of an interview or conversation are all part of it. You can compare a research journal to a laboratory notebook a scientist has to keep. Everything is in it.

A journal is written over a long period and demonstrates best your own personal development. Due to its investigative and innovative character it is now widely accepted as legitimate research. It can appear rather as literature than research, but as Elias Canetti pointed out, it holds potential because it's a dialogue with a "cruel partner" - we are our worst critics, aren't we?

You will experience positive and frustrating moments - just don't let the positive effects get out of sight: journal writing deepens your understanding of yourself, of your teacher persona, your school, your classroom and students.

WHEN to write?

Write your log entry after each lesson in which you implemented a new strategy. Provide a fixed slot in your time-table - that will make it easier in your day-to-day school life.

HOW to write?

There is no censorship: don't start thinking about punctuation or spelling. Use a notebook with no less than 40 pages that contains wide margins (for changes, additions, references). Use different colours to highlight important passages, ideas or words. Start each entry with the date (of the event and the written record) and contextual information (time, which class, focus of study and anything else that seems important, e.g. a fire drill). Use paragraphs, headings and subheadings and a list of content at the beginning or end of the journal for easy navigation.

WHAT to write and include

Use your journal for feelings, reactions, interpretations, reflections, ideas and explanations. Vivid descriptions, also called thick descriptions, are helpful. Make sure to not step into the widely known pitfall of journal writing: differentiate between description and interpretation. Hold a balance between the two in your journal. Include photographs (e.g. your classroom design), documents (e.g. official ones) or student work. For your writing to not become diffuse and generalized, relate ideas to specific events and reflections. Conduct in between

analyses: Which initial research question can be answered from your data and which data is still necessary? How do you have to modify your research question based on your journal entries to better fit the purpose? An analysis also prevents you from collecting too much data.

When rereading your entries, the following suggestions help you categorizing your data:

Theoretical Notes (TN) make connections between data and understanding them. During reflection ideas come to mind and these are captured with TNs. They clarify ideas, connect accounts, identify puzzling situations, connect own experience with existing theory and formulate hypotheses.

Methodological Notes (MN) capture the researcher's self-observation. As with TNs, these notes can be an integral part or added later. MNs are research on your research which could be daunting. They include the circumstance in which a method was used, the role you played in the investigation, decisions about the future steps, conflicts and ethical dilemmas.

Last but not least, Planning Notes (PN) should be included. They remind us of plans we want to put into action at a later stage. Careful though: Don't overload your entries with PNs. Mark plans with a symbol □ in the margin. It can be ticked when a plan has been carried out.

In-depths reflections can be a result when writing often. They usually lead the way to knowledge we cannot really put into words: e.g. problems that do not seem to have any logic reason.

On ethical issues

Your journal is a semi-public document, meaning it is private to you but there is the possibility to publish certain outcomes. It is vital in any case that you inform your students and principal about you conducting research. You would need an informed-consent that can be given orally or in writing.

Examples

Before coming to examples of journal writing, please consider the following: Learning how to keep a research journal is best done by doing it.

Source: Altrichter, H., Posch, P. & Somekh, B., 2000. Teachers investigate their work 4th ed., London & New York: Routledge.

Appendix B: Information Leaflet

Hello Spanish Teacher!



My name is Annelie and I believe that it is time to bridge the gap between second and third level classroom research. Teachers are best placed to explore current practices and experiment with new methods to enhance their students' learning.

This is how it works:

Step 1



Are you interested in learning more about effective teaching and how to generate long lasting language skills? I will guide and support you in finding appropriate methods for your classroom.

Step 2



We will investigate into what works best and what is beneficial for your classroom. The project is tailored to your needs and your context. You will try out different methods and evaluate results together with me. There is neither right or wrong, nor critique - just the fruits of joint collaboration

Step 3



You can share outcomes of your enquiry; submit a professional practice portfolio and gain academic credit (10ECTS) from NUI Galway; or just do it for yourself and gain more job satisfaction.



Become part of a teacher community that wants to enhance practice through classroom research!

About me:

My expertise lies in foreign language teaching. I hold a Masters degree in German as a Foreign Language and Pedagogy, taught the previous 9 years in Ireland and abroad and now pursue a PhD at NUIG. After my presidency of the GDI (German Teachers' Association of Ireland) from 2010-2012, I want to investigate further how I can best support teachers' professional learning.

Please contact me if you would like to be involved in this exciting project starting September 2014.



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[@Anneschanne](https://twitter.com/Anneschanne)

This PhD project strives for second and third level collaboration and is kindly supported by the James Hardiman Research Fellowship of NUI Galway.



NUI Galway
OĒ Gaillimh

Too often we are so preoccupied with the destination that we forget the journey.

Appendix C: Participant Information



TITLE OF PROJECT: Foreign language teaching and learning in Ireland - an enquiry-based project to develop the continuous professional development of foreign language teachers

NAME OF RESEARCHER: Annelie Eberhardt, M.A.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

I would like to invite you to take part in my research study titled *Foreign language teaching and learning in Ireland - an enquiry-based project to develop the continuous professional development of foreign language teachers*. Before you decide, please, take a look at the following information on why the research is being done and what it would involve for you.

Part 1 tells you the purpose of this study and what your role in it will be if you decide to take part.

Part 2 gives you more detailed information about the conduct of the study.

1)

Why this study is timely?

The purpose of this project is to give teachers a voice. Research about schools, teachers and students is done mostly by “outsiders” (researchers from research institutes, universities and other national and international bodies). This study puts teachers at the centre of school and learning. New DES initiatives like school-self-evaluation and the new Junior Cycle encourage teachers to become more reflective, creative and holistic when teaching. How this can be achieved is, however, rarely addressed. This study will help teachers to enquire into their professional practice with the aim of improving it. It will support the professionalisation of teachers and help them to meet new requirements in terms of teaching approaches and professional development.

In a report to the Teaching Council from 2009 it is already written that continuous professional development (CPD) “initiatives should provide opportunities for teachers to interactively examine practice in new ways and to share practice expertise and dilemmas with peers in a community of learners” (Conway 2009:xxix). Results from studies on effective CPD show furthermore that one-shot seminars or workshops that use a top-down delivery are far less effective than CPD that is designed by teachers themselves. The Teaching Council supports this stance as can be seen in the report *Practice-based Research Encompassing Professional Development*. Both reports are available online under Teachingcouncil.ie > Research > Commissioned Research. Thus, back-up and support from official stakeholders is available.

This PhD study is funded by the Hardiman Research Scholarship. It has received ethical approval by NUI Galway’s Research Ethics Committee. Funding for this research is secured.

What would happen if you take part?

If you decide to take part, you will be working with a professional community of modern language teachers with the aim of exploring modern language methodologies in order to improve learning and teaching in the modern language classroom. The project will take place during the school year of 2014/15.

In September 2014, the group (a maximum of 10 teachers) will meet in NUI Galway (or at a location most suitable for all). Here, the intention of the study will be discussed and milestones will be set for the school year.

You will have until mid-term in October to find a “problem” that you want to research. Issues could be for instance: How can I make my students more active? or How can I raise student talking time?

After you found your issue, I will help you to find information on your chosen topic and will be guiding you to carry out practitioner research. To get a better idea of your school/class context, I will visit you in your classroom at least five times over the whole school year. These visits are not judgemental or evaluative. On the contrary, they are helping us to develop your enquiry.

During my visit, I might be a silent observer, contributor or team-teacher – whichever you feel most comfortable with. After our classroom experience we will talk about your research and observations as well as relevant findings and possible challenges.

If you work collaboratively with other teachers of foreign languages (in your school or from another school), collaborative focus groups can be set up where everyone can share their experiences.

Throughout the project, participants will write reflective notes to record what they are doing, what is happening in the classroom and, in how far changes and/or improvements can be observed.

These notes are your data which we can analyse to see if your interventions were successful (e.g. making students more active or raising the amount of student talk). You might implement several cycles of interventions and monitoring – practitioner research is fluid and very dependent on the specific context in which the enquiry is conducted. I will always be there to support you if you are looking for resources, feedback and/or a different perspective.

Teachers committing to practitioner research report back that it might take some time to get into it but that the results are well worth it: teachers feel empowered again and able to provoke positive change.

2)

All data collected during the course will be kept strictly confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for all names (students, teachers, schools, etc.) in order to ensure anonymity of participants. The results of the study will be published in my dissertation and in journal articles. At conferences, findings from this study will also be presented.

Please, do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss this project further. You can reach me via email a.eberhardt2@nuigalway.ie or phone 085 723 6228.

Here is a list of questions that might arise. Feel free to send in more.

- How much time will I have to put into this, above and beyond my current teaching time?

A rough estimate could be 4 hours each for the initial and the final meeting, one hour after each observation plus the time spent on reading and reflecting.

- Do I get expenses if I have to travel to Galway?

A proposal will be sent to the Teacher Professional Network to see if expenses for travel can be paid by the DES.

- What day of the week will the group meeting/s take place?

This depends on where teachers are located and will be decided as soon as the group is complete.

- How long will the meeting run for?

Approximately four hours for the initial and last meeting depending on issues arising, and one hour after each observation.

- Do I need permission from my school?

A consent form will be given to the school principal.

- Do I need permission from the students in my class and/or their parents.

Consent forms will also be prepared for students and parents.

Appendix D: Consent Form for Participants



TITLE OF PROJECT: Foreign language teaching and learning in Ireland - an enquiry-based project to develop the continuous professional development of foreign language teachers

NAME OF RESEARCHER: Annelie Eberhardt, M.A.

CONSENT FORM

Please initial
all boxes

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated April 8th 2014 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

3. I understand that relevant sections of my notes and data collected during the study will be looked at by the researcher and her supervisor. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records. Anonymity and confidentiality is being provided for publication purposes.

4. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant Date Signature

Name of Person taking consent. Date Signature

Appendix E: Consent Form for Principals

Consent form

I, _____ principal of _____

hereby permit / do not permit _____ to take part in the project *Foreign language teaching and learning in Ireland - an enquiry-based project to develop the continuous professional development of foreign language teachers*, which is running over the school year 2014/15.

I understand that the project is aimed at improving the learning quality of students through effective teacher professional development. This involves that the teacher collects and analyses data that is related to student learning and foreign language teaching methodology.

I agree that at certain times during the school year, a collaborating Ph.D. student from the National University of Ireland, Galway, will observe the classroom and film the teaching to better evaluate it afterwards.

I agree that notes and data collected during the study will be looked at by the teacher, the researcher and her supervisor. Anonymity and confidentiality is being provided during the whole project and for publication purposes. Data collected by the researcher will be kept the minimum amount of 5 years and will then be destroyed.

During the course of the study, the researcher will use encrypted memory sticks for back-up and password protected computer which only the researcher can access.

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____
Name of principal	Date	Signature

Appendix F: Consent Form for Parents

Consent form

I parent/guardian of _____ hereby permit / do not permit my child/ward to be part of the teacher training project, *Foreign language teaching and learning in Ireland - an enquiry-based project to develop the continuous professional development of foreign language teachers* which is running over the school year 2014/15.

I understand that the project is aimed at improving the learning quality of students through effective teacher professional development. This involves that the teacher collects and analyses data that is related to student learning and foreign language teaching methodology.

I agree that at certain times during the school year, a collaborating Ph.D. student from the National University of Ireland, Galway, will observe the classroom and film the teaching to better evaluate it afterwards.

I agree that notes and data collected during the study will be looked at by the teacher, the researcher and her supervisor. Anonymity and confidentiality is being provided during the whole project and for publication purposes. Data collected by the researcher will be kept the minimum amount of 5 years and will then be destroyed.

During the course of the study, the researcher will use encrypted memory sticks for back-up and password protected computer which only the researcher can access.

_____	_____	_____
Name of parent/guard	Date	Signature

Please return this consent form to _____ by _____

Appendix G: Questionnaire Before First Collaborative Meeting

Why did you decide to take part in this study?

What is your overall impression so far?

Are there enough resources available?

How often do you find time for reflective writing?

Did you read some (academic) research about your topic?

If you would like something to change, what would it be?

What do you expect from the meeting on Saturday?

Appendix H: Questionnaire After Filming of Lesson

What are your first thoughts?

Are you content with your students' involvement? If yes, why? If not, why not?

What do you notice regarding your teaching style / your teaching persona?

Are there questions coming up that you would like to share here?

Do you think it is beneficial for your CPD to be filmed in class?

Appendix I: Questionnaire at Beginning of New School Year 2015/2016

Are you planning to continue enquiring into your practice?

