



PHD

Teaching together: A study of Irish Special Education Teachers' views and experiences of collaboration and its potential for professional development.

Higgins, Andrea

Award date:
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**Teaching together: A study of Irish Special Education
Teachers' views and experiences of collaboration and its
potential for professional development.**

Andrea Higgins

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath

Department of Education

July 2020

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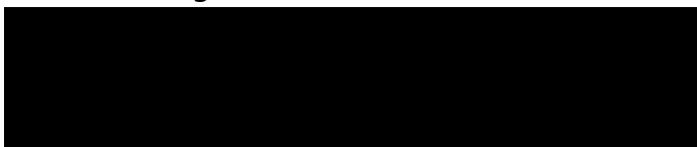


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Abstract

The new policy guiding the allocation of special educational needs teaching resources to Irish primary schools (DES, 2017; DES, 2017b) advocates a more collaborative approach to SEN teaching in the hope of developing more inclusive schools. A whole school focus on meeting the needs of students with SEN is recommended. Discussion amongst colleagues on students' needs, joint decision-making on levels and forms of support and the sharing of knowledge, skills and information are required. However, the greatest change is evident in the shift from the traditional reliance on the withdrawal of students with SEN from their classrooms to receive extra support. Instead the expectation is now that classroom-based interventions will be provided where appropriate, with withdrawal playing a more supplementary role. Team-teaching with its significant potential for the development of teachers' professional knowledge has become the vehicle of choice for the provision of in-class support. Consequently, SETs are now tasked with working in classrooms with their mainstream colleagues and thereby relinquishing the privacy of teaching in the SEN room. Further, due to their knowledge and experience of SEN teaching, special education teachers have been placed in the default role of change agents within their schools without sufficient attention to the supports available to them.

Despite the sophisticated levels of teacher collaboration that the new policy requires, particularly in relation to team-teaching, and the potential for the development of teachers' professional knowledge that it offers, no empirical work on collaboration between SETs and their teaching colleagues was conducted in advance. This study involving individual, in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus groups with special education teachers sought to fill that gap. Specifically, the research employed Little's (1990) model of teacher collaboration to investigate the forms of collaboration that Irish primary school SETs and their teaching colleagues were involved in and their effect on the way the SETs professional knowledge was built and sustained. The contextual factors that affected collaboration between the SETs and their teaching colleagues were examined. The interaction between the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and teachers' professional working relationships and how it affected collaboration between SETs and their teaching colleagues was also explored. The support needed by the special education teachers in order to build their professional knowledge through collaboration and thereby advance SEN practice in their schools was investigated.

The study found that the collaboration that the SETs were involved in aligned with Little's (1990) four forms of collaboration namely storytelling and scanning for ideas, aid and assistance, sharing and joint work. The SETs collaboration with their colleagues tended to be informal in nature and was highly dependent on personality issues and the quality of professional

working relationships. In the main professional learning tended to be at the discretion of the individual teacher and lacked peer critique. The Irish primary school proved a challenging environment for the development of collaborative SEN practice that builds professional learning. Factors such as the lack of a shared knowledge base and implementation plan for the development of a collaborative approach to SEN teaching and leadership that failed to support teacher collaboration made the SETs role as change agent very difficult. The interaction between the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and teachers' working relationships added further complexity. Issues of professional confidence, respect, trust and betrayal came to the fore and the fear of conflict proved a strong disincentive to the joint evaluation of team-taught lessons.

Despite the courageous agency of the SETs their efforts to implement a more collaborative approach to SEN practice in their schools, resulted in superficial forms of collaboration with variable impact on professional learning due mainly to the lack of capacity within the schools to support them in their endeavour. Professional development at school level is urgently required to provide teachers with the necessary knowledge and interpersonal skills to engage in critical evaluation of and reflection on SEN practice with colleagues. A distributed approach to leadership capable of bringing teachers together, supporting initiative and enabling effective staff discussion that delivers an agreed approach to the development of a collaborative approach to SEN practice is vital to the success of the current SEN policy.

List of Abbreviations

CPD:	Continuous Professional Development
DES:	Department of Education and Skills
EPSEN:	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs
GAM:	General Allocation Model
NCCA:	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE:	National Council for Special Education
NEPS:	National Educational Psychological Service
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PDST:	Professional Development Service for Teachers
SEN:	Special Educational Needs
SET:	Special Education Teacher
SERC:	Special Education Review Committee
SNA:	Special Needs Assistant
SSE:	School Self-Evaluation
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Overview

The new policy guiding the allocation of special educational needs (SEN) teaching resources to Irish primary schools (Department of Education and Skills (DES), 2017) aims to develop “*truly inclusive schools*” (p.5). To this end, a more collaborative approach to SEN teaching and a whole school focus on meeting the needs of students with SEN is recommended. Discussion amongst colleagues on students’ needs, joint decision-making on levels and forms of support, the sharing of knowledge, skills and information in relation to the development of student support plans and the maintenance of support files evidence the emphasis on collaboration. Crucially, there is a significant shift from the traditional reliance on the withdrawal of students with SEN from their classrooms to receive extra support. Instead, where appropriate, the focus is on classroom-based interventions delivered through team-teaching, with withdrawal playing a more supplementary role.

Effective collaboration, as envisaged in the new policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b), requires special education teachers (SETs) to discuss aspects of professional practice and share their knowledge of SEN provision with colleagues. Special education teachers also have the opportunity to increase their awareness of the difficulties of providing inclusive education for students with SEN at classroom level, through collaboration and discussion with mainstream teachers around issues relating to SEN practice. During team-teaching, when the special education and mainstream teachers work together in the classroom, the observation of colleagues’ teaching provides fertile ground for professional learning in relation to SEN practice. Special education teachers, in particular, have the opportunity to model inclusive teaching approaches and interventions that mainstream teachers may not be aware of. However effective team-teaching that builds teachers’ professional knowledge, in this case of SEN practice, requires teachers to engage in what Little (1990) describes as joint work. Teaching is seen as a collective task and teachers work interdependently. Crucially teachers engage in joint evaluation of and reflection on the lesson to determine what worked and the aspects that require improvement in subsequent lessons. Without such collaborative inquiry and reflection, the potential for teacher learning and the associated transformation of SEN practice is greatly diluted and the hope of the current SEN policy to deliver truly inclusive education in Irish primary schools is dimmed.

However, the transition from policy to practice is rarely seamless. The successful implementation of the SEN policy at school level lies in the ability of the special education teachers to collaborate effectively with their colleagues, both SETs and mainstream teachers, in a way that builds professional knowledge of SEN practice. While potentially a very successful vehicle for change, collaboration is both cognitively and emotionally

demanding and requires careful consideration and support. Working collaboratively with colleagues involves professional exposure that the privacy of individual practice protects teachers from (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Teachers are required to offer opinions, question aspects of practice and teach in front of colleagues. The emotional and relational dimension of collaboration comes to the fore when teachers work together particularly at the level of team-teaching. Issues of professional confidence, respect and trust raise their heads and fear of conflict becomes more acute (Hargreaves, 2001; Achinstein, 2002).

Developing a collaborative approach to SEN teaching requires teachers to take shared responsibility and is dependent on supportive school organization and leadership that understands and facilitates teacher collaboration (Little, 1990). The need for appropriate organisational support is particularly important given that responsibility for the implementation of the new policy leans heavily on the shoulders of the special education teachers by virtue of their knowledge and experience of working with students with SEN and due to the traditional confinement of expertise in relation to special educational needs teaching to them (Rose et al., 2015; Kinsella and Senior, 2008). However, while the new policy positions the SETs as change agents, the capacity of the system to support them in this role is questionable. Indeed, despite the sophisticated levels of teacher collaboration that the new policy requires and the potential for the development of teachers' professional knowledge that it offers, detailed advance preparation for its implementation was sparse.

Effectively guided and supported, the shift to a more collaborative approach to SEN provision in Irish primary schools has the potential to develop the special education teachers' professional knowledge. Further, it can empower them as agents of change and enable them to share their professional knowledge and skills with their colleagues and develop more effective and inclusive SEN practice throughout the school. The success of the current policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) in developing inclusive education for students with SEN through more collaborative practice merits closer attention at this time if its full potential is to be realised.

In the sections that follow the rationale and research questions are presented. The core ideas, concepts and issues that are central to this study are then outlined. The use of Little's (1990) seminal work on the continuum of teacher workplace collaboration as a focal frame to explore and understand the different forms of teacher collaboration and their impact on building teachers' professional knowledge, is explained. A brief discussion on the significant contextual factors, both policy and school based, that impact on the special education teachers' attempts to implement collaborative SEN practice follows. The pivotal interaction between the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and teachers' professional working relationships is outlined. The methodology for the study is then set out and the chapter concludes with an overview of the structure of the thesis.

1.2. Rationale for the study and research questions

1.2.1. Rationale

Providing inclusive education for students with SEN via effective teacher collaboration as required by the recently introduced policy for SEN provision in Irish primary schools (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) is challenging. How prepared special education teachers are for the demands of implementing a more collaborative approach to SEN practice and crucially the capacity of the Irish primary school workplace to support and facilitate them in this endeavour merits significant consideration. However, to date, no study detailing the nature of the collaboration taking place between special education teachers and their teaching colleagues and its ability to develop professional knowledge around inclusive SEN practice has been undertaken in Ireland. This research intends to fill that gap and provide original insights from the special education teachers' perspectives, on the forms of collaboration they are involved in and what collaboration requires and delivers in terms of developing their professional knowledge. The contextual factors influencing the special education teachers' collaboration with their teaching colleagues and the interaction between the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and teachers' professional working relationships is examined. Most importantly, the special education teachers' views on how developing collaborative SEN practice with their teaching colleagues can be better supported is investigated.

1.2.2. Research Questions

The aim of this research is to analyse the way in which collaboration between special education teachers and their teaching colleagues in Irish primary schools operates and its ability to build and sustain the special education teachers' professional knowledge of practice?

Specifically, the research seeks to answer the following questions:

- What forms of collaboration are the special education teachers and their teaching colleagues (both special education and mainstream teachers) engaged in and what is their effect on the way the special education teachers' professional knowledge is built and sustained?
- How do contextual factors affect collaboration between special education teachers and their teaching colleagues?
- How does the interaction between the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and teachers' professional working relationships affect collaboration between special education teachers and their teaching colleagues?
- What support do special education teachers need in order to build their professional knowledge through collaboration and thereby advance SEN practice in their schools?

1.3. The nature of teacher collaboration and its potential impact on professional knowledge

Little's (1990) seminal study of the continuum of teacher collegiality is used in this dissertation as a lens to describe the different collaborative activities that the special education teachers engage in and crucially their impact on building and sustaining professional knowledge. Four forms of collaboration are identified by Little each offering potential opportunities for teachers' professional learning. However, a distinction is drawn between those forms of collaboration that are predominantly informal in nature (storytelling and scanning for ideas, aid and assistance and sharing) and the more structured form described by Little as joint work. While valuable in their own right, informal forms of collaboration can indirectly support the privacy of individual teachers' professional practice and maintain norms of non-interference. In contrast, the more demanding and revealing form of collaboration (joint work) involves peer observation and scrutiny of teaching and requires and promotes teacher interdependence and collective responsibility (Little, 1990).

However, collaboration does not take place in a vacuum. The contextual and organisational factors that surround its operation and the interaction between the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and teachers' professional working relationships exert a very strong influence on the forms of collaboration that teachers engage in and on their ability to build professional knowledge (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Little 1990).

1.4. The contextual factors that influence teacher collaboration

Analysis of the contextual factors that influence teacher collaboration show a policy environment that has been consistently collaboration friendly over a number of years. However, the practice environment of the Irish primary school, though informed and directed by policy, has very significant defining features that are not immediately conducive to delivering the high levels of collaboration envisioned in the current SEN policy and signalled in preceding policy, as discussed below.

1.4.1. The policy environment

The shift towards greater teacher collaboration in Irish primary schools is very evident and most tested in the area of special educational needs, occasioned largely by the requirement in the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, that education for people with SEN "*shall, wherever possible, take place in an inclusive environment with those who do not have such needs...*" (Government of Ireland, 2004, p. 1). The

subsequent introduction of the individual education plan (IEP) as a best practice requirement for students with SEN gave structure to a more collaborative relationship between special education teachers and their mainstream colleagues (NCSE, 2006). The recent introduction of the student support plan and student support file (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) further affirms a collaborative approach to joint planning by teachers in relation to meeting the needs of students with special educational needs. However, it is in the current SEN policy's (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) emphasis on the provision of in-class support via team-teaching, that the strongest shift to formal collaboration between SETs and their mainstream colleagues is evident. Such collaboration, reflective of Little's (1990) joint work has particularly strong potential for developing professional knowledge of SEN practice as two or more teachers bring together different areas of expertise to jointly plan, teach, evaluate and reflect on the team-taught lessons (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Little, 1990).

A wider collaboration-friendly policy framework also supports the move to more collaborative SEN practice that builds teachers' professional knowledge. In keeping with a knowledge-in-practice conception of teacher learning (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999) Cosán, the national framework for teachers' learning (Teaching Council, 2016), acknowledges school-based teacher learning that is embedded in professional practice. Importantly, in so doing, Cosán identifies the school workplace as a site for collaborative teacher learning that builds professional knowledge (Teaching Council, 2016) and resonates with the view of the contemporary teacher as a collaborative professional (Conway et al., 2009). The current SEN policy (DES, 2017) that requires a collaborative approach to special education teaching with a strong emphasis on team-teaching in particular provides fertile ground for such school-based teacher learning to be realised.

Further policy support for teacher engagement in collaboration that builds professional knowledge of SEN practice is evident in the introduction of School Self Evaluation (SSE) described as "a collaborative, inclusive, reflective process of school review" (DES, 2012, p.12) that tasks principals and teachers with continuously evaluating and improving selected aspects of their schools' professional practice. Crucially, in relation to current SEN policy (DES, 2017a), SSE provides a means of developing a strong shared professional knowledge base in relation to SEN practice, akin to Lortie's (1975) technical culture. A valuable adjunct to the school self-evaluation process lies in the availability of non-teaching hours, via the Croke Park Agreement (DES, 2011) during which teachers have the opportunity to come together and work on professional issues in order to meet the identified system needs of the school. Crucially the combined potential of the school self-evaluation process and the Croke Park hours offer a rich opportunity for schools to enable special education teachers in their role as change agents to work collaboratively with colleagues towards the development of an agreed implementation plan for the development of more collaborative SEN teaching.

However, while there is evidence of significant policy support in relation to a move to collaborative SEN practice, effective collaboration that builds professional knowledge does not automatically develop in response to policy directives. A greater understanding of what collaborative SEN practice entails and of the schools' capacity to meet its requirements is merited.

1.4.2. Significant school-based factors that influence the development of collaborative SEN practice

Despite a growing collaboration friendly policy environment Ireland's legendary teacher autonomy (OECD, 1991) and long tradition of individual, private and often isolated practice has been the mainstay of primary school teaching heretofore. Indeed, previous models of SEN provision indirectly reinforced the individual culture of teaching. A history of neglect followed by a system of separate education for students with complex needs (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011) did little to promote collaboration. The subsequent policy of integration influenced by a psycho-medical model of SEN provision and its misinterpretation at school level (DES, 1999, 2003a), resulted in fragmented and potentially divisive SEN provision in primary schools. Students were categorized as having either high incidence or low incidence needs and were taught by learning support and resource teachers respectively. The traditional withdrawal model of providing support teaching for students with special educational needs maintained the privacy of teachers' practice and guarded their autonomy.

Unfortunately, as Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) explain, individual, autonomous practice is a poor foundation for developing a collaborative approach to SEN practice as envisioned in the current policy (DES, 2017; NCSE, 2014,). In stark contrast to collaborative cultures, individual professional cultures are defined by teacher autonomy, where though geographically close to colleagues, teachers teach alone and at times in relative isolation. Consequently, professional interaction between teachers can be limited and superficial. While the private nature of practice may appear to offer teachers protection from the ongoing scrutiny of colleagues, long-term isolation can instead result in a lack of professional confidence. The corresponding fear of sharing their thoughts, questions and problems in relation to aspects of professional practice with colleagues obstructs collaboration and necessary change (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Antithetically, successful implementation of the current SEN policy (DES, 2017a) requires secure staff relationships that facilitate constructive professional debate and disagreement that enables the development of a shared professional knowledge base (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012), to guide a collaborative approach to SEN practice. Indeed, the level of collaboration envisaged in the current SEN policy ultimately requires the replacement of individualism with collective teacher autonomy (Little, 1990).

Bridging the chasm between individual and collaborative SEN practice is reliant on supportive leadership that understands the complexity of collaboration, sees its potential for the development of teachers' professional

knowledge and for the improvement of SEN practice throughout the school and, vitally, is willing and able to support the SETs in their default position as agents of change.

1.4.3. Leadership and collaboration

While leadership related policy focused on supporting teacher collaboration and the development of professional knowledge is in keeping with and indeed highly supportive of the current SEN policy (DES, 2017a), the practice of leadership in schools is more complex. From a policy perspective the Quality Framework for Primary Schools (DES, 2016a) identifies the role of the school principal in developing and sustaining a collaborative team approach amongst staff members. Aspects of the Quality Framework relating to the work of the principal resonate with a distributed view of leadership practice in which the principal engages in quality interaction with staff members and supports informal leadership roles (Spillane, 2005; Harris, 2008). Principals are tasked with building collaborative cultures that support teachers in working together. Further, schools are viewed as dynamic learning organisations in which teachers are enabled to build their professional knowledge and in which change is managed collaboratively, sensitively and with appropriate flexibility (DES 2016). In similar vein, the Chief Inspector (Republic of Ireland), Dr. Harold Hislop, identified the need for principals to develop climates of trust and professional respect in schools that support the sharing of expertise and, akin to Little's (1990) joint work, peer observation of practice with constructively critical feedback (Hislop, 2015).

However, the demands on school leaders to facilitate sophisticated levels of collaborative SEN practice in school is daunting especially given that, heretofore, there has been little investment in the professional development of principals (Hislop, 2015). Indeed, questions have been raised as to the importance of leadership qualities in the criteria for appointment and the possible lack of leadership and people management skills as a reason for the difficulties experienced by principals in carrying out the role (Drea and O'Brian, 2002).

The recently established Centre for School Leadership (2015) and the launch of a Postgraduate Diploma in Leadership (2017) show a commitment to change past deficits and reflect the importance currently being awarded to leadership in the Irish education system. However, old customs die hard and a legacy of traditional hierarchical models of leadership may not easily transition towards more distributed leadership practice that facilitates teacher collaboration and nurtures the necessary attendant workplace relationships (Spillane, 2005).

Leaders who, consonant with the Quality Framework's objectives (DES, 2016a), can nurture a collaborative team approach amongst staff members in their schools are pivotal to achieving a collaborative approach to SEN practice. However, leadership is not the sole determiner of success therein.

An understanding of the interaction between the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and teachers' professional working relationships is crucial to the development of collaborative SEN practice and essential for leaders and staff members alike.

1.5. The interaction between the emotional and relational dimensions of collaboration and teachers' professional working relationships

Collaboration places demands on teachers' professional working relationships that individual practice does not (Achinstein, 2002). Effective collaboration requires interdependence between teachers that nurtures the sharing of ideas, opinions, knowledge and skills and allows for observation of practice and constructively critical feedback and reflection (Little 1990; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

Teachers' engagement with these activities is necessary for the effective implementation of the current SEN policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b). However, professional interaction of this nature requires a challenging transition from the safety of individual practice to the greater professional exposure inherent in collaborative SEN practice and crucially a different skillset. Communication and interpersonal skills, professional respect and trust play a central role in developing collaboration that builds professional knowledge. However, a history of individual professional practice can significantly limit teachers' opportunity to develop these skills and understanding. Effective communication skills, a fundamental building block of collaborative interaction among teachers, develop through awareness, knowledge and practice (Friend and Cook, 2013). Similarly, professional respect evidenced by a sensitivity to the strengths and needs of colleagues that enables each teacher to play their part in a shared task, (Sennett, 2003) can be deprived of sufficient opportunity to develop in an environment where independent individual professional practice dominates. More complex still is the development of trust that allows teachers to accept the necessary vulnerability occasioned by the change to collaborative SEN practice in the expectation of good will and with confidence that no harm will be caused to them in the process (Tschannen and Hoy, 2000). The instances of betrayal among teachers, revealed in Hargreaves' (2002) research, suggest that such enabling levels of trust in the school workplace cannot be taken for granted.

However, amid the many potential barriers to developing strong collaborative SEN practice in Irish primary schools, it is the issue of conflict and the nature of teachers' working relationships that raises most concern. Given that teachers' workplace relations tend to be defined more by careful friendliness than sturdy friendship and the high value teachers place on being socially accepted by colleagues (Hargreaves, 2001), it is not surprising that conflict is negatively viewed by teachers and tends to be avoided (Achinstein, 2002). The unsuitability of teachers' professional working relationships to the effective management of conflict is a sensitive issue that

requires significant consideration (Achinstein, 2002). Without the capacity to manage conflict constructively, collaboration can reinforce similar views and positions instead of developing appropriately “robust professional dialogue” (Hargreaves, 2001, p. 519) that is vital for the development of effective collaboration that develops teachers’ professional knowledge of SEN practice.

Reflecting back on the core issues of relevance to developing collaborative SEN practice in Irish primary schools, it is particularly noteworthy that teacher collaboration can take many forms with varying impact on the development of teachers’ professional knowledge (Little, 1990). A number of significant factors influence the forms of collaboration that teachers engage in and the nature and depth of the professional learning that results. Collaborative professional cultures where teachers contribute to and are guided by a shared knowledge base and leadership capable of facilitating and supporting teacher collaboration are enabling and helpful. However, it is in the interaction between the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and teachers’ professional working relationships, specifically issues of communication, trust and conflict that the greatest challenges to the development of collaborative SEN practice reside.

Currently in the Irish primary school context the move to more collaborative SEN practice nestles within a collaboration friendly policy environment. However, information on how exactly Irish primary school special education teachers collaborate with their teaching colleagues, the significant issues they encounter and the impact of their collaboration on building teacher professional knowledge remains significantly under researched. This thesis, through the methodology employed, gives voice to the experiences of special education teachers in relation to the development of policy compliant collaborative SEN practice in their schools.

1.6. Methodology

In order to answer the research questions data was collected from 13 primary school special education teachers using individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, each lasting between 1.5 to 2.0 hours. Interviews were conducted in the period from April to June 2017. Two focus group interviews containing 10 and 11 special education teachers respectively were carried out in March 2018. The first focus group interview was of two hours duration and the second ran for one hour and forty minutes.

The participants in this study were all primary school special education teachers and graduates of the Postgraduate Diploma in SEN from the School of Education, National University of Ireland, Galway. Fifteen primary school special education teachers, selected from past cohorts, were invited to participate in the individual face to face interviews and thirteen accepted. Twenty-one special education teachers from the 2017-18 cohort were invited to participate in focus group interviews and all agreed to participate.

In keeping with the qualitative nature of the study a purposive sampling approach was used (Miles and Huberman, 1994) whereby teachers were selected because of their perceived ability “to purposely inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2007, p.125). As “good” informants (Morse, 1994, p.228) the teachers had knowledge and experience of collaboration gained from their professional development on the Postgraduate Diploma in SEN and from professional practice in their schools.

1.7. Structure of the Thesis

Following this introductory Chapter, which has provided an overview of the study, there are seven further chapters.

In an effort to better understand the challenge of enacting the current SEN policy (DES, 2017a) that aims to provide inclusive schools through a more collaborative approach to SEN practice, Chapter two provides an analysis of the policy’s historical context. Ireland’s journey from State neglect of students with SEN through policies of segregation and integration towards inclusion and importantly the implications of this legacy for current SEN policy and practice (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) are discussed.

Chapter three sets out the literature that provides the conceptual underpinnings of the study. Different forms of teacher collaboration and their varying impacts on the development of teachers’ professional knowledge are described with reference to Little’s (1990) continuum of teacher collegiality. The school-based contextual factors that impact teacher collaboration in particular the opportunities and challenges for school-based teacher learning through collaboration, cultures of individualism, collaborative cultures and leadership are examined. The chapter concludes with a section on the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration with a focus on teachers’ professional working relationships, communication skills and issues around professional respect, trust and conflict.

The methodology for the study is outlined in Chapter four. The context for the study is explained. The methodological approach and the particular methods used are detailed.

The findings of the study are contained in the next three chapters. At this time of significant policy change to more collaborative SEN practice Chapter 5 details the forms of collaboration that Irish SETs are engaging in and their impact on developing the special education teachers’ professional knowledge of SEN practice. Little’s (1990) four types of collaboration namely storytelling and scanning for ideas, aid and assistance, sharing and joint work have been employed as an organising framework.

Chapter six examines the organisational environment of the primary schools in which the SETs are tasked with working collaboratively with colleagues to best meet the needs of students with SEN. The challenges and opportunities that the organisational environment of the school poses for the special education teachers as they endeavor to develop collaborative SEN practice are discussed. The pivotal role played by the school leader in relation to teacher collaboration around SEN is detailed. The aspects of leadership practice that enable and constrain teacher collaboration are explored.

Data on the impact that the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration had on the special education teachers' professional relationships and on their ability to collaborate with colleagues is presented in Chapter seven. The influence of issues such as teacher confidence, competence, trust and betrayal on the special education teachers' working relationships and consequently on their ability to collaborate is examined. The role that conflict plays in defining how collaborative SEN practice operates is discussed. In section two of the chapter the SEN teachers' views on how best they can be supported in collaborating with colleagues is explored.

Chapter eight concludes the study. The significant themes in the research are discussed and the study's original contribution to knowledge is detailed. Finally, suggestions for the future development of collaborative SEN practice in Irish primary schools, informed by the findings and supported by the relevant literature, is presented.

Chapter Two: The History and Policy Context of Special Needs Education in Primary Schools in Ireland: From neglect through integration towards inclusion via teacher collaboration

2.1. Introduction

The new SEN policy that aims to provide inclusive schools through a more collaborative approach to SEN practice (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) poses many challenges and opportunities for Irish primary school special education teachers. Realising the potential that collaborative SEN practice has for the development of special education teachers' professional knowledge and that of their colleagues is key to the successful implementation of the new SEN policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b). However, the history of special educational needs education in Ireland and the previous SEN policies have not provided a fertile foundation conducive to the development of such collaborative SEN practice that builds teachers' professional knowledge and guides and informs inclusive SEN practice in schools. Indeed, it can be argued that past policy (DES, 1999) created practices and procedures that supported an individual and fragmented approach to SEN teaching. Crucially, the legacy of history and past policy has the potential to pose significant barriers to the optimal implementation of the current policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) that relies on effective collaborative SEN practice amongst teachers.

This study investigates the nature of the collaboration that primary school special education teachers are involved in. The impact of school-based organisational factors on collaboration and the interaction between the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and teachers' professional working relationships are examined. Central to such an investigation is an understanding of the context within which the current SEN policy that requires effective teacher collaboration sits. Accordingly, this chapter provides a look back at where we have come from in order to better understand the enormity of the change to more collaborative professional SEN practice that the current policy occasions. To this end, relevant aspects of the history of SEN provision in Ireland are outlined. A journey from State neglect and reliance on voluntary, charitable provision in the 1800s to the slow emergence of State recognition for special services in the 1900s leading to a policy of segregation in the 1960s and 1970s as the main form of SEN provision, is presented. The move from segregated provision to integrated provision that was strongly influenced and guided by the very influential report of the Special Education Review Committee (SERC Report, 1993) is then discussed. The ongoing move towards inclusive education through legislation and significant policy change is documented. The current SEN policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b), a significant milestone on the road towards inclusion and the context for this study, is explained with particular attention given to the shift to highly collaborative SEN practice and the casting of SETs in the role of change agents.