Yes/No

If yes: What topic or topics would you like to explore?

Are you currently using any of the enquiry methods we used during the last school year?

Yes/No

If yes, please provide some detail:

What type of support would be beneficial for you to effectively enquire into your practice in the future?

Would you like to meet with other teachers to talk about enquiry-based-teaching experiences?

Do you think that regional teacher enquiry groups would be a good idea?

Would you like to attend regional teacher enquiry group meetings?

Could you see yourself leading/facilitating a regional teacher enquiry group?

Do you think that teachers in your school would be interested in collaborating in a teacher-enquiry group?

Could you see yourself facilitating/leading a teacher enquiry group in your school?

Yes/No

Please provide reasons:

Appendix J: Key Findings Presented at Member Check

Finding 1

Observation and critical feedback are wanted and needed but are not common practice yet.

Would you agree with this finding? YES / NO / UNDECIDED

Further description of finding:

Teachers in this study find that many of their colleagues do not want anyone else in class. Reasons for this can be that teaching is a lonely profession and that many teachers are not yet truly collaborative in order to observe other colleagues and be observed by them. Even if the wish to observe exists, timetabling is often an issue.

What would you add/suggest/change to the above?

Finding 2

Minimal collaboration exists but usually focuses on administrative tasks.

Would you agree with this finding? YES / NO / UNDECIDED

Further description of finding:

Depending on the school context, collaboration among teachers of modern languages usually consists of administrative planning. Croke Park hours are used for planning the school year, talking about grades and exams. Brief chats in the hallway or teacher room were mentioned to share methods of modern language teaching but no real open-door culture exists. Resources are seldom shared or made public. However, increasing the collaboration among language teachers is seen as advantageous.

What would you add/suggest/change to the above?

Finding 3

CPD is helpful when it is about sharing resources and getting new ideas for the classroom.

Would you agree with this finding? YES / NO / UNDECIDED

Further description of finding:

CPD is seen as a way to meet other teachers and hear about anything tried and tested. The focus is on the result: did it work or did it not work. This is seen as more worthwhile than listening to a keynote speaker at a conference or in school. CPD delivered by non-teachers is also less trustworthy. CPD should be tailored to individual needs, be subject-specific and specific to Ireland. Making CPD mandatory could be a difficult undergoing even though none of the teachers in this study was against it per se. It would have to be approached sensitively and should be scaffolded to not overwhelm and disgruntle colleague teachers.

What would you add/suggest/change to the above?

Finding 4

Teachers sacrifice educational goals because of a busy workplace.

Would you agree with this finding? YES / NO / UNDECIDED

Further description of finding:

Teaching aspirations are often not reached fully due to a busy time schedule and the curriculum. Teachers have the constant feeling of rushing and not having the time to do things they would deem more helpful for students' learning. "Finding a balance" is seen as a goal to combine the complexity of the workplace and the wish to live up to one's own educational values.

What would you add/suggest/change to the above?

Finding 5

Reflective practice means 'only' thinking about teaching. Reflecting via writing or talking to someone, is harder to achieve.

Would you agree/disagree with this finding? YES / NO / UNDECIDED

Further description of finding:

All teachers reflect in order to improve their teaching and their students' learning. Deep reflection by making use of a diary/journal or critical friend, is more difficult to achieve. Taking part in this study led mostly to more self-criticality and "forced" some participants to reflect more deeply. Using the video to trigger reflection can be improved by watching the video with another person instead of alone. Teachers tend to be too critical about their own teaching.

What would you add/suggest/change to the above?

Finding 6

Data collection and analysis is a somewhat new concept for teachers.

Would you agree with this finding? YES / NO / UNDECIDED

Further description of finding:

Collecting and analysing data systematically was new to teachers, especially teachers not recently trained (PME, M.Ed.) and not familiar with Action Research. The biggest restriction to collect and analyse data is time. Time and insecurities on how to document processes and results - which would lead to evidence-based teaching and learning - are the two main pitfalls when it comes to data. However, teachers in this study started using methods to bring out student voice that influenced their teaching.

What would you add/suggest/change to the above?

Finding 7

The concept of student voice is seen as desirable. However, student voice needs to be monitored and is not always trustworthy.

Would you agree with this finding? YES / NO / UNDECIDED

Further description of finding:

Teachers liked the idea of focus groups as a way to collect data. Letting students partake in decisions and therefore democratise the classroom was not contested. However, giving students a voice is not possible with all cohorts. Some classes lack discipline or would take advantage of being given a voice negatively.

Teachers changed teaching content or methods after handing out questionnaires and surveys and receiving feedback that way. Getting anonymous feedback is the best way so that students feel more free to write down what they really think.

What would you add/suggest/change to the above?

Finding 8

Research on teaching and learning modern languages does not play an important role.

Would you agree with this finding? YES / NO / UNDECIDED

Further description of finding:

Research rather belongs to third level than second level. It is often seen as too far removed from reality. Academic language can be a barrier, as well as too much information. Reading about the findings of a certain research project would be sufficient instead of making the time to read a whole article.

What would you add/suggest/change to the above?

Finding 9

Teacher learning is best achieved within small projects that are doable and not too time-consuming.

Would you agree with this finding? YES / NO / UNDECIDED

Further description of finding:

Because of time constraints, committing oneself to smaller projects, either alone or in a group within the school, is seen as more achievable.

Teachers also enjoy meeting up with like-minded colleagues from different schools. Face-to-face meetings/courses are favoured over online meetings/courses. Online CPD is often times seen as "ticking boxes" and not too beneficial.

What would you add/suggest/change to the above?

Finding 10

Enquiring into teaching methods as a way of CPD leads to professional improvement and higher self-efficacy.

Would you agree with this finding? YES / NO / UNDECIDED

Further description of finding:

Teachers made changes to their classroom teaching and saw positive effects. Teachers enjoyed being observed and receiving feedback. Collaborating with other members of the group was seen as a way to hear about other teaching contexts, to get ideas and advice. Collaborative enquiry hence can be the answer to sustainable and effective CPD.

What would you add/suggest/change to the above?

Finding 11

I was more perceived as an inspector than fellow researcher or mentor.

Would you agree with this finding? YES / NO / UNDECIDED

Further description of finding:

While I wanted to make teachers researchers of their own classrooms, participants of the study cherished much more to have someone observe them teaching and have a one-to-one feedback after the lesson.

What would you add/suggest/change to the above?

Finding 12

By letting teachers shape the course of the study, sharing ideas and resources was more dominant than action research.

Would you agree with this finding? YES / NO / UNDECIDED

Further description of finding:

At our meetings, teachers enjoyed much more talking to each other, hearing about methods, resources and ideas than hearing about the tools for action research: reflective writing, data collection and analysis.

What would you add/suggest/change to the above?

Finding 13

Our online platform, PBworks, was not used consistently and did not support the action research study.

Would you agree with this finding? YES / NO / UNDECIDED

Further description of finding:

Teachers welcomed face-to-face collaboration more than online collaboration. PBworks seemed too difficult to use. Also, it was initiated by me and not by participants themselves which can be another reason for not working out as a tool for collaboration.

What would you add/suggest/change to the above?

Extras

Finding

Getting better at the job means to push oneself out of the comfort zone.

Would you agree with this finding? YES / NO / UNDECIDED

Further description of finding:

Pushing oneself out of the comfort zone is sometimes seen as a hurdle to take. It makes teachers look at their own teaching from a different angle, introduce something new into the classroom and change certain aspects. The overall aim is to improve students' learning. Teachers question their own teaching constantly. As a result, they feel that they don't become "stuck in a rut".

What would you add/suggest/change to the above?

Finding

NQTs in this study feel more uncertain about the teaching profession than more experienced teachers.

Would you agree with this finding? YES / NO / UNDECIDED

Further description of finding:

NQTs showed huge dedication and enthusiasm for their chosen profession. However, they often don't see themselves as teachers for a lifetime. This can be due to job insecurity and feeling overwhelmed inside and outside class as a NQT. University programmes could not truly prepare them for the reality. Droichead was seen as a good example to introduce NQTs to the profession. Instead of learning one-way from more experienced teachers, NQTs would like to see an exchange on level playing field.

What would you add/suggest/change to the above?

Appendix K: Teacher Narratives

Narration about

Brian, German teacher

How can I motivate my students to enjoy doing reading exercises and what are good ways to work with texts?

Brian's first research question dealt with homework and the advantages and disadvantages of it. As the school year progressed, however, his students were doing their homework regularly and he did not see an issue anymore. He found another issue that he wanted to tackle: Whenever he told his students 'Today, we are going to do this text on page so and so', students' motivation dropped immediately. Brian's enquiry looks at two issues when using texts in his German class. His main question is if it is useful at all to be reading a text out loud in class. He wondered which methods he could use: letting students read the text as homework, letting them read it on their own quietly, himself reading the text or one student reading the beginning and him taking over. Also, he wants to find out about best ways to work with a text. What other options are there than answering the questions to the text the book provides. I am writing on purpose in the present tense, as Brian mentioned in our last interview that this enquiry is not over yet and that he is still looking for ideas and is constantly trying out new things.

Brian teaches a mixed-ability fourth year German class where he finds that the atmosphere can be sometimes "tricky" because students have a lot of energy. There are ordinary and higher level students which calls for differentiation.

Something I've been working on is to differentiate more because some pupils in this class they all have the grammar stuff. They would have done it for the Junior Cert. And there are others that are just going for the ordinary level and they wouldn't know any of it. So, you know to keep them all on track is tricky.

It is valid to add 'How do I best differentiate?' as another research question. With the year progressing, differentiation seemed to become a more urgent issue to be dealt with. When I observed one of his classes, he used a power-point that showed one column for ordinary and another column for higher level. While at the beginning of the school year, Brian posed higher level questions to the whole class, he differentiates much more now by integrating both, higher and lower level questions, into his teaching.

Because I think that was also not helping the atmosphere. If you have a few pupils just looking at this text and saying: I have no clue what this is about. And other kids are kind of left waiting because they are ready to move on. But the others still don't know what it's about. So, I think differentiation can help as far as things with texts go.

When I asked him after the observation how the class went in his opinion he said that he never knows which knowledge is already there because he did not teach this class before (it is his first year in the school). It is thus hard to anticipate and plan. He said he would have needed more time to assess students on what they learned during the lesson. In his reply regarding student involvement in this lesson, he said

I would be happier if there was more of a progression evident in pupils' involvement. In my ideal lesson, the development of the lesson would build upon and build up the pupils' knowledge. The lesson could start with assessing what the pupils already know. Then move onto building upon this by introducing new information. The next step would be that the pupils work with assistance and then independently.

The video I took of his class, which Brian watched afterwards, gave him food for thought. He said he was astonished about how much and how fast he was speaking.

I could make the lesson more effective by speaking less, slower and more directed. While the different stages of the lesson were clear in my mind, I didn't feel they were made clear to the pupils.

It was interesting for him to see the lesson from the students' perspective. Brian sees room for improvement in several areas. He wondered: How can I pose questions in a more effective way and how can I integrate more deeper level questioning? How do I make my students speak more in the target language? And how do I make all students take part and overcome their reluctance in answering questions? All questions seem interwoven, too: Students do not respond enough to his questions which can have several reasons: motivation and fear of making mistakes, Brian's question-strategies and the amount of teacher talk. Overall, his opinion on being filmed in class is

While I found it quite uncomfortable watching myself teach, I found it very beneficial and it is something I would be open to repeating for the sake of seeing an improvement.

Brian also followed my advice to gather data in form of a student questionnaire to see what they like and dislike about reading and working with texts in the classroom. He noted down some answers. In his reflective journal, Brian briefly wrote down ideas from our first interview (e.g. instead of using questions from the book, make one group of students come up with questions that are passed on to the next group) and also ideas he got from the reading articles on PBworks.

Have pupils try and figure out vocab from the context rather than just telling them words. Picking out key info rather than understanding everything. Focus on what they know rather than what they don't.

An entry from his journal reads

What do I want to achieve with this text? Make this clear to the pupils.

This goes hand in hand with another quote from our third interview:

A lot of self-reflection is necessary to kind of get ideas about when students are engaged.

However, he finds that there is not enough time to reflect. Many evenings are spent correcting essays and tests. But still, he saw change in his class:

[w]ith some of the differentiate activities I've been trying, I'm actually getting feedback out of them [students].

When I asked him if he saw an impact apart from a higher student participation, he said he should have looked at grades at the start and at the end of the year but missed out on that opportunity. In his enquiry, Brian found it difficult to focus on only one aspect. It appeared to him that many areas needed his attention and he said his approach "could be more systematic".

It's just hard. You have to kind of think where should I put the focus on. More focus onto correcting students' copies, more focus into evaluating how I'm teaching, more focus into my power-points, more focus into resources.

He still finds that reading is an important area as it is pivotal in the Leaving Certificate exam to deal with texts and answer questions. When I asked him if the enquiry helped him

understand the language learning process better, Brian said “It certainly got me thinking about it more”. The reason for taking part in this project was for him to receive feedback from another professional. This is what he experienced in the school he was teaching in the year before. There, Brian took part in the Droichead programme. At the time, he came straight from his training, got full teaching hours and felt just not prepared. Within Droichead, he worked with another teacher on classroom management and found this to be a good support. Brian can imagine that the Department of Education and Skills wants CPD to look like that: that teachers collaborate, that NQTs have a mentor at their side.

Part of my project was that teachers read articles on PBworks. Brian read and commented on them with the latter option rarely being used by other participants. He admits, though, that

trying to read the articles and think yourself is there actually something I can use, would have been a bit time-consuming [...]. I think it might take you about 10 minutes to properly read through an article and think how you could apply that to a lesson. Whereas I think in 3 minutes a German teacher could give me a quick idea on an activity she used in class that worked really well and then I could go away and try it.

Brian enjoyed the meetings with the other modern language teachers to get ideas and share resources. He told me after the second group meeting that he implemented something he heard at the meeting right away in his classroom. He suggested that it would be more advantageous if the meetings would be held among German teachers only because then CPD would be more syllabus and content-bound. He is looking sceptically at mandatory CPD not because of himself but because of other teachers that would not approve of it. He said he is used to it and as a newly qualified teacher, he had no choice in taking part in the Droichead programme. But he went away with a positive feeling about professional learning and collaboration with other teachers. He enjoys any material or conversation that makes him think about teaching.

Well, anything that gets you thinking about your teaching and plodding on doing the same thing is good. Because you need to change things constantly. Every class is different. You can't just keep doing the same things.

While the articles were at times too academic or not context-specific, he would wish for concise information about teaching German in Irish secondary schools. He said two of the articles did trigger something and he changed his teaching methods regarding reading a text because of them. He read about skimming and scanning a text and also that teachers should not ask questions right after the reading process but should give students some time to think about what is in the text. Differentiating more improved the atmosphere in class. Before it was

trying to get through the 40 minutes, you know. I have tried to bring a wee bit more variation into it. Variation between: let's read a little bit, let's get you to work a little bit on your own on that text and have a few different activities.

He expanded his activities before working with the text, while working with it and after. He is still looking for more ideas and possibilities to work with texts in the modern language classroom. Hence, his enquiry is not finished.

It's such an important area that it's something I would definitely like to improve further on.

And he is thinking about other areas for investigation. For example, target language use. He thinks the stories about German teachers speaking only in German in class are anecdotal. He never witnessed this.

Something I'm very interested in but I haven't really come to any conclusion about the degree to which a foreign language can be used in a classroom on secondary school level.

These questions arise but there is not really the time to discuss it with fellow teachers in his school. During meetings, administrative issues are being talked about.

Sometimes the time isn't really there to be chatting to the German teachers. Like you see each other passing by each other during the day, and lunch time just quickly. And then you have these meetings which really aren't very much... and usually we are just talking about what you gonna do with the February test, where are you in the curriculum. I mean, just the time isn't really there as a teacher.

Hence, Brian wanted to take part in this project foremost to get feedback, to get involved and talk about what works well and what does not. When I asked him if he would do a focus group with his students to get information from them, he said he likes the idea but would have to structure it and think about how to do it. He feels that students are not in the habit to think about their learning. They come to class

and it's just doing what they are told and following instructions. It's kind of a change of perspective for them to have them actually get to think about how they learn. It's a good idea but it's not necessarily something they are used to do. That's what I consider the teacher's job.

In his opinion, it is novel to Irish secondary students to be taking initiative over their own learning. Teachers he knows that worked on projects with students "will know the grief". Brian also argues that grades are extremely important. He feels, though, that students do not take the responsibility to achieve the grades they want.

But you simply have to get across to them they simply can't do higher level if they don't put in the work themselves and if they are not taking the responsibility for homework and study.

Brian said that students approach teachers telling them the grade they need in order to do a certain course at university. Teachers wish they had autonomous learners but the reality is just different. To make students less focused on grades, Brian argues that more emphasis should be put on feedback, oral or written. And while the teacher monitors the process, students will only receive such feedback. After talking about the issue of grades, Brian concludes

I'm undecided on grades. To what degree I should be pushing the fact of grades to what degree I should be pushing it to the side-lines.

But he is sure that students need some pressure.

I would like to see the majority of them under more pressure as they are just sitting back and they are not taking a handle on things.

That notion of not-yet-autonomous language learners also resonates with regard to motivation. Brian would like to see his students more motivated but he also points out that one has to look into motivation in other subjects. If one student does not show any motivation that "puts a different light on things". Teachers only talk among each other when problems exist. If Brian had a highly unmotivated student in his class he would consult with the year head teacher. He says it is a pity that there is not more time for teachers to collaborate and prevent problems rather than deal with existing problems. The direction CPD might take – to use enquiry and teacher research for professional development – he sees sceptical. As mentioned before because

*if it would be accepted it would be begrudgingly accepted. It defeats the purpose.
[...] Especially in the current climate with teachers and unions and disagreements.*

He also suspects that Cosán, the plan for mandatory CPD by the Teaching Council and the Department of Education is rather bringing “a business mentality into a school”. It would suddenly be about quotas: to reflect, to see what has been achieved and to make plans for improvement. Brian said for planning CPD, one should start out with asking questions: For whom?, Why?, What does it want to achieve?, What needs to be improved?

Instead of just changing things for the sake of changing things. So, if I was going to change something as in regards to bring in CPD, one question would be: Why are we even doing this? Do we need to do this? You know. I don't believe in fixing something that is not broken.

Brian exemplifies this with the Croke Park hours that are not seen by teachers as being useful. The government decided “teachers should do more work”. But there are no clear guidelines on how that work should look like.

What's the point in it? Teachers don't see the point in it. A lot of principals don't see the point in it. No, it hasn't really gone down too well.

While the Droichead programme was a success in his former school which took part in a pilot project, he knows that it did not work out so well in other pilot schools. Brian said he was lucky regarding the teacher he worked with. What needs to be emphasised is the collaboration between NQTs and mentors and that there should be reciprocal learning. Both can learn from each other. Brian argues that

[t]he very experienced teachers they are not teaching the method they were teaching five years ago. Teachers are constantly looking at how they can improve.

In Brian's opinion, CPD should be about formalising what teachers are doing anyway day in and day out, giving their professional learning more structure. What is happening so far is not seen as research. But in his vision, teachers coming together sharing ideas and knowledge, learning from each other, having enough time to reflect is the way to go.

If he wants to be a teacher until retirement

is hard to know really whether I can imagine if in 20 years time I still be teaching the numbers 1 – 10.

[...] you kind of get a permanent job, that's really it.

You know, children never grow up. There is just a new group coming in who don't know the numbers.

Having that future feeling of stagnation, might lead Brian to look into other avenues for careers but so far he is content with his position in the new school and he is hoping that his contract will be renewed.

Narrative about
Ciara, Chinese Teacher

How can I develop a love for learning?

The first thing that comes to my mind about Ciara's enquiry is her wish that students enjoy learning and her firm belief that only with enjoyment and a positive attitude, learning takes place. Ciara is a teacher of Spanish - normally. But being an adventure-seeking, never resting teacher, she started learning Chinese with the University College Dublin's Confucius Institute during the summer of 2014. Being only a couple months ahead of her students, she started teaching the subject to Transition Year (TY) students from September 2014. This was a new, unique situation. While in her Spanish classes, she has to follow the curriculum, prepare her students for exams and having the advantage to know her subject very well, she was now in the position of a learner herself. She realised much more what it meant for her students to learn Chinese, the progress and pitfalls along the way, the sensation of a language that is so different from the languages normally taught and learned in school. Ciara mentioned how much she craved for grammar rules in the Chinese lessons she attended. When she put up her hand in one of the classes to ask for a rule, the teacher replied "There are no rules." Learning rather happens due to repetition of patterns and recognising sounds. Ciara could see that students

find it from that point of view much easier to pick up. They are not looking for a way to remember. They just go with it. So, it's retraining myself and to allow myself to not have a rule.

That was a crucial moment: to struggle and to find ways to come to terms with learning a new language. And furthermore, to have in the back of her mind that in a couple weeks, she will be teaching it without having reached proficiency. She was afraid of students asking specific questions and not having the answer to it. From an outsider perspective, this is great: as teachers we always think we have to have answers. However, this new teaching situation, while making Ciara insecure, gave her a fresh outlook on teaching and learning a language.

Before teaching her first class, Ciara wrote into her diary

Do the students even know where China is? Do I?! Feeling out of my depth and at sea since I haven't even started the classes myself.

The first class went really well: Ciara was happy with the material and the engagement from students. She noted down

Well I certainly enjoyed the class despite being nervous before I began. Being so used to having fluency when I teach usually, knowing that I know nothing certainly had me feeling queasy - way out of my comfort zone [...]

Her reflections revolved around questions like how to consolidate new vocabulary, what other words would be good to know (e.g. okay, alright, yes, no) or how students can find information themselves. Here, she showed them how to use Google translate including a warning that the translation might not be 100% correct "but because we are dealing with single words at a very very basic level I feel it is useful". After her first class, Ciara also knew that she will never be able to go through all the material she got from the Confucius Institute.

Well, this is about promoting a life-long learning skill so I decided to let the students decide: they could tick their top three and the most popular topics would be the ones we would focus on.

She was surprised about the topics her students chose since she would have opted for different ones. The class wanted to hear and learn about Chinese sport, music and food.

When I first visited Ciara in her school, in October 2014, she taught the first cycle of TY Chinese. Because TY has a rota system, two more cycles were to follow with different students but with the same content: a good starting point for a teacher researcher enquiring about “How can I develop a love for learning.” She could tweak and twist things according to students’ needs in the second and third cycle. Another aspect was favourable: TY has a different focus, the teacher is not bound to the syllabus, there is no exam or proficiency test at the end. The teacher can freely design the content. Ciara saw this as a breath of fresh air because students

get so bored in schools in certain ways that maybe the desire to learn is beaten out of them to a certain extent. Particularly when it’s an exam-driven year. So, I would be hoping that an insight like this will be totally different and will remind them in the future and come back to enjoying learning and loving it.

She voices concern about the syllabus, saying that it “can limit real education and the desire to learn.” Therefore, she finds it both - interesting and hard - to meet syllabus requirements, but still keep students engaged and happy. To accomplish this, her main concern is that students get a voice to articulate their wishes, their concerns - to have a say about what the class is targeting and to establish a cooperative rapport. Letting them choose the topics for example, is a “big departure from [her] ‘normal’ language classes” due to syllabus constraints. In our last interview, Ciara said that usually as a language teacher one does not receive a lot of positive feedback from the students. This is not due to the language teacher, but the challenging exams students have to take in their third year (Junior Certificate) and final year (Leaving Certificate). With her TY class, she was able to approach modern language teaching differently. The day I was visiting the class, students (and I) were learning to eat with chopsticks. Ciara brought in nuts and sweets that we had to pick up carefully in order to eat them - it was clear that students enjoyed this class. Before they went out after the “chopstick” class, Ciara used the “exit ticket method” where each student could only leave the classroom after answering her question. I was impressed by how much students retained without having written down too much. Ciara said in our second interview

I also wanted every student in the room to know, walking out of there, that they could say something in Chinese, no matter what their previous experience has been with learning a language.

Her enquiry was going well. Students liked her teaching style, with the material and design of the lessons. She received very good feedback from them. Some students did not like too much writing script and some found the power-points, especially on geography, too boring. Ciara took students’ complaints on board and said she will think of a different way to introduce China’s geography. The negative feedback was minimal.