2.2. State neglect and segregated provision

The beginning of special education provision in Ireland can be traced back to the establishment of a national system of education under British rule in 1831. As in many countries, services for the deaf and blind were first set up followed by services for children with physical and mental disabilities. These services were provided by religious orders or by charitable individuals or organisations and were separate from the mainstream school system (SERC, 1993).

By the late nineteenth century mainstream schooling had become compulsory in Ireland. Following the foundation of the Irish state in 1922 the focus of the government in relation to schooling was to provide basic instruction and implement the 'Gaelicisation' programme that made Irish language the sole medium of instruction in schools. Meeting the needs of students with learning disability was not a priority and reliance on charitable provision remained. From the 1940s the Primary Certificate (then a formal State examination) was compulsory for all children aged 12 years attending mainstream primary school. In the absence of a remedial service, the examination caused distress to pupils with learning difficulties in literacy and numeracy (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011).

The mid 1900s saw many of the existing voluntary services for children with special educational needs/disabilities get State recognition. The Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Mental Handicap (1965) was a very influential document that guided State policy on special education for the following thirty years. It recommended a segregated and medical model of service provision despite a questioning of this approach in the United States and Scandinavia at the time. A significant increase in places in residential special schools and the creation of 3,000 places for children in day special schools and in special classes attached to mainstream schools was proposed as was the classification of children according to levels of disability. The mid 1970's saw a network of over 100 special schools and an increasing number of special classes in mainstream schools mainly for children with mild general learning disabilities in operation. Children with severe and profound learning disability were considered incapable of benefitting from education and as a result only received care (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011). A segregated model of education provision was now firmly established in Ireland.

In the mainstream school setting, awareness of a broader range of learning difficulties than those catered for in special schools and special classes was emerging. Remedial teachers were appointed at primary and second level schools to provide individual and small group instruction for students experiencing difficulty with literacy and numeracy in mainstream classrooms (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011). While remedial teachers were few in number and not available to all schools their appointment recognised that learning difficulties existed in mainstream schools and had to be catered for therein.

The New Curriculum for Primary Schools was introduced in 1971. It was innovative, child-centred, and acknowledged individual differences. It focused on active learning, learning through play, collaborative learning and a wide range of teaching methodologies. However, despite a growing awareness of the need for teacher professional development, a lack of adequate in-service education for teachers limited its full implementation (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011).

In summary, during the period from 1831 to the 1970s, a psycho-medical model of special educational needs that focused on the deficits within the child dominated. Segregated provision in special schools and classes for children with significant needs and complex disabilities was provided. The focus on deficit and difference sent a strong message that children with complex special needs required special teaching that was not available in the mainstream school.

The recognition of literacy and numeracy difficulties within the primary school was a welcome development. However, the appointment of remedial teachers, as the name suggested, maintained the notion of difference due to deficit. The withdrawal of students from their mainstream classrooms to receive support in the remedial teacher's room reinforced the view that students with SEN required a form of teaching that was different to the teaching that occurred in the mainstream classroom. The emphasis on difference meant that the teaching provided in mainstream classrooms for students with SEN was not sufficiently interrogated. The parallel remedial service protected the mainstream education system from the rigor of reflection and change.

The overall lack of focus on how the teaching and learning opportunities provided in mainstream schools could expand and change to cater for the learning of students with special educational needs in this early stage of Ireland's SEN journey was antithetical to the current SEN policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b). While subsequent changes to Ireland's political landscape, notably a strong European influence, prompted a move from segregated provision for students with special needs to a policy of integration, the psycho-medical model remained (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011). Echoes of difference as a deficit and the need for provision that was different from the teaching that occurred in the mainstream classroom lingered. A foundation for individual, separate professional practice was established that ran contrary to the present policy initiative that requires sophisticated levels of teacher collaboration to inclusively meet the special educational needs of students.

2.3. A policy of Integration

In 1973 Ireland became a member of the European Community and at this time the educational rights of children with disabilities were being enshrined into law across Europe. The need for legislation to guide and support progress in special education provision in Ireland became evident. As outlined by Griffin and Shevlin (2011), the Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People (1978) also known as the Warnock Report made proposals to the UK government and informed the UK Education Act (1981). Consonant with Warnock, The White Paper on Educational Development (1980) confirmed that integration was to be official policy in Ireland. The publication of The Education and Training of Severely and Profoundly Mentally Handicapped Children in Ireland (1983), again in keeping with Warnock, acknowledged for the first time in Ireland that no child was ineducable (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011).

The move towards integration was further strengthened by Ireland's adoption of the European Union Council of Ministers' Charter in 1990. The Irish government was committed to develop policy according to the philosophy of integration in common with other member states. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) was signed by Ireland in 1992 and specifically included the rights of children with disabilities to receive high quality education tailored to their learning needs. Significantly, in 1991 the Special Education Review Committee (SERC) was established by the Department of Education and Science and tasked with examining special education provision and investigating how the system could be resourced to allow for the effective implementation of the integration policy (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011).

2.3.1. The Report of the Special Education Review Committee

The Report of the Special Education Review Committee (the SERC Report, 1993) was a seminal document in Irish special needs education and its influence on policy and practice is still evident today (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011). A continuum of service provision was recommended including both special and mainstream schools "we favour as much integration as is appropriate and feasible with as little segregation as is necessary" (p.22). The SERC Report's support for integration, "Except where individual circumstances make this impracticable, appropriate education for all children with special educational needs should be provided in ordinary schools" (SERC Report, 1993, p.20), constituted a definite move away from the previous reliance on segregation. Also, a suggested increase in the number of remedial teachers heightened awareness of special educational needs arising from difficulty with literacy and/or numeracy.

However, the SERC Report's definition of educational integration, in particular, highlights Ireland's distance from inclusive education at that time

“the participation of pupils with disabilities in school activities with other pupils, to the maximum extent which is consistent with the broader overall interests of both the pupils with disabilities and the other pupils in the class/group” (p. 18-19). Contrasted with Mittler’s (1995, p.63) explanation of inclusive education as a process that “starts with radical school reform, changing the existing system and rethinking the entire curriculum of the school in order to meet the needs of all children,” Ireland’s lack of critical reflection on how mainstream schools could meet students’ special educational needs is very evident. In retrospect, the SERC Report’s (1993) retention of categories of disability, that remained consonant with a psycho-medical model through its focus on within child deficits (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011) diminished the need for teachers to work together and interrogate and develop practice. Consequently, significant barriers to future collaborative professional SEN practice that builds professional SEN knowledge, the focus of this study and a cornerstone of current policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) were indirectly created.

Further, the SERC Report (1993) recommended linking provision of resources in the form of extra support teaching hours directly to individual students according to their category of disability. These pupils with special educational needs arising from disability would receive extra teaching hours commensurate with the “proportion of a teacher post to which s/he would theoretically be entitled in a special school or class designated for the category to which s/he belongs” (SERC Report, 1993 p. 176). Accessing these resources was dependent on an assessment being carried out by a relevant specialist that confirmed the student’s category of disability. This approach, underpinned by a psycho-medical model, directed “the professional gaze towards the pupil rather than towards professional practices or organizational structure” (McDonnell, 2003, p. 262). A discourse of “expertism” (Troyna and Vincent, 1996, cited in McDonnell, 2003, p. 265) ensued that gave a very privileged role to certain groups of professionals leading to vested interests disproportionately informing the practice and policy of special needs education.

The SERC Report (1993) also suggested three different types of support teacher to meet the needs of students in the different categories of disability and difficulties. Remedial teachers would teach pupils “with less serious learning difficulties, generally in literacy or/and numeracy” (The SERC Report, 1993, p. 172). Their work would involve “teaching withdrawal groups, working side-by-side with the class teacher and fulfilling an advisory role for colleagues and parents” (p.169). Resource teachers (a new role introduced in SERC) would teach “pupils with more serious learning difficulties and disabilities” (p.170). Visiting teachers, it was envisaged would work directly for the Department of Education and cover large geographical areas. Their role was to visit schools to provide direct teaching for “pupils with specific conditions or from traveller families, who are capable of benefiting from placement in ordinary schools, given additional support teaching” and advise teachers and parents (p.172).

In tandem with promoting a policy of integration, the SERC Report (1993) emphasized difference and deficit and maintained segregation for students with more complex needs at a time when international thinking, as evidenced by the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), supported the development of schools that were responsive to all students irrespective of the provenance of their needs. While the SERC Report (1993) also recommended a flexible approach to school organisation around SEN provision and mentioned adapted curricula and even team-teaching, the different categories of disability and different teaching roles sent a strong conflicting message. The introduction of an expert focused policy of provision did not give sufficient consideration to the need for teachers and principals in mainstream schools to be supported in developing the skills and organisation necessary to examine and develop professional practice in order to effectively support students with SEN (McDonnell, 2003). While, it could be argued that the current policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) is a compensation for the SERC Report's oversight, the legacy of this fragmented and expert driven approach has left an unhelpful legacy to schools and in particular to SETs tasked with implementing a more collaborative approach to inclusive SEN practice.

2.3.2. Legislation and related policy

Following from the SERC Report (1993), awareness of a social model of disability and a human rights approach gained momentum as reflected in the National Convention (1994) the Government White Paper on Education (1995) and the Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities (1996). Also, parental litigation on behalf of their children with disability such as the O'Donoghue (1993) landmark case informed and progressed thinking in relation to the education of students with special educational needs, ultimately prompting a legislative response (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011).

The Education Act (GoI, 1998), the first legislative framework for Education since the foundation of the State was enacted in 1998 (Kinsella and Senior, 2008). This was "An Act to make provision in the interests of the common good for the education of every person in the state, including any person with a disability or who has other special educational needs..." (p.5). The Education Act defined special educational needs as "... the educational needs of students who have a disability and the needs of exceptionally able students;" (p.8) and consonant with the SERC Report (1993) maintained a strong medical deficit model in its five part definition of disability using descriptors such as "malfunction", "malformation", "condition", "illness" and "chronic disease" (p.6). The definition used in the Education Act (1998) reflected the policy of integration of the time and demonstrated, once again, that Ireland had a distance yet to travel towards inclusion.

The Education Act (GoI, 1998) significantly furthered the integration of students with special educational needs in mainstream primary schools. It promoted "best practice in teaching methods with regard to the diverse needs of students and the development of the skills and competencies of

teachers;" (6 (f) p.10). Equality of access to, participation in and benefit from education for students (6(c) p.10) was also promoted, as was parental choice in deciding on a school for their child (6(e) p.10). Schools were tasked with using their "available resources" to "ensure that the educational needs of all students, including those with a disability or other special educational needs, were identified and provided for," (9(a) p.13). The inspectorate was required to assess the effectiveness of the education programmes provided for students with special educational needs and to support schools in developing appropriate strategies and policies. The Act detailed the responsibility of The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) for advising the Minister on "curriculum for students with a disability or other special educational need" (41(f) p.36) and "on appropriate methods for the assessment of the effectiveness of the education provided in schools with particular regard to mechanisms whereby students who have problems achieving their potential may be identified as early as practicable and assisted" (41(b) p.35).

2.3.3. The Policy of Automatic Entitlement

In 1998, in accordance with the Education Act (GoI, 1998), the then Minister for Education, Mícheal Martin announced a policy of automatic entitlement (DES, 1998). Consonant with the recommendations of the SERC Report (1993), children who were diagnosed by a relevant specialist, generally a psychologist, as having a particular disability were given extra resources in the form of teaching hours, special needs assistants and equipment, as appropriate for their particular category of disability. In retrospect, this was a watershed in Irish special needs education. At its launch there were 104 resource teachers and 299 special needs assistants employed. In 2004 these numbers had grown to 2,600 and 4,600 respectively (DES, 2004 cited in Travers, 2006).

Resource teachers were employed to deliver the extra hours of teaching to pupils assessed as having learning disabilities. The special education circular 08/99 (DES, 1999a) gave details of the resource teacher's role and how this system should operate. The post of Resource Teacher was described as "an additional post allocated to assist a school or cluster of schools in providing an education which meets the needs and abilities of children assessed as having disabilities." They were to provide "additional teaching support" for these children and "advise and liaise with other teachers, parents and relevant professionals." The circular stated that this was a "whole school effort and not the responsibility of the resource teacher alone" because the children in question were to be "fully integrated into a mainstream school" and as a result would be spending most of their time with the mainstream teacher (DES, 1999a, p.1)

However, what emerged in practice was quite the antithesis of this whole school approach and was later described in special education circular 24/03 (DES, 2003a) as a misinterpretation of circular 08/99 (DES, 1999a). MacGiolla Phadraig (2007) argues that the policy outlined in circular 08/99

(DES, 1999a) was a resource-based provision that failed to deliver inclusion largely because it was not linked to a significant policy directive on inclusion in mainstream classes. In the main, children with special educational needs arising from a disability were withdrawn from their classrooms and received one to one instruction from the resource teacher commensurate with the number of extra teaching hours sanctioned on the basis of the individual child's application, though this was never the intention of the policy makers (Travers, 2006). Class teachers had to cope with the disruption to the class programme caused by the withdrawal of individual children assessed as having complex needs to attend the resource teacher or teachers at various times and the withdrawal of small groups of students to attend the learning support teacher generally for literacy and numeracy support. The individual, withdrawal model of provision was reinforced and barriers to in-class provision and small group work were created (Travers, 2006).

Evidence of the aforementioned "expertism" (Troyna and Vincent, 1996, cited in McDonnell, 2003, p. 265) was abundant. Assessment was seen as the preserve of outside specialists and resource teachers followed the specialist's recommendations. The assessment issue was further complicated by long waiting lists for psychological assessments provided by the newly established National Educational Psychology Service (NEPS) that led many parents to pay for private psychological assessments for their children.

2.3.3.1. Learning Support teachers and Resource teachers: an unhelpful distinction

In the primary school, there was now an obvious distinction between students with learning difficulties in reading and mathematics (high incidence needs) attending learning support teachers (previously called remedial teachers) and students with special educational needs /disabilities (low incidence needs) requiring additional resources and taught by resource teachers. Travers' (2006, p.161, 164) study of learning support and resource teachers' perceptions of each other's roles at this time showed that a significant percentage of teachers considered that the roles were distinct and that the distinction should be retained. 57% of all teachers surveyed either disagreed or strongly disagreed that in-class support measures best met the needs of most children with SEN while 32% were undecided. Teachers in primary schools were now doing very different jobs and far from using the different perspectives to enhance collaboration, this situation reinforced teacher isolation. In the policy environment, the "professional gaze" (McDonnell, 2003, p. 262) seems to have been much more focused on providing additional support to meet the needs of individual children than to assess and monitor the system's capacity to provide the "whole school approach" optimistically suggested in the special education circular 08/99 (DES, 1999a). Crucially and of significance to this study, an approach to practice antithetical to collaborative practice was developing.

Despite the increased number of teachers in new posts, professional development opportunities were not put in place and many teachers waited

years before gaining access to appropriate courses (Travers, 2006). The situation was further complicated by the existence of two different, voluntary Postgraduate Diploma courses to cater separately for the needs of learning support teachers and their resource teacher colleagues. However, this anomaly was subsequently ended and one course, the Combined Postgraduate Diploma in Special Educational Needs emerged and continues to meet the needs of all support teachers.

2.3.3.2. A Misinterpretation of Policy

Following a review process, special education circular 24/03 (DES, 2003a) issued and confirmed that there had been a misapplication of the terms of special education circular 08/99 (DES, 1999a) and announced radical changes to provision.

Of particular interest to this study, special education circular 24/03, (DES, 2003a) while clarifying the misapplication, gave a very good insight into the direction of future policy, one that clearly was at variance with the views of the teachers in Travers' (2006) study- "the practice has developed in recent years of using resource hours for individual tuition only. An exclusive reliance on this approach is contrary to the principle on integration in teaching and learning. Wherever possible, schools should provide additional help for children in the mainstream classroom or, if necessary, in small groups. This will also have the effect of minimizing the disruption to the normal class programme that can happen if individual children are being withdrawn at different times for tuition." (p.2,3)

Most importantly, circular 24/03 (DES, 2003a) showed awareness of the need for effective and efficient management of SEN provision in schools that earlier policy had neglected. Schools were tasked with using resources in a way that would best meet the needs of students with SEN. Consonant with current policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) the sharing of teachers' skills through a team approach was suggested. "The Department will support school management in the development of coherent special educational support teams that draw on the skills of all the specialist teachers... without making artificial distinctions between them." (DES, 2003a, p.3)

A significant divergence from previous policy also lay in the approach to assessment. Instead of immediate recourse to specialist assessments and reports in order to obtain resources, a staged approach to assessment and intervention was introduced that respected teacher knowledge and skill in relation to the assessment of students' learning needs. Stage 1 involved intervention by the class teacher in consultation with the child's parents. Stage 2 saw the involvement of the learning support and/or resource teacher who carried out diagnostic testing and collaboratively prepared and implemented an appropriate intervention with the class teacher including the provision of supplementary teaching. Stage 3 which involved consultation with outside experts, generally a NEPS psychologist, was only

reached when there was evidence that the earlier interventions had failed to deliver progress.

Special education circular 24/03 (DES, 2003a) outlined a futuristic model of practice. The sole reliance on individual tuition was contested. A support team was recommended instead of the previous artificial distinction between learning support and resource teachers. However, the misapplication of special education circular 08/99 (DES, 1999a) compounded the legacy of individual professional SEN practice and fragmented provision that resulted from earlier policy and created a context that was not immediately conducive to developing a team approach.

2.3.3.3. The General Allocation Model

Special Education Circular 02/05 (DES, 2005) known as the General Allocation Model (GAM) of SEN provision, followed on from DES Circular 24/03. In retrospect, the general allocation model formed a bridge between the earlier policies of integration and current more inclusive policy. Students' special educational needs were categorized as either high incidence or low incidence. High incidence needs included children who scored at or below the 10th percentile on standardised tests in reading or maths and were thereby deemed to require learning support. Children with borderline and mild general learning disabilities and special learning disability (dyslexia) who previously got resource hours were now categorized as having high incidence needs. An annual resource allocation was made to schools based on the predicted incidence of high incidence special educational needs within different size school populations. This meant that schools could immediately meet the high incidence needs without recourse to assessments and reports. Low incidence needs described as "complex and enduring" (p.5) occurred less frequently and could not be predicted in the same way. As a result, an expert assessment was still required in order for schools to obtain additional resources including extra teaching hours to meet the needs of these children.

Special education circular 02/05 (DES, 2005) again emphasized the importance of the effective management of SEN provision at school level. Importantly and consonant with inclusion, support teaching was seen as additional to the support the student received from the class teacher. Schools were required to flexibly deploy resources to best meet the needs of students with SEN. There was a clear expectation that a support team approach would apply and that learning support and resource teachers would collaborate with class teachers in the planning and delivery of special education provision and that school organisation would allow for in-class as well as out-of-class teaching support.

The General Allocation Model (DES, 2005) continued to guide SEN provision in Irish primary schools until its replacement by the current model (DES, 2017a) which will be discussed later in the chapter. A look at some significant parallel developments related to SEN provision during the operation of the General Allocation Model, notably the Education for Persons

with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004), need firstly to be addressed because of their importance in relation to inclusion and associated teacher collaboration.

2.4. Moving towards Inclusion

In the years following the Education Act (1998) and preceding the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs ACT (EPSEN) (2004), a number of significant documents issued which gave a good indication of an emerging change in thinking. They promoted more inclusive approaches to meeting the needs of students with special educational needs. A study of remedial education in Irish primary schools (Sheil et al., 1998) reported a lack of coherence between classroom and support (then called remedial) programmes with the majority of remedial/support teachers' time used in providing individual and small group tuition to students withdrawn from their classrooms. In response, The Learning Support Guidelines (DES, 2000) gave very clear guidance to support teachers (now special education teachers), primarily working with students experiencing difficulty with literacy and numeracy, on how practice should be organised in primary schools. It emphasized whole school approaches to meeting the needs of students with special educational needs. Most importantly, it stated that classroom teachers had first line responsibility for these students and that support teachers provided supplementary teaching to support the child in better accessing his/her class curriculum. Collaboration between class and support teachers was emphasized as was a move away from a sole reliance on withdrawal. Inclusive approaches such as in-class support, prevention and early intervention programmes were recommended. The Guidelines outlined a process of identification, diagnostic assessment and development of individual learning plans for students with special needs. This was described as a collaborative process involving the class teacher, the special education teacher and the child's parents. An inclusive, collaborative tone was also reflected in the report of the task force on Dyslexia (DES, 2001a) and the report of the task force on Autism (DES, 2001 b). Both reports recommended an inclusive whole school approach involving collaboration between class teachers, special education teachers and parents.

During this time, a raft of legislation was enacted that supported the Education Act. The Education Welfare Act (2000) acknowledged the right of every child to an education and, in pursuit of same, sought to encourage attendance and prevent non-attendance. The National Educational Welfare Board was established under this legislation to monitor and support attendance including the attendance of children with special educational needs. The Equal Status Act (2000) prohibited discrimination in relation to school enrolment and access to curricular programmes (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011; NCSE, 2006). Education in Ireland was now operating within a legislative framework that supported the rights of all children to an appropriate education.

2.4.1. The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act

Finally, the long-awaited Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act was enacted in 2004. Described as having “a future vision for rights based special educational needs provision (that) is both compelling and challenging” (NCSE, 2006, p.6), it provides a legislative framework for inclusive education for people with special educational needs in Ireland. The preamble states that education for people with special educational needs “shall, wherever possible, take place in an inclusive environment with those who do not have such needs, to provide that people with special educational needs shall have the same right to avail of, and benefit from, appropriate education as do their peers who do not have such needs, to assist children with special educational needs to leave school with the skills necessary to participate, to the level of their capacity, in an inclusive way in the social and economic activities of society and to live independent and fulfilled lives” (EPSEN, 2004, p.1).

Crucially, the definition of disability in the EPSEN Act moves from the earlier psycho-medical deficit model and focuses on the consequences not the cause, “a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability or any other condition, which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition.” The Act supports “the rights of children to an assessment, to an individual education plan, and to an independent appeals process” (NCSE, 2006, p.47). Procedures for assessing and reviewing the needs of students with special needs and providing an appropriate intervention are outlined. The school Principal is responsible for the overall SEN provision in the school and for ensuring that a pupil’s special educational needs are effectively met. A staged process for the identification and assessment of students’ needs is outlined. The procedure for developing an Individual Education Plan (IEP) involving collaboration between principal, teachers, parents and health and education professionals is outlined in detail.

The National Council for Special Educational Needs (NCSE) was established through the EPSEN Act. Its functions include planning and co-ordinating the provision of education for children with SEN, ensuring that their progress is monitored and reviewed, advising and disseminating information on best practice in relation to the education of students with SEN, conducting research and advising the Minister (NCSE, 2006, p. 48). With the enactment of EPSEN, inclusion was enshrined in Irish legislation and subsequent policy on resource provision for students with SEN in schools reflected this.

2.4.2. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: General Comment No. 4

A further milestone on the journey towards inclusion occurred when Ireland signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2007. It is legally binding and clarifies the obligations on States to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities. Crucially it moves away from earlier psycho-medical models of disability and establishes a human rights model that views persons with disability as persons with rights who are active members of society capable of claiming their rights and making free, informed decisions about their lives (UN, 2007). In the preamble (UN, 2007, p.1) disability is described as ‘an evolving concept’ that ‘results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.’

Ireland’s ratification of the Convention in 2018 has resulted in a renewed focus on issues of inclusion in society generally and in education specifically. General Comment No. 4 (UN, 2016) is of particular relevance to this study as it provides detailed information on the right to inclusive education understood as ‘a fundamental human right of all learners’ (p.3). Inclusive education requires changes to the culture, policy and practice of mainstream schools to enable them to effectively include all students and committed leadership to ensure that such fundamental change is implemented and embedded. Schools must deliver a personalised response to the student’s need and not expect the student to fit into the existing system. Inclusion is also dependent on changes in content. Curricula must be adjusted to meet the needs of all students. Classroom pedagogy should reflect instructional strategies, teaching methods and approaches that meet the diverse range of learning needs present in the classroom and incorporate individualised education plans and alternative means of communication, as required. Flexible assessment methods that recognise the progress of individual students with disabilities must also be provided (UN, 2016).

To this end, the State must ensure that all teachers are educated in the values and competencies to deliver inclusive learning environments based on a human rights model of disability. Adaptations to pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes including dedicated modules and practical experiential learning to develop teachers’ skills and confidence in problem-solving the challenges of providing inclusive education are required. Of particular relevance to this study is the recommendation that teachers should benefit from an inclusive culture that enables them to reflect on their own teaching and focus on how they can ensure the attainment of educational outcomes for all students. The promotion of collaborative practice including team-teaching is recommended as is support for teachers from universities, peer support, study groups, and links between education institutions (UN, 2016).

In Ireland, inclusive education is currently provided via a continuum of educational provision including mainstream classes, special classes in mainstream schools and special schools (NCSE, 2019). The current model of SEN provision (DES 2017a) is broadly consonant with many of the requirements identified in General Comment No. 4, in relation to the education of students with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary schools. However, the provision of special classes and special schools to cater for the needs of students with more complex special educational needs may be viewed as contrary to the UNCRPD's (2007) definition of inclusion and regarded as segregation (NCSE, 2019).

Consequently, Ireland must now decide if special schools and classes should continue to operate as part of the continuum of provision or whether the inclusion of students with more complex needs in mainstream classes is preferable. In order to inform the decision making process the NCSE carried out an initial process of review which reported that 'while all consultation groups agreed that in theory, as recommended by the UNCRPD, all students should be educated together, there was considerably less consensus around whether this was feasible or even desirable for all students particularly those with the most serious medical needs or those with the most severe behavioural needs' (NCSE, 2019, p.9). To further advance the discussion, a new model of support for schools, the School Inclusion Model, is currently being piloted in a selection of schools. It aims to build schools' capacity to provide an inclusive education for students with more complex needs and will provide evidence to guide decisions with regard to the future of special schools and special classes (NCSE, 2019). As Ireland continues its journey towards inclusion, the vital need for teachers to collaborate effectively on how best to meet the needs of students with SEN in their schools becomes increasingly apparent.

2.4.3. The Current Model of Special Educational Needs teaching resource provision

While the previously described General Allocation Model contained in special education circular 02/05 (DES, 2005) was in operation, a comprehensive review of special education supports in schools was conducted by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) at the request of the then Minister, Ruairí Quinn, and its findings were published in the policy advice paper 'Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Schools' (NCSE, 2013). A number of shortcomings in the General Allocation Model were identified. Social disadvantage was reinforced by favouring children whose parents could pay for assessments to obtain State resources; there was a risk that children were being diagnosed for resource purposes rather than health reasons; the spectrum of abilities and needs within a category of disability was not adequately recognised and the educational outcomes for children in receipt of additional resources was not sufficiently monitored (NCSE, 2014). Informed by the findings of the aforementioned review, the NCSE's Working Party Report (2014) proposed a new model of resource allocation to schools. Titled, "Delivery for students with special educational

needs: A better and more equitable way” the model proposed a new process for the allocation of resources to schools and signalled a very definite change in the way schools use their SEN teaching resources.

Details of how the new model of SEN teaching resource provision would operate issued to primary schools via Special Education Circular 0013/2017 (DES, 2017a) with accompanying guidelines (DES, 2017b). Under the now current model, each school receives a single, unified allocation for special educational support teaching based on the school’s educational profile. The profile is comprised of two components - a baseline component and the individual school’s educational profile component. The baseline allocation provides every mainstream primary school with the teaching resources to support inclusion and ensure that whole school policies and practices are in place to prevent learning difficulties where possible, and to provide early intervention programmes. The school’s educational profile contains three elements namely the number of students with complex needs in the school, the number of students scoring below a certain threshold on standardised tests of reading or maths and the social context of the school (gender and disadvantage). The combination of a baseline component and a school’s educational profile component, it is argued, will deliver a more equitable distribution of resources (NCSE, 2014; DES, 2017a).

The current model of SEN provision differs significantly from previous models in that it accords with a social model of inclusion and in so doing places a definite onus on the system and on the individual school to meet the needs of students with special educational needs within the framework of an inclusive school. Crucially, the current model (DES, 2017a) reflects a move away from the psycho-medical deficit model of resource allocation that was initially suggested in the SERC Report (1993). Support for students with complex needs will no longer be dependent on schools making applications for teaching resources for individual pupils supported by specialist assessments and reports. Instead, the child’s educational needs, regardless of their provenance, are now the key focus and there is a distinct onus on schools to use their allocated teaching resources to identify and best meet those needs. However, the greater autonomy given to schools in the deployment of their resources comes with significant collective professional responsibility that earlier policies did not afford teachers the opportunity to develop.

SEN policy (DES, 2017a) now requires a collaborative whole-school approach involving evaluation of and reflection on SEN practice throughout the school. “It (a whole school approach) encompasses a process of reflection, planning and review of policies and practices, and includes an evaluation of how pupils with special educational needs are identified by the school, the interventions that are put in place to meet their needs and how the outcomes of those interventions are measured and monitored” (DES, 2017b, p.22). Special education teachers are expected to work as a core team and not the fragmented practice of the past where the different titles of Learning Support and Resource teachers created an unhelpful and artificial divide. The

previous titles of learning support and resource teachers have been replaced by the generic title of Special Education Teacher (SET).

The current policy also (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) places a very definite focus on providing for the needs of students within their classroom. SETs are expected to plan interventions in consultation with mainstream class teachers. "Special education teachers, in consultation with class teachers, should plan their interventions carefully to address pupils' priority learning needs and to achieve the targets identified in the relevant Continuum of Support plan" (DES, 2017b, p.14). The previous reliance on withdrawal of students from their classrooms to receive learning support is now challenged. Even when students with SEN require more intensive help, the expectation is that where appropriate team-teaching will be used. Withdrawal for small group and individual teaching is exclusive to teaching and learning that cannot be carried out successfully in the classroom. Accordingly, SETs are expected to use a range of teaching approaches suitable for classroom interventions, small group and individual work "Special education teachers should be familiar with a wide range of teaching approaches, methodologies and resources to cater for particular learning styles and to meet a variety of needs. Teaching approaches will include a combination of team-teaching initiatives, co-operative teaching, early intervention and small group or individual support" (DES, 2017 b, p. 13).

A significant aspect of the current SEN policy (DES, 2017a; 2017b) that directly relates to this study, is the considerable opportunity it offers teachers to engage in school based professional learning through teacher collaboration. To this end, collaboration in the form of developing and sharing knowledge of practice is encouraged. Exploring effective approaches to team-teaching in particular offers rich possibilities for the development of teachers' professional knowledge of inclusive SEN practice. The element of peer observation makes teaching public and allows for professional learning and the development of SEN practice through reflection and critique. "Schools have the flexibility to innovate by developing and trialling new approaches and by using assessment data to evaluate the efficacy of these interventions. Developing and sharing successful practice has the potential to contribute to improvements in the overall provision for pupils with special educational needs" (DES, 2017 b, p.14).

Interestingly, the promotion of collaborative practice that builds professional knowledge is not exclusive to SEN policy. The recently published national framework for teacher learning, Cosán, (Teaching Council, 2016) recognises and affirms school-based teacher learning through collaboration as a valuable form of teachers' professional development. The confluence of thinking creates a very interesting and potentially enabling environment for the development of professional knowledge through school-based teacher collaboration. However, consonant with the focus of this study, full realisation of the available opportunities for teacher professional development in relation to special educational needs via collaboration is dependent on an intricate web of contextual and human factors. How well

prepared Irish primary schools are to meet the demands of this new collaborative, inclusive approach to SEN provision is questionable. Can well intentioned policy change schools from an integrationist approach that allowed separate systems of mainstream and SEN education and professional practice to co-exist, to collaborative, inclusive schools that develop professional knowledge of SEN practice through teacher collaboration?

Kinsella and Senior (2008) offer some pertinent insights. They argue that a move to inclusive schools constitutes a major cultural shift and is not one that will happen through the natural developmental process that occurs in schools. Certain prerequisites such as “a review of structures, practices and policies and a change in the attitudes and the cultures in mainstream schools” are necessary (p.654). Findings from their research highlight the importance of discussion and collaborative problem solving amongst staff on all aspects of special educational needs provision in the school and in particular communication between special education teachers and their mainstream colleagues (Kinsella and Senior, 2008).

Their conceptual model of inclusion gives a clear picture of what is required of Irish primary schools in order to become inclusive. They identify three interrelated constructs namely “expertise, structures and process” (2008, p. 656). Expertise refers to the knowledge and skills available to and used within the school including leadership skills. Structures refer to resources, policies, roles and responsibilities. Process includes communication, collaboration and consultation, dialogue, problem solving, induction, mentoring, team learning, school planning and review and policy development. Addressing the expertise and structures without paying sufficient attention to the deeper level processes of communication and collaboration results in a limited response to meeting the needs of students with special educational needs. Resources and expertise tend to remain confined to special education teachers resulting in a lack of professional development opportunities for their mainstream colleagues with attendant consequences for all pupils in the school Kinsella and Senior (2008).

2.4.4. Special education teachers as change agents

The current model of SEN resource provision (DES, 2017a; DES 2017b), consonant with Kinsella and Senior (2008), recognises the need for communication and collaboration between teachers in relation to developing more inclusive schools. However, the means by which it is envisaged that greater teacher collaboration will be achieved, though strongly implicit, is scant on detail.

Responsibility for the development of a more collaborative approach to SEN provision in Irish primary schools, rests heavily on the shoulders of the special education teachers. The aforementioned confinement of SEN expertise to special education teachers (Kinsella and Senior, 2008) combined with the predominantly bring back model of CPD (Sugrue, 2002) places them in the role of change agents. Their task according to the current model (DES,

2017a; DES, 2017b) involves sharing their knowledge and skills in relation to SEN practice with their colleagues “the classroom teacher will be supported by Special Educational Needs Teachers, who will have access to additional training in the area of special education, and who will work closely with the class teacher to provide additional teaching support for children with special educational needs.” (DES, 2017b, p.17).

The emphasis on team-teaching is particularly noteworthy because it places significant demands on the special education teachers in their role as change agents. As the majority of mainstream teachers have not had focused CPD on implementing team-teaching, special education teachers are required to support them in its appropriate and effective use in order to comply with the new model of SEN provision. However, unlike other forms of collaboration and information sharing, team-teaching involves teachers working together in the students’ classroom. The unavoidable observation of colleagues teaching is very new to most teachers and adds a further layer of complexity to the special education teachers’ agency.

Crucially, what appears to be overlooked in the policy change to more collaborative SEN practice (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) is the capacity of Irish primary schools to support and facilitate special education teachers in their agential activity. While agency involves an individual dimension, it is not a power that individuals have (Biesta and Tedder, 2007), but rather what they do in a particular context. Actors act by means of their environment rather than in it (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2013). For the special education teachers, their agency in relation to the development of collaborative SEN practice will depend on the interaction of their individual professional effort, school based contextual factors and the resources at their disposal (Biesta and Tedder, 2007 p.137).

With reference to Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998 p.972) “chordal triad” of agency, the special education teachers will also be influenced by aspects of the past, by possibilities for the future and by the present. For the SETs, their past work experience is mainly centred on working with small groups of students or individual students in the privacy of the SEN room. The future work situation is very different involving in-class support via team-teaching, the detail of which they must develop in collaboration with their colleagues. The present is a state of change with associated confusion and fear as special education teachers try to implement a more collaborative approach to SEN practice in their schools from a foundation of individual and often fragmented professional practice. In keeping with Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) practical-evaluative dimension of agency, the special education teachers’ main task is to identify the demands of the present policy situation and make judgments on the way forward from the possible courses of action available to them in their school contexts.

Teacher agency is largely about the different types of action that are accessible to teachers at a particular time. Individuals are helped and hindered by the social and material environments in which they operate (Priestly et al., 2012). However, humans are capable of being reflexive and

creative and by such means behaving in ways that are counter to the environmental constraints that challenge their agency (Biesta and Teder, 2007; Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2013). It remains to be seen what “repertoires for manoeuvre” (Priestley et al., 2012, p.211) are available to the Irish primary school SETs as they endeavor to develop policy compliant collaborative SEN practice in their schools and the creativity they can bring to their agency in the face of the challenges they meet and the legacy of history and past SEN policy.

2.5. Conclusion

On reflection, it appears that Ireland’s journey towards inclusion has advanced significantly but, as Kinsella and Senior (2008) advise, the present push towards developing and maintaining inclusive schools is a complicated process. Ireland’s history of SEN provision is not particularly helpful in preparing the foundations for inclusive schooling via teacher collaboration. A past defined by voluntary, charitable provision for students with special educational needs arising from disability followed by State supported segregated education provision in special schools, emanated from and reinforced a mindset that was very distant from, if indeed not antithetical to, inclusion. The SERC Report (1993) heralded a very significant change in thinking and supported the integration of students with disabilities in Irish mainstream primary schools. However, the adherence to a psycho-medical deficit model of SEN resource provision recommended in the SERC Report and echoed in the Education Act (1998) and subsequent education policy resulted in the allocation of additional resource teaching hours to individual students according to their category of diagnosed disability on the basis of an expert report.

A fragmented practice, based on the withdrawal of students with SEN from their mainstream classroom to have their needs met, emerged. Students with high incidence needs attended learning support teachers (formerly remedial teachers) in small groups while their peers with low incidence needs arising from a disability generally got individual tuition for a set number of hours per week from a resource teacher. What got lost in this process was a meaningful engagement with how teaching resources could best be used to meet the needs of students with SEN and indeed all students in a school. Isolated professional practice was reinforced as each teacher ploughed their own furrow in keeping with their different titles and caseloads. Most regrettable was the tragic underuse of the rich opportunities for developing collaborative processes that came with increased staffing and resourcing.

The current model of SEN provision (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b), aims to develop truly inclusive schools through a significantly altered model of teaching resource allocation that requires teachers to engage in collaborative SEN practice in order to effectively meet the needs of students with SEN. It remains to be seen if the worthy aspiration of the policy in relation to inclusion is realised, or if the complexity of teacher collaboration in the school workplace dilutes policy implementation. The next chapter looks at

the wider policy environment and the literature on collaboration with a view to understanding exactly what collaboration is. The contextual factors that have been identified as facilitating or hindering successful teacher collaboration are discussed. The interaction between the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and teachers' professional working relationships and the conditions necessary to foster effective collaboration that builds professional knowledge of SEN practice in Irish primary schools are explored.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

Developing Special Education Teachers' Professional Knowledge through School-based Teacher Collaboration: a very human story

3.1. Introduction

This study explores the forms of collaboration that Irish primary school SETs are involved in and their impact on the special education teachers' professional knowledge development. The current policy guiding provision for students with special educational needs (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) promotes a whole school approach to meeting the needs of students with SEN. Teachers are required to work together to provide the most effective and inclusive education possible for students with special educational needs. Joint decision making by teachers on the needs and most appropriate levels and forms of support for students is required. Special education teachers are expected to work as a team. A move away from the traditional reliance on a withdrawal model of provision in favour of more inclusive in-class support through team teaching requires SETs to work in classrooms with their mainstream colleagues. As part of their role special education teachers are now expected to discuss aspects of SEN practice with their colleagues, share information, knowledge and skills, give advice on SEN issues and jointly evaluate in-class interventions with mainstream colleagues in order to improve in-class support.

In recognition of the importance of SEN practice in schools, the DES support a Postgraduate Diploma in SEN course for special education teachers which allows them an unprecedented and unparalleled eight weeks release from school over the course of one academic year to attend university with full substitute cover provided to their schools. The aim of this programme is to provide practitioners with the knowledge and skills necessary to inclusively meet the needs of students with SEN, and, in keeping with a bring-back model of teacher professional learning (Sugrue, 2002), to inform school wide policy and practice in this regard through effective school based teacher collaboration. The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) provides a supplementary range of day and evening courses for SETs to allow them to up-skill on a variety of SEN related issues with a view to implementing them in their schools.

Full realisation of current SEN policy is dependent on effective collaborative SEN practice that builds professional knowledge through a process of inquiry, experimentation and reflection (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b). The very human process of teacher collaboration involving sharing, discussing, observing and critiquing aspects of SEN practice is the pivot on which the delivery of inclusive teaching depends. How fit for purpose this previously

untested and underdeveloped pivot is remains to be seen and is the question that forms this study and guides this chapter.

In order to conduct the literature review, a list of keywords was created that reflected the topic and research questions. The keywords 'teacher collaboration'; 'teacher collaboration and schools'; 'teacher collaboration and Irish primary schools'; were used to search the university's library catalogue, EBSCO and Google Scholar for existing knowledge on the topic of teacher collaboration in the form of peer reviewed articles and books. The Boolean operator 'AND' was used when further refinement was required as in teacher collaboration in schools and conflict; teacher collaboration in schools and trust; teacher collaboration in schools and leadership.

The literature on teacher collaboration is vast and wide ranging. Much of the recent literature relates to school improvement, curriculum development and professional development initiatives involving collaboration, the use of technology to build collaboration networks, studies relating to teacher educators and pre-service teachers in relation to collaboration and studies set in second level schools. Primary school teachers' subjective experience of collaboration in their daily professional practice, the focus of this study, was not strongly represented. To aid the selection process, abstracts were read, and articles were selected or rejected on the basis of their relevance to the research questions. In many cases the title was sufficient to exclude. While interesting and generally informative, the initial selection of peer reviewed journal articles did not provide sufficient information on the lived experience of teachers in relation to collaboration.

This limitation prompted the complementary use of further investigative strategies. When relevant articles were identified the bibliography was checked to locate other related sources of information. Crucially, note was made of recurrent citations to identify the most important publications on the topic. The number of citations that accrued to particular publications was checked via Google Scholar. A high citation count signified that an article was very influential in the field. By such means the seminal articles published by Little (1990) and Hargreaves (2001) were found. The work of both Little and Hargreaves provided information on the nature of the collaboration that teachers were engaged in during their daily work and in the case of Hargreaves in particular, data was collected mainly from teachers. Their work was distinctly different from more recent research studies that, in the main, investigate the impact of initiatives designed to develop collaboration.

Little's (1990) much cited continuum of collaboration provided the model by which Irish primary school special education teachers' subjective experience of collaboration could be described and analysed. The use of Google Scholar to identify studies that cited the work of Little (1990) and Hargreaves (2001) complemented earlier searches and provided relevant, informative studies on the under-researched issues of trust, betrayal and conflict in relation to teacher collaboration. A thematic approach defined by the research questions was used to guide the writing of the review and give coherence to the study.

Teacher collaboration is not new in the education context. However, it wears many coats and serves many masters. As a result, it can be easily misunderstood and treated with some suspicion. Lavie (2006) examines five discourses on school-based teacher collaboration and in so doing highlights the contested nature of collaboration evident in the differing arguments put forward by each one.

Cultural discourses relate to the “beliefs, norms and values that school members construct and internalize to orientate their personal and professional relationships” (Lavie, 2006, p.77). The socially constructed nature of teacher collaboration and school collaborative cultures that focus on the personal and professional dimensions of teachers’ work, interdependency and trust feature strongly in this discourse. Critical discourses focus more on the sociopolitical dimension of teaching. Here collaboration is seen as a means of producing greater flexibility within organisations to bring about change and can be used as a covert means of advancing reform in the public sector. The school effectiveness and improvement discourse speaks to teacher collaboration and consensus building around institutional goals and values. A managerialist orientation stressing strong leadership, a shared vision and improved performance in the pursuit of excellence, delivered through collaboration, is a well-known argument. Restructuring discourses, with echoes of the cultural discourse, are increasingly evident in the rhetoric of the professional community and the schools as a learning organisation. Mutual support emanating from the collaborative nature of the community supports an expansion of the role of teacher and of teachers’ research. The school-as-community discourse shares some similarity with the school effectiveness discourse in relation to the importance given to consensus and shared values. However, in the school-as-community discourse the focus of collaboration is on developing communities of difference and establishing shared values around issues such as inclusion and respect (Lavie, 2006).

The current policy advocating a more collaborative approach to SEN teaching in Irish primary schools (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) reflects aspects of all five discourses. The cultural discourse is evident in the focus on developing a more collaborative approach to SEN teaching through collaboration between teachers. Building professional learning via teacher collaboration suggests echoes of the restructuring discourse. The development of more inclusive schools, that value and support difference, through teacher collaboration around SEN practice resonate with the school-as-community discourse.

At system level collaboration is complex and can be used for many different purposes (Lavie, 2006). The complexity becomes more acute at school level as the challenges of collaboration impact directly on the teachers involved. Kelchtermans (2006, p.222) advises that “the cultural and structural working conditions in schools determine and mediate actual teacher collaboration, as well as the way “collegiality” is experienced and valued by the staff members involved”. In similar vein, the three data chapters in this study respectively

present information on the forms of collaboration that teachers engage in, the impact of significant contextual factors on collaboration and the interaction between teachers' working relationships and the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration. This chapter, in the sections that follow, analyses the core concepts and ideas that are of critical importance to each of these aspects of collaboration.

The nature of collaboration is firstly explored through the lens of Little's (1990) continuum of teacher collegiality with its different levels of teacher collaboration and their varying impacts on the development of professional knowledge. A discussion on team-teaching, because of its similarity to Little's (1990) joint work and its prominence in current SEN policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b), follows.

The contextual factors that influence teacher collaboration are then examined. The external contextual factors that exert a significant influence on schools' capacity to support teacher collaboration and realise its potential for teacher learning are analysed. In particular the recent and current focus on the teacher as a collaborative, reflective, inquiry-oriented professional evident in the Code of Practice for teachers (Teaching Council, 2012), Cosán, the national framework for teacher learning (Teaching Council, 2016), the system of School Self-Evaluation (DES, 2012) and the introduction of the Croke Park non-teaching hours (DES, 2011) are discussed. An exploration of the contextual factors internal to the school workplace such as the professional cultures of individualism and collaboration, autonomy and leadership and their impact on teacher collaboration and teacher learning is then presented.

Next, literature relevant to the interaction between teachers' professional working relationships and the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration is analysed. Core issues of communication, professional respect, trust and conflict management that play a crucial role in the success of school-based teacher learning through collaboration are examined.

The chapter concludes with a summary of the significant factors that influence school-based teacher collaboration and its ability to build teachers' professional knowledge.

3.2. The Nature of Teacher Collaboration

Little's framework provides the lens through which the collaboration that the Irish primary school SETs are involved in and its impact on their professional learning is discussed and analysed in Chapter 5 of this study. Little's (1990) four forms of teacher collaboration (storytelling and scanning for ideas, aid and assistance, sharing and joint working) clarify the concept of collaboration and provide a structure that allows for its accurate description, evaluation and analysis. The forms differ in the degree to which they challenge individual teacher privacy, promote teacher interdependence and

impact teacher professional learning. Together they reveal the multifaceted and complex nature of school-based teacher collaboration.

3.2.1. Storytelling and scanning for ideas

Storytelling and scanning for ideas describes a form of collaboration amongst teachers that helps them to solve problems in practice, get ideas and reassurance while maintaining individual independence and autonomy. Such interactions take place at a safe distance from the classroom and their informal nature protects teachers from any form of scrutiny. Use of the information shared through such collaboration is at the discretion of the teacher and supports an unexamined independent trial and error approach to building teacher competence (Little, 1990).

While activities such as storytelling away from the classroom have obvious limitations for developing professional practice when compared to a collaborative activity in which teachers observe each other teaching, Little (1990) advises that stories vary, and their importance can only be gauged by their impact on teachers' work. Storytelling and scanning for ideas, often through informally glimpsing and overhearing colleagues' teaching behaviours, are very definite features of teachers' workplace interaction. They circumvent the constraints of school organisation and merit closer investigation with a view to establishing their impact on the development of teachers' professional knowledge (Little, 1990).

3.2.2. Aid and assistance

Central to the conception of collaboration as aid and assistance is the expectation that colleagues will give each other help, when asked. This understanding is very much in keeping with an individual egalitarian professional culture (Little, 1990). Unsolicited advice-giving and discussions on aspects of practice are rare as there is an associated risk of passing judgment on the competence of colleagues (Little, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1991). Consequently, teachers favour a professional aloofness rather than risk any social estrangement caused by impingement on another teacher's classroom practice (Rosenholtz, 1991). Requesting help requires teachers to confront their own professional inadequacies (Rosenholtz, 1991). The choice to ask for assistance is a personal one for the individual teacher, weighed against the possible consequences for self-esteem, professional competence and social standing (Little, 1990).

Similarly, Lortie (1975) with reference to teachers' perceptions of "the good colleague" (p.194) describes how egalitarianism prevents the imposition of one colleague's views on another but deems that all requests should be positively responded to. "Putting on airs" (p.194) was not allowed and there were no special privileges for giving help. "Live and let live and help when asked" (p.195) was the rule.

While potentially beneficial to both parties, aid and assistance falls short of a collaborative culture openly pursuing excellence and the development of professional knowledge through shared action and critical reflection. Indeed, as Little (1990) argues, aid sought and given in this way can be viewed as a type of collaboration that actually maintains an individual culture.

3.2.3. Sharing

Sharing is a form of collaboration in which teachers openly share and pool resources, ideas and examples of work carried out in their classrooms. With reference to the work of Nias (1989), Little (1990) cites the example of school assemblies where teachers display work samples for the entire school to view. While assembly is not common in Irish primary schools, other activities such as displaying students' work on corridors and class productions for school concerts can serve the same purpose in relation to sharing as a form of teacher workplace learning. Such observation of colleagues' work can support teacher learning and can stimulate further discussion amongst colleagues. However, learning is not guaranteed.

The extent to which teachers choose to reveal aspects of their practice through sharing and to learn from observation is very personal and individual. Further, actions around sharing can be interpreted as a form of competition with attendant damage to relationships. A tension can also exist between the value inherent in sharing ideas and the loss of trusted ideas and teaching strategies created by individual teachers that they perceive as distinguishing them from their colleagues (Little, 1990).

3.2.4. Joint work

Finally, joint work is distinctly different from the other forms of collaboration in that it involves obvious interdependence between teachers. This interdependence most often arises from the demands of practice and is linked to teachers taking initiative in relation to the development of their professional practice. Indeed, teachers' belief that they can satisfactorily carry out their work independently acts as a disincentive to joint work (Little, 1990).

In essence joint work describes teachers working together and sharing responsibility for the teaching of students. Joint work demands joint planning and joint evaluation and discussion on practice and is facilitated by professional competence (Little, 1990). Teachers reveal aspects of their professional practice in the joint work of team teaching where colleagues observe each other teaching.

When teachers collaborate at the level of 'joint work', collective autonomy replaces individualism. Teachers work together with a view to improving professional practice. Aspects of practice are examined, and agreement is reached on certain guiding values, standards and approaches. While individual autonomy is curbed, professional security and confidence can

increase especially when teachers' ideas, knowledge and skills are endorsed by their colleagues. In revealing aspects of their heretofore private practice teachers risk the scrutiny of colleagues but equally stand to gain professional affirmation that isolated practice denies.

Joint working is not without cost and risk. The necessary scrutiny and critical reflection to ensure the improvement of practice as distinct from the reinforcement of poor practice opens the possibility of conflict as teachers' individual positions are revealed and decisions have to be made on how to jointly advance practice. Joint working is distinctly different from traditional forms of individual practice and as a result requires particular organisational commitment and support that further heightens its collaborative and public dimensions and demands (Little, 1990).

3.3. Team-teaching

Developing a more collaborative approach to SEN teaching in the Irish primary school involves activities that reflect all the forms of collaboration identified by Little (1990). However, the specific reference to team-teaching in the policy documents (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) bestow on it a particular importance. Team-teaching and co-teaching are terms now used interchangeably to describe teaching approaches in mainstream classrooms involving the classroom teacher and one or more special education teachers. As Murawski's (2009, p.9) definition of team-teaching explains, it is expected that all students will benefit, "two or more professionals who deliver quality instruction to students with and without disabilities in a classroom." However, the reference to team-teaching in the current SEN policy document (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) reflects a specific move towards greater in-class provision for students with special educational needs within the overall context of developing more inclusive schools.

There are a number of different approaches to team teaching as described by Murawski (2009). In the one teach one support approach, the teachers can alternate teaching and support roles to ensure professional parity of esteem. While one teacher takes responsibility for content instruction the other teacher focuses on supporting student learning within the classroom. Parallel teaching describes a situation where both teachers are simultaneously involved in content instruction. The class is divided into two heterogeneous groups and each teacher teaches one group either in the same or different rooms. In station teaching, small groups of students rotate amongst a number of stations. Each teacher works at a particular station. Independent stations where students work without direct teacher supervision are also possible. Responsibility for planning and teaching is divided between the teachers involved. Alternative teaching is a regrouping approach. The majority of students remain in the class group and other students form smaller groups as need requires for pre-teaching, re-teaching, extension exercises or other individual teaching activities. Classic team-teaching is the most demanding approach. All students remain in the large group and the teachers work as a team to deliver lesson content. Murawski (2009, p.203) describes it as

“sharing the stage”. Teachers can role-play and debate together to make content clearer and can interject and ask questions of each other. Currently in Irish primary schools, the one teach one support approach and the station teaching approach are the most commonly used.

While all forms of teacher collaboration offer opportunities for informal learning, successful team-teaching is a form of joint work (Little, 1990) in that teachers teach together in the same classroom and in so doing provide the opportunity for peer observation. The joint planning and evaluation of lessons and the observation of a colleague teaching allow for the sharing of different knowledge, experience and skills and offer opportunities to realise the very powerful potential of giving and receiving effective feedback. In so doing, team-teaching involves strategies that “open practice in ways that encourage sharing, reflecting and taking risks necessary to change” (Vescio et al., 2008, p.84).

However, research on collaboration between special education and mainstream teachers in team-teaching situations reveals barriers to building professional knowledge through such open practice. The lack of parity of esteem amongst team-teaching partners, personality clashes, perceived loss of control over one’s own class, unsupportive leadership and school organisation, the lack of experience of collaboration and insufficient professional development limit success and can cause significant problems (Villa, Thousand and Nevin, 2008; Murawski, 2009)

While classroom teachers have become familiar with the presence of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) in the classroom, teaching with another teaching colleague is still very new. The provision of in-class support to meet the needs of students with special educational needs currently provides the most formally recognised opportunity for two or more teachers to work together in the same classroom. Apart from the SEN area, other opportunities for teachers to work together tend to be more informal in nature, for a particular purpose and of limited duration. Teachers who do not participate in such endeavors generally teach alone in their classrooms and, importantly, working with colleagues is confined to activities that do not require observing each other teach. This context is well captured by Tomás Ó Ruairc, Director of the Teaching Council in his comment (Irish Times, Feb 10, 2015) that “the practice of teachers critiquing the work of their peers remains rare” and that there exists a stereotypical view that teachers are not doing their job if they are not teaching and consequently that time spent by teachers on continuous professional development is a luxury not an essential.