What did not go so well in Ciara’s opinion was her own research time and time for reflection. She was very frank about her reason to participate in the project: to force herself to become a reflective practitioner. She said she hates reflective writing: it feels repetitive, it is hard to do, it is difficult to make time for it. While she noticed that six weeks into the school year, the writing became more automatic, she also felt “remiss from the point of view of keeping [her] notes regularly updated”. However, reflective thinking happens all the time - if written down or not. Ciara is convinced that “[taking] stock through enquiry while on the job is invaluable to anyone looking to improve.” She worked for 5 years with the *Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)*, giving workshops on different modern language teaching related topics. She is always interested in learning new things and trying new things. Getting out of her comfort zone is her way of pushing herself to become a better teacher. She told me that she only uses power-point at the moment but she would love

to incorporate Edmodo or the Flipped Classroom. These are next steps she is planning to implement. What she liked about this project was the structure it has given her because to her “[n]ot having direction can result in a meaningless or ineffective enquiry.” The project with NUI Galway gave her that direction and the meet-ups with the other teachers and

[k]nowing that there are other people also pushing themselves was consoling and the meetings have proven most energising and renewing.

What she was wondering about, though, was how to continue learning Chinese. She had her 10 week course but could not keep up the course throughout the year as this meant driving over an hour on a Monday night to the class - “with a full timetable and a family”. Having Chinese classes at the same time as teaching it to her students, is an interesting combination: Ciara noticed how fast she is usually progressing in class content-wise. “Spanish, particularly for the first years.” She feels that after her Chinese classes in Galway, she can teach the language more knowledgably. At the end of September, around four weeks into the school year and taking those Chinese classes, Ciara wrote into her journal:

Finding time to do the study is also proving a major challenge. It showed me just how busy I am in school with all of the regular curriculum work combined with the volunteer work. It has certainly given me pause to consider just how much I have taken on.

After the first course of Chinese was over, Ciara did not go ahead because of the distance to the course location and because of not wanting to do it online. Online classes were no option for her as she wants face-to-face interaction and because she had the impression with a different online course she took before that it was rather a “box-ticking-exercise”. What changed for her, is that from September 2015 onward, a Chinese teacher from the Confucius Institute will join Ciara since there are more students in TY with two groups taught simultaneously. At the end of their cycle they will receive a certificate. If this is changing the students’ attitude toward class - making it seem like a normal, more formal modern language class with an exam at the end - is something Ciara would like to observe. Because

immediately when you have an exam, you’ll have people who jump ship straight away, who won’t even look at it.

She might use again questionnaires alongside with her own observation and reflective journal to find out what students would like to do and what they did not like to do in class. This was the route she took in her first year of enquiry when she found out that China’s geography did not resonate with the students. Or after one observation, Ciara wrote as an answer to the interview question “What would you change the next time?” after an observation in February

I did an awful lot of talking...I would like to avoid that the next time...get more suggestions from students, e.g. extract more prior knowledge.

Before Ciara started with the second TY group and second cycle, she summarised in her reflective journal that she is delighted how the Chinese experience is going so far: students are willing to learn, the material is fun and students remember and use the structures they were learning. Ciara hopes that this positive experience instils an inner motivation for lifelong learning. With her second group, she “would like to get them thinking more about themselves as learners”. Unfortunately, the reflection ends here due to time commitment and all the other duties coming up during the school term.

When I asked Ciara if she would use focus groups as well for data collection, her initial reaction was that one would have to choose “clients” well but it “might be the way to go”. However, Ciara said in our third interview that she believes anonymous feedback can be more honest since students in a face-to-face interaction might want to please the teacher.

There lies the problem with the focus group and also with the fact that she would “pick people who are going to participate [and] you are not going to necessarily get the cross section then.”

Regarding the enquiry project, Ciara said that she enjoyed having someone in class. This - she did not anticipate. The last time she was observed was when she was training to become a teacher.

I found that having someone there where you knew that afterwards you're going to talk about how it had gone and there are going to be negatives because there always are. It's more on a level playing field when you are in the position where you want to discuss and criticise and improve. And I found that very good because they are always talking about having a teacher come in and observe you while you're teaching. Teachers were like: No, I couldn't do that. I felt very different.

A negative aspect of the enquiry, however, was being videoed during the lesson. The worst part of it was, however, to watch oneself afterwards. Because teachers are very self-critical, it would be advantageous to have someone at the side while watching the video in order to not be too hard on oneself and one's own criticism.

The video on its own, I would just be cringing. Combined with constructive discussion, it's great.

When I asked if it is feasible to observe other teachers and being observed and to give feedback to each other then, the problem would occur that teachers do not critique each other because “it's very difficult to find a way to say something that someone would not take as criticism in a negative way”. What makes collaboration and constructive feedback even harder is the vibe of competition in the school. Ciara remembered an instance when the results came out and a teacher approached her and asked how many A's she got in her class. She was dumbfounded and had to think hard about an answer because that is not how she thinks. But that particular school culture changed her. Now, it crosses her mind constantly - ‘how many A's will I get this year’.

The expectation is that you should be getting [A's]. This is what kills me - how teachers are seen - that it's by the grades that you get. Nothing is taken into consideration about who it is that you are teaching.

Ciara told the moving story of a student she taught only during her last, 6th year. The student was traumatised from the French classes she took before. She would not speak up and would not participate. Social difficulties also played a role. However, that student did read out a passage in French. Ciara's empathy, by not forcing her, paid off. And the student got a D, a pass in Leaving Cert French - and Ciara says that this is the best grade she is indirectly responsible for. Not an A from an A student. This D means much more to her but it would not mean anything to other teachers or the school management. The mentality in her school of being judged as a good teacher by the amount of A's your students get, is seen very negatively by Ciara. She likes healthy competition but nothing that could lead to an “interdepartmental strife”.

While seeing it as a challenge to meet the requirements of the syllabus, technology is another aspect, Ciara is thinking a lot about. Technological tools for the classroom are advancing at a rapid pace and in Ciara's opinion there is only one way to react:

[...] we have to bring it in. We have to use it. We have to get used to using it. [...] it's new territory for everybody. It's a big challenge. We can't hide our heads in the sand. We have to embrace it and go with it.

CPD in relation to technology or other content should be subject-specific, relevant and no “box-ticking exercise”. Ciara did an online CPD course and thinks that a face-to-face interaction needs to be there as well. She likes to read research on learning and teaching, e.g. on mixed-ability when this was being made a project with the PDST. However,

[...] for secondary school teachers, I think, it's the practice that is really important. You don't need to know why such a thing was researched [...] I do like to read things but I wouldn't necessarily feel that I need to know the background, the pros and cons of the flipped classroom before I try it out. You know, if it works, I'll try it. That's all I need to know.

Teachers learning from other teachers' experiences is the most powerful way of learning. If one teacher already “tried and tested” a certain method or resource, then it is valuable and empowering to others.

The way for teacher learning is collaboration through mainly face-to-face interaction, but as well reflection on one's own teaching.

I definitely think the reflection is important - even though I hate to say it out loud - it is important.

Ciara knows that her research question “How can I develop a love for learning?” will not be answered with one solution. She said there might never be a solution. There can be progress - and she found that herself and her students made progress in the TY Chinese class: Ciara by reflecting about classes she taught, from student questionnaires, from being filmed, from meeting other teachers and her students in trying out new ways of learning with willingness and desire but without having the pressure of an exam at their back.

Ciara's ultimate goal was, and is, to develop students' ability for lifelong learning and to make them think about their own learning: stepping away from being passive consumers to active users. If that means that she has to step out of her comfort zone as well, then it is something she is more than willing to do.

Narration about

Jacinta, French teacher

How can I improve listening comprehension with French songs?

Jacinta did an enquiry on listening. It is one of the harder skills to acquire in a foreign language and it is practiced a lot in class to prepare students for the Leaving Certificate aural exam. But Jacinta observed that simple fill-in-the-gap exercises – while not being bad per se – can be seen as a monotonous and boring activity by students if employed all the time. Students are more visual and the need to react to that can be met by using videos in the classroom and in Jacinta's case: videos with modern French music, comedians or slam poetry. Jacinta is a teacher in her 20s and being herself interested in modern French music, she introduces songs that are closer to her students' hearts than songs by Jacques Brel (without wanting to minimize his great achievement by any means). Jacinta knows when a song is working: students are tapping along. They bring the music they listen to in the classroom to their homes. This is Jacinta's goal and shows that her method is successful. A student recently told her that his older brother was listening to one of the songs during the whole night. With this approach, students do not just see French as a subject, as something they have to do, as something they might need to reach high points in order to get into the right course in college. Making a classroom language a lived language is difficult, but Jacinta wants that the learning-off-by-heart mentality for the Irish Leaving Certificate will soon belong in the past.

I think it has to start from kind of like the Junior Cert level. We do a Junior Cert oral in our school and I think it improves the level of speaking. [...] they had already the experience of a type of oral before so they were able to kind of, you know, use that to their advantage. And I think then you have to do more kind of...I think it depends on you.

She herself remembers every single line of her German oral exam, and gives the example of "Das Handy ist in der Schule verboten." She criticises that no one is speaking that way in the real world. And that she wants her students to be able to hold conversations and not be shocked if an unexpected question is being raised during their exams.

By using topical songs that fit in with the curriculum and doing activities before, during and after listening, Jacinta tried to a) make her French class more interesting and motivating and b) raise students' grades in listening comprehension, as this part is seen as one of the hardest in the exam since it is nothing that can be prepared and learned-off-by-heart. However, creating her own resources is very time-consuming. While having had more time during her pre-service education and her first year of teaching, she finds it challenging to balance everything. Teaching encompasses correcting, going to meetings, Croke Park hours, extra-curricular activities, e.g. she was responsible for the make-up for the yearly musical in school – there is constantly something going on; to Jacinta it feels like non-stop. It is only human to have some classes where she just plays a CD and does the typical monotonous exercises with the students.

Can you give everything the best attention that you can give? You know what I mean. Sometimes you just have to do a class that is just listening. And it's – to me it's a bit boring cause you just play play play – but sometimes you have to do it.

Reading an article in the newspaper about the Finnish system made her wonder: The Irish education system follows much stronger an American way while the Finnish system acknowledges teachers more, parents, students and the general public show them more respect and there is no moaning about teachers' "too long" summer holidays as Jacinta would often hear in Ireland. She is tired of listening to the prejudice that teachers are lazy.

You need kind of your down time. It's like when people say we have so many holidays but like you are so tired that you need all those holidays.

Jacinta is far from being "lazy" during her holidays. She targets her own professional learning by accompanying students on trips to Germany or doing a teacher training course in France. She also worked in an orphanage in the Ukraine. During the school year a mentoring course, a presentation she gave about blogging to other staff in school and at the moment an Apple iPad course to create Junior Cycle teaching material add as well to her already high workload. Whole-school CPD approaches are sometimes complicated to carry out as teachers' backgrounds and knowledge is different. Teachers in Jacinta's school therefore request more time for subject-specific meetings. However, these meetings are rather administrative in deciding on who takes which classes and which books are used. Jacinta noticed furthermore that motivation among staff in her school to do additional CPD went down because of cuts and extra hours. Workload and time seem to be a universal problem. On top of that, teaching 30 students per class (only one of her classes has 28) would be challenging to everyone. Making every student say something in the target language is pivotal but not manageable with 30 students. Jacinta finds that she knows her very good students and her very bad students. "The middle gets lost." And she can't stand behind every single one of them helping them with their tasks. Teachers, she finds "don't have enough time in a day to get through to everyone." She also sees a limitation in technology. While she completely supports that technology should be used, sometimes things don't work out the way she planned them to. The security settings were changed by the school without telling her and she couldn't access the videos, other days the internet is down – things that are beyond her control and moments in which she has to come up quickly with a Plan B. Jacinta would find that it is hard to introduce something new like French songs to classes that she did not teach from the start. There are particular groups that would moan and say no learning takes place when they listen to songs and they much rather work with the book. The result is that Jacinta is "not overly enthusiastic about doing songs with them. [...] they don't appreciate anything. I kind of gave up with them because they don't do any work ever. They are lazy [...]."

She also would not want to do a focus group with a class like this as the responses would be rather negative than positive.

I just think there are some classes they are a bit too stand-offish that I don't think [...] I don't think they would give me a proper, any feedback that would be useful. I think they would be very: We hate that, we hate...you know what I mean? Rather than saying: Oh, we would prefer, we did this, we did that, or we would like better. [...] they are very negative.

In her other classes, she brings in as much French and German as possible. Only when she finds students are getting lost, she would switch into English. Her aim is to use as little

English as possible as this would have a knock-on effect for her students' language skills. A next project would entail enquiring about spoken French or German and making students use the target language in a more conversational manner.

I think to use more target language and I'd be tempted to be...you know you try as much as possible to use the target language but sometimes it's not always possible.

To her teaching languages is to open new worlds to her students. Students shall see an additional language as something important and advantageous for jobs later on as well. After watching a report about intelligent people on television, Jacinta got upset that intelligence is rather seen as getting the highest points in the Leaving Certificate doing scientific courses like Maths or Biology. Getting a very good grade in German or French in the Leaving Certificate is not seen as that outstanding and being really intelligent in her opinion. All the intelligent people on the show did Honours Maths or Biology in school. Jacinta herself did scientific courses but settled for French and German. Another reason why it is hard to motivate students for modern languages in Ireland is due to the way Irish is being taught and dealt with. There is a resistance built up against languages because of experiences with Irish.

Languages are like the poor pets in the curriculum or something.

Hence, she wants to

[...] foster a bit of love for, just learning languages.

The class I was observing was a very eager class, 5th years. Jacinta worked with them on their portfolio in preparation for the exam where each student picked a picture that he or she has to talk about for a certain amount of time. She told her students to not pick random pictures from their trip to France. She was amazed that students picked pictures to talk about abortion and environmental issues. She said very frankly:

I think I need to work on my vocabulary. Because I have no...I don't think I have that much vocabulary on abortion.

Jacinta sees herself as a lifelong learner and is not assuming that as a teacher she needs to know it all. While working with a language assistant in one of the classes, the question about the meaning of "insulin pen" in French came up. Jacinta and the assistant did not know the answer and talked in French in front of the class. She noticed that students weren't working during that time and she mentioned that she won't handle the situation like this again because valuable teaching time was lost. In the future, she wants to use the assistants more for correcting

[...] because [their] phrasing is obviously better than mine.

While other teachers might be intimidated by having native speakers in their classrooms, Jacinta is embracing the fact of having one. She also saw her language assistant doing a song in class with her students but using the "old" method of having a picture, a fill-in-the-gap exercise and the song on tape. She noticed

[...] they weren't enthusiastic about the song. You know, they were just doing it to get it done. And they actually didn't like it. Whereas I know that I put on something catchy and there is a beat [...].

Her students agree with her all the time, she says, about her good choices. While she is sometimes unsure if she can believe them, she definitely saw that the choice made by the assistant was not appreciated. Also, Jacinta uses so many different activities when bringing a song to class. While I observed her, I was taking notes on the different possibilities because I liked them and would like to use them for my classes. For a while, she used a website for resources but the material didn't really link in as much as she wanted it to. She is creating most of the exercises herself. It is a lucky case that there are so many songs in French, however, she says it is hard to find catchy songs in German that would appeal to younger students. However, for the next school year she has to find those German bands and create resources on their songs as she will be teaching a fourth year German class.

At the end, her students' language skills did improve during the school year. If that is the case because of the songs is hard to tell for sure but can be speculated. The listening comprehension results improved, which Jacinta knows from the beginning and end of year test that were both based on Leaving Certificate exams. The fact that she was more consistent in using songs in the classroom and that she put more effort into preparation resulted in higher motivation and she assumes, grades. She paid more attention to detail, reflecting carefully in writing what went well, what did not go so well, what can be improved the next time, how did it work with technology. While reflection is something she does all the time in thinking, she enjoyed writing things down which lead her to be even more reflective.

If I had gone like last year and would have just like fill in the blanks while with this I paid more attention to detail and I adapted everything accordingly after that.

Into her journal, Jacinta wrote down which song she used, if students liked or disliked it, what worked well, problems she encountered and what she could tweak for the next time. Taking part in this project had not only the effect of reflecting better but also the chance to meet other teachers of modern languages. She saw that as a success of the enquiry project as

[teachers] have the more realistic approach to like teaching. [...] They know what's going on. If something works for them more than likely can it be adapted to work for my class as well.

Jacinta said that in college she learned about the ideal classroom but not the reality. Learning from other teachers is more rewarding in a sense that she feels more motivated after a workshop with other teachers than a workshop given by a college lecturer. The enquiry also made her think more about what she is trying to achieve by using songs in the classroom.

That was my goal of it. Whereas before I was kind of just doing it because it wasn't as boring as just listening to: learn about this topic and then listen to Mary and John talking about their...

However, academic papers concerning songs in the modern language classroom that I uploaded for her on PBworks

have been written by people who wouldn't have as much contact with the classroom all the time. So they might therefore [...] they might just be a bit removed from it. So they mightn't be as realistic in what the approach is. They might be talking about the ideal class but not necessarily have...I know definitely, I don't have all ideal classes.

While it was pleasant to meet other teachers in the project and to share ideas, Jacinta says that it is tricky to share resources with teachers in her school: some share things all the time, others never, which causes an imbalance and ultimately led to an end of an open culture of sharing. Jacinta says

[...] that's about personalities. You have to work with people who are like that as well. I mean that's frustrating. You mightn't get as much done in a subject department meeting because of this drama.

When I asked Jacinta if she wants to teach until retirement, she mentioned that a friend recently said to her that would be another 35 years to go and that this was quite a scary thought. She loves teaching but she also longed for the summer holiday break at the time the interview took place. If Ireland would incorporate the Finnish mantra of less-is-more, Jacinta thinks that this would be an improvement for students and teachers alike. But she cannot see that coming any time soon.

Because she saw that her students improved their listening comprehension, she would firstly like to investigate further in using popular songs and slam poetry in her French and German classes, but secondly also give her students the confidence and skill to speak more freely in the target language and thus enhance their oral skills. Taking part in the enquiry project lead Jacinta to a more structured approach working with songs in her classroom introducing many more activities in relation to songs than before. Her biggest success is that students downloaded the songs (which she can see via Edmodo) and listen to them outside their French classes; that her students see the relevance of the songs and the purpose to expand their vocabulary with them; and that they tap and even sing along in class being motivated and interested.

Narration about
Marie, French teacher

How can the Flipped Classroom help my students to become more independent learners?

Marie set out to enquire about the Flipped Classroom (FC) and if using the method can help in making her students more independent. Flipping the classroom meant to Marie to “flip her life” as she wrote about it in her blog. She introduced this rather new method to find a solution to her problem: she wants all her students to be motivated language learners.

I think that motivation is what makes a student excel in a subject at school... Motivation to get good grades, motivation to learn because one loves the subject, motivation to please the teacher/parents. Motivation to achieve one's dream and access a course etc... Each individual student must find his/her own motivation to work at a subject.

Flipping a classroom means that students do a certain amount of work outside the classroom and come into the next lesson with a certain amount of background knowledge on a topic that is going to be dealt with that day. That could mean that on Tuesday evening at home they watch a Youtube clip on a grammar aspect like *passé simple*, they take notes or fill in a worksheet while/after watching. They can replay as often as they want and can therefore learn at their own pace. In class on Wednesday, the teacher then - after a short revision - makes certain that everyone is on track, focuses on exercises and helps students individually while they engage in single, pair or group work. This means less teacher talk but more time for practice. With a very full curriculum and the constant worry to not fit everything into the lessons, flipping the classroom can free up valuable class time, be more motivating and propel students to become independent learners. So far the theory. Marie took part in this project to enquire if that method is really changing her 5th year students from being spoon-fed to being independent French language learners. She says she is tired of spoon-feeding her students:

I don't want to be a leader. I don't even want to be a guide. I want them to guide themselves.

I recall a situation in her lesson when a student was asking what *XYZ* means in French. Marie just pointed at the dictionaries and said to the student to find the answer herself. Marie told me also that if a student misses class and would ask her for the homework he/she has to do, she would kindly remind them that they should ask their classmates who can give them the same answer. Marie is not a sage on stage and she would struggle to be seen as a guide on the side. She wants her students to think independently and to find solutions to their questions and problems themselves. She would tell them that they need that skill when they go to university. Marie wants them to see that she

is not [their] only source of information. [...] So if I do find a good website, then I will tell them: this is where you get your information for grammar, okay? And you can go maybe there and there but this is the main one. [...] and I have to say it to them clearly: I need you to be an independent learner and I want you to not rely on my information.

Hence, in every instance, Marie is pushing her students to do things on their own, giving them the right back-up and guiding them in becoming autonomous.

The flipped classroom can be one way to help her students be more independent in her French class. It was noticeable from the first weeks using the FC, that time can be saved.

[...] the recap took 10 minutes. It would have taken me a full class to teach them, if not two classes.

In her first year trying the FC, Marie used Edmodo as a software where she can store the videos, where students can leave and respond to comments, upload something they find interesting, for Marie to upload worksheets etc. Marie wrote in her blog entry that showing students how to use Edmodo and how to watch the education videos takes up time at first, too. She shows them step by step how to pause, rewind, take notes etc. When Marie noticed that “one of [her] star pupils” did not take down notes, she started to investigate with the others

some had taken down notes, some had not (we had agreed that it was necessary the previous week, but I had not obviously reinforced it enough). I am thinking it is necessary that I create a template for the videos.

After this observation, Marie created worksheets to accompany each video. She tweaked and twisted things by observing and getting feedback from the students. She also started giving students a warm-up for the videos just as she would give them a warm-up before a reading or listening exercise. This meant giving them clues on what the video is about and connecting it to previous knowledge instead of only saying “Watch the video and tell me about the *imparfait* tomorrow in class in French.” She noticed that this task was perceived as too daunting. Also, writing down these incidents/epiphanies in her blog entries is a wonderful way to not forget. It is something, Marie says, keeps her going. I was able to read and comment on her entries which added much richness: I not only had interview transcripts and notes from observations, but I had in between updates on how Marie is getting on with the project and her enquiry.

While school life was extremely busy - Marie needed to organize the exchange between a French class and her own class - she still made time to read up on articles I put up on PBworks for her. She even uploaded her own findings and hence, made perfect use of the online tool that was PBworks. After reading an article on millennial students for example, Marie concluded on her blog that these are the students we have in front of us: they are tech-savvy and not learning much from teacher-centred lessons and therefore should be prone to the FC. Marie made again an interesting observation: Her fifth year students found it harder to start using Edmodo and the FC than her first year students who started right after the introduction to Edmodo to communicate with her on the platform. Reason for this could be that the senior students

are so used to traditional teaching, moving to something different takes a lot of effort and trust too.... if not trust... maybe belief that there is more than trad teaching, i.e. "I can teach myself, I don't always need a teacher to learn and understand a new concept, my peer can help me too".

Even though it took her senior students a while, they soon got into the FC and the software and started using them without any problem.

I asked at the beginning if the FC - which sounds like a perfect fit for a (language) classroom - is a total success. Not always. Marie admitted that at times she was maybe “over-optimistic” in firstly thinking every student will watch the video and secondly that every student will gain a basic understanding. Her solution to the first case was to give the student(s) that missed out on watching the video a headset to watch it in class while she would carry on with the others. But in case two she noticed that at times she did need to re-

explain a lot which could be due to the topic, to the video material or the worksheet - or simply the fact that it is the middle of the school year and everybody is tired.

Half-way through the school year and her FC project, Marie did a questionnaire with her students. The feedback was positive but still, Marie said, the method needs improvement. What Marie took into consideration after reviewing the questionnaires was to give students more than one way to find information, to use cognates more often and very simple examples. Marie also said that

[n]ow, I'm kind of obsessed with the Flipped Classroom. But is there another way to make them independent learners?

This healthy doubting is only one of Marie's qualities as a teacher. It is a constant reviewing and then adapting after reflecting on her goal to make students more independent, especially when it comes to learning French grammar. But there are further positive sides: Marie definitely sees an improvement in participation after introducing the FC.

I have student XYZ that [...] would not talk much in class. Now I remember, the passé composé, no comparative - superlative, she was the first one to come in and ask me a question. That was big for her to do it.

She also started to let the students become the teachers and explain rules to one another. Even though this is a strategy that takes some time, especially for more shy and introverted students, she does encourage them to do that.

When I asked her if the FC has an impact on students' learning and as a consequence has an impact on their grades, Marie said that she does not know if they would have learned better or the same way in a normal classroom. Marie is always wondering if the FC is a success. One blog entry is completely dedicated to that topic and she describes how she taught the *passé composé* with the help of three videos and worksheets which students had to watch over the winter midterm break. The feedback she got after that exercise was that one video was too long and too boring and some worksheets too complex. The success was that the students explained to her (the not-knowing student) the *passé composé* and later worked very well on an exercise talking about their holidays in pairs. She took the feedback on board and created for the next video a simpler worksheet that allows students more freedom in giving answers, e.g. with questions like 'What did you learn in this clip?' 'What is essential to know?' She also started doing voice-overs over her own power-point presentations which are better tailored to her cohort's needs. Students prefer them to YouTube videos.