The current SEN policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) tasks teachers with developing a more collaborative approach to SEN teaching. Discussion amongst colleagues, the sharing of knowledge and skills and most importantly the development of team-teaching evidence the emphasis on collaboration. Effectively guided and supported, the collaborative approach to SEN provision in schools has the potential to develop the special education teachers’ professional knowledge. Further, it can empower them as agents of

change and enable them to share their professional knowledge with their colleagues and develop more effective and inclusive SEN practice throughout the school, a need identified by Rose et al., (2015 p. xii) and apparently not lost on policy makers “ Teacher confidence in addressing a range of SEN is variable and expertise in this area often resides with specialist teachers rather than across a whole teaching staff.”

However, teacher collaboration that builds professional knowledge and sustains improved teaching and learning in schools is complex and hugely dependent on contextual and human factors (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). If the current move to more collaborative SEN practice (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) is to achieve its potential, a school system and workplace that is sympathetic to teacher collaboration and to inquiry and reflection on practice is required. A look at the external contextual factors that impact on school-based teacher collaboration that develops professional learning is therefore merited.

3.4. External contextual factors that impact on teacher collaboration and its potential to build teacher professional learning

The SEN policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) with its focus on teacher collaboration that has the potential to build teachers’ professional knowledge is not an anomaly within the primary school system. Support for school-based teacher collaboration that builds professional knowledge has increased significantly in recent years prompted by the ever-changing needs of society. In particular, the knowledge-based society, the challenges and opportunities posed by globalisation and, of particular significance to this study, the diversity in schools and classrooms is forcing a review of traditional approaches to teacher education (Conway et al, 2009). Teachers now need to continually reinvent themselves and become facilitators of learning instead of transmitters of a formal body of knowledge (Sugrue, 2002). Consonant with aspects of earlier policy, Conway et al (2009), in their report on teacher education, recommend a continuum of teacher education connecting initial teacher education, induction and continuing professional development and is the framework currently in place in Ireland. They present a significantly different conceptualisation of the contemporary teacher and school to those traditionally held. Schools are described as places where knowledge is generated and shared. Teachers are knowledgeable, inquiry-oriented professionals capable of identifying problems in professional practice and gathering the required evidence to respond effectively.

A number of very significant developments have occurred that support the view of teachers as collaborating professionals engaged in a process of inquiry and reflection in their schools. The Code of Practice for teachers (Teaching Council, 2012), Cosán, the national framework for teacher learning (Teaching Council, 2016), the system of School Self-Evaluation (DES, 2012)

and the Croke Park Hours (DES, 2011) each in their different ways resonate with a knowledge-in-practice (Cochran-Smyth and Lytle, 1999) conception of teacher learning that supports school based teacher collaboration and associated professional learning. The following sections explore this support for teacher collaboration further.

3.4.1. Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers

The leaning towards school-based inquiry and collaboration is reflected in the Code of Conduct (Teaching Council, 2016). The Code envisions the teacher as a reflective practitioner. Teachers are expected to “seek to develop positive relationships with colleagues that are characterized by professional integrity and judgment” and to “work to establish and maintain a culture of mutual trust and respect in their schools” (p.7). Specifically, in relation to professional practice teachers must “maintain high standards of practice” and “in a context of mutual respect, be open and responsive to constructive feedback regarding their practice and, if necessary, seek appropriate support, advice and guidance” (p.8). In the section of the Code titled Professional Collegiality and Collaboration teachers are asked to “work with teaching colleagues and student teachers in the interests of sharing, developing and supporting good practice and maintaining the highest quality of educational experiences for pupils/students” and to “work in a collaborative manner with ... other members of staff... in seeking to effectively meet the needs of pupils/students” (p.8).

While the Code of Practice is supportive of teacher collaboration, its statements are very general. The teacher behaviours required to implement the sophisticated levels of collaboration envisioned in current SEN policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) are not sufficiently captured. Detailed statements that guide teachers’ approach to the joint work of team-teaching in particular are merited given its importance in the development of collaborative SEN practice (DES, 2017a) and the provision of inclusive education for all students (UNCRPD, 2016). The Code also fails to adequately reflect the complexity of the fundamental changes in professional practice that inclusive education will necessitate most especially the transition from individual to collaborative approaches to teaching.

3.4.2. Cosán, the National Framework for Teachers’ Learning

The expectation of teacher collaboration that develops professional practice and meets the needs of students is also reflected in Cosán, the national Framework for Teachers’ Learning (Teaching Council, 2016). The framework aims to develop a professional culture of learning around “teachers’ active engagement in their own learning, for their benefit and that of their students” (Teaching Council, 2016, p. 3). Central to the Cosán framework are a number of key issues. Teachers will be enabled to identify and engage in professional development that meets their needs and those of their students. The

framework will have the required flexibility to respond to the diversity of needs experienced by teachers throughout their careers. CPD programmes will be of high quality and relevant to teachers' daily work and will impact positively on teachers' professional practice.

Within the Cosán Framework, the Teaching Council (2016) views teachers' professional development along four dimensions namely: formal/informal; personal/professional; collaborative/individual and school-based/external to the school (Teaching Council, 2016). Across these dimensions, a range of learning processes is envisaged to adequately reflect the complex nature of teaching. These include: courses and programmes, workshops and seminars, immersive professional activities, reading, professional contributions, mentoring/coaching, and of particular interest to this study, learning through collaboration and learning through practice (Teaching Council, 2016).

What is particularly striking about the Cosán framework is the emphasis on collaboration and reflection. The Teaching Council's guiding principles of "shared professional responsibility and collective professional confidence" (Teaching Council 2016, p.21), which underpin the framework, suggest strong collaborative intent. "Practice and Collaboration" is identified as a learning process and includes teacher learning through "engaging in team-teaching", "action research projects," "piloting new initiatives" and "sharing experiences with colleagues through making presentations or otherwise contributing to the knowledge base of teaching and learning" (Teaching Council 2016, p.17).

3.4.3. A knowledge-in-practice conception of teacher learning

Crucially, Cosán, while aware of the benefits and importance of externally generated knowledge as in the knowledge-for-practice conception also reflects the conception of "knowledge-in-practice" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999, p. 262, 272). Consonant with a situative perspective on cognition, the "knowledge-in-practice" conception of knowledge acknowledges the importance of the physical and social contexts in which learning takes place, the social nature of learning and the way in which learning is distributed across the individuals and artifacts involved (Putnam and Borko, 2000). The school and classroom environments and the act of teaching influences how teachers think, teach and learn and vice versa (Putnam and Borko, 2000), a position now recognized in the Cosán framework (Teaching Council, 2016). Further, the proximity of teachers to their colleagues and their shared involvement in the task of teaching facilitates collaborative activity and associated distributed cognition (Lave, 1988 in Putnam and Borko, 2000).

Crucially, in its recognition of a knowledge-in-practice conception of teacher professional learning, Cosán affirms the importance and value of teachers' active role in professional knowledge generation in the school context. Previously, in accordance with a dominant knowledge-for-practice conception of teacher learning, professional learning was seen to take place

outside the school. Teachers were implementers of transmitted knowledge more than generators (Cochran-Smyth and Lytle, 1999). Of particular relevance to the current SEN policy's encouragement of collaborative SEN practice (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b), a knowledge-in-practice conception of teacher learning supports the view that, teachers in collaboration with their colleagues can learn from inquiry into and reflection on aspects of practice within their classrooms and schools. In this way, they can generate knowledge that is contextually responsive to the challenges and problems of professional practice. Such school-based collaborative professional learning has the added value of being able to link teacher and student learning (Sugrue, 2002). As teachers collaboratively examine and experiment with aspects of professional practice in their classrooms, very immediate and insightful feedback is available through the observed effect on student learning and through students' views, as appropriate. Other perspectives can also enhance school based collaborative teacher learning through facilitation by outsiders, often university consultants, who can support and assist teachers in reflecting on their values and assumptions about teaching and learning and how these relate to or diverge from specific aspects of professional practice (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999; Sugrue, 2002).

The recognition of a knowledge-in-practice conception of teacher learning (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999) in Cosán (Teaching Council, 2016) supports the development of teachers' professional knowledge of SEN practice through school-based teacher collaboration and identifies team-teaching as one such activity. Further, very definite structures, in particular School-Self Evaluation (SSE) (DES, 2012) and the Croke Park Agreement (DES, 2011) have also been put in place in Irish primary schools to support the inquiry into and reflection on practice that builds professional learning from collaboration.

3.4.4. School Self-Evaluation

The move towards teacher learning through collaboration, evident in the national framework for teacher professional learning (Teaching Council, 2016) and in SEN policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b), is reflected in the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process described as “a collaborative, inclusive, reflective process of school review” (DES, 2012, p.12). School Self-Evaluation tasks principals and teachers with collaboratively and continuously evaluating and improving selected aspects of their schools' professional practice. Implementation of the School Self-Evaluation process and its outcomes form a central part of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) Inspectors' published external evaluation of schools. A statement from the then Minister for Education, at the introduction of the School Self-Evaluation process, Ruairí Quinn, clearly linked collaboration and the building of professional knowledge “(Teachers) will work collaboratively to change their practice and improve the learning experience for students” (DES, 2012, p.3).

3.4.5. Croke Park Hours

A significant support for teachers to work more collaboratively came in the form of obligatory non-teaching hours. The Croke Park Public Service Agreement, circular 008/2011, aimed to ensure that the “Irish Public Service continues its contribution to the return of economic growth and prosperity to Ireland” (DES, 2011, p.3) at a time of serious fiscal constraint. The agreement provided for teachers to work for an additional thirty-six hours per school year at primary level. The hours became known as the Croke Park Hours and are in operation since February 2011.

The most significant feature of the Croke Park hours, apart from their unpopularity amongst teachers, is that they provide non-contact time for teachers to attend to professional requirements other than teaching: “the central purpose of the additional time is to provide for certain essential activities to take place without reducing class contact/tuition time” Circular, 0042/2016 (DES, 2016b, p.1). A plan for the use of the thirty-six hours should be drawn up by the principal and teaching staff and agreed by the Board of Management of the school. A record of the full usage of the hours should be published in normal communication to the parents of the students attending the school.

Eight areas are listed for which the Croke Park hours can be used. They include school planning, continuous professional development, induction, pre and post school supervision, policy development, staff meetings, nationally planned in-service and school arranged in-service. Importantly, there is scope under these headings for schools to identify their own priorities and meet the system needs of the school and flexibility in how the hours can be used. Circular 0042/2016 (DES, 2016b) in a recent review of usage, detailed that an amount of up to and not in excess of ten hours could be spent on planning and development work on other than a whole school basis. Despite their unwelcome arrival, the Croke Park hours, now in place, provide unprecedented time for teachers to work together and collaborate on aspects of practice. Used effectively they provide substantial support for the development of collaborative SEN practice in schools that has the potential to build teacher learning.

Current SEN policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) that urges a more collaborative approach to SEN teaching and in particular its emphasis on team-teaching, provides considerable scope for professional learning via collaboration. Cosán, the national Framework for Teachers’ Learning (Teaching Council, 2016) is supportive. Its embrace of a knowledge-in-practice conception of teacher learning (Cochran-Smyth and Lytle, 1999) affirms school-based teacher inquiry into and reflection on professional practice. Structures and processes such as the Croke Park hours and School Self Evaluation provide the time and means by which practice can be discussed, reviewed and improved.

However, these external contextual factors that influence the capacity of schools to support teacher collaboration and build professional practice, alone, cannot guarantee successful teacher collaboration. An analysis of the significant literature that examines internal school based contextual factors namely individual and collaborative school cultures, autonomy and leadership presents a pastiche of barriers and opportunities for special education teachers as they enact their agency and implement a policy compliant, collaborative approach to SEN teaching in their schools.

3.5. Individualism

Though infiltrated by more collaborative teaching approaches in recent times, a culture of professional autonomy, individualism and isolation has been the common state in teaching in Ireland (OECD, 1991) and merits investigation because of the barriers it poses to the current development of collaborative SEN practice, the focus of this study. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) explain that where individual school cultures operate, teachers while geographically close to their teaching colleagues teach alone in the privacy of their classrooms. Isolation protects teachers from the scrutiny of peers, but it also deprives them of necessary support and valuable feedback. Given the uncertain nature of teaching, support and feedback are vital. Faced alone, professional uncertainty can cause anxiety and can lead to professional stagnation. Isolation and uncertainty prevent teachers from learning from each other and can result in a lack of awareness of poor quality individual professional practice (Rosenholtz, 1991).

Lortie (1975) identifies the lack of a “powerful technical culture” (p. 192) among teachers as a very limiting feature and consequence of a culture of individualism. While teachers may share knowledge and resources, it is not a systematic and informed inquiry into and reflection on practice but more an exchange of some “tricks of the trade” (p. 195). This is compounded by the fact that interaction between teachers is “at the margin of their daily work” (p.192). The lack of a strong, common professional knowledge base developed through shared goals in relation to teaching and student learning, shared values and problems intensifies teacher uncertainty about their instructional practice and threatens teachers’ self-esteem. As a consequence, teachers are disinclined to engage in effective processes of sharing and mutual assistance that collaborative practice requires. Instead, teachers develop norms of self-reliance that perpetuate teacher uncertainty and militate against the development of a strong technical culture and confident professional practice. Teaching is seen as the possession of the individual teacher and not the endeavour of the school community and unsolicited aid from colleagues violates norms of self-reliance (Rosenholtz, 1991). The occupational norms of non-interference and equal status described by Little (1990) as defining features of the profession further support privacy and threaten collaboration. Individual school cultures also make the critique and disagreement necessary to develop professional practice difficult (Ball 1994 cited in Putnam and Borko, 2000). Instead of the more challenging and

revealing interactions that build professional knowledge, more informal interchanges around sharing and assisting prevail (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Such interactions provide minimal, non-threatening contact which maintains a certain cohesion and stability in the school workplace and protects teachers' independence and privacy. While portrayed as forms of collaboration, these interactions can actually support and maintain independent work practices (Little, 1990).

What is lost in cultures of private individual practice is the opportunity to discuss and examine fundamental aspects of professional practice that lead to the development of professional knowledge of practice and ultimately better learning outcomes for students (Little, 1990). The absence of scrutiny and debate amongst teachers around the issues of professional practice indirectly reinforces an uncritical acceptance of aspects of teaching. Teachers do not readily have the opportunity to observe other teachers teaching and to receive feedback from colleagues on their own practice. Private individual practice that excludes peer observation limits the valuable information that can inform and develop practice and constrains possibilities for receiving support and affirmation from colleagues (Little, 1990).

Of interest to the development of collaborative SEN practice and in particular, in-class support via team-teaching, is Lortie's (1975) finding that teachers gain psychic rewards from work within their own classroom without the assistance of their peers. As a result, intrusion on classroom boundaries by colleagues can be unwelcome as it can interfere with such benefits. Further, in relation to the current focus on teacher collaboration that builds professional learning, Putnam and Borko (2000) remind us that schools tend to focus on individual competencies rather than the sharing of learning and the culture of the school can make it difficult for teachers to explore new approaches to teaching and to incorporate new ideas and practices (Putnam and Borko, 2000). Sugrue's (2002, p. 330) research that revealed "an absence of support for teachers at the point of experimentation-their classroom," concurs. While teachers appreciated more participative and interactive professional learning, primary school cultures supported norms of individualism.

In contrast to more participative professional learning, a trial and error approach as described by Lortie (1975) sits comfortably within an individual school culture but constrains the quality of professional learning. Opportunities for learning are reliant on the individual teacher's ability to identify problems, develop appropriate solutions and assess the outcomes. The aforementioned absence of a strong technical culture curtails teachers' ability to interpret events that occur in professional practice. Through a trial and error approach to professional learning, teachers construct individual conceptions of good teaching and of the means by which it can be attained (Lortie, 1975).

Surgue (2002) argues that because of their symbiosis, the transformation of school cultures and professional practice needs to be simultaneously

supported. To this end, he advocates the encouragement of practitioners to develop “a scholarly literature that will begin to sustain and support inquiry and reflection about the nature of practice” (2002, p.330). Revisiting his suggestion at this time of SEN policy change in Ireland seems worthwhile given that both inquiry and reflection are essential elements of effective school based teacher collaboration that builds professional knowledge (Little, 1990) and in light of Rosenholtz’s (1991) advice that the best defense against the crippling effects of teacher uncertainty in times of challenge and change, lies in effective collaboration with colleagues.

3.5.1. Factors responsible for Individualism

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) outline a number of factors that are responsible for teacher individualism all of which are evident in the Irish primary school system and of significance in relation to the development of collaborative SEN practice and team-teaching in particular. The architecture of school buildings where teachers teach in their own classrooms can confer a sense of territory. Evaluation practices fashioned by a top down inspectorial accountability system can cause teachers to see help and collaboration as forms of inspection. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue that a very definite change in mindset is required to decouple observation of teaching from the inspection process and see it instead as a positive feature of professional practice. A wide range of changes in education and continually increasing expectations can result in teachers setting unrealistically high expectations for themselves in a profession that lacks clearly defined limits. The resultant guilt and perfectionism can prevent collaboration and instead nurture stoicism and self-sacrifice amongst isolated and competitive teachers (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

The long-term effects of sustained professional isolation are quite serious. A lack of confidence and attendant anxiety can cause teachers to fall into a professional rut and create barriers to any collaboration with colleagues that would risk revealing their thoughts, knowledge and teaching practices (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). The associated effects on school development are obvious. Such impoverished collegial interaction limits continuous improvement and development as in Rosenholtz’ (1991) description of stuck schools.

Ireland’s legendary autonomy (OECD, 1995) is reflective of teaching as an individual, isolated profession and is quite distant from the type of environment that nurtures effective school-based teacher collaboration. When a cultural shift from isolated to more collaborative practice is promoted at policy level, as is currently occurring in Ireland, individualism can create substantial barriers to effective teacher collaboration and can limit the professional knowledge development that teachers can achieve through working together. A closer examination of collaborative professional practice explains why.

3.6. Collaborative professional practice

Hargreaves and Fullan's (2012, p.110) view that individual, isolated school cultures can be "a license to be brilliant but also to be abominable or just plain bland" offers a very plausible explanation as to why policy in Ireland is presently focused on moving towards greater teacher collaboration. In contrast to the limitations of the individual school culture outlined above, a collaborative school culture, is seen as a license for teachers to collectively and continuously improve their teaching throughout their careers and increase their professional knowledge. Collaboration is the antithesis of traditional patterns of isolated professional practice. Effective school-based collaboration facilitates teachers to work together to develop their teaching and the learning of students in their schools (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

Associated with the move from individual teacher autonomy to collective autonomy, via the process of collaboration, is the fear that teachers' individuality will be sacrificed. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012, p.111) advise that "strong collaboration and distinctive individuality go together in vibrant communities of innovation and growth." In collaborative school cultures, there is broad agreement on values, individuality is supported and disagreement within agreed limits is encouraged. Secure staff relationships allow constructive professional disagreement to take place. Teachers share knowledge, skills and ideas. They support and encourage each other to be more open and actively engaged in improvement and change. Fear and failure are shared, and vulnerability is voiced. Leadership is central to the development of such collaborative school cultures. Principals who are able to build "trust and respect with and among their teachers" and establish and support new norms and behaviours that develop and demonstrate trust and nurture collaboration are vital (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, p.113).

Rosenholtz (1991, p.44) advises that "norms of collaboration don't simply just happen." Teachers need to be involved in decision-making about the technical issues of teaching. Through this process teachers have opportunities for substantive interaction with colleagues as they discuss and debate aspects of professional practice, recognise common problems and collaboratively seek solutions. Sensitivity to their particular school situation develops, as does awareness of the need for effective mutual assistance and sharing, given that no teacher has immunity from classroom problems. The benefit of individual colleagues' different professional knowledge and competence becomes evident as solutions to problems are explored. Crucially the involvement in decision-making and the development of shared teaching goals help teachers to feel part of a "community of endeavor" (p.45). Teacher certainty about their school's technical culture and their own professional practice ensues. Opportunities to team-teach, a situation that the current SEN policy (DES, 2017) has created in Irish primary schools, and the associated organisational need to plan and evaluate classroom instruction, also encourage mutual assistance and collaboration between teachers (Rosenholtz, 1991).

3.6.1. A Model of Collaborative Practice

The research of James et al. (2007) gives us a picture of collaborative school cultures in operation derived from their study of 18 primary schools in Wales that were performing well despite their socially disadvantaged contexts. Joint working was a prominent feature as was the teaching team. All members of the team were equally valued and there was parity of esteem despite different roles. Through reflection on practice, accepted ways of working were agreed and it was expected that all members of staff would comply. Consistency of approach and consonance amongst staff members' teaching practice was in evidence. Creativity was encouraged and supported.

Through a process of careful consideration, new ideas and suggested changes were incorporated into existing practice if deemed to improve pupils' learning. The collective authority of the staff was in evidence and was developed and sustained through open, comfortable communication amongst staff members and "secure and straightforward" working relationships (p.548).

Staff members were aware of each other's strengths and weaknesses and gave and received help with ease. When problems and conflicts arose, they tended to be issue based not person based and were discussed openly and resolved fairly. Staff members spoke of "fairness, justice and even-handedness in the ways the schools worked...mutual accountability, a high level of trust and a spirit of collective effort" (p. 548).

Developing such a collaborative school culture is a slow, demanding and complex process involving significant organisational and personal commitment. Moving from an individual to a collaborative school culture happens incrementally over time. The cultural shift involved can be either helped or hindered by the existence of a variety of forms of collaboration between groups of teachers in a school and also through the introduction of programmes and initiatives that require teachers to work together. Some of the better-known forms of such collaboration include balkanisation, contrived collegiality, arranged collegiality and professional learning communities. The essential difference between these various forms of collaboration lies in their ability to generalise into fully collaborative school cultures and develop professional capital throughout the school (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

3.6.2. Balkanisation

Balkanisation occurs in schools when subgroups of teachers form around shared professional issues and interests. While collaboration exists within the group, it is not shared throughout the school. Instead, the subgroup remains separate and can become insulated from the rest of the staff. Feelings of superiority can accompany such balkanized groupings with corresponding feelings of envy manifested in other staff members' avoidance of or animosity towards the sub-group and its focus (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, p.115).

3.6.3. Contrived Collegiality

“Contrived collegiality” (Hargreaves, 1994; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, p117) is a regulated form of collaboration, driven by an external agenda where procedures and programmes are put in place to get teachers working together in pursuit of particular initiatives. While such procedures aim to start collaboration between teachers, they can be viewed as bureaucratic impositions that fail to sufficiently acknowledge teachers' knowledge and judgment. As such, they are often deemed to be artificial and superficial in nature. However, collaborative cultures do not develop unaided and such approaches can give teachers an initial experience of working together, which if positive, can build the foundations of deeper future collaborative cultures (Burns and Darling-Hammond, 2014). Currently a number of programmes to develop literacy and numeracy skills and to enhance students' well-being have been introduced into the primary school system and are used voluntarily by schools. While not their primary aim, these programmes facilitate teacher collaboration in their delivery. How embedded and effective the teacher collaboration becomes is an issue for the individual school.

3.6.4. Arranged Collegiality

“Arranged collegiality” (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, p.118), recognises the limitations of contrived collegiality and puts structures and resources in place to facilitate teachers to work together to improve aspects of professional practice. The emphasis is on supporting teachers, not imposing. Over time, recognition, trust and support develop and collaborative cultures can emerge.

3.6.5. Professional Learning Communities

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) involve teachers working together in continuing groups over time. In keeping with distributed learning, teachers with different knowledge and expertise come together and can learn from the different perspectives of fellow teachers and gain new insights into teaching and learning through “rich conversations” (Putnam and Borko, 2000, p. 8).

The PLC operates through collective responsibility, within a culture of respect and care for each other, as professionals and as people. It is this culture that facilitates the honest and challenging conversations about professional practice that lead to improvement. Participating teachers have a shared purpose in relation to improving practice and student learning through their professional knowledge development, which is informed by research and the wisdom of experienced collective judgment. Problems provide an opportunity for organisational learning that strengthen the school and are owned by all (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

3.7. Autonomy and Collaboration

The current move from isolated, individual practice to collaborative practice can sometimes present simplistically as a move from bad to good. Without doubt continuous isolated professional practice is ill-equipped for the demands of contemporary teaching and prevents teachers from developing their professional knowledge through effective collaboration. However, in our jettisoning of individualism, teacher autonomy can get lost. Autonomy has become strongly associated with individual, isolated school cultures and disassociated from collaborative cultures. At first glance autonomy and collaboration seem strange bedfellows but on closer inspection, it appears that our ability to harness the natural tension that exists between them is a significant determiner of the success of teacher learning and professional knowledge development in the school workplace (Clement and Vandenberghe, 2000).

Collaboration is not about controlling teachers or creating group-think (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Healthy workplace collaboration must be able to embrace the diversity of its teachers because each teacher's individuality, often developed in autonomous work, has the potential to inform and enrich the collective and vice versa. What is crucial is that the school workplace recognises this complementarity and provides a learning space in which learning opportunities are identified and engaged with in a way that informs practice at a deep level and builds professional knowledge (Clement and Vandenberghe, 2000).

Central to developing and sustaining such a learning space is discussion. Teachers need to be willing and able to openly discuss issues and problems of practice and work collaboratively to improve them through shared goals and in a spirit of mutual respect and trust. Each teacher's individuality and autonomy are allowed to flourish and enhance the collaboration process and ultimately the learning of all involved. In such cases, teachers' collaboration, individuality and autonomy support not stymie one another. An individual teacher's idea can be affirmed and supported by the group and the teacher credited. Teachers can choose to autonomously work on a shared problem and return to the group with the fruits of their individual labour or collectively pursue a course of action.

Hargreaves (1993 cited in Clement and Vandenburghe, 2000) describes three forms of teacher autonomy that relate to school culture. Constrained individualism refers to a situation where teachers have no opportunity to collaborate within their schools. Strategic individualism describes how teachers protect their practice from scrutiny and overlook opportunities to explore problems of practice. They largely plough their own furrow within the status quo of the school. Elective individualism occurs when teachers enthusiastically engage with a particular aspect of their professional practice because of personal interest. Clement and Vandenburghe, (2000), add a fourth form, ascribed autonomy, wherein teachers, upon sharing information, are affirmed by colleagues for their knowledge and skill in a particular area and accorded a certain status within the school on this basis. Crucially affirmation replaces teachers' negative perception of having their ideas pilfered by their colleagues (Clement and Vandenburghe, 2000) and the feeling of loss associated with the sharing of ideas (Little, 1990) mentioned earlier.

Professional cultures have a very significant impact of the forms of collaboration that teachers engage in and on their learning. In the section that follows the current focus on leadership that builds and supports collaborative professional cultures that support teacher collaboration and the continuous improvement of practice through inquiry, experimentation and reflection is explicated.