Marie is definitely hooked to the FC: She introduced it to all her classes from 1st to 6th year with a very positive response. She argues, though, that the positive responses in the questionnaire could be because students like her and see her making an effort. Still, she did surveys with all the students involved in using the FC to

convince my colleagues of the usefulness of FC for other subjects such as science and maths.

Nonetheless, Marie is humble, even shy, about the successes she achieved with the FC. Only if she can present facts that prove it was successful, she is going to share her knowledge with her peers. It is fortunate that her school environment is very open to new ideas and staff are approachable. It was interesting to hear, however, that only in our enquiry group it was possible to say

I can't teach... I'm failing in that. And at least that day we had: I'm not good at. You know it's good to hear that. To question.

The project also “forced” her to do a questionnaire. Marie knew the date I came to her class and she made sure that the questionnaire was ready by then for us to take a look at it. Without me coming in, she might have prolonged handing out a questionnaire. She admits that it is difficult for teachers to collect data all the time. But two questionnaires per school year were beneficial and not too labour-intensive. For the next school year and her next round with the flipped classroom, Marie would like to try an anonymous way of getting feedback via a software like Survey Monkey. She would also not shy away from a focus group but would be wary if students would really tell the truth or if they would be biased standing in front of the teacher.

What was labour-intensive and could be a negative side of the FC is that it takes a long time to find appropriate material online, which is not too hard but also not too easy. Marie even resorted to doing her own videos but it took her

a full day to do an 8min voice over PowerPoint video on the progressive present in French! One of the easiest grammar rule ... not even a grammar rule but more a structure... but the good thing is that it's done for next year, and I am using it in class for my 3rd year and my second year... so not a real waste of time so maybe.

In Marie's school, all teachers got involved in a project on different learning styles. Through this, she came to the conclusion to tweak her FC approach a little and also involve more reading exercises. “One support isn't enough.” Besides the powerpoint video with her voice over and the worksheet, she would like to include grammar pages where students have the chance to read about a topic.

Marie stressed that her weak point is being a native speaker of French and hence finding it hard sometimes to step into her students' shoes to understand their struggles. She also thinks that she is “not good at grammar” but wants to put a strong emphasis on grammar in her lessons. She worked on that issue by

[going] to basics, start from basics to slightly harder. And those steps. I know from previous years and even last year, I went too fast and then I was losing them.

Marie finds that there is a learning curve her students and herself are on, regarding them becoming independent learners, and herself to guide them without overburdening them. She wondered if she is a real “flipper” and came to the conclusion: not yet. She does give students their own learning space to then bring them back into a group space for collaborative work. But she finds that she would like them to work collaboratively online as well. She is online every evening on Edmodo to answer their questions but no one poses one.

[T]hey do not interact much or at all with each other but rather wait to be in class to ask questions...to me rather than to their peers as first point of contact.

In her blog entry from February 2015, she asked the following questions:

- *What else can I put on FC apart from Grammar concepts and Vocab learning? Can I flip reading comprehension skills, aural skills, essay writing skills??*
- *How can I encourage my students to engage more on Edmodo and make it THEIR learning platform?*
- *The assessment method on Edmodo is simplistic, i.e. lower level of the Blooms taxonomy.. is it sufficient for the students at this point of teaching?*

- *How can I encourage my colleagues to try out the concept especially for Science and Maths subjects?*
- *How can I engage with other Language Teachers that are Flipping their Classes too in Ireland (I am more interested of Ireland because of the Curriculum").*

Regarding this project, Marie liked that I came in to observe her, even film her once, get constructive criticism (in person and on her blog) and talk to someone about her class and the new method. About being filmed, she remarked:

[...] when you watch the video at home on your own, you only see the negative side and nobody is there to say, like - you were - but look the way the child reacts, isn't that great. [...] You only focus on the negative sides. That's why I hated watching the videos. First I was thinking "What am I wearing?"

Marie kept the blog going in year two of her investigation about the FC. She changed a few things like giving students more reading material as she found that presenting a rule to them with the task to fill in the gap exercises was too much for some students. She notices that flipping works better in certain classes than in others, especially with her third and sixth years. Contrasting this against the following lines, seems worth another investigation.

[We] need to think how to make them more independent. And I think we have great ideas in first year and in second year and in fifth year. But once the exam time is coming in third year and sixth year, we revert to our old habits. Learn that essay by heart. Make sure what the changes are. So we go back to spoon-feeding. We can blame the exam.

Could it be students craving for different teaching styles in exam-driven years? As Marie's definition of reflective practice is to "never stop thinking about your work", I am sure that she won't refrain from finding answers to her questions.

Narration about

Mary, German teacher

How can I give my very mixed-level German class a positive experience about learning a language?

Mary's way of teaching and her research question is closely linked to the student cohort she is teaching. Mary teaches a first year German class in which most students have a Traveller background. Her question is: How can I keep my students on target, keep them interested in the language, not lose them throughout the year and give them a positive feeling about themselves and learning German?

Mary's class is special. When I first went in to observe the class, I thought, her research question must be about teaching children with a travelling background. I uploaded articles for her but after having our first interview it was obvious that Mary has many years of experience teaching this cohort. Her plan was to look into different teaching methods, trying to keep them interested and not hating the subject. Moreover, she does not want to spoon-feed them any longer, but rather, let them make the connections themselves. By that she argues that students would feel more confident, empowered and hence, get a good opinion about themselves.

Although they are weak...they still can, you know. Like, I would like to push them more [...] I can do this, I really and truly can do this. And I can make these connections and I understand this. Because that will go across the board in other subjects as well, support them as young women, that they won't have this helpless thing.

She knew from the start of the school year, though, that one student will definitely be a challenge.

Already she can be very...she says things without thinking. She's not a bad child. [...] You know, she has learning difficulties. But I said to her, you know [name of student], if you were born in Germany, you'd speak fluent German. And she says: Would I teacher? [...] So I tell her it just means you have to work a little harder. But it doesn't mean you wouldn't be able to learn a language.

It is that growth mindset that Mary likes her students to get. The difficult part is that three of her students find it extremely difficult to focus and follow Mary's teaching. To see how she could possibly help her students to learn better, Mary did a questionnaire with the students on their preferred learning styles. It turned out that especially the weaker students are very visual and creative: they love to cut and paste things into their copies for example. Mary also found out that working with a lot of pictures is helpful. And she always makes sure that the weaker students are able to answer a question during her lesson. Mary observed that students want a routine. Every class begins with a prayer in German which settles students down. In her class, they would not get up randomly and disturb other students which they would do in other classes as Mary heard from the special needs assistant. She told Mary that they are behaving well in her class compared to others. To gather more data for her enquiry, Mary planned to do a focus group with the language assistant together which did not happen at the end. If she had done a focus group, she would want to make sure, though, that

it would have to be interpreted by someone who understands the gang because to read through what point was she making there because very often what they say isn't totally what they mean.

Mary says in the interview that especially the weaker students would want to have more games, cutting and pasting things into their copies - things they feel they are able to do. But

Mary needs to bring them up to a certain standard to pass the exam. Hence, she is trying to mix her approaches. Having two excellent students in her first year, Mary makes sure to differentiate and teach according to the capabilities of all her students.

Some of them are extremely weak. So, we are getting the very basics and this will be reinforced all along. Then I'll add in the extra bits and the more capable children will be able to take that on.

She uses power-points in nearly every class, stimulating her students' learning with a lot of visuals. In the future, she would like to become better at sketching on the board and using mind-maps in her power-points. Mary also designed a sheet called "Deutsch macht Spass" where students can tick off what they have done in class, what they are able to do and what is going to be part of the test. That way, Mary combines her interactive, student-centred teaching methods with the more official character of the test that students need to do at the end of the year.

In one of the interviews, she made very clear that her class is not a normal class. These are not middle class children whose parents care about them getting good grades. In other schools, teachers

can teach new knowledge and know how to hang it on old knowledge, or something that's already there. Sometimes what's already there: there isn't anything there.

Mary finds different ways to get through to the students. She started a card-making workshop that is on every lunch break. She is giving up her own lunch break to meet students that worked well in class and hence deserve being in the workshop. While she would acknowledge that it is terrible to find ways to bribe them, in her opinion, it is worth doing it. She has a good rapport with her students, they like her, give her cards and presents on her birthday and at the end of the year. That makes Mary successful in teaching students other teachers would find extremely difficult to teach. She understands their background.

There is a middle class, middle aged woman who teaches a 13 year old who has total hardship, unbelievable hardship.

Mary prepares her students carefully for any oral or written test, explaining the outline and doing mock exams before. Students feel in many other classes that they are not cut out for school and learning, which triggers aggression. Mary is being fair to them and tries to not take things personally. However, she admits that

I have my own baggage as well. I mean you are trying always to be a role model. But some of them complain. And they treat you disrespectfully and usually [...] you can react. It doesn't happen in this German class because they are little dotes. I love them.

If you didn't have them on board, God help you.

But when she has them on board and when they learn, the reward to Mary is actually higher than teaching any other class. During the school year, Mary was working with a language assistant in that particular German class. She took joy out of this collaboration as the language assistant understood the classroom situation very well. She was liked by the students. Mary would ask her, how could we do that? And the assistant would take a lot of notes on how Mary is doing things. Collaboration is key to Mary. When she did her Master in Education, she focused on a whole-school approach for modern language teachers. The teachers got their own resource room and started sharing resources. Mary would loath to go into a staff room where no open culture to share things existed. Some teachers, she finds though, are not that open to sharing and collaborating.

Because it's kind of, [they] don't want to do it, but [they] don't want anyone else to do it either.

Reasons for this could be a worry, a lack of technical knowledge, burn-out or other personal circumstances. When we talked about mandatory CPD, Mary would be positive about it. It should be during school hours, though. Observing other teachers would also be no problem at all. But what she added was that no one would force a child to do something, so one shouldn't force a teacher to do something either.

You can't force anyone to do anything. But if you let them [teachers] observe teachers – now, they shouldn't have any problem with that. And maybe get some tips and that. [...] And even have teachers that would chat to them afterwards and all, and bring them along a bit. [...] It's kind of like introducing a child to anything, it's kind of scaffolding, helping them along.

CPD is essential because

[...] if you want to be in charge of classes and young people and you are supposed to be the expert in your area, I mean, you have to do your best to keep up. [...] you are talking about people's whole future and that. It's good, it's fresh and it gives you a challenge and you see what's out there.

Her Master's made her think 'outside the box' and she got so many ideas during her studies but she finds it hard to incorporate those ideas in her day to day work since it often feels like "keeping your head up above the water". Reasons for taking part in the enquiry project were to be part of a bigger group and share information with other modern language teachers.

When you meet other people who are in the same kind of job and trying to teach a language and that and the experiences. It's good and it's not so much as if you are out on your own. And it was lovely meeting those other teachers. It was very enjoyable.

Meeting other teachers was affirming. She loved hearing about *Blendspace* and the *Flipped Classroom*. Mary wants to introduce more work with the internet and use online resources for teaching German. Her summer project will be to get into *Blendspace* and be able to use it. *The Flipped Classroom* method would not work with her first years as most of them have no internet or computer at home. What is of advantage during these collaborations is that teachers can tell each other what worked well and what did not – in which case it is saving others time trying it out. When I asked her what practitioner enquiry means to her, she replied

you are making decisions, you are going with the decision, then you're reflecting on it, and you think will I go ahead or not. And my decision is paying off.

Hence, Mary's enquiry was successful. Even though it meant to be

[a] lot of hard work now, a lot of hard work. And you know something. I think that I wouldn't have done it any other way – whether I would have taken part in this or not.

Mary is very active in pushing her professional learning.

But it's great because it gets you back in the loop, it let's you think of how you are doing things. Be honest with yourself.

This enquiry project was a vehicle for Mary's own learning and exchange with other teachers. The enquiry

[...] changed one thing and I think it kind of boiled you up a bit. When you meet other people who are in the same kind of job and trying to teach a language and that and the experiences. It's good and it's not so much as if you are out on your own. And it was lovely meeting those other teachers. It was very enjoyable.

Enquiring about her class, though, Mary would as well have done under her own initiative. She enjoys reading books on several educational topics, like psychological and emotional states of children and teenagers. There are books in the staff room as well, and in former times the school received newsletters by the Marino Institute that were interesting to read. Whatever it takes to make her classes better, she would look at. Mary tried to reflect in writing at the beginning of the school year, but told me, that she gave up on this very early since she finds it easier to reflect mentally. She is constantly thinking about her classes, why a child got upset with her, why a child did not take part or did not understand the lesson's content. Weekends she usually spends preparing her lessons to make them more interactive and looking for material online. After she watched the video I filmed of her class, she pondered if she should change the layout of the classroom because *"the lines don't work. But then again for classroom management you kind of need that."* She admitted that she hoped students would object to me filming the class that day because she dreaded watching the little clip. Even though she would like to change the classroom layout to cater for more group work, she feels that the students are well organised and that any change could be seen as a disruption.

Mary is very active regarding extracurricular projects like green schools and student's council. She is mentoring an at-risk child at school that is doing much better now. She did courses on classroom management and CSPE. Other teachers do not mind her being as active as they know that she is *harmless* and that she would help out anyone who needs help. CPD to her just needs to be relevant. A workshop should be designed like this: if it is for example about listening comprehension, details should be given of how to do it, how to mark it, how to differentiate with it.

[S]omething that's actually not just talking around.

Mary said that she tries to constantly get out of her comfort zone by doing new and different things. She is constantly reflecting about her classes, and a class that did not go well would seriously upset her. What is even more important about her teaching is that she is not giving up even though some of her classes from time to time can be *like Beirut*.

But you know, what you put into something you will get out. If you put in a bit of effort into what you are doing, you get so much more out. [...] Like there is nothing better than to bounce into school and be full of biz.

There is no better sentence to finish this narration.

Narration about

Olwyn, German teacher

How can I create a more student-centred and fun Transition Year class but also make sure that basics don't get lost?

Olwyn was teaching a Transition Year (TY) class for the first time in 2014/2015. She was aware of the fact that TY is a special year in school. Hence, she wanted to enquire about her teaching and her students' learning. Olwyn knew from other teachers that it is a difficult year because the formal school structure is not as enforced as it would be in other years. While this also brings the advantage to have more freedom, Olwyn noticed quickly that it is hard to have all the students in class at the same time. Some are off for volleyball practice, others to prepare for a competition (in that year her school took part in the "Build a Bank" competition, her own TYs entered a poetry and essay competition), later on in the year, students were missing class because of the school musical and because of Italian lessons. There was always something going on and she could not expect all her students to be in and be prepared. If a line could be drawn to visualize Olwyn's year, the line would start quite high but fall gradually after. At the beginning of the school year, Olwyn said: "Well, just like the kids, I'm motivated. I'm full of energy. I want it all to be great."

She wanted her TY students to learn about cultural aspects of Germany but also not leave grammar aspects out of the picture because students would tend to forget what they have learned during Junior Cycle and then have to start afresh in Senior Cycle. To avoid this, Olwyn wanted to teach grammar in a fun way, "without it becoming boring". Her plan for TY German was seconded by her students' answers in the questionnaire she handed out. They wanted to know more about German music, film and culture but also revise word order and grammar. They said that they enjoy listening but dislike writing letters. Her idea was to choose topics that prepare them for their Leaving Certificate, that are relevant and make them use authentic language. Role plays and dialogues in the restaurant, at the train station etc. were among the things she had in mind. She made clear that she does not

[...] want it to be teacher-based. I want it to be student-based, student-centred, self-discovery. I want them to realize that they can use German, that they can speak it and you know that it's relevant in their lives and that it will create better opportunities for them after school.

Olwyn had all her students' Junior Certificate results to evaluate their level at the beginning of TY. She wanted to assess them at the beginning and at the end of the school year regarding motivation and the ability to speak the language. Language skills were tested all through TY with tests and an oral exam at the end. To learn about motivation, Olwyn wanted to observe students in class with the help of the language assistant. However, her major concern at the beginning was the collection of data. Her idea was to have a table with all student names and rubrics from 6 (very high) to 1 (very low).

I think a rubric is the best way. And then I can use that rubric if I have them in 5th year as well to say student X didn't really like working alone, she preferred it when she was in a group. [...] But does the rubric work for you?

Olwyn was not really sure about the rubric and its application in class. She wanted to do a needs analysis: If student X likes group work then she would implement more group work. If student Y was very motivated during one week, that student might get some extra homework. By doing this, Olwyn wanted to differentiate. But how to analyse a rubric like the one she had in mind and base her teaching on single needs in the classroom, was a little tricky and messy. I suggested to her to base her observation on motivation on integrating different teaching methods, change the classroom design, use a different strategy for

teaching vocabulary, use a song etc. to see what would have a good effect on her students' learning. Also, as TY is a very flexible year, she would be free to try more project-based and group work. She could then observe her students' reaction, maybe do a questionnaire or focus group interview and see if motivation increased. To my suggestion she responded:

However, different methodologies attract different students. If I do one methodology that works very well with half the class, it mightn't work so well with the other half. It's about balance. This is all interesting. Because I don't know which students respond well to which methodology.

With regard to doing a focus group interview, Olwyn would want to make sure to group students looking at their relational statuses and their skills.

I think if I was to do a focus group like that I would have to pick five students who are alike and talk to them and then another five students who are alike. I don't think I can mix them in one focus group. Because very often, the high-achievers are not friends with the low-achievers. And if I was to do a small focus group like that, it would create maybe tension.

After all, Olwyn thinks that students are open about what they like and dislike in class. She does not find the need to do a focus group because

very often they tell you anyway. [...] after Aschenputtel they said, that was great Miss. We really liked that.

Olwyn's concern was also that the language abilities in her TY were very mixed. One student had an A in her Junior Certificate, another student did not even sit the Junior Certificate exam. "So, I have a huge difference in class." She wanted to cater for all of them.

At the start of the year, you have your new stationary, your new copies. You can start afresh. Nobody is better than anybody else. But somewhere along the way...

Olwyn mentioned that November is usually the month when everybody, teachers and students alike, are tired. She wanted to help students to keep a high level of motivation by doing things they like to do, but also implement grammar in a more interesting way. After our first meeting, I uploaded different links and book titles into her folder on PBworks for her to look into different resources to help create the learning environment she had in mind.

When I visited her class in the middle of the project, the class worked on a fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm. Olwyn's language assistant read the story in German, they paused often to write down important words on the whiteboard which Olwyn translated into English and which the students wrote down. At the end of the story, there was a test with 100 words in German to be translated into English. The interesting twist that came with the test was a sponsor (a parent or a friend) who would give the student for each correct word € 0.10. This surely helped with motivation. This was not the only reason why students were happy to work on a fairy tale: it was a topical choice since 'Into the Woods' just came into the cinemas. They also learned verbs in the simple past which was a good preparation for Senior Cycle. Unfortunately, the intended 2 weeks module on the fairy tale turned out to be 6 weeks because

Wednesday, they went on a retreat, so they weren't in school. Thursday, they went to the cinema, so they weren't in school. [...] for the next 2 weeks they have work experience and then there is midterm break. I won't see them again for another month. [...] That's the problem with TYs.

Another issue that Olwyn wanted to solve was that her students did not talk much in class. Her language assistant suggested to let them read a couple of sentences which students heard

before to consolidate what has been learned. While Olwyn would not want her students to read out a passage for the first time as “it can be embarrassing and makes them nervous and just demoralises”, she liked the idea that they take a turn each to read certain passages.

This shows that Olwyn is very much able to put herself into the shoes of her students. At another point in the interview, she said that when someone only starts out to learn a language and the task is to read a text “you have to be able to make sense of what’s going on; get the bigger picture.”

Olwyn also talked about the many absences in her class: “I really do not want them to go into fifth year and be lost.” She was tweaking her TY course along the way to make sure that actual learning takes place. After my observation, Olwyn said that she ran out of time at the end and the lesson ended without a summary or recap. She wanted to implement at least 5 minutes towards the end to go over the learned material - something she would make sure of in other classes. Emphasising vocabulary, especially verbs, in class, made her students realise that they got a little “rusty” and that words they should have known from Junior Cycle were not in their active memory. All in all, Olwyn was happy with the progress students made during the module even though she never taught the whole class in one because some students could not attend class.

Before introducing another fairy tale, she wanted to

[...] get their [her students’] opinion: Did you think that this was a good idea, did it help you to learn new verbs.

What Olwyn found difficult with all her classes is to differentiate. She was actively questioning her approach.

[...] some days I feel like all I do is higher level stuff and the ordinary level are just sitting there doing nothing. But there are some things that I have to cover for the higher level curriculum. [...] So it’s like having two classes at the same time.

When it comes closer to exam times, Olwyn would separate the classes, give each group different tasks but concentrate one day on one level and the next day on the other level.

But while you are teaching it, you can’t really let them work on their own cause they don’t know it yet. You know, it’s hard.

When I asked her if there is one thing in her professional life that she would be able to change and what that would be, Olwyn replied: “To have more time.” Being involved in extracurricular activities like the musical, the mentoring program in her school and giving grinds, made her feel like constantly running out of time. At the beginning of her career, Olwyn had 12 hours to teach and “[i]t was actually a different world then”. For a 40-minute class, she was able to prepare flash cards and engaging activities; she would have a well thought-through lesson plan.

And I was always out with my scissors, my glue, and I had lovely things. [...] This year like, it’s impossible to go laminating things. I would never have time to laminate anything.

Of course, she still prepares her courses, but the attention to detail that she was able to put in before is not sustainable any longer. For some lessons, Olwyn knows, that she “[has] great stuff prepared.” But there are lessons where she knows she would have needed more time preparing them to make them truly good lessons.

The reason for committing herself to all the extracurricular work can be partly found in the fact that she has a new principal and no permanent position in school. Olwyn wanted to show

him that she does not shy away from extra work and that she is “an asset to the school”. Unfortunately, Olwyn feels like she cannot “be seen as too ambitious” because

if you make it look like you are doing a lot of work, other teachers will start to think: Oh, who does she think she is? What is she trying to say? [...] It's very hard to explain that. It's kind of a feeling you get from the like.

She was doing a lot of work during that school year and it was sad to hear that she felt restricted in actually talking about it. She mentioned, though, that the work on the musical strengthened her relationship with her students. While she had a good rapport with them during Junior Cycle, she felt “like a lot of them were like my little nieces, very close with them now altogether” when preparing for the musical.

On another more positive note, the project brought her together with like-minded teachers.

So, it's nice to be around other teachers that want to be better teachers. Some teachers don't care. And it's nice to be around teachers that care. [...] I really liked that.

Olwyn said that her TY German class could have been very easy going, with her going in and showing DVDs throughout the year like other teachers do.

It could have been that kind of year for me. But I don't want it to be that kind of year for me. I want to keep them engaged but actually learning as well at the same time.

Without taking part in this project, Olwyn believes that she would not have been as critical and reflective regarding her teaching and regarding that TY class. Because it was her first time teaching TY, reflecting about her teaching was even more important, in her opinion. Without the meeting in December with the whole group, Olwyn argues she would not have pushed herself to find a suitable story to read in class. “So, it does keep me on my toes as well.” Hearing other teachers’ concerns was important to Olwyn as well, as “their concerns are also my concerns.” Evaluating on her enquiry, however, Olwyn said “I don’t see mine being a success story, unfortunately.” This is due to the unexpectedness TY brings along: students are absent a lot, competitions get priority, as well as work placements. Getting into a flow was definitely very hard to achieve for Olwyn. She thinks that she could not have done it any better.

In our last interview, she told me that she could not start a second fairy tale because extracurricular activities took over and students also had Italian after the Easter break. Of the three hours of German with her class, two hours were dedicated to Italian then. Olwyn also wanted to have an end of year questionnaire or some sort of feedback from her cohort to see if they enjoyed their TY German year and if they actually felt motivated. However, she “didn’t because class ended before I knew class was ending.” She started writing a reflective journal that she completely abandoned mid-way because of time restrictions. Also, her initial fear, that her students would forget a lot of their German during TY, and be less prepared for Senior Cycle, became reality in her eyes.

There were successes as well, though. Olwyn said she felt motivated throughout the year to keep her students motivated. Two of her students won a national competition (one the poetry competition, the other the Austrian Embassy’s essay competition). One girl in her class got an A in the 100-word vocabulary test while she got a D in her Junior Certificate. “So I gave her one of the big prizes because she improved dramatically.” Olwyn also enjoyed working with the language assistant and did team-teaching in most of the lessons.

Her overall experience in taking part in the project was positive.

I would say my enquiry was successful because if I wasn't doing this research project I wouldn't have put as much work into it maybe. I was motivated the whole year to keep them motivated. It wasn't a success though, because they didn't learn a lot of German.