3.8. Leadership and collaboration

3.8.1. A Distributed Perspective

The teacher development and school improvement literature (Little, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1991) implicitly supports a distributed model of school leadership that facilitates teacher collaboration, builds professional knowledge and implements necessary changes in practice. In her study, Rosenholtz (1991) outlined how principals established collaborative norms in their schools. They made helping behaviours dominant features of school life and urged teachers to ask if they didn't know something. Teachers were encouraged to work together, and principals structured specific helping relationships between teachers. Crucially, they ensured that teachers shared in shaping the way their schools operated. Consonant with distributed leadership, principals in schools with collaborative cultures trusted teachers' creative instincts and shared technical responsibilities with them. Teachers were given certain responsibilities. Committees were set up to tease through new ideas and subsequently present them to the full staff. Principals made leadership directed towards reflection on and improvement of teaching, a responsibility for every teacher in the school.

In stark contrast, principals in isolated school settings exhibited scolding behaviours that threatened teachers' sense of self-worth. When teachers

requested or offered advice, they perceived that it threatened the principal's self-esteem. Uncertain principals tended to be controlling and did things their way. Non-involvement in school and classroom problems by principals was ascribed to the lack of a strong technical culture and lack of competence. Less uncertain principals empowered teachers and joined with them in school improvement activities, thereby enhancing professional knowledge and confidence Rosenholtz's (1991).

Consonant with Rosenholtz's (1991) analysis of the actions and behaviours of principals, the current focus on distributed leadership reflects a growing awareness that the school principal is at the centre of a human communication network and that working with teachers is a crucial aspect of the role (DES, 2016a). Distributed leadership is distinctly different from traditional, hierarchical models in which leadership is manifested exclusively through the actions of the principal. Drawing on distributed cognition and activity theory, Spillane, Halverson, Diamond (2004, p.11) describe distributed leadership as "a practice distributed over leaders, followers and their situation".

Though currently popular, Spillane (2005) argues that a distributed leadership perspective is not a panacea for all the problems experienced in schools nor is it a straightforward process. In her analysis of distributed leadership, Harris (2008, p. 35) describes those in formal leadership roles as "the gatekeepers" of distributed practice in that they must create the conditions within their schools that facilitate and develop distributed leadership practice. Distributed leadership is not restricted to a particular form and does not reside exclusively in the role of leader. Instead, distributed leadership is organised within the school in the way that provides the most effective response to the issues and problems that emerge. Teachers are enabled to take informal leadership roles and work together to solve pedagogical problems and in so doing, engage in the leadership practice of the school. Quality interaction between formal and informal leaders within the school then replaces the more traditional form of the leader-follower relationship (Harris, 2008). Most importantly, through their interactions "a reciprocal interdependency" emerges (Spillane, 2005, p.146). Each person benefits from the different knowledge, skills and perspectives that their colleagues bring to the leadership task. Through such reciprocity, collective leading emerges, and the cognition of the group exceeds that of any one member (Spillane, 2005).

Distributed leadership presents a significant departure from more traditional models and as Harris (2008) reminds, schools as organisations present considerable challenges to new ways of working. Structures can be inflexible and cultures resistant to adopting new ways of working. A shift in culture from traditional models, where leadership is vested in one person, to a distributed model that views leadership as an organisational resource, is challenging. The structural organization of schools that is dominated by compartmentalisation also poses a barrier to a more fluid approach to leadership.

However, despite the challenges and cognisant of the limitations of any perspective on leadership, distributed leadership is inclusive and consonant with teacher collaboration. The focus on interaction and positive interdependence suggests leaders who can model and support the emotionally underpinned collaborative behaviours that are vital for the development of teacher collaboration (Slater, 2005). Specifically, in relation to developing collaborative SEN practice, a distributed perspective on leadership can empower SETs to take initiative and have their positive agency affirmed through informal leadership roles. The focus on interaction and reciprocal interdependency (Spillane, 2005) seems particularly suited to developing the team-teaching aspect of the special education teachers' work and to realising its potential to develop knowledge of professional practice.

3.8.2. A Framework for Leadership Practice: The Ontario Leadership Framework

The centrality of building collaborative cultures that support staff members in working together is clearly demonstrated in the Ontario Leadership Framework (2013). In keeping with an instructional and distributed approach, leadership is defined as “the exercise of influence on organizational members and diverse stakeholders toward the identification and achievement of the organisation’s vision and goals” (p.12). In this definition leadership is again seen primarily as a human endeavour focused, in relation to schools, on working effectively with staff to achieve better teaching and learning outcomes for students. What is particularly important is the way in which the influence is exercised. Successful leadership is described as supportive and facilitative as distinct from manipulative or coercive. It includes formal and informal leadership extending throughout the school from the principal and deputy principal to teachers in management roles and teachers leading school-based projects.

Developed with extensive and in-depth reference to research on leadership, the Ontario Leadership Framework (2013, p.12) outlines the practices of effective principals in five areas: “Setting Directions, Building Relationships and Developing People, Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices, Improving the Instructional Programme and Securing Accountability”. “Setting Directions” involves the principal in building a shared vision and associated goals for the school in collaboration with staff. These agreed goals then guide and inform teaching and learning and decision-making in the school. Teachers are encouraged to take responsibility for achieving the school vision and goals for all students. The benefits of such an approach for school-based teacher collaboration are many. The findings of Szczesiul and Huizenga (2014) show that a shared vision and goals help to develop interdependence and collective responsibility amongst teachers. Positive interdependence helps teachers to overcome the uncertainty that isolated practice can engender and the perceived risks of exploring problems of practice. Teachers are motivated to improve practice through school-based collaboration because problems in

practice are seen as collective problems best served by collaborative discussion and not examples of individual teacher deficit to be hidden.

However, it is in the areas of “Building Relationships” and “Developing People” and “Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices”, that the aspects of leadership practice, crucial for the development of teachers’ professional knowledge through school-based collaboration, can most clearly be seen. These practices include: facilitating opportunities for staff to learn from one another; supporting staff in developing new practices consonant with their individual interests and the agreed goals of the school; establishing norms in the school that demonstrate appreciation for constructive debate about best practices; encouraging staff to listen to each other’s ideas and genuinely consider their value; and guiding staff in demonstrating respect, care and personal regard for each other (Ontario Leadership Framework, 2013, p.12).

In relation to Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices, “building collaborative cultures and distributing leadership” and “structuring the organization to facilitate collaboration” are crucial. Effective school leaders are expected to model collaboration in their own work and provide opportunities, resources and structures that support teachers in working together to improve practice. The development of mutual respect and trust, the use of open communication and compromise and the involvement of teachers in decision making that impacts on their teaching are central elements of the collaborative process (Ontario Leadership Framework, 2013, p.12). The positive influence on collaboration of support from the school principal and teacher involvement in curricular and instructional decision-making, both elements of the Ontario Framework, is borne out in a recent study of Dutch primary teachers (Honinigh and Hooge, 2014).

“Improving the Instructional Programme” requires leaders to participate with teachers in the improvement of teaching in the school and to provide opportunities for teachers to observe effective teaching practice among peers. The current SEN policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) that advocates team-teaching as a means of providing in-class support to students with SEN in Irish primary schools offers the opportunity for observation of practice and in so doing resonates with leadership practice as outlined in the Ontario Framework (2013). “Securing Accountability” highlights the importance of staff engagement in the analysis of high-quality data and the promotion of collective responsibility for student achievement and well-being (Ontario Leadership Framework, 2013, p.13).

3.8.3. The Development of Leadership Practice in Ireland

The Ontario Leadership Framework (2013) describes highly inclusive and collaborative leadership practice. Elements of the framework are reflected in the policy approach to school planning in Irish primary schools, the process that most clearly demonstrates the role of the school principal.

School Planning only became a statutory requirement for schools with the enactment of the Education Act (1998). Under section 20 of the Act, schools were obliged to have a school plan. School Planning Guidelines (DES, 1999b) issued to all primary schools followed by a self-evaluation guide 'Looking at our School' (2003). Both documents espoused an inclusive and collaborative guiding philosophy.

School Planning was based on a partnership model that was inclusive of all stakeholders. It was envisaged that the school plan would be developed through collaboration. Guidance was given on effective teamwork and decision-making strategies. The role of the principal was viewed as pivotal in the school planning process. Similar to the Ontario Leadership Framework (2013), the planning process required a vision and associated goals that guided the daily operations of the school, and through effective collaboration, were owned by all.

The School Planning Guidelines (DES, 1999) also recommended that the principal facilitate teachers in sharing aspects of their teaching programmes and information from courses or other professional development activities with their colleagues. This resonated with Section 23 of the Education Act (GoI, 1998), which states that it is the responsibility of the principal to provide leadership to teachers and promote their professional development.

However, while a very collaborative approach to School Planning, hugely dependent on effective leadership and supportive of teacher professional development was being encouraged, serious questions were being asked about school leadership in light of falling numbers of candidates to fill vacant posts and the difficulties experienced by incumbents. Very significantly, the Hay Report (Drea and O'Brien, 2002) questioned if Irish Primary School principals were selected on the basis of their leadership qualities and pointed to a lack of debate on how to select effective leaders. The difficulty experienced by principals in delivering the role effectively was highlighted. The report suggested that this difficulty might be due to a deficit of leadership and people management skills, inadequacies in the selection process and a lack of professional development opportunities. Insufficient clarity about what the role entailed, and lack of time and resources were also cited.

The very significant proportion of principals who had full time teaching duties was also highlighted as a key challenge to leadership development in Ireland (Drea and O'Brien, 2002) a situation that still pertains. Over 60% of Irish primary school principals have a full teaching timetable (Brennan and Mac Ruaric, 2015) mainly due to the large number of small rural primary schools in Ireland. The middle management structure generally consists of a deputy principal and depending on school size, one or more assistant principals and management post holders.

3.8.4. Current challenges and opportunities for leadership In Ireland

The aforementioned planning process evolved over time into the now mandatory process of School Self Evaluation (DES, 2012) that tasks principals and teachers with continuously evaluating and improving selected aspects of their schools' professional practice. Leadership and collaboration are at the heart of the School Self Evaluation initiative. In a recent address, the Chief Inspector Dr. Harold Hislop (2015) identified the need for principals to build a strong collaborative culture amongst teachers and to use the School Self Evaluation process "to focus the conversations of teachers on the quality of students' learning and its relationship with teachers' practice" (p.6). He spoke of the need to create "the climate of trust and professional respect in which collaborative learning can occur among all of the staff" (p.4/5) and the need for teachers to be open to reviewing their own practice and changing it for the benefit of the students.

Central to the development of teaching, Hislop (2015) argued, was the sharing of expertise and the development of a culture that supported teachers in critically and constructively observing each other's practice. To this end, the role of the principal was crucial in the facilitation of team teaching, the organisation of observation periods and gaining agreement with teachers on secure protocols for peer-to-peer observation and feedback. The focus was on development rather than accountability. Further, he envisaged principals observing teachers' practice and giving feedback during developmentally focused one-to-one discussions.

3.8.5. The quality framework for Irish primary schools

Looking at our School (DES, 2016a), the current quality framework for Irish primary schools enshrines the views expressed by the Chief Inspector (Hislop, 2015). It provides "a unified and coherent set of standards for two dimensions of the work of schools: Teaching and Learning and Leadership and Management. It is designed for teachers and for school leaders to use in implementing the most effective and engaging teaching and learning approaches and in enhancing the quality of leadership in their schools" (DES, 2016, p.7). Of particular interest to this study is the framework's view of schools as dynamic learning organisations, where teachers are enabled to work individually and collectively to build their professional capacity. By such means it is envisaged that continuous improvement in teaching and learning will be supported and self-evaluation and reflective practice will be embedded in schools.

The four domains relating to the leadership dimension include Leading learning and teaching; Managing the organisation; Leading school development and Developing leadership capacity. Within each domain, the statements of effective leadership practice are consonant with distributed and instructional styles of leadership and echo many of the effective

leadership practices enshrined in the Ontario Leadership Framework (2013).

The statements within the domains suggest a sophisticated level of leadership practice. Of direct relevance to this study, given its focus on the change to more collaborative SEN practice is the expectation that the principal and other leaders will possess the necessary skills and knowledge “to demonstrate a clear understanding of change processes and approach the management of change in a collaborative, flexible and sensitive manner” (DES, 2016a, p. 27).

The role of the principal in relation to the empowerment of teachers “to take on leadership roles and to lead learning, through the effective use of distributed leadership models,” if appropriately implemented, could greatly support the special education teachers in their role as change agents. Likewise, the principal’s encouragement of “teamwork in all aspects of school life” and the creation and motivation of staff teams and working groups to lead developments in key areas (DES, 2016a, p.29), if properly executed, would provide appropriate structures and support for the development of teacher collaboration that builds professional knowledge of SEN practice.

The DES policy documents guiding leadership practice in Irish primary schools acknowledge the importance of leaders who can work effectively with teachers, who can develop a team approach to improving teaching and learning through reflection and critique of practice and manage change effectively. Confirmation by the Chief Inspector that the external school Inspection process evaluates leadership and that inspection models reflect the importance of developing collaborative cultures in schools focused on teaching and learning, (Hislop 2015), is reassuring in light of the SEN teachers’ task.

3.8.6. Support for School leaders

However, Hislop’s, (2015) concession that there had not been significant investment in the professional development of principals and that no prescribed postgraduate qualification was required as a condition of appointment signalled the need for caution. A number of recent initiatives have rectified the identified deficits in leadership education and support. However, their focus on the education of individual leaders runs contrary to Spillane, Halverson and Diamond’s (2004) argument that if a distributed approach to leadership is to develop then the school rather than an individual leader may be a more appropriate unit for future interventions to develop leadership expertise.

The launch of the Postgraduate Diploma in School Leadership in 2017 provides a national professional development programme for aspiring leaders delivered through the Universities. The recent establishment of the Centre for School Leadership aims to deliver “a more strategic approach to meeting the needs of school leaders” (Nihill, 2016, p.22), offers mentors for

newly appointed principals and facilitates the development of leadership clusters. The Professional Development Service (PDST) offers advice and support to principals through its 'Misneach' and 'Forbairt' programmes. Support for school principals, from within the profession is provided by the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN).

Of particular interest to this study is the recent report (Fitzpatrick Associates, 2018), commissioned by the DES, that sought to elicit school leaders' views on their professional development needs. The report identified conflict management and resolution; the development of leadership capacity through the distribution of leadership roles within the school and building a collaborative school culture with staff as critical areas of need for leaders' professional development. While the report demonstrates ongoing commitment to providing support for principals, participation in all programmes is, at present, voluntary.

3.8.7. Development in a time of performativity

Leadership in Irish primary schools is currently receiving overdue attention. As with the Ontario Leadership Framework (2013), Irish education policy on leadership, evident in the School Self-Evaluation (DES, 2012) process and the quality framework for schools (DES 2016), is underpinned by concepts of distributed and instructional leadership. What remains to be seen is how effectively policy will translate into practice. How leadership practice develops will have a very significant bearing on how special education teachers can develop a collaborative approach to SEN practice in Irish primary schools.

Distributed leadership can empower teachers through its focus on interaction (Sugrue, 2009) and the development of informal leadership roles that facilitate and support school based collaborative teacher learning (Szczesniul and Huizenga, 2014). However, poorly executed, distributed leadership can result in a "hermaphrodite hand on the tiller," (Sugrue, 2009, p.368) with attendant staff division and overall lack of guidance. Instructional leadership, in its benign orientation is helpful to teachers striving to improve their professional practice. The principal is seen as a go to person who can advise, encourage innovation and collaboration and reassure when experiments fall short. However, in stark contrast, the frame of performativity can cast the instructional leader as a figure of control and power who monitors teaching and promotes a please the principal approach to professional development (Sugrue, 2009).

Currently in Ireland a benignant approach to leadership is promoted with a focus on support and development (Hislop, 2015; DES, 2016a). However, running parallel to the benign interpretation is a neo liberal culture of managerialism and performativity evident in increased frequency of school inspections, the rating of schools on a scale of 1-4 that thereby identifies underperforming schools, the publication of school evaluation reports on the

Department of Education and Skills (DES) website, incidental inspections and mandatory standardised testing (Mac Ruairc, 2010).

The potential impact of a managerialist policy direction on school leadership is an open book. Small schools reliant on a collaborative, interpersonal dynamic may not be well served by more prescriptive forms of instructional and distributed leadership that police instead of support teaching and learning (Mac Ruairc, 2010). While accountability is vital, the necessary courageous experimentation required in all schools for meaningful implementation of the new SEN policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) requires support and compassion. Fear of punishment will not serve the change process well.

3.8.8. The social dimension of leadership

The practice of leadership is emotionally imbued with positive and negative consequences for both leaders and followers (Brennan and Mac Ruairc, 2015; Berkovich and Eyal, 2015). Even within the administrative frame of school planning and evaluation, the personal reigns supreme as principals are tasked with delivering shared goals and outcomes. Ultimately, leadership succeeds through positive social influence. The role is essentially about working with and developing people, most especially teachers, and leading them towards a shared vision for teaching and learning that benefits all. Language underpinned by the social and emotional aspects of leadership abound. Developing practice through evaluation and reflection, building collaborative cultures, creating and supporting teams and supporting teacher professional development within dynamic learning organisations give a flavour of the skills and knowledge school principals are now expected to own and demonstrate (DES, 2016a). Most important, in relation to the special education teachers' attempts to implement collaborative SEN practice, is the principal's ability to develop and support an appropriate "zone of enactment" that provides the necessary social resources and supports to enable changes in professional practice. To this end, encouragement of collaboration in place of private practice is required, as is the facilitation of quality discussion amongst colleagues about practice and necessary changes. Developing teachers' understanding of the required change and of the effort involved in enacting it, are also key supports as is the provision of the necessary material resources (Spillane, 1999, p.164).

Sugrue's (2009) contention that what we need in the rank of principal are ordinary people capable of doing extraordinary things who allow people to flourish, may reflect to some extent the 'heroics of leadership' genre (Spillane 2005, p.143). However, his advice merits attention as Irish primary schools move towards more collaborative SEN teaching. Crucial to the special education teachers' attempts at developing a more collaborative approach to SEN practice are leaders who have the ability to bring teachers together and support them in working collaboratively. To this end, serious consideration will need to be given to the human issues surrounding teachers' professional working relations and the emotional and relational dimension of

collaboration. Consequently, effective interpersonal communication skills, professional respect, trust and conflict require particular attention at this juncture in Irish primary schools and will be discussed in the next section.

3.9. The emotional and relational dimension of teacher collaboration: the velvet glove that masks the iron hand?

The focus on teacher collaboration places new demands on teachers' professional working relationships and brings issues around interpersonal communication skills to the fore. While communication is a central feature of all teachers' work, it is largely focused on communication with students. Working collaboratively with colleagues merits specific attention, as it requires more sophisticated communication skills than general discussion and conversation demands.

When teachers collaborate with colleagues, they risk exposure that the relative privacy of individual practice protects them from. When discussing aspects of professional practice with colleagues, teachers are required to give opinions and in so doing reveal their thoughts. In a team-teaching situation, peer observation of teaching practice brings the nature of the teachers' professional working relationship into sharper focus and raises issues about professional respect, trust, betrayal, interdependence and conflict.

3.9.1. Interpersonal Communication

Friend and Cook (2013) explain that communication skills are a fundamental building block of collaborative interactions and merit study and focused practice. In keeping with a transactional view of communication they define interpersonal communication as "a complex, transactional process through which people create shared meanings through continuously and simultaneously exchanging messages" (p. 33). Their definition is similar to that of Dewey, in that both definitions demonstrate that communication is about content and relationship and involves a process that is active and creative "the establishment of cooperation in an activity in which there are partners, and in which the activity of each is modified and regulated by partnership" (Dewey 1958 (1929) p.179 cited in Biesta 2013, p. 27).

Communication requires cognitive and behavioural skills. Communicators must observe and interpret both verbal and non-verbal cues. Becoming aware of the significance of a nod or a smile or a frown is very important. Assessing the clarity of your message and restating or elaborating when needed and monitoring your rate of speech play a significant role in effective interpersonal communication. The irreversibility of interpersonal communication requires self-monitoring and mindfulness to avoid unpleasant consequences (Friend and Cook, 2013).

Friend and Cook (2013) advise that teachers also need to become aware of their perceptions and how they influence their understanding of colleagues and how they interpret colleagues' communication. Monitoring biases and their effect on communication, being watchful of jumping to premature conclusions instead of checking for additional information, seeking clarification, and trying to find alternative explanations help communicators to manage their perceptions and limit misinterpretation of colleagues' communication and consequent damage to relationships.

The ability to listen and respond appropriately to colleagues is another vital communication skill. Listening is the main means of getting information and of demonstrating interest in the messages of colleagues. It shows concern for the speaker and an interest in understanding what they are trying to communicate. Most importantly, through effective listening teachers receive the necessary information to participate appropriately in the collaborative task. Without effective listening inappropriate responses can suggest that the communication was trivial (Friend and Cook, 2013).

The ability to give and receive feedback is essential for successful collaboration and is reliant of good listening skills (Friend and Cook, 2013). Effective feedback is described as "feedback that others can and do use to evaluate their own situations or behavior" (p. 77). It should be descriptive instead of evaluative or advisory, specific rather than general, directed at something that can be acted on and concise. Requesting and accepting feedback in order to gain valuable information on personal behaviours and situations, necessary to improve collaboration and collaborative relationships is also a key skill. Effective responding requires verbal skills of prompting, paraphrasing, reflecting and questioning.

Biesta (2013) states that all education is a risk. He explains with reference to the fact that "education is not an interaction between robots but an encounter between human beings" (p.1). As special education teachers endeavor to develop collaborative SEN practice in an education system that has traditionally operated an individualistic and autonomous approach to teaching, the necessary new forms of interaction and communication required, make that risk explicit. It is unwise to assume that all teachers have the level of interpersonal communication skills required for collaborative SEN practice. However, Friend and Cook (2013) advise that communication competence "is largely a set of skills that can be learned and continually refined" (p.37) a point that highlights the need for professional development and practice in relation to these vital skills. Dewey's view that "of all affairs, communication is the most wonderful" offers guidance and caution to special education teachers at this juncture as they embark upon the implementation of collaborative SEN practice in their schools (Dewey, 1958 (1929), p.166 cited in Biesta, 2013, p.26).

3.9.2. Professional Respect

Professional respect, central to school based collaborative teacher learning, is very nebulous and difficult to define. Sennett (2003) describes the subtlety of professional respect and uses a practical example of a concert performance to describe an elusive and difficult concept that is fundamental to effective workplace collaboration. Sennett's concert is a good analogy for schools. The singer and pianist worked together to authentically perform Schubert's work. While each performer was accomplished in his own field, it was the merging of talents and the acknowledgement of what each needed from the other in order to use their talents fully for the purpose of authentic performance that made both great. Working in this professionally respectful way accorded both performers prestige, delivered a successful performance that benefitted the audience and appropriately acknowledged Schubert- the quintessence of a modern-day, win-win situation.

In similar vein, teachers are increasingly required to work in concert to teach authentically in a way that improves teaching and learning and benefits all students (DES, 2016a; DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b). Simple, one might think, given that teachers work together in the same school with the shared task of improving student learning. Complex, when one realises that many teachers work as autonomous individuals and aim to accomplish the task of teaching in different ways and with varying levels of success (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

Currently Irish education policy requires a more concerted effort from schools to achieve student learning through shared values, purpose, vision and goals and the attendant organisational structures and social, interpersonal resources (DES, 2016a). Central to developing such a collaborative approach, according to Sennett, is professional respect. Teachers need to show professional sensitivity to the legitimate needs of colleagues in order for each teacher to play, if not a virtuoso teaching role, the best teaching role possible in reaching the shared goals of the school. In sum, professional respect stems from a belief "that each person is gifted in his or her own way" (Sennett, 2003, p.67). Accordingly, the task facing Irish primary schools is to harness teachers' talents to achieve a strong professional knowledge base in relation to SEN practice evident in quality teaching and student learning. Sennett's (2003) argument that such mutuality is rare and must be enacted poses a very significant challenge for principals and teachers as we journey towards more accountable, reflective and collaborative professional SEN practice in Irish primary schools (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b).

3.9.3. Trust

Collaboration is reciprocally related to trust, another highly complex concept that eludes easy definition. Successful opportunities to work together can develop trust (Rousseau et al 1998 in Tschannen and Hoy, 2000) but trust is a necessary precursor to effective teacher collaboration. This causality dilemma confronts Irish primary school teachers and principals as they move from the traditional norms of individual practice to more collaborative practice, consonant with current policy directives, and creates a challenging space to manage.

Should betrayal result from broken trust during collaboration attempts, the long-term negative effects can have serious implications for future collaborative practice. Distrust, once established, can become self-perpetuating and prevent open communication, replacing it instead with suspicion (Govier, 1992 in Tschannen and Hoy, 2000) thereby depriving collaboration of one of its most important elements.

Central, also, to effective collaboration is the willingness and ability of teachers to work interdependently (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Interdependence is embraced when reliance on others is considered essential for task achievement (Rousseau et al 1998 in Tschannen and Hoy, 2000). However, reliance is a double-edged sword. Its companion, vulnerability, arises from not knowing the exact intentions of the others involved and not being able to predict how appropriately they will behave. Trust bestows the confidence to manage the inherent risk potential (Rousseau et al 1998 in Tschannen and Hoy, 2000) and allows collaboration to take place. When teachers can successfully pursue individual, private practice in the safe confines of their own classrooms, trust is not an issue and has neither significant need nor opportunity to be developed in the school workplace. However, pockets of good practice in individual classrooms gives at best a variable standard of teaching to students and good practice in the absence of transparency and critique is questionable (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Therefore, the momentum for collaboration continues to gather speed in Irish education, and, given the strong empirical support for the centrality of trust to collaboration (Tschannen, 2001; Grosemans et al., 2015), the heretofore, elusive concept of trust in Irish primary schools comes into more prominent focus.

The following definition of trust, emanating from an extensive analysis of definitions, gives a clearer view of what trust entails. "Trust is one party's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is (a) benevolent, (b) reliable, (c) competent, (d) honest, and (e) open" (Hoy and Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 1998, in Tschannen and Hoy, 2000). In relation to Irish primary school special education teachers who are embarking on collaboration and particularly team-teaching with their colleagues, these key elements of trust have very concrete and specific implications. Benevolence involves having "faith in the altruism of the other" resulting in an expectation of good will and

a confidence that no harm will be caused (Tschannen and Hoy, 2000, p.557). Reliability means that the other person can be relied upon to deliver whatever is required in the interdependent activity while competence requires that the other person has the requisite skills and knowledge to meet expectations. Honesty is directly related to a person's integrity and authenticity and ensures truthful, responsible behaviour. Openness describes the sharing of relevant information based on a reciprocal trust that neither the information nor the giver will be exploited (Tschannen and Hoy, 2000).

The development of trust, necessary for effective teacher collaboration, relies on a demanding list of human characteristics that need to be consistently demonstrated, judged and accepted by the parties involved. Time and access facilitate the process, but neither can be guaranteed for teachers who have traditionally worked mostly in the privacy of their own classrooms.

3.9.4. Betrayal

With trust comes the possibility of betrayal, a cold consequence contrary to the generosity and warmth associated with the act of trusting. Betrayal has a long memory. The hurt lives on and fractured relationships remain and remind. Revenge, generally a negative concept but with some possibilities for healing can become the focus of energy in the absence of more sophisticated repair processes (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2000). For teachers, however, "the Othello-like path of retribution and revenge" (Hargreaves, 2002, p.405) is rarely taken. Instead teachers avoid interaction with the betrayer, withdraw into their own classrooms and psychologically distance themselves from what they are feeling. Sennett (1999) argues that restoring trust in another is a reflexive act that requires individuals to face their own vulnerability. However, he cautions that it is not a purely personal action. It involves a social dimension. Organisations that promote autonomy and independence create a sense of vulnerability and social structures that do not promote reliance on others in a crisis fuel an absence of trust.