To see how other teachers get on in their enquiry and getting advice from them and “to hear what they would do in my situation” was very valuable for Olwyn. Her opinion is that: “I think no matter what career you are in, CPD is so important.” In our third interview, Olwyn told me that she is going on a career break to travel and improve on her languages.

I feel like myself, I really need to go on with my languages. [...] There are lots of language teachers who forgot their languages. They can't actually speak them. [...] I'm worried that will happen to me someday.

Her ideal for CPD is to have face-to-face interaction. She did not use PBworks since she would rather “bring my coffee and my pen and drive my car and go there.” When she had the option to do Chinese online or in an Education Centre, she opted for the Education Centre. At our meeting in December, she liked most that teachers acted out a teaching method and she could experience it first hand instead of reading about it. During her Diploma in Higher Education, she got used to being observed and to observe others. However, in her school, teachers would reply to her question to observe them: “Oh, today I'm not really doing anything, so don't come today.” Olwyn said the reason is

[...] it's not a new thing to me. It was very new to other members of staff and they didn't like it at all. They wake up terrified sometimes about these incidental inspections. Terrified. And I say to them if it happens, like, it happens.

When I asked her if she would do an enquiry like this again, Olwyn answered yes without any hesitation and that she “would probably even try to do it better the next time [...]”

Narration about
Rachel, German teacher

How can I create an active learning environment?

In her reflection, Rachel noted that

things don't get any easier. Teaching is a very demanding job and requires a lot more than standing in front of a class and teaching the set curriculum.

At the time of the study, Rachel wanted to focus on her second year German class since it was a very active class, giddy and hyper in first year, a little better in second year. She wanted to channel their energy towards learning the language. While Rachel thought first of enquiring about reading or listening (as she noticed the receptive skills (listening and reading) are the weakest skills in her cohort), she shifted towards creating an active learning environment to see if students would be more focused and motivated. She often feels drained after classes because she is giving so much. This relates to Rachel's feeling of pressure in class as she tries to change activities often.

[...] that's one of my negative things. I feel like ten minutes of a certain activity is too long. Plus, I think they get bored.

Rachel wanted to step away from solely relying on the book and from "to kind of cover the book" to introducing more pair and group work along with activities she created or found resources for. When she wants her students to work on a text, Rachel would now

not just read [...] a text and answer [...] questions. But we are looking at the text, the questions and seeing what answers could be coming up, brainstorming and then afterwards going back to the text and reinforcing whether it's the past tense, picking out parts of the past tense and then maybe even putting them into the present tense. You know different activities that you are not just seeing it as a listening comprehension or reading.

Rachel was taking part in this project to do exactly that: to improve on her methods in her German class, keep up to date and reflect on her teaching to "find the correct approach to maximise both learning and enjoyment of German". She started to reflect about her classes, especially that second year German class. To start out, she did a quick survey with her class asking them what they like, what they dislike and what they would like to do more often. Besides answers like watching more movies and listening to more songs, students also said to work more often in pairs and groups as they enjoyed doing that. Rachel's first step after that survey was to look at the language levels and the seating plan and match weaker and stronger students with each other so that the stronger student can support the weaker one. Or she separated two very chatty students and asked them to sit next to a more quiet student.

This definitely made a difference. Firstly, they were not so giddy but I also felt the weaker students made more of an effort when they saw the stronger students making an effort.

Rachel would have a seating plan from year one to year six. However, if there is a student approaching her asking to sit next to another student, she would give "them that little bit of control". There was a situation with her fifth years who were very quiet. Rachel told them in one class that she wants them to live and speak the language. She asked them all to stand up, to push in their chairs and take their bags. She then told them to go anywhere in the classroom where they would like to sit.

So they moved. And now they are with friends which can be a negative thing if it's not controlled. But I think it's a positive thing 'cause they are more confident. 'Cause fifth year is a hard year.

As mentioned before, Rachel often felt tired after classes. She feels guilty when she is not constantly walking around. When there is a moment of silence, she jumps to the next task. When her students are doing something quietly, she cannot focus and her mind starts racing about when to finish that task and start the next one. She started reflecting on that issue and found a solution. She not only changed the seating plan but also the class layout. Instead of having them in rows she would put them together to facilitate group work “to give them more authority”.

This immediately made a difference. It opened up the classroom to group work and the students at the back of the room were now fully involved in everything. The students all commented on how they loved the layout and it helped change the atmosphere to make it more conducive to learning.

Rachel would also give them more time to fulfil tasks and become more relaxed herself. She made sure to ask her students along the way how they find certain things. The school also requires her to fill in a self-evaluation for the overall *School Self Evaluation (SSE)*. She is observing that through the different activities that she offers, especially the weaker students have a better chance to understand a certain aspect of the German language instead of being rushed through towards the next topic.

[...] you can see that some of them comprehend more. Especially the weak ones when they write it and match it. They find it better than some of the quicker ones [...]. So, I think the reinforcement like today, the matching activity and then the fill in the blanks, it kind of reinforced the verbs into their head.

Her biggest challenge was to find time. Rachel mentioned in an interview that so far she can spend her evenings and weekends on working for school but that as soon as she has a family, she cannot see this carrying on in the same way. Teaching a language involves constantly correcting and taking work home because “the only way to correct [grammar mistakes] is to take it home.” With a big fifth and sixth year class, it would take her all evening to correct. Hence, writing down her reflections is nearly impossible. She writes up her plans, but a deeper reflection is something she can only do mentally.

But to say I'm keeping a diary, would be a lie. Because I'm trying you know, but it's just impossible.

Rachel is also very active outside the classroom. She is involved in facilitating CPD for German teachers, she became Head of German in her school, she started an online ICT and Chinese course - all in the same year. Next to that there are extracurricular activities, parent-teacher meetings, she had an inspection from the Department of Education and each year the school carries out a *SSE*. Taking part in this project is an avenue for Kim to meet like-minded people, to share ideas, resources and thoughts and to see

we all have the same struggle with time and everything else but we all want the same kind of thing.

When I asked her what she would like to do at our teacher meeting, she said she would like to see how other teachers plan their lessons as she finds that being very time-consuming on top of keeping student files, noting down behaviour and correcting tests.

I find this is one of my biggest problems in teaching. I love being in the classroom and I absolutely light up in the classroom and it's all I ever wanted to do. Outside the classroom I find hard.

Rachel would like to see how teachers plan and organize their lessons. She wants a simpler way of approaching her work, as it is not sustainable at the moment. Something that annoys her is that outsiders do not understand how busy the life of the teacher is. To Rachel, it is being 100% available all the time, teaching, talking to other teachers during breaks about administrative issues, using breaks also to talk to students, at the end of the day preparing for the next day, correcting etc. It is an endless loop. She said something very interesting about teachers not going to CPD events because they should not be bored with something irrelevant to their professional lives. If they come, they should be walking out with a goodie bag that day, pumped with new ideas and resources to implement in their next classes. If they go through the trouble to drive a long way to the conference, maybe finding a babysitter, this is the least that should be offered to them. She related this to feedback she received from teachers attending the German teacher conferences that take place every year in November. Teachers were not interested most of the time in the keynote speaker, usually brought in from Germany, Austria or Switzerland. They wanted something that is relevant to their daily work.

Sharing resources and seeing how other teachers in her school are designing the layout for their classes is unfortunately not an option yet in her school but after an inspection, the inspector suggested that teachers should observe each other. Without being subject-specific, a German teacher could observe a Wood-works or Home Economics teacher - anything is possible to spark an exchange. When Rachel mentioned to her colleagues that I am coming in observing her, they said

[...] fair play to you because I wouldn't have the time for that. And it is...it's true. I'm sure you find it hard to get participants, do you?

Rachel does like her current employment very much, despite the more closed door policy. She said the school's ethos is very agreeable with her. She would like to start a school exchange with a German school but got as a reply from one teacher from Germany that they would not put in all the effort to set up an exchange with a non-permanent teacher. She would prefer staying in this school but job security is one aspect most young teachers have to struggle with.

I asked Rachel why she is doing all these things on top of her already very full and demanding time-table. Her reply was: satisfaction.

I know from my own personal experience, the teachers that cared and were enthusiastic and wanted the students to learn were the ones that I learned from. Whereas the teachers that came in and were unorganised, and book, talk and nothing planned - I hated going to class. [...] but I do think I care too much.

As a result for her care, students do like her a lot. One student that is no longer her own student, said to her in the corridor "Miss, can I have you next year please?" and Rachel found this rewarding because "you don't often hear them say thank you". What Rachel wants for her students is to get away from the learning-off-by-heart spirit. She would like them to have the confidence to actually speak to someone like me when I visited the classroom and not be shy. When the inspector was in her class, she spoke the whole way through in German to the students.

I was very confident and students even tried to speak in German. And it was amazing. And then the next day, I was in trying to speak in German and they started speaking English. But I have to say now [...] I try and speak most of the time in

German. And even [...] from the time you were in the classroom, I kind of tried to speak more.

By speaking German herself in the classroom, Rachel tries to give students the needed confidence to do the same. She would still go back into English when she teaches grammar, “otherwise they get lost.”

But I think there needs to be more of an authentic feel that they need to use the language in order to gain something.

Rachel loves grammar herself. She feels however, that her vocabulary is suffering just because she does not need the broad range she acquired when teaching German in school. She loves German and she would like to instil that feeling of finding it advantageous to be able to speak another modern language in her students. Comparing Irish to German students, she can see, though, why it is not working out as well in Ireland as it does in Germany for students learning English for example. In her opinion, Irish students learn a language to get a good grade and get into their favoured course at university. German students need English because it is a widely spoken language they are confronted with in media, when travelling, working etc.

That's the problem with language learning in Ireland. You learn it in the classroom. You are afraid to make a mistake. And mistakes are the transit part of learning. You know, from making mistakes you go: Oh, I won't say that again. Whereas some of them are afraid to speak because they are making mistakes. That would be my goal for myself and my students. To forget about making mistakes.

I like that Rachel includes herself into that wish as she would like to be more confident as well. She also pointed out that in general, Irish teachers of German should be more confident. They are confident teaching the language in their classrooms. However - and this reflects my experience as well - talking to a German native speaker or colleagues is often done through English.

Well it shouldn't be. It should be the opposite. That's why I love speaking German with you. Because you have the opportunity to kind of speak it.

Rachel has very much a can-do-attitude which is very refreshing. Whenever we met, I got an honest picture about her job situation and her thoughts regarding certain questions I posed, but I also got ideas and ways to handle challenges and setbacks. The can-do-attitude is mirrored in all the changes Rachel brought into her classroom. To see if they have a positive or negative impact, she not only carried out a quick survey at the beginning, but also in the middle and at the end. In the middle of the year, she did a brainstorm with students writing down what they would like to do in class. Students came up with many answers, and Rachel would make sure to “try and sway them towards something that is manageable.” Before the school year ended, she asked her students to write down how they feel about learning German.

I was truly blown away by their responses. They were so positive and encouraging and that makes it all worthwhile.

Besides changing the layout of the classroom and bringing in more activities, like fill in the gap or matching exercises, Rachel created mini tests that students completed first on their own and then together at the board. She also split the class into two groups to bring in some competition and fun. Students also assessed each other's work in pencil before handing it up and Rachel found this very beneficial. In her reflective writing, Rachel concludes that

[a]lthough the year has been mainly a positive one, I do feel the workload is still quite heavy. From reflecting on my teaching, I definitely have made some changes and they have helped but what I have noticed, is that there is not enough time allocated for teachers to truly reflect on their teaching nor to create materials nor to meet with colleagues to discuss their subject needs.

Research is a field she feels belongs to third level rather than second level. Rachel would say that research from third level is a bit “airy-fairy”. Her mother is doing a B.A. at the moment and Rachel told me that she finds it ridiculous that authors quote an author who is quoted yet be another author. She thinks they should just clearly state what they think. Hence, her opinion on continuous professional development is that it

[...] is vital but I believe we can learn more from one another than any research paper. If only we had the time and resources to regularly meet, we could work together to help one another and in turn make learning and teaching more worthwhile.

If CPD was being made mandatory, she would prefer if teachers had to write reflections after each mini-term, of which there are five in her school, but that they would have an allocated time to do that. There should be face-to-face meetings and possibilities made available online to share ideas and resources. Her definition of practitioner enquiry, my last question in the last interview, was that

[i]t's evaluating yourself in your own profession and reflecting on what you do, how you do it and how you can improve it.

What a wonderful, short and precise definition and end for this narration.