In Hargreaves' (2002) research teachers referred to feeling betrayed as a result of contractual betrayal where colleagues did not meet professional expectations, communications betrayal through colleagues' malicious gossip and competence betrayal evident in a lack of professional respect and regard around issues of competence. Such acts of betrayal reflect serious human issues in the school workplace that require attention and to date are silent passengers in the Irish primary school special education teachers' collaboration journey.

3.9.5. Teachers' professional working relationships

Collaboration makes demands on teachers' working relationships that individual, autonomous practice does not (Little, 1990; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Given the move to more collaborative SEN teaching in Irish primary schools, the nature of teachers' working relationships merits consideration. The international literature provides interesting insights that demonstrate the complexity of teachers' professional relationships and the challenges that collaboration presents.

Hargreaves' (2001) empirical study highlights the importance for teachers of feeling appreciated and acknowledged by their colleagues. Importantly, this was not the acknowledgement of good professional practice observed by colleagues. Instead, it was a form of acknowledgement that generally occurred at a distance from practice as in retirement speeches and such like. Teachers also valued being socially accepted by their colleagues and receiving personal support from them. Relationships varied from those more akin to friendliness than friendship to others that were both personally and professionally closer. However, close personal bonds of friendship were "special and exceptional rather than pervasive features of many teachers' professional lives" (p. 7).

Nias (1989), with reference to her detailed study of the personal and professional experience of primary school teachers in England and Wales, spoke of teachers need for friendship and reassurance from their colleagues and ascribed this to the stressful nature of teaching children and to teachers' need for affirmation from adults. Teachers valued an environment of mutual dependence where sharing was the norm. Mid-career teachers found sharing particularly helpful when facing new challenges for which they felt insufficiently prepared. One teacher spoke of the importance of sharing difficult moments in a team-teaching situation: "One of the things I liked about team teaching was that you could catch the other teacher's eye across the room when something awful happened. You didn't have to say anything but you both knew and it was reassuring. Sometimes it kept you from going right round the bend" (p.145). While there were many examples of supportive sharing, generosity was not guaranteed as explained in the following quote: "I've discovered that teachers are very territorial and materialistic. They like to keep their own books, they like their own rooms, they won't part with equipment, they want to keep 'their' children." (p.143).

Nias (1989) raises some interesting issues in relation to the school as a workplace. It differs from other places of employment in that as one interviewee explained "people do the job and go home" (p.151). This was attributed, to some extent, to teachers taking up positions in locations where they had family or friends and so were not reliant on the workplace for social engagements. The focus on children reigned supreme in the school workplace: "Everybody goes around patting the children on the back with great enthusiasm and saying how wonderful they are, but nobody pats you on the back and says how wonderful you are" (p.147). Giving praise and

recognition to colleagues was the most highly valued feature of professional working relationships and the one most absent. Teachers needed to be more aware of each other as people, as described by one school head “Teaching isn’t just working with children, it’s enjoying the staffroom and the laughing that goes on there” (p.152).

3.9.6. Conflict and teachers’ professional working relationships

Conflict and disagreement play a major role in determining the level of collaboration that teachers are willing to engage in. Teachers’ friendships and their professional working relationships have a huge bearing on how conflict is viewed and managed and how collaboration operates. When asked to describe instances of experiencing negative emotions, collaborating with colleagues who hold different views featured strongly in teachers’ responses (Vangricken et al., 2015). In particular, having to work with imposed team-teaching partners and issues around providing in-class support for students with SEN were cited. Hargreaves (1994) explains that teachers will sometimes confine collaboration to safer, less contentious aspects of practice and avoid any threat to the existing relationships that deeper, more personally and professionally revealing collaboration on actual teaching practice might occasion.

In Hargreaves’ (2001) study teachers generally viewed conflict and disagreement as negative and something to be avoided. Professional disagreement that is required to reap the benefits of different perspectives and develop professional knowledge through changes and improvements in teaching was not generally embraced. Instead weaker forms of friendliness tended to reinforce similar views and positions. Differences in teachers’ purpose and practice were tolerated largely through avoidance and politeness. In situations when these differences were publicly voiced, they most often resulted in conflict with long lasting consequences.

Similarly, Nias et al (1989) found that while good personal relationships allowed disagreement, teachers were not willing to engage in same, if it risked damaging their relationships and tended to avoid challenging the status quo. De Lima (2001) argues that strong personal relationships and shared values can hinder teacher professional development and that fear of damaging personal relationships poses a barrier to the more questioning and challenging approach needed for schools to continuously improve. Hargreaves’ (2001) suggests that strong friendships value disagreement and that the attendant trust protects from the fear that disagreement could damage the relationship. Emotional understanding developed through close relationships between colleagues and supportive working conditions prevent the problems of misinterpretation and misunderstanding which can limit the development of successful teaching in schools (Hargreaves, 2001).

The development of emotional understanding is dependent on both individual teachers’ emotional intelligence and on the way professional

interactions and shared work experiences are developed and supported in the school. Professional geographies that establish norms of individualism or collaboration, political geographies that define interpersonal communication in terms of status and power and physical geographies of time and space play a significant role in determining the nature of teachers' relationships with their colleagues (Hargreaves, 2001). Hargreaves advocates exploring teacher relationships in the context of professional purpose given that "personal closeness and emotional support among teachers are of little professional value, unless they ultimately promote and do not hinder professional interaction that improves the work of teaching" (p.8). Otherwise, the necessary "robust professional dialogue" (Hargreaves, 2001, p.519) will yield to softer, more superficial forms of collaboration that are less effective in building and sustaining professional knowledge in schools.

Achinstein (2002) argues that while teachers' fear of conflict is understandable, the negative consequences have far reaching effects particularly as a school's approach to conflict, impacts its capacity for organisational learning. Schools that avoid conflict generally have limited mechanisms for public debate. Instead, conflict is privatised through informal systems. School communities can also transfer conflict onto those outside of their community and avoid questioning their own practices and assumptions. In contrast, school communities that embrace conflict, openly acknowledge differences in practice and difficult issues and develop professionally through joint critical reflection.

Teachers need support in understanding and accepting conflict as an essential part of community and collaboration. They need to realise that accepting easy consensus limits their ability to change and ultimately leads to staleness and loss of necessary perspective. Teachers need to understand that ability to engage in critical reflection and to work together to explore issues of conflict is crucial for the development of professional knowledge (Achinstein, 2002). In order for schools to flourish, teachers and principals need to find a "space for dissent" (p.442) in which a "dialogue of differences" (p.422) can be voiced and supportive professional relationships can be developed.

However, Achinstein (2002) cautions that those supporting a shift to more collaborative practice can fail to recognise the role of disagreement and conflict associated with community. As a result, teachers are insufficiently prepared to embark on collaborative practice leading to frustration and lack of success with implementation. Understanding the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and in particular the interconnected nature of collaboration, conflict and teachers' professional working relationships, is an essential and timely task. The development of special education teachers' professional knowledge of SEN practice through effective teacher collaboration in our primary schools is dependent on practitioners who can work positively with colleagues who hold differing opinions and not shy from challenging conversations and critical reflection.

3.10. Conclusion

Vangricken's (2015) review of the research on teacher collaboration lists an extensive range of benefits that includes improved professional teaching practice and student learning, teacher efficacy and morale. These benefits in particular make a compelling argument for the development of teacher collaboration and give an insight into why collaboration is now a central feature of the Department of Education and Skills strategy to improve teacher and school performance in Ireland (DES, 2012; DES, 2016a; DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b). The associated, enhanced teacher knowledge, skills and efficacy in turn make teaching more satisfying and explains teachers' positive disposition towards collaboration (Burns and Darling Hammond, 2014, p.20).

It is in the area of SEN that the strongest shift to teacher collaboration in Irish Primary schools is evident. The current policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) that promotes a collaborative approach to SEN teaching requires significant collaboration between special education teachers and their colleagues ranging from discussion on students' strengths and needs to the much more open and joint work of team teaching in the mainstream classroom. As a result, a clear understanding of what teacher collaboration entails is timely. Little's (1990) continuum of teacher collegiality serves this purpose well by providing a framework for the description and analysis of the types of collaboration that teachers engage in. Four forms of teacher collaboration (storytelling and scanning for ideas, aid and assistance, sharing and joint work) and their varying impact on the development of professional knowledge are detailed within the framework.

Support for teacher collaboration in the Irish primary school has grown steadily in recent years. The School Self-Evaluation process (DES, 2012), the introduction of the Croke Park non-teaching hours (DES, 2011), and more recently Cosán, the national framework for teacher learning (Teaching Council, 2016) affirm and support school-based teacher collaboration in their various ways. However, while the alignment of external contextual factors that encourage teacher collaboration is necessary, school-based contextual factors exert a very strong influence on the forms of collaboration teachers can engage in and crucially their ability to develop professional knowledge. Individual professional cultures can make collaboration difficult if teachers guard their privacy and autonomy and favour teaching alone in their classrooms. In contrast, collaborative professional cultures enable teachers to work together and to build their professional knowledge.

Central to the development of professional collaborative cultures and to effective school-based teacher collaboration is leadership, a role that operates through social influence in an emotional landscape (Brennan and Mac Ruairc, 2015; Berkovich and Eyal, 2015; OLF, 2013). The Quality framework 'Looking at our School' (DES, 2016a) reflects both a distributed and an instructional approach to leadership. However, in parallel, a managerialist focus is emerging that may restrict the more enabling aspects of leadership styles suitable to building collaborative school cultures (Mac

Ruairc, 2010). The absence, until very recently, of a coherent approach to the professional development of principals, and the lack of a required specific qualification for appointment heightens the challenge already inherent in the sensitive task of facilitating and supporting the development of effective school-based teacher collaboration.

The emotional geography of teachers' workplace relationships plays a very significant role in how teachers relate to one another and in the level of collaboration that is possible and its translation into professional knowledge (Hargreaves, 2001). Issues of professional respect, trust, betrayal and conflict that could be avoided or circumvented in isolated school cultures can present greater challenges in the move to more collaborative practice. Ultimately, teachers who view themselves as individual professionals may not immediately adjust to the role of collaborating professionals and a change of mentality that could take considerable time and effort may be required (Vangricken et al., 2015).

This is an exciting time in Irish primary education with a plethora of challenges and opportunities in relation to the development of collaborative SEN practice. It appears that what is most needed are teachers and principals who are willing to take the risk and move away from the dubious safety of private practice, embrace teacher collaboration that builds professional knowledge, have those courageous conversations about practice and bravely bring previously unspoken issues of trust, professional respect and conflict into the primary school workplace. The harder policy imperatives and organisational features are forming. The focus is now on softer human change at school level. However, the policy and practice environments don't always dance in synchrony. What lies ahead for Irish Primary schools as they endeavor to embrace the policy demands of more inclusive, collaborative SEN practice remains to be seen- an ongoing saga of human fragility that fails to face the human challenges that collaborative practice demands or a velvet revolution?

The following methodology chapter explains how this study of the collaboration between special education teachers and their colleagues in Irish primary schools and its impact on building professional knowledge around SEN practice was carried out.

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The new policy guiding the allocation of special educational needs teaching resources to Irish primary schools (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) advocates a more collaborative whole school approach to SEN teaching in the hope of developing more inclusive schools. SETs are required to share knowledge and skills with their colleagues and through effective discussion and collaboration reach joint decisions on important issues such as the levels and forms of support individual students will receive. Instead of the traditional reliance on the withdrawal of students with SEN from their classrooms to receive extra support the expectation is now that SETs will work with mainstream teachers to provide in-class support in the child's classroom via team-teaching.

Special education teachers' knowledge and experience of SEN teaching positions them as agents of change in relation to implementation of the current policy. Success in this challenging role is hugely dependent on supportive school organisation and leadership that understands and facilitates teacher collaboration (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). However, despite the demanding levels of teacher collaboration that the new policy requires and the potential for the development of teachers' professional knowledge that it offers, no empirical work on collaboration between SETs and their colleagues was conducted in advance. This study involving individual, in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus groups with primary school SETs aims to fill that gap.

In the sections that follow the methodology used in this study is described. The next section, 4.2, restates the rationale, the research aim and the research questions. Section 4.3 outlines the research design, addressing issues of ontology and epistemology and the appropriateness of the chosen research instruments, namely the individual semi-structured face to face interview and the focus group interview, and the selection of the study participants. Section 4.4 describes the research process, the conduct of the individual and the focus group interviews. Section 4.5 sets out the approach to data analysis. In section 4.6 the ethical considerations that underpin all aspects of the research are discussed. In the final section, the potential for bias, particularly in light of my previous and, for some, then current professional relationship with the participants is explicated. My position in relation to the research and how reflexivity was employed throughout the research process to combat bias is discussed.

4.2. Rationale and Research Questions

4.2.1. Rationale

Providing inclusive education for students with SEN via effective teacher collaboration as required by the recently introduced policy for SEN provision in Irish primary schools (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) is challenging. How prepared special education teachers are for the demands of implementing a more collaborative approach to SEN practice, and crucially the capacity of the Irish primary school workplace to support and facilitate them in this endeavor, merits significant consideration. However, to date, no study detailing the nature of the collaboration taking place between special education teachers and their teaching colleagues and its ability to develop professional knowledge around SEN practice has been undertaken in Ireland. This study intends to fill that gap and provide original insights from the special education teachers' perspectives, on the forms of collaboration they are involved in and what collaboration requires and delivers in terms of developing their professional knowledge. The contextual factors influencing the special education teachers' collaboration with their teaching colleagues and the interaction between the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and teachers' professional working relationships is examined. Most importantly, the special education teachers' views on how developing collaborative SEN practice with their teaching colleagues can be better supported is investigated.

4.2.2. Research Aim and Questions

The aim of the research is to analyse the way in which collaboration between special education teachers and their teaching colleagues in Irish primary schools operates and its ability to build and sustain the special education teachers' professional knowledge of practice.

Specifically, the research seeks to answer the following:

- What forms of collaboration are the special education teachers and their teaching colleagues engaged in and what is their effect on the way the special education teachers' professional knowledge is built and sustained?
- How do contextual factors affect collaboration between special education teachers and their teaching colleagues?
- How does the interaction between the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and teachers' professional working relationships affect collaboration between special education teachers and their teaching colleagues?
- What support do special education teachers need in order to build their professional knowledge through collaboration and thereby advance special educational needs practice in their schools?

4.3. Research Strategy

A research strategy is comprised of ontology, epistemology and methodology. Ontological and epistemological positions shape the way research is conducted, specifically, how a research study is designed, and the methods selected to collect data.

This phenomenological study is set within the social constructivist research paradigm (Creswell, 2013). Constructivist research is based on the ontological premise that reality is molded by human experience and social contexts. The constructivist epistemological position that guides this study is that reality is best explored through the examination of the subjective interpretations of its participants. The issues being studied are viewed from the perspective of the participants. The meaning of their experiences is used to understand why they act and behave in the way they do. Knowledge is constructed in the interaction between social actors and the social world and is best understood from the standpoint of those participating in it (Creswell, 2013). The researcher's concern is with understanding the world from the experiences and the interpretation of the experiences of the study's participants. Researchers need to "position themselves" in the research and be aware of how their interpretation is shaped by their own experience and background (Creswell, 2013, p.25).

4.3.1. Methodology

Methodology is a "research strategy that translates ontological and epistemological principles into guidelines that show how research is to be conducted" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 31-32). This is a phenomenological study that draws primarily on the work of Alfred Shutz (1960). Phenomenology views society as a human construction arising from human experience as it is lived by the social actors (Laverty, 2003). The actor's understanding of the social world develops intersubjectively with and through others (Wilson, 2018) with whom the individual is 'interrelated by common knowledge, common work and common suffering' (Schutz, 1960 p.210). Consequently, phenomenology seeks to discover and understand the subjective view of the social actor. For Schultz the 'doing and feeling' of the actor whom he referred to as the 'forgotten man of the social sciences' was fundamental to understanding the particular social action and ultimately the social world (Schutz, 1960, p.207). Indeed, safeguarding the subjective point of view, it was argued, guarded against the construction of a fictional world by the scientific observer (Schutz 1960, p.209).

In this phenomenological study, the subjective views of the SETs are explored as they engage with their colleagues in developing collaborative SEN practice in their schools. In keeping with phenomenology's emphasis on understanding the person's experience of the world and their situation (Wilson, 2018), a two -phase data collection process involving a number of individual face-to-face interviews followed by focus group interviews was

deemed appropriate in order systematically and effectively access the teachers' views on collaboration. The choice of a two-phase data collection process was informed by the work of Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006). Their research on the number of interviews required for thematic exhaustion based on a purposive study using sixty in-depth interviews revealed that saturation was achieved in the first twelve interviews "For most research enterprises, however, in which the aim is to understand common perceptions and experiences among a group of relatively homogeneous individuals, twelve interviews should suffice" (p.22). Indeed, of particular relevance to this study involving special education teachers, is the connection between participant homogeneity in relation to the research and saturation "The more similar participants in a sample are in their experiences with respect to the research domain, the sooner we would expect to reach saturation" (p.19).

The two-phase process allowed for deeper engagement with the research question as appropriate for doctoral study. Using the focus group interviews as an adjunct had the advantage of validating the findings from the face to face individual interviews and giving greater clarity and depth where required (Wilkinson, 1998). The wisdom of this decision was borne out in the subsequent data collection process.

4.3.1.1. Individual Interviews

The choice to use in-depth individual face to face interviews for phase one was made on the basis that interviews enable participants to discuss their interpretations of the world and how they regard situations from their own viewpoint (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011), in this case how special education teachers view their experience of collaboration with their teaching colleagues in the primary school workplace. Silverman's (1993) attestation as to the usefulness of interviews in qualitative research for gathering facts, identifying feelings, exploring and explaining behavior and offering opinions on particular situations and how they could be changed bears further testament to the suitability of interviews for this study. Factual information on the forms of collaboration that the special education teachers were engaged in was sought. The teachers' views on the organisational factors that influenced their collaboration with colleagues and on the impact of the interaction between the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and teachers' professional working relationships on their efforts to develop collaborative SEN practice were elicited. The special education teachers' thoughts and ideas on how teacher collaboration could be better supported and improved were explored.

Further, semi-structured interviews, while appropriately ordered, provide the necessary flexibility to probe issues more deeply when required and to engage with appropriate spontaneity that serves to illuminate aspects of complex issues (Silverman, 1993). This flexibility was particularly important given that the participants all had expert knowledge of and experience in teacher collaboration and as a result were in a position to raise relevant issues that benefitted the study. The use of semi-structured interviews also

facilitated the thick description (Geertz, 1973 cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011) necessary to capture the complexity and sensitivity of teacher collaboration and its ability to develop the special education teachers' professional knowledge of SEN practice.

4.3.1.2. Focus Groups

Focus group methodology "is a way of collecting qualitative data, which usually involves engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion (or discussions) 'focused' around a particular topic or set of issues," (Wilkinson, 2011, p.168). In phase two of the research, two focus group interviews were used as an adjunct to the individual face-to-face interviews that constituted the method of data collection in phase one. The focus group interview was selected because of its suitability to qualitative data and more specifically because it is "a particularly good choice of method when the purpose of the research is to elicit people's understandings, opinions and views," (Wilkinson, 1998, p.187). In relation to this study the focus group interviews validated the themes that emerged from phase one of the data collection process. They facilitated the further examination of certain significant themes in order to gain a deeper understanding of the core concept and added some fresh insights and a greater richness and depth to the data overall (Wilkinson, 1998).

The greater detail and richness that focus groups can deliver is due largely to their social nature. The focus group is fundamentally a process through which participants collaboratively produce an account of their views (Barbour and Schostak, 2005). Indeed, the distinguishing feature of the focus group interview is the "explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group" (Morgan, 1997). The discussion between the participants has the potential to generate accounts of greater scope and detail than one-to-one interviews. Views expressed can be elaborated in response to agreement and encouragement from participants. Equally views can be clarified and defended when questioned or challenged (Wilkinson, 1998).

The focus group also differs from the individual interview in relation to the role of the researcher. Participants talk more to one another than to the researcher (Wilkinson, 1998) and the listening skills of the moderator come to the fore (Barbour and Schostak, 2005). The researcher/moderator can actively engage in the process and explore expressed views more fully (Barbour and Schostak, 2005). Different perspectives can be invited and there is an ongoing opportunity to check meaning and ensure that the researcher's understanding accurately reflects the views expressed.

4.3.1.3. The Researcher's Background.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) advise that it is not possible to fully understand any phenomenon without reference to the context in which it is embedded. Consequently, they suggest that prolonged engagement and persistent observation increase the probability that credible findings and interpretations will emerge from research. Prolonged engagement with the focus of the study can also support the building of trust with participants. Though focusing primarily on naturalistic inquiry, their views reflect the relevance of the researcher's background to this study. My early professional practice as a primary school mainstream and special education teacher and, most especially, my current role of many years as a lecturer in SEN education and now director of the Postgraduate Diploma in SEN at the National University of Ireland, Galway (a programme of continuing professional development for practicing SETs, available in Colleges of Education and Universities and funded by the Teacher Education Section of the Department of Education and Skills) provided important insights into teacher collaboration and into the challenges faced by SETs as they engaged in the process of collaboration with their teaching colleagues. Over recent years, I became aware that though many SETs viewed collaboration positively and were very aware of the benefits for teachers and students, few teachers experienced or developed strong collaborative practice in their schools. The introduction of the aforementioned SEN policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) that requires significant levels of teacher collaboration provided the impetus to systematically research special education teachers' views on the development of collaborative SEN practice in their schools.

4.3.1.4. Design of interview and focus group schedules

Significant attention was paid to the design of the individual interview (Appendix 1) and focus group (Appendix 2) schedules and in particular to the framing of the questions. Guided by Tuckman (1972), all the questions emanated from the research aim. The purpose of the research guided the formation of all the questions and ensured, as far as possible, that the data was collected appropriately and efficiently and that it informed the study and ultimately answered the research questions. Due consideration was also given to the knowledge the respondents were reasonably expected to have, the nature of the relationship between the interviewer and interviewees and the interviewer's insight into the respondent's situation (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p. 415/416) in the development of the questions.

A range of question types including open-ended and closed questions and direct and indirect questions were used in the individual interview schedule. Together they provided factual information on and rich descriptive accounts of teacher collaboration. While the sequence and wording of the questions remained consistent for all respondents, where necessary, probes were used

in order to seek elaboration, clarification and to provide further detail. To this end and in keeping with semi-structured interviews, responding questions to information from the interviewee were used when required, in particular, follow up, probing, specifying and interpreting questions (Kvale, 1996). The sparse use and careful monitoring of probes minimised the increased risk of bias that their use can pose (Fowler, 2009). The focus group schedule sought the views of the SETs on the significant themes that emerged from the analysis of the data in phase one of the research. Open-ended questions to facilitate further insights into the themes presented were used.

4.3.1.5. Schedule of Questions for Individual Interviews

The schedule of questions was divided into five sections. Section one asked general questions about the special education teachers' work and its main aim was to help the participants to settle into the interview process. The four remaining sections each reflected one of the research questions. Section two of the interview schedule used questions designed to elicit the nature of the collaboration that the SETs were engaged in, both with their SEN and mainstream colleagues, using Little's (1990) four forms of collaboration as a lens. The impact of each form of collaboration on the development of the SEN teachers' professional knowledge of SEN practice was also explored. In relation to the joint work of team-teaching a number of specific questions sought to discover how team-taught lessons were evaluated, the use of critical inquiry and feedback and the special education teachers' views on peer observation of teaching. A series of open-ended questions that supplied "a frame of reference for respondents' answers but put a minimum of restraint on the answers and their expression" (Kelinger, 1970, cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p. 416) was used. A detailed and rich description of what the collaborative activities entailed and their ability to develop professional knowledge resulted. The data yielded from these questions answered the first research question:

- What forms of collaboration are the special education teachers and their teaching colleagues engaged in and what is their effect on the way the special education teachers' professional knowledge is built and sustained?

Section three of the interview schedule contained questions that elicited information on the influence of school-based contextual factors on teacher collaboration in keeping with the overall research aim and in particular the question:

- How do contextual factors affect collaboration between special education teachers and their teaching colleagues?

The questions in section four of the interview schedule sought to discover information on the impact of the interaction between the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and teachers' professional working relationships on teacher collaboration, consonant with the research question:

- How does the interaction between the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and teachers' professional working relationships affect collaboration between special education teachers and their teaching colleagues?

Sections three and four used a variety of specific and non-specific questions to capture the sensitive nature of some of the data that referred to the interactions and relationships within the teachers' primary school workplaces. While some direct and specific questions were required, awareness that such questions can cause respondents to become guarded was taken into account and they were balanced by indirect questions that enabled the respondents to give more honest, open responses. A funnel approach moving from general to more specific questions was used in this regard on occasion (Tuckman, 1972). Questions that dealt with more sensitive issues, in particular interpersonal relationships and leadership were carefully worded to allow teachers give essential information from their particular situations and viewpoints without naming or identifying or being negatively critical of particular people.

Section five of the interview schedule used a range of specific and open-ended questions to answer the research question:

- What support do special education teachers need in order to build their professional knowledge through collaboration and thereby advance special educational needs practice in their schools?

The interview schedule was piloted on three occasions. Three special education teachers who were known to me and not involved in the study carried out one pilot each. After the first pilot, changes were made to the language of some questions in order to make the questions clearer for special education teachers i.e. adding let down/disappointed to the question on betrayal. The second pilot revealed the need to give the schedule to the respondents in advance of the interview. The reason for this suggestion was that the questions required thought and reflection. It was argued that teachers would be interested in the process, particularly when they had agreed to be involved, and would like to participate as fully as possible. The third pilot confirmed that the schedule was fit for purpose.

All the advice was acted on and proved very helpful. It was apparent during the interviews that having the schedule in advance gave ownership of the process to the teachers and it was evident that they had given time and thought to the questions and that they were personally invested in the process.

4.3.1.6. Schedule of Questions for Focus Groups

The focus group schedule was divided into four sections reflecting the four research questions. Each section presented the main themes that had been identified from the data relating to the specific research question in the individual face to face interviews. Section one presented the themes related to the forms of collaboration the SETs were involved in and their impact on building the special education teachers' professional knowledge. The themes from the data relating to the research question that focused on the school based contextual factors that influenced collaboration were contained in section two. Section three presented the main themes from the data related to the research question on the impact of the interaction between the emotional and relational aspects of collaboration and teachers' professional working relationships on collaboration. Finally, section four of the focus group interview schedule presented themes from the data on the special education teachers' views on the support needed to develop teacher collaboration that builds professional knowledge of SEN practice.

After each main theme was presented a small number of open-ended questions were posed. The purpose of the questions was to facilitate the teachers in reflecting on the information and to ascertain what their thoughts were on the themes and if the teachers agreed with the themes or not. In relation to some themes, teachers were asked why the situation was as described and how the situation could be changed or improved. The schedule was given to the participating teachers a week in advance to allow them to reflect on the themes and questions and thereby assist with the timely management of the focus group.

4.3.1.7. The Study Participants

In keeping with the qualitative nature of the study a purposive sampling approach was used (Miles and Huberman, 1994) whereby teachers were selected because of their perceived ability "to purposely inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2007, p.125). Due to the sample size, variables such as school size and gender were not included as they would have fragmented the findings and diluted the primary focus of the research which aimed to ascertain the views of SETs on their experience of collaboration.

The participants in this study were all qualified primary school teachers who had worked as mainstream teachers before embarking on the role of SET in their schools. They were all recent graduates or current part-time students of the Postgraduate Diploma in SEN from the School of Education, National University of Ireland, Galway. SETs continue to work in their schools while completing the Postgraduate Diploma course of professional development in special needs education and are released from their schools for eight weeks during the school year to attend lectures and related activities. Given the

policy shift towards more inclusive education for students with SEN via effective teacher collaboration, these teachers were meeting the issues around collaboration in their schools on a regular basis. Their postgraduate study provided them with current thinking on collaboration. As a result, they had the necessary knowledge and experience of teacher collaboration to be considered “good” informants (Morse, 1994, p.228) and to produce rich and insightful data.

Consonant with the methodological design, fifteen primary school SEN teachers, all recent graduates of the Postgraduate Diploma in SEN at the National University of Ireland, Galway and living within a 70 km radius of Galway city were randomly selected, contacted and invited to participate in the individual face to face interviews. Thirteen special education teachers were in a position to participate.

In relation to the focus groups, Balbour and Schsotak’s (2005) advice that a focus group as close to a real-life situation as possible, such as a peer or professional group, is preferable to convening a group of strangers was acted upon. Primary school special education teachers participating on the Postgraduate Diploma in SEN programme were invited to participate in the focus group interviews during one of their lecture blocks at the University. All twenty-one primary SETs agreed to take part. Two self-selected focus groups were formed, one of ten members and one with eleven. The teachers on the programme were known to one another and were accustomed to participating in interactive lecture and workshop sessions. Their familiarity greatly assisted the smooth running and relaxed atmosphere in the focus group interviews.

The thirteen SETs who participated in the face-to-face individual interviews were each assigned a numerical code in the range Respondents Ind 1- Ind 13. Similarly, the ten participants in Focus Group A were each assigned a code in the range Respondents A 14-A 23 and the eleven participants in Focus Group B were given an individual code in the range Respondents B 24-B 34. By such means, individual contributions could be identified in the Findings chapters and the anonymity of the participants protected.

4.4. The Research Process

4.4.1. Phase one: Conduct of the Individual Interviews

This study, in its attempt to investigate the forms of collaboration that the special education teachers were engaged in, was dependent on the willingness and generosity of the teachers to provide rich data. In due recognition, careful consideration was given to the conduct of the interview from the opening of the interview and throughout the interview process to the closing of the interview (Lincoln and Gubba, 1985).

The individual face-to-face interviews were conducted in my office at the School of Education, National University of Ireland, Galway in the period April to June, 2017 from 5-7pm. Teachers were offered a choice of venue, my office in the University or a venue close to their homes. All of the respondents opted to travel to my office. The start time allowed teachers time to relax after work and travel to the venue.

I met each teacher at the main entrance to the office block. Tea, coffee and water were offered and the nearest toilet was indicated. The opening of the interview was particularly important as it allowed the interviewer and interviewee time to settle into the process and allowed the interviewer time to explain how the interview would proceed and answer any questions the respondents had (Lincoln and Gubba, 1985). My previous relationship with the teachers was helpful in this regard. However, the interview process was different to the context in which I previously worked with the teachers. Mindful of this, time was taken prior to commencement of the interview to explain again the purpose of the interview, the number of SETs involved, confidentiality (reference will only be made in the study and in any subsequent publications to the generic title Irish primary school special education teacher/SET) and the voluntary nature of their participation. (These issues had been addressed prior to the interview as detailed later in the Ethics section).

In order to tease through the issues in sufficient depth the interviews ran for between 1.5-2.0 hours' duration. Water was provided and the teachers were advised that the recorder could be stopped at any time to allow for a break. I was conscious that an overly long interview would impose significantly on the teachers' time, particularly at the end of a day's teaching, and be counterproductive. However, my fears were not borne out and while some teachers reported feeling tired at the end of the interview all participants were focused and energised throughout. Only a small number of teachers availed of a break during the interview. Time management was essential. The interview was conducted professionally. The conversation was maintained and kept on track. Appropriate and sensitive pacing gave the participants sufficient time to think and created an atmosphere of respect and relaxation (Lincoln and Gubba, 1985).

Time was taken at the end to thank the teachers and to reiterate the importance of their contribution (Lincoln and Gubba, 1985), and the value of their knowledge, skill and experience to the study. Unexpectedly the teachers individually thanked me for having the opportunity to participate in the study. They expressed gratitude for the opportunity to discuss their practice and for having their voice heard. Many teachers remarked that it was the first time they had really thought about and reflected on their professional practice. I found this uncomfortable in the beginning. I was baffled as to why the teachers would thank me since, in my view, I was the beneficiary. However, as the interviews proceeded, I became accustomed to hearing the same story and very glad that the process was mutually beneficial.

4.4.2. Phase 2: Conduct of Focus Group Interviews

Two focus groups were conducted in March, 2018. A small, comfortable tutorial room with good acoustics was used. Tea, coffee and light refreshments were provided for the teachers before the interview commenced. Teachers had the time to chat and become familiar with the room and relax into the interview process.

As with the individual interviews, time was taken prior to commencement to restate the purpose of the interview. I thanked them for agreeing to take part and stressed the importance to the study of their professional status and their associated knowledge, experience and views. The voluntary nature of their participation was reiterated. I explained how the interview would proceed and answered any questions the respondents had (Lincoln and Gubba, 1985). (These issues had been addressed prior to the focus group interview as detailed later in the Ethics section). Confidentiality was guaranteed in so far as was possible. Reference would only be made in the study and in any subsequent publications to the generic title Irish primary school special education teacher/SET. However, confidentiality was dependent upon all participants agreeing to maintain the anonymity of the participants and while it was expected that all respondents would uphold this, I couldn't personally guarantee it.

Each focus group lasted for approximately two hours and was recorded. I read aloud each theme before asking for the teachers' thoughts on it. Individuals volunteered and others joined in agreement or with different perspectives. All teachers participated fully and generously. At times responses were appropriately non-verbal. Head nodding and smiling showed agreement with the point made. The fear that the social nature of the focus group could lean towards consensus (Balbour and Schostak, 2005) was not in evidence. Different views and insights were provided with ease. On a few occasions, when different opinions were sought, they were given. The fear that some participants might be reticent about offering a view in front of others was also unfounded. There was no evidence of constraint or silence.

In relation to my role as researcher/moderator, my main tasks involved posing the questions, keeping the discussion flowing, enabling group members to participate fully and encouraging group members to interact with one another (Wilkinson, 2014, p.169). Indeed, interaction between research participants has been described as the hallmark of focus group research (Morgan, 1988). Listening was very important (Balbour and Schostak, 2005) especially when lengthy, energised discussions took place on a significant theme and involved a lot of voices with multiple contributions and some unavoidable overlap. The focus group allowed me to summarise and check that my understanding reflected the views expressed, an activity that proved very helpful later in the data analysis process.

I thanked the teachers for their contribution and as in the individual interviews I was surprised, gladdened and informed by their response. They found the experience very interesting, enjoyable and enlightening. They had never spent dedicated time discussing their professional practice with a group of colleagues before. They were energised by the experience and had learned through their participation. They regretted not having had such experiences in the past and saw great merit in having focused discussions with colleagues on their work in the future.

The focus group proved highly beneficial in two ways. The views expressed by the teachers in the focus groups confirmed the themes from the individual interviews. Deeper insights were given to explain certain aspects of significant themes for example the reasons for conflict avoidance and the underdeveloped concept of the school as a workplace. Overall the focus group method worked very well as an adjunct to the individual interviews.

4.5. Data Analysis

Reflexive Thematic Analysis is an approach to thematic analysis, used for capturing themes or patterns across qualitative datasets. Themes in Reflexive Thematic Analysis are conceptualised as “meaning-based patterns, evident in explicit (semantic) or conceptual (latent) ways and as the output of coding-themes result from considerable analytic work on the part of the researcher to explore and develop an understanding of patterned meaning across the data set.” (Braun et al., 2018, p.6).

Reflexive Thematic Analysis is consonant with a “qualitative orientation that usually emphasizes meaning as contextual or situated, reality or realities as multiple and researcher subjectivity as not just valid but a resource” (Braun et al., 2018, p.6).

The overall aim of reflexive thematic analysis is to provide a coherent interpretation of the data, grounded in the data. Braun et al. (2018, p.6) liken the researcher to a “storyteller” actively engaged in interpreting the data informed by their cultural membership, social position, theoretical assumptions and ideological commitments and scholarly knowledge.

Reflexive thematic analysis is consonant with the constructivist paradigm guiding this study and the qualitative methodological design, hence its choice as the data analysis method. Following phase one and phase two of the data collection process, audio recordings of the individual interviews and focus groups respectively, were transcribed verbatim. Data collected from the individual interviews in phase one of the research process and subsequently from the focus groups in phase two, was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis involving familiarization with the data, the generation of codes, the construction of themes, the revising and defining of themes and the production of the report (Braun et al., 2018) as outlined below. The themes that emerged from the analysis of the data from the individual interviews formed the basis of the focus group discussion.

4.5.1. Familiarization

The familiarization phase involved listening to the audio recordings and reading the interview and focus group transcripts. Listening to each audio recording in full without the transcribed text initially proved very helpful. It gave a very good overall sense of the dataset. It allowed me to become familiar and comfortable with the data, to hear particularly interesting information and to begin the process of making connections within the data set (Braun et al., 2018). The multi-sensory nature of the listening experience aided memory of what had been heard and brought subsequent readings of the transcribed text to life. Listening to the individual interview recordings and later to the discussion group recordings supported my awareness of significant features such as pausing, variations in tone and nuanced delivery that gave a deeper and richer sense of the data, that transcription alone fails to capture (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p. 556).

The second stage in the familiarization process involved listening to the audio recordings while simultaneously reading the transcripts and making casual notes. Repeated listening to the individual interviews and subsequently to focus group discussions gave me a more intimate knowledge of the contents and a better sense of the whole and facilitated the emergence of codes and themes (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p. 556) in the subsequent phases of the reflexive thematic analysis process.

4.5.2. Generating codes

The generation of codes required more detailed engagement with the data. The aim was to systematically and rigorously identify meaning and make sense of the data (Braun et al., 2018). As detailed earlier, the individual interview schedule was organised into five sections, a general introductory section and four subsequent sections that each reflected a distinct aspect of the research question. The focus group schedule was organised according to the themes generated from the analysis of data from the individual interviews in phase one of the data collection process. The generation of codes involved listening to each audio recording across the full dataset section by section according to the interview schedule for phase one and the focus group schedule for phase 2, while making notes on a prepared template. The next stage in this phase of data analysis involved reading through the notes for each section across the full data set and generating codes and then checking for overlap between the sections. On-going reference was made to the transcribed text during this phase to ensure that the notes and codes were an accurate interpretation of the meaning. By such means the reflective thematic analysis was organised by the research questions. This approach was chosen because it maintained the coherence of the material. It also proved to be a very effective means of drawing together all the data relevant to the driving concerns of the research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p. 552).

4.5.3. Constructing themes

According to (Braun et al., 2018, p.12) themes “are built, molded and given meaning at the intersection of data, researcher experience and subjectivity and research questions”. Their description of the construction of themes as a process similar to engineering or design resonated with my experience. Similar codes were brought together with their data and formed “clusters of meaning” that were then translated into candidate themes. Guiding the formation of the candidate themes was the advice that “(g)ood themes are those that tell a coherent, insightful story about the data in relation to the research question” (p.12).

The candidate themes that emerged from analysis of the data from phase one of the research process were brought to the focus group. The application of reflexive thematic analysis to the data from the focus groups confirmed the candidate themes and expanded and clarified the content of some. While analysis of the focus group data did not change any candidate theme, the greater detail in the content supporting the candidate theme influenced the subsequent phase of the revising and defining of themes.

4.5.4. Revising and defining themes

The revising and defining phases seek to ensure that themes and theme names clearly, comprehensively and concisely capture what is meaningful about the data, related to the research question, getting you close to a “completed analysis” (p.14) The phases of revising and defining themes involved looking back over the coded data for each candidate theme and checking that all the data related to the central organising concept. Themes were then checked against the whole dataset to establish how they related to one another and crucially to assess how the themes worked together to accurately and efficiently tell the overall story of the data. At this point where strong relationships were evident between themes some candidate themes merged into stronger overarching themes reflected in the Findings chapters.

4.5.5. Producing the report

Writing up is the final phase of the reflexive thematic analysis approach and can also be the “final test” (p.15) of how well the themes work individually and in relation to the dataset overall. During the writing up phase I revisited the research question and reconnected with the literature and with reference to my notes from the familiarization and coding phases ensured that the final themes remained close to the data and answered the research question.

4.6. Ethics

The ethical conduct of the research was in accordance with the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011) guidelines. The four key principles for the ethical conduct of educational research namely anonymity, confidentiality the right of participants to withdraw and no intent to harm were upheld (BERA, 2011). My previous relationship with the teachers eased the initial contact in relation to their possible participation. A letter of invitation to participate in the study was sent to each teacher, requesting that they email or phone me if they were interested in participating. Importantly, there was no obligation to reply if a teacher was not interested. The letter described the study, its purpose, the expected duration of the interview and exactly what their participation would require. Teachers were advised that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Importantly, confidentiality was guaranteed. Teachers were assured that reference to the participants in the study and in any subsequent publications would be solely through the use of the generic title 'Irish primary school special education teacher/SET'. Information from a participant would not be used in any way that could identify an individual teacher or his/her colleagues or school. Teachers were informed that a voice recorder would be used and that the voice files would be securely stored. In relation to the focus groups teachers were reminded that their anonymity could only be guaranteed if all participants observed confidentiality as requested. The lecturer/student relationship that existed with the teachers participating in the focus group discussions required a very explicit statement that their participation was voluntary, and that non-participation was acceptable (BERA, 2011). The letter also explained the importance of their contribution to developing a greater understanding of teacher collaboration and in particular collaborative SEN practice in the Irish context. A follow up phone call was made to those teachers who accepted the invitation to participate, to answer any questions the teachers had and to confirm location, date and time. A copy of the interview schedule was sent to all participants because the in-depth nature of the questions required some reflection.

Scott and Morrison (2006) stress the importance of surfacing the power relation that exists between the researcher and the participants and bringing it to the attention of the reader. As already mentioned all the SETs involved in the study had a previous lecturer-student relationship with me. There is a perception of power attached to the role of lecturer and programme director. However, my work with the teachers on the Postgraduate Diploma in SEN is based on professional respect, trust and honesty. The programme aims to be both personally and professionally enabling of the participating SETs through both the content and delivery. The SETs are supported in becoming reflective practitioners and encouraged to express their honest opinions in relation to the programme and their practice. Crucially, we inhabit different but equal roles in education as we work together in partnership to develop SEN provision in schools. The SETs' awareness and appreciation of this aspect of

the course culture is evidenced in their consistently positive programme evaluations and in the interaction during lectures and workshops.

The role of researcher is also associated with a perception of power. As researcher, I initiated the project. I devised and asked the questions which in themselves reflected a level of comprehension of the special education teachers' work (Hoffman, 2007). However, my perception of the power dynamic was somewhat different. For me the power resided with the SETs and I was humbled by and grateful for their generosity. They had the knowledge and professional experience that I needed. They had control over the information they decided to share and how fully they chose to respond to the questions that were posed (Hoffman, 2007). Further, the special education teachers' power was enhanced by the way the research was conducted. All communication with the SETs in relation to the research stemmed from a position of respect, equality and gratitude. They were aware that their participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time (Hoffman, 2007). Having the interview schedule in advance further enhanced the special education teachers' power in the interview process. Finally, aware that authorship of the story of the research conferred power on the researcher (Hoffman, 2007) I was at all times conscious of giving truthful voice to their subjective experiences of collaboration.

Application for ethical approval was made to the Ethics committee at the Department of Education, University of Bath, United Kingdom and the invitation process commenced when approval was granted. Ethics is not a discrete area. It permeates all aspects of good research. In relation to this study, maintaining an ethical approach throughout the research required careful monitoring of bias, most especially because of my previous professional relationship with the teachers and my work in the area. The use of reflexivity in this regard is explicated in the next section.

4.7. Bias, reflexivity and personal position

Carrying out this research on a topic of interest to me professionally, with primary school special education teachers who were all graduates or students of the Postgraduate Diploma in SEN programme, and thereby known to me, confers many affordances as discussed above, but also some constraints. While my current and past roles in education gave me credibility in the field and a deep understanding of the topic, they also posed a challenge in relation to awareness and management of bias. Awareness of bias is central to limiting its influence and eliminating it as far as possible. In the knowledge that all researchers bring their own biographies to the research situation (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p. 225) and considering the interpersonal nature of interviews and the attendant inevitability of the researcher having influence on the interviewees and thereby on the data (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989 in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011), serious monitoring of possible bias was required.

I maintained an acute awareness of the ways in which my background in teaching, my current position, my beliefs and perceptions about teacher collaboration, influenced by a socio-cultural paradigm, shaped the research. Key to managing bias was keeping in mind that the focus of the research was to understand the reality of teacher collaboration and its potential to develop teachers' professional knowledge, from the perspective of the special education teachers (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). My previous lecturer/student relationship with the teacher participants could also have been a factor in allowing bias to creep into the research. Such a power relationship could occasion a misperception of needing to give the correct answer. The democratic course culture built on honesty, professional respect and reflection, evident in course evaluations, limited this possibility. Teachers were accustomed to working with me as equals in a joint endeavor. Also, the relationship in relation to this study was distinctly different. I was reliant on the participation of the teachers to complete the research and in return, should they choose to participate, they had the opportunity to contribute to knowledge creation on an issue of direct relevance to their professional lives.

Central to the management of bias in this research was reflexivity, primarily because it acknowledges that researchers are part of the social world that they are researching (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983) and not immune to its influences. Essentially, reflexivity requires self-awareness throughout all stages of the research process in order to enhance its credibility (Creswell, 2007). In relation to this research study, I needed to have a clear understanding of my position regarding teacher collaboration and its potential to develop professional knowledge. I needed to acknowledge this position and reveal it (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). To this end, a clear and honest statement of my personal position was required.

Informed by the literature on teacher collaboration, Irish education policy, my experience working in education to date and the information from discussions with special education teachers my current position is that teacher collaboration between SETs and their teaching colleagues has the potential to develop professional knowledge of SEN practice with resultant benefits for teachers, students and the primary education system. However, it is not a simple process leading to a definite outcome. Teacher collaboration that builds professional knowledge is a highly complex and multi-layered issue that, despite its potential for good, can have negative consequences for those involved particularly if undertaken without appropriate support, knowledge and skills.

Having thus established my position, it was important to maintain awareness of it at all stages of the research study, and, in this way, prevent bias infiltrating the process unobserved. Consistent mindfulness of my role as a reflexive researcher, guided by Cooley's (1902 cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011) notion of the looking glass self, informed my ongoing reflection on all aspects of the research process, on myself as researcher and on my relationship and interaction with the research participants. This

process was facilitated by a system of “inner monitoring” and “disciplined noticing” (Mason, 1993, p. 120), in which my reflexive-self monitored my researcher-self. Patton’s (2002, p.66) reflexive questions about myself as researcher (“what do I know?, how do I know what I know?, what shapes and has shaped my perspective?, with what voice do I share my perspective?, what do I do with what I have found”) about the participants (“how do they know what they know?, what shapes and has shaped their perspectives? how do they perceive me? why? how do I know? how do I perceive them?”) and about the study’s audience (“how do they make sense of what I give them? what perspectives do they bring to the findings I offer? how do they perceive me? how do I perceive them?”), informed my approach.

Rhadakrishner’s translation below gives a very clear and concrete description of the very powerful but potentially amorphous dual role as active researcher and self-monitor. More importantly it gives a very clear image of the dual role that remained with me throughout the research process and guided my research practice:

“Two birds, close-yoked companions,
Both clasp the self-same tree;
One eats the sweet fruit,
The other looks on without eating.”

Translated ‘from one of the oldest recorded writings of any culture’ by Rhadakrishner (1953, p. 623 cited in Mason, 1993, p. 120).

Chapter Five: The nature of the collaboration that Irish primary school special education teachers are involved in and its impact on their professional knowledge of SEN teaching.

5.1. Introduction

In keeping with the aim of the study and with reference, in particular, to the work of Little (1990), this chapter presents information on the nature of the collaboration special education teachers in Irish primary schools are engaged in, and importantly, how their professional knowledge of SEN teaching develops as a result. The focus on collaboration and its ability to develop the special education teachers' professional knowledge of SEN practice is highly relevant and timely. Current policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) in relation to special education needs strongly encourages more collaborative practice in schools in order to better and more inclusively meet the needs of students with SEN. The definite focus on meeting the needs of students with SEN in their classrooms, where appropriate, heralds significant changes to teachers' practice in relation to SEN teaching.

Reliance on the withdrawal of students with special educational needs from their classroom to receive support has lessened. Increasingly, SETs work with mainstream teachers in the child's classroom via forms of team-teaching. The traditional division between the work of the mainstream teacher and the SET, in relation to meeting the needs of the child with SEN has blurred. More holistic and consistent provision requiring collaboration and the sharing of information between all teachers working with the student, is now required.

While the challenges of the policy change to more collaborative and inclusive SEN practice are immediately obvious, the potentially transformative opportunities for teachers and schools that it provides are more obscure. Moving away from the isolation of individual practice to working collaboratively with colleagues in pursuance of truly inclusive schools (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) encourages discussion, experimentation and evaluation of teaching, processes that are central to the development of teachers' professional practice (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

At this time of significant policy change to more collaborative SEN practice, a better understanding of the forms of collaboration that Irish SETs are engaging in and their impact on developing the special education teachers' professional knowledge of SEN practice is merited. To this end, Little's (1990) four types of collaboration namely storytelling and scanning for ideas, aid and assistance, sharing and joint work have been employed as an organising framework.

As discussed in the literature review, storytelling and scanning for ideas is described by Little, (1990) as the incidental, informal interactions between teachers on a daily basis that inform teachers' professional practice while maintaining teachers' independence and autonomy. Aid and assistance (Little 1990) details the expectation amongst teachers that colleagues will provide help when required, and most importantly, only when requested. Sharing as outlined by Little (1990) involves the sharing of materials, teaching methods, ideas and opinions amongst teachers that, at its best, can prompt meaningful discussion on practice. Joint work differs significantly from storytelling and scanning for ideas, aid and assistance and sharing. It is a more public and interdependent form of teacher collaboration and is very reliant on supportive school organisation. According to Little (1990) joint work requires teachers to take shared responsibility for teaching. A collective autonomy emerges and there is evidence of teachers' initiative in relation to professional practice.

In the sections that follow, the collaboration amongst SETs and between SETs and their mainstream colleagues, is explored through the lens of Little's (1990) four types of collaboration as outlined above. The professional development potential of each form of collaboration is also documented.

Section one presents information on storytelling and scanning for ideas as a form of collaboration among SETs and between SETs and mainstream teachers. The impact of storytelling and scanning for ideas on the development of the special education teachers' professional knowledge of SEN practice is discussed.

Section two follows with an exploration of the special education teachers' experience of collaboration with colleagues relative to that described by Little (1990) as aid and assistance and the opportunity provided by that form of collaboration for the development of the special education teachers' practice.

Section three examines the special education teachers' collaboration through the lens of Little's (1990) sharing and explains how knowledge of SEN practice is strengthened through such collaboration.

Finally, section four looks at the more formal, structured aspects of the special education teachers' collaboration with their colleagues with reference to Little's (1990) joint work. The collaboration between the SETs and mainstream teachers in the planning and use of IEPs (reflective of the system now also applied to Student Support Plans (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) is analysed, as is the provision of in-class support for students with SEN via team-teaching. An explication of the impact of this more formal collaboration on the development of the special education teachers' professional knowledge of SEN practice is presented.

The chapter concludes with a summary of the main findings and the significant issues arising.

5.2. Storytelling and scanning for ideas

In this section the special education teachers' experience of collaboration via storytelling and scanning for ideas with fellow SETs and with mainstream colleagues is presented. The varied nature of the storytelling that is at times general and at other times specific is outlined. The personal dimension of storytelling and the lack of time for this valued aspect of the special education teachers' professional practice are explained. The impact of storytelling and scanning for ideas on the professional development of the special education teachers is presented.

5.2.1. Storytelling and scanning for ideas among special education teachers.

In keeping with Little (1990), storytelling and scanning for ideas was a definite feature of all the SETs regular, daily interactions with colleagues that took place as they carried out their work. The SETs placed a very high value on story telling as Respondent A 20's comment illustrates.

A 20 *"When I read this (Focus Group Discussion Schedule) I was so happy that it had been given a name (storytelling and scanning for ideas) and recognised as a format because it is the most important way we have of communicating with colleagues and staff. And it was the first time I actually saw it written down as a valued practice."*

Perhaps the greatest achievement of storytelling and scanning for ideas was its ability to compensate for the lack of an organised in-school facility for discussing practice and sharing information, an organisational issue that will be explored further in Chapter 6. Respondents A 22 and B 28 explain.

A 22 *"It covers, I think those quick chats cover your short-term planning more, as in what's happening now."*

B 28 *"I think there's a recognition that it's a really necessary part of teaching. It's to be saying what do you know about this, have you seen this before, you know what can you tell me about this? I think it's you know, driven by necessity."*

While a common, necessary and valued practice, storytelling did not happen amongst all teachers. Personality and the quality of working relationships played a significant role in selecting colleagues to share stories with as outlined by Respondent Ind 2.

Ind 2 *"Yeah, not all of my colleagues but those with whom I'm friendly enough with. Especially maybe those who I'm working with on a daily basis, but again its, unless you are meeting these people personally and some of them, I do meet personally after school."*

Respect for the students was another concern for teachers in relation to sharing stories from practice. Respondent Ind 2 explains.

Ind 2 *“I don’t really like talking about the kids in the staffroom. It’s very open and I just think as well that it’s a bit unfair to children.”*

Professional judgment was exercised in the selection of stories and listeners. There was a strong expectation that stories shared would yield advice and information that could benefit the child and advance their learning, as elucidated by Respondent Ind 5.

Ind 5 *“...it depends on the stories that you are sharing, so I suppose if it’s in relation to what’s going to help children and what’s going to be best for children if it is effective. But if it’s a story that mightn’t be that nice I think there’s no need sometimes to share those.”*

Storytelling was mainly informal and general in nature. However, the SETs storytelling and scanning for ideas differed from that described by Little (1990), in that it was, at times, focused and specific. Information on the SETs general storytelling will now be presented followed by the findings relating to their specific storytelling.

5.2.2. General storytelling and scanning for ideas

During general storytelling and scanning for ideas, the SETs could talk to a colleague about a strategy they used that worked well or that was ineffective. Through general storytelling advice and information could be informally gained as a result of listening to a story from another teacher’s practice as Respondent Ind 2 outlines.

Ind 2 *“It wouldn’t be a case that we would make it our business to go to a colleague and say guess what happened, but I mean, as we are sitting chatting of course you are going to end up sharing information and telling stories. And a lot of the time it can be almost, you feel almost that you are maybe being asked for advice. Or it could be that the teacher, either I or the teacher with whom I’m talking, if we were in a group, we might be talking about the difficulties of perhaps working with a child with behavioural difficulties or with literacy difficulties or speech and language difficulties. And what we have found, and you know what we found works and what doesn’t work.”*

Such informal general storytelling can also prompt SETs to reflect on their own practice and check their knowledge and skills. Respondent Ind 10 explains.

Ind 10 *“Yes I think it is its very like for all the reasons that I said it is its very effective I think because you know again it keeps you on your toes as well and it opens you to different possibilities and ways of teaching and*

ways of dealing with children.

General storytelling was a very effective means for the SETs to seek and gain reassurance about some aspect of their practice as Respondent A 15 describes during Focus Group A's discussion.

A 15 *"I think people like to get a little bit of reassurance as well. If you're in a particular situation and you handle something in a certain way, you like to share it with a colleague to say 'ok did I handle that well, could I have handled it better?' So as well as taking the isolation element out of it, I think there's that little bit of you know to get reassurance that I did the right thing."*

Incidental, unintended scanning for ideas also occurred by virtue of teachers working in the same building. As teachers walked along corridors or looked into classrooms or heard through thin walls they learned from the unintended revelations, a situation aptly captured by Respondent Ind 9.

Ind 9 *"And often times things emerge even from informal conversations do you know what I mean and plus our prefab walls are like paper so you know we learn from each other by osmosis do you know what I mean so."*

5.2.3. More specific storytelling and scanning for ideas

As well as the general and unintended storytelling and scanning for ideas detailed above, more purposeful and considered story telling also took place. A lot of sharing of stories from the special education teachers' practice revolved around getting information from their SEN colleagues who taught the child in the previous year or colleagues who had greater knowledge of the child's specific learning need. Stories were also shared at the end of the school year when the child was moving on to another SET. Respondent Ind 9 explains.

Ind 9 *"I certainly would seek out a more experienced colleague if there was something that I needed to find out about as well and the form would be sort of talking about something that had not worked perhaps, and different ways of tackling it. Or talking about things that did work that were successful or suggestions or something, offering suggestions, in a lot of cases tweaking strategies that we use."*

Story sharing also occurred in a slightly more structured way when, for example, the SETs sought each other out during the school day to discuss a particular issue. When time couldn't be found during the school day the SETs met during lunch break or after school as described by Respondent Ind 10.

Ind 10 *"And then I mean in general I mean I suppose after school, you know, again in the evenings, you know, if you have a particular problem or a particular query, you know, you are going to go and find that person to talk to them about, you know, maybe what you are wondering about."*

Though not the norm, in some schools, regular scheduled meetings took place where SEN interventions were planned, reviewed and changed as required. The interaction between Respondents A 19 and A 17 during Focus Group A's discussion demonstrates the rarity of such meetings and the importance of supportive leadership.

A 19 *"In our school, I haven't heard of many other schools that do it, we on a Friday from half 1 to 3, that's designated for the SEN team for planning and meetings. So, we do all our IPs (individual plans) there, we meet up with other teachers. We brought in a few other collaborations, things like Lift Off and things like that. So that's where we do our planning".*

A 17 *"And is it every Friday?"*

A 19 *"Every Friday."*

A 17 *"And that's on your timetable?"*

A 19 *"On the timetable. And we were asked, a few teachers might be a little bit concerned, 'what about the inspector' and our principal just said 'I'll deal with the inspector.'"*

5.2.4. Lack of time and opportunity to meet with colleagues

Collaborating and developing their professional knowledge of SEN teaching through storytelling with colleagues was determined to a large extent by the time and opportunity to have contact with their SEN colleagues. While most stories were shared during the spontaneous interactions that occur between SETs when they meet on the school corridors, stories are also shared with specific colleagues at break times in the staffroom or during yard duty and after school.

By developing such a flexible, innovative and informal system of collaboration, the SETs circumvented the lack of more structured organisational support for discussion of practice. Their informal teacher-led arrangements also demonstrated the high value they placed on collaboration with colleagues through storytelling and scanning for ideas. Respondent Ind 10 elaborates.

Ind 10 *"So as I mentioned there are three of us in the school who are the SEN team. We meet informally daily I suppose and discuss things, maybe a grabbed two minutes here and there. And then we have set up kind of a system where, you know, maybe every two months we will try, the three of us to sit down together and discuss, you know, how things are going so we will just take that out of our class time, maybe two to three on a Thursday evening or something like that. We also have a system in place where on a Friday when pupil of the week is happening and the*

school is at assembly, we kind of maybe can grab time then as well to, you know, discuss things”.

However, the special education teachers’ innovation does not always rest easy with school leaders and may even be viewed as a somewhat covert activity especially in schools where time not spent teaching is seen as time wasted. Indeed, current policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b), while emphasising the integrity of teaching time and cautioning against the abuse of discussion time indirectly supports a jaundiced view of informal storytelling and scanning for ideas. Respondent Ind 10 explains the constraints surrounding informal storytelling.

Ind 10 *“Yes it definitely does I think, you know its invaluable really and again that is why I would never apologise for, you know, being in collaboration, you know. Again, I know a lot of people who would feel, oh if you are seen talking in the corridor or talking in the room, you know, and the principal comes along you need to jump. But I mean, I suppose because you know it works so well and it is so invaluable, I think it’s something that, you know, you should never kind of have to apologise for”*

However, though necessary and valued, informal conversations between teachers were unsatisfactory and even unprofessional at times as illustrated by Respondents A 18, A 14 and A 21 during Focus Group A’s discussion.

A 18 *“And I suppose we’re always whispering to each other; you know we’re always whispering and the kids then are probably looking at us thinking.”*

A 14 *“And some kids are picking up things.”*

A 18 *“Exactly because they’ll think well they have to be whispering about me because I’m the one that needs the help you know.”*

A 21 *“It’s unprofessional.”*

A 14 *“Yeah.”*

A 18 *“And you don’t want to get caught by the principal or by anyone else thinking well look at them two having a chat.”*

While storytelling and scanning for ideas was a necessary compensation for the lack of more formal collaboration time it was not sufficient. There was also the fear that it would be seen as enough and weaken the need for structured time for discussion and collaboration on practice. The following excerpt from Focus Group A’s discussion illustrates these issues.

A 15 *“Teachers work collaboratively every single day, they always have and they always will. It’s just not structured. You know there’s no such thing as this is your time now for discussing the child and it happens every day. But it’s just not done in a structured way.”*

A 21 *"But it's not entirely satisfactory".*

A 17 *"No."*

A 16 *"No."*

A 14 *"Absolutely."*

A 21 *"For me personally it's the most common form of collaboration but I find it quite unsatisfactory because you're very aware of the teacher under pressure with the workload. You might be just finishing mid-sentence because there's an interruption. So, while it is a form of collaboration, in promoting it I wouldn't want for any reason that someone would say well it's a satisfactory medium of collaboration, aren't you doing it already? I think a really protected time built into the school day timetable is required"*

A14 *"Formalised."*

5.2.5. The personal dimension of storytelling and scanning for ideas

While storytelling was very focused on practice, it also had a human and personal dimension. The SETs reported that story telling breaks the isolation inherent in teaching as Respondent A 16 states.

A 16 *"I think it takes the isolation out of the job when you share stories."*

However, the opportunity to share stories from practice with colleagues is dependent on relationships between teachers in schools. While in some staffrooms story sharing is supported, in others it is not, as Respondent B 25 reports during Focus Group B's discussion.

B 25 *"Yeah I think that depends on your staff because some staffrooms you go into and you come in at break time and everyone pretends like they've had a beautiful morning and it's fabulous. Whereas in other staffrooms you come in and you go oh janey-mackers he's driving me bananas and what will I do now. So, it does depend on the staff relationships as well and what the thought process around that is."*

Respondent Ind 10 explains that through storytelling teachers can feel a sense of comradeship. They can share a problem and confide in a colleague with a safety that their staffroom may not offer.

Ind 10 *"I think the comradeship you feel from it (storytelling) and that you know everybody is not going to always have a great day and you know it's not all you know I suppose rosy or plain sailing all the time. Even though from the staffroom you might think everyone is getting on great"*

but I think it's when you meet them on a one to one level that people will confide in you and kind of you know ask your advice or vice versa".

At other times storytelling provides an opportunity for SETs to vent their frustrations as the following excerpt from Focus Group B's discussion captures.

B 24 *"Sometimes you don't even want help you just want to vent"*

B 30 *"Offload."*

B 24 *"... (laughing) you are not looking for advice you are not looking for, you are just looking to tell what happened I don't know why but just to..."*

B26 *"See if anyone else has experienced that or has noticed what you've noticed as well."*

5.2.6. Storytelling between special education teachers and their mainstream colleagues

Collaboration via the sharing of stories from practice between SETs and their mainstream colleagues was also predominantly informal in nature with scheduled meetings generally limited to the beginning and end of the year. Storytelling was dependent on the nature of the relationship between the SET and mainstream teacher with issues around opportunity and geography also impacting.

Where students with SEN were withdrawn from the classroom to receive support, storytelling took place when the SET collected and returned the students, as Respondent A 14 describes.

A 14 *"Yeah I find that the story, we do a lot of it when you're collecting the kids or bringing them back, you'd be just talking about you know in general how is he or she getting on, what are you doing in class here with regards to maths, what are you working on. We'd have a lot more informal chat and over and back."*

In-class support was seen as a very effective vehicle for storytelling. The increased contact time afforded greater opportunity for both teachers to get to know one another and to share stories from practice. However, all storytelling was dependent on the relationship between the teachers involved. Some relationships allowed for storytelling and problem sharing between the mainstream teacher and the SET as illustrated by Respondent Ind 11 in the following comment.

Ind 11 *"I have a really good relationship with. I am blessed with the two teachers that I work with and you know the way sometimes people are talking about children like they can't do this, they can't do that, we are*

always saying 'oh look what they did for me, or whatever today'. You know, 'look what they did in my classroom'

However, in some situations, as described by Respondent Ind 2, the classroom is seen as the teacher's domain and the SET, who is providing in-class support, can feel more like an intruder than a colleague.

Ind 2 *"But it doesn't happen all of the time because you know I wouldn't have a great relationship with all of the teachers. So I'm working with some teachers who I really just come to their door and I just don't feel very welcome."*

5.2.7. Professional Development arising from storytelling and scanning for ideas.

Learning from talking to colleagues and from listening to information shared informally between selected colleagues was a very important vehicle for the professional development of the SETs. Sharing stories from practice allowed the SETs to reflect on aspects of their practice and learn something new every day. They benefitted from new ideas and different resources shared with them by their SEN colleagues. Through storytelling the SETs became aware of other ways of teaching the children in their caseloads. Respondent Ind 2 explains.

Ind 2 *"Absolutely, because even if it's only you know another teacher venting to you about how difficult it is to do reading with a child who's comprehension is at rock bottom, or maybe who's receptive language is on the floor, it makes you think yourself about well you know it helps you to sort of think more deeply about...about that child's deficit and then you know to maybe problem solve together and to maybe discuss other ways of doing things. Maybe to...hmm...maybe make suggestions where you could change what you are doing. I've often said to some of my colleagues 'just leave it and move onto something else', if the child is not, you know, responding and is not enjoying it. Don't put yourself or the child through it, just drop it and just do something else. So I think it is great to sit and talk to teachers because you learn an awful lot from one another."*

The SETs also benefitted from SEN colleagues' knowledge of a particular student or of a particular learning need as Respondent Ind 5 explains.

Ind 5 *"I suppose if I was concerned about a child, someone might have done a course or have taught a child similar or have taught the child last year and they will have given me ideas that I could use."*

All the SETs in a school have different talents and weaknesses. Telling stories helps to build the SEN team and thereby strengthen professional knowledge and practice. Respondent Ind 9 describes how SETs share their knowledge through storytelling.

Ind 9 *“It does, I suppose it would possibly, in the process of a story somebody talks about an approach they had taken and we might say ‘oh I would not have thought about that before’ or vice versa, you know, you might offer something. Or you might say ‘do you know what I tried with another guy and it did actually work and it might help you out’, you know, so I find we do that a lot actually, you know.”*

The SETs benefitted from story sharing with their mainstream colleagues in different and very specific ways. Key to this learning is the fact that both teachers have knowledge of the child but in different contexts. The mainstream teacher observes the child in the classroom throughout the day during a range of activities and can bring a different perspective to an issue because of this. Mainstream teachers also have more regular contact with parents and may hear about family issues that are impacting the child’s learning. In contrast, the SET supports the child for shorter periods in specific subjects during in-class support or in a withdrawal situation, either individually or as a member of a small group. As a result, SETs can become detached from the classroom context and can erroneously assume total responsibility for the student. Respondent Ind 1 outlines the benefits of collaboration between SETs and mainstream teachers below.

Ind 1 *“So it does keep you involved in all aspects of the child’s educational provision and the class teacher, the class teacher also I think has a lot of information that you often aren’t privy to because they are the first link with, with the parent or if there are other professionals at home, so I think working with and feeding off the class teacher certainly does develop your own SEN practice.”*

Knowledge of what the child has difficulty with in the classroom and awareness of other relevant factors gives a clearer overall picture of the child that can positively inform and develop the special education teachers’ professional knowledge of SEN practice. As well as learning more about meeting the needs of the students, the SETs developed a clearer understanding of the issues faced by mainstream colleagues in relation to meeting the needs of students with SEN in the classroom, such as difficulty organising effective differentiation and group work. Respondent Ind 13 elaborates on how collaboration between the SET and mainstream teachers can provide a more accurate assessment of the child’s needs in the classroom and a more appropriate intervention.

Ind 13 *“Definitely, and there’s no doubt that what happens in the classroom is different to what happens in small group situations, so ultimately the role of the SET is to assist and to improve the child’s ability to become more independent, to remove that scaffolding. So we have a child in first class who was taken on, for instance, in terms of literacy – now it became evident during the year that literacy really wasn’t the priority need, his need was to have movement breaks, but to become more independent and more engaged within the classroom situation, so it’s in*

talking to the class teacher on a daily basis, we've been trying to put strategies in to place whereby he will take more independence himself."

However professional development arising from collaboration was dependent on the professional relationships between the SETs and their mainstream colleagues. While positive professional relationships provided enjoyable learning experiences, a territorial divide prevented collaboration that could build professional knowledge. Respondents Ind 5 and Ind 3 describe these respective situations.

Ind 5 *"So basically in our school we are assigned to certain teachers as I call them 'my teachers'. ...and I would have a great relationship with them. I would be in frequently into their rooms so we would discuss, it would be anything, any child. So, there's constant to and fro, I'm in all the time, we are constantly talking about children and coming up with ideas".*

Ind 3 *"Some (mainstream teachers) would, yes, and some would not. There's still that very much this is my domain and what I do in here is absolutely nobody's business."*

The SETs were also aware that the information or action arising from storytelling was not always commensurate with the time spent in conversation with colleagues. Also, storytelling that built teachers' professional knowledge was reliant on the expertise of colleagues and on many occasions, SETs were involved in storytelling with colleagues who did not have any more information than they had. In such circumstances story telling provided more support for ideas than professional learning. The following excerpt from Focus Group A's discussion illustrates these issues.

A 20 *"I think it also lacks structure and focus because it is very informal. So you might spend 10, 20 minutes chatting but at the end of it you haven't got targets, you haven't got focus; there's nothing formal about it. So at least if you had an allocated time you'd have an agenda, you'd have a focus, you'd have something to come out with."*

A 16 *"Structure."*

A 20 *"Which I would strive for and the other thing I'd say is it has limitations as professional development, it's not really development, you are limited by someone else's expertise or knowledge. So it could be a case of the blind leading the blind sometimes, you know."*

Overall, storytelling and scanning for ideas was a ubiquitous and valued teacher-led initiative that cleverly circumvented the restrictions of school organisation that limited formal opportunities for teachers to meet and discuss aspects of practice. While the SETs unequivocally considered storytelling to be an effective and uncomplicated support for their individual professional practice, learning was subject to considerable constraints. The development of the special education teachers' professional knowledge of

SEN practice through storytelling and scanning for ideas was dependent on teachers' personalities and their working relationships, colleagues' knowledge and opportunities and time to meet. Discussion on and critique of teaching was rare during storytelling. Instead professional learning was through talking and listening and was at the discretion of the individual teacher resulting in variable quality and impact. In keeping with Little's (1990) analysis, storytelling and scanning for ideas was a double-edged sword. While demonstrating an awareness of the need for collaboration that developed their professional knowledge of SEN practice, storytelling and scanning for ideas also respected and affirmed the privacy of teachers' individual practice. The constraints on learning identified in storytelling and scanning for ideas are not exclusive to that particular form of collaboration. They are instead a theme that connects all four forms of collaboration detailed in this chapter.

5.3. Aid and assistance

In this section, aid and assistance as a form of collaboration among SETs and between the SETs and their mainstream colleagues, will be discussed. Its affordances and constraints on developing the special education teachers' professional knowledge of SEN practice will be outlined. The sensitive issue of giving unsolicited advice to colleagues is explored.

5.3.1. Aid and assistance among special education teachers

All the SETs who were interviewed had experience of asking for and being asked for aid within the SEN team and of giving and receiving assistance. The facility to ask for and receive assistance from colleagues was highly valued. Respondent Ind 5 explains.

Ind 5 *'...there's no better experts in the field than the people who are actually in the field.'*

Nevertheless, as with collaboration via storytelling and scanning for ideas, in most cases the seeking and giving of 'aid and assistance' happened informally and was restricted to certain colleagues based on personality and relationship. SETs received ongoing advice and support from colleagues with whom they had close working relationships, generally based on good personal friendships. Respondent Ind 10 describes the impact of different professional relationships on giving and receiving aid and assistance.

Ind 10 *"Yes definitely I suppose, again in my situation I would be very good friends with one of the girls in particular that I am working with and I would feel very... I would have a very close working relationship with her, built I suppose from a good personal relationship as well. And I definitely you know would ask her advice and I would feel that, you know, she would do her best to help me and be very willing to stop what she is doing and, you know, that I am not a bother interrupting her. And*

you know it works both ways. I did my best to help her and I suppose the other girl that I work with again, you know, again if ever she approaches me for help, you know, or advice on things I would be more than willing to help her. But I kind of just get the feeling that she kind of likes to do her own thing as well so, you know, you just have to be careful."

Importantly, as explained by Respondent Ind 3 below, the security of friendship reduced the fear that seeking advice could be interpreted as a sign of professional incompetence and weakness.

Ind 3 *"Yes, especially while doing the course they would ask for the most up to date information. Yes, you would have one or two that wouldn't, you know that wouldn't feel either comfortable or maybe it would be a sense of pride that wouldn't allow them to go there. There would be a feeling like well, if I ask that question, they are going to think I don't know it. But in fact, it's just being able to thrash it out I think is the important thing...it's nearly seen as a sign of weakness. But there are, every school has their groups and their friends you know, but for me I think that it is important to be able to approach each other."*

However, notwithstanding the teachers' reliance on the established system of informally seeking and receiving aid and assistance from friendly colleagues, the emergence of a more formal and expertise-based approach to getting advice that did not carry the fear of an aspersion of incompetence was in evidence. Meeting the diverse range of learning needs now present in schools requires individual SETs to acquire specialist professional knowledge in particular areas of practice. Advice sought from colleagues based on their particular expertise and on their prior experience of working with a student was more specific and purposeful in nature and was not exclusively dependent on close personal relationships. This more formal, expertise focused approach to seeking aid and assistance is described by Respondent Ind 12 and Respondent Ind 6 below.

Ind 12 *"We would definitely, within the team there are people who have different talents so for example I am very good on Numicon, maths or language would be a huge thing that I would be very good at and say another SEN teacher had a problem in that area they would come and ask me would I help them plan a programme, or sit in with them while they did it and give them advice and that would happen quite a lot.... We have another teacher say who is very good at social and emotional. I am not great on social and emotional so for example if I had a child that was autistic and who was having problems with an aspect of being withdrawn or an aspect of the teaching, I would go to her and say to her, look I am having problems. Can you help me and she would say, what we will do is this, this, this and this and she would help me do up maybe a story board or something like that, that would help but it usually would be in either my room or her room and we would sit down and we would talk about it."*

Ind 6 *“for example for literacy then most of the teachers will come to me around literacy, however they know that (X) is in charge of numeracy, so when it comes to numeracy they’ll go to him first and say look, we’re trying this and we’re getting absolutely nowhere, while somebody will come to me and say like this child appears to be, for example, dyslexic, has dyslexic like tendencies and they’ll say to me look, what can I do? While if it comes to maths they’ll always go to (X). If it’s social and emotional - one of the other guys went off and did training with Friends For Life, so when it comes to Friends For Life they will go to him.... they will just go to whoever has the considered expertise in a particular area of difficulty in a class.”*

The emergence of individual SETs who have particular areas of expertise is a subtle change, born of need but one that may have the potential to challenge the traditional norms of autonomy and egalitarianism and the culture of isolation in teaching. Individual special education teachers who have specific professional knowledge bring forth two new and potentially significant conceptions. Firstly, the notion of all teachers being the same is challenged and secondly the base for seeking and receiving aid and assistance between colleagues is broadened. Awareness of a colleague’s specialist knowledge gives a license to request and reasonably expect their assistance without reliance on close working relationships or the fear of being seen as incompetent.

5.3.2. Aid and Assistance between special education teachers and mainstream teachers

Generally, it is mainstream teachers, especially those without SEN experience, who ask SETs for aid and assistance. SETs are seen as the experts in SEN teaching particularly if they have completed the Postgraduate Diploma in Special Educational Needs programme. Here again the notion of professional difference, in this instance defined by the different roles of SET and mainstream teacher emerges. Respondent Ind 11 explains.

Ind 11 *“I would yes, I would find that the mainstream teachers would ask me more it’s you know they would kind of especially after doing the course they would see me kind of more knowledgeable on SEN. Now they are very knowledgeable as well, but they would definitely come to me more than I would go to them...”*

SETs are highly committed to providing advice sought by the mainstream teachers. The act of giving advice and, in particular, providing answers to questions posed by the mainstream teacher can help clarify the information for the SET also. If the required information is not available within the SEN team, the SET will research it and discuss further with the mainstream teacher. SETs will also, with the agreement of the mainstream teacher, model a strategy in the classroom that could better meet the needs of the students

with SEN and thereby provide the required and requested aid and assistance. Respondent Ind 8 elaborates.

Ind 8 *“that sort of culture is created where the teachers view the learning support team as the leaders of literacy, so if they’re having problems with something or needing advice or needing resources they would come and question, you know, they would come and ask us and we would advise or go in to class and model or share our resources that we would have with them, so that would occur regularly.”*

The focus of the special education teachers’ requests for aid and assistance from their mainstream colleagues is somewhat different. The SETs seek aid and assistance from mainstream teachers in relation to information on the child’s functioning within the class context more than requesting advice on practice. This information helps the SET to better meet the needs of the child as Respondent Ind 10 outlines.

Ind 10 *“Yes I think it does because it you know again I am more aware of the standard of the class and maybe the child then that has dyslexia within that group or the child that you know has some sort of an anxiety issue or that just lacks confidence and I am more aware of those children now from talking to the class teacher. And I have a better rounded picture I suppose of the child and feel that I can help them then when I am in the room without them feeling that they are under a spotlight or being singled out so it makes that work definitely much better”*

Where a student has very challenging and complex needs, a greater professional interdependence can be fostered resulting in higher levels of collaboration between the mainstream and the special education teacher and greater mutuality in aiding and assisting each other. However, in some situations, a negative power dynamic and an associated albeit, misconstrued, sense of entitlement can impact on the working relationship between SETs and mainstream teachers. A perception that the classroom is the mainstream teacher’s personal domain and that they are busier and have more power than their SEN counterparts can militate against collaborative aid and assistance. Instead, the SEN teachers’ role is seen as providing help and support as dictated by the mainstream teacher’s wishes and terms.

5.3.3. Unsolicited aid and assistance: a tricky issue

Despite the green shoots of change in relation to individual special education teachers’ areas of expertise and more formal approaches to receiving aid and assistance, one long honoured rule of engagement between teachers remained sacrosanct. Consonant with Little’s study (1990), in the main, aid and assistance was only offered to an individual teacher when requested.

While all the SETs considered that this restriction limited the spread of good SEN practice throughout the school and believed it should be professionally acceptable to give advice without being asked, in practice giving unsolicited

advice was rare and generally avoided as Respondent A 19's comment evinces.

A 19 *"I wouldn't touch that (giving unsolicited advice) with a barge poll."*

Giving unsolicited advice was considered a delicate issue and very new for teachers. Further the SETs were not skilled in having such communication with colleagues. The SETs felt that there was a fine line between telling somebody what to do and giving advice. Giving unsolicited advice to colleagues could be interpreted as an attack on teacher autonomy and professional egalitarianism. It could be seen as making a judgment on a colleague's competence and causing hurt and insult to a colleague. Respondents B 24, B 25 and B 30 illustrate these issues in the following excerpt from Focus Group B's discussion.

B 24 *"Fear of insulting somebody or you know, some people will take it a lot more personally rather than the professional."*

B 25 *"We haven't been trained to give that feedback either you know we are great at saying that looked like a beautiful lesson fair play. But you would rarely go and say you know such and such really wasn't getting that, you know it's an insult, you'd feel like you were insulting somebody else's practice if you try and correct it."*

B 30 *"Even if they came to you I don't think I'd take it too well either. I'm saying it would be hard to take it yourself."*

At times the SETs faced a dilemma. When they deemed it necessary to give unsolicited advice to a colleague on how best to meet the needs of a child with SEN, they had to do so circuitously making sure that they respected professional equality and autonomy and maintained good working relationships as Respondent A 21 describes.

A 21 *"the essence of our work is the child. The service we're delivering is for the child. And of course, you can be very idealistic and say right whatever, come hell or high water I'm serving the child, but you have to be realistic as well. And I see as the underlying essence of this is you know in personal relationships, how to cope with conflict, we don't have the skills"*

The SETs brought impressive sensitivity and ingenuity to the task of giving unsolicited aid and assistance to colleagues when the interests of the child with SEN demanded such action. Relationships and personalities were key factors in the approach used by the SETs. They were very careful not to offend the other teacher or provoke a negative response. The way the advice giving was approached was of paramount importance. Respondent Ind 2 explains.

Ind 2 *"..it depends, I mean there's a way of giving advice as well, so you know it's a tricky enough area. You are not going to barge into someone's*

room and start giving them advice on how to teach something. But you would hope that you can engage with somebody and end up without planning it even giving them advice because it emerges within the conversation that you are having with them."

The special education teachers would try to engage in conversation about the particular student with the teacher and hope that the opportunity to impart the necessary information would emerge as outlined by Respondent Ind 3.

Ind 3 *"I think it is how you would approach it. I think it is how you would deliver it, like everything, I think if you delivered it properly or in such a way, in not a critical way. If it was like 'oh I was watching what you were doing there the other day, I thought it was wonderful, have you tried this', so then offering an alternative and then engaging in discussion that way. However, if you feel the person is not prepared to engage with you, there isn't a whole pile you can do because I think if you force a collaborative approach on somebody it will have a negative effect."*

Sharing a good idea with the teacher and offering to model it for them in their classroom was also suggested. Where station teaching was in operation, the rotation of stations allowed for good practice to be modelled without targeting any individual teacher, a tactic illustrated by Respondent Ind 12 below.

Ind 12 *"Now I would say if I am not asked, I don't offer advice, so I just think there is a very fine line between telling somebody what to do and offering advice on what to do. So, you have to be very careful. It's also very new for a lot of teachers so you have to pick your way very, very carefully. So for example if you are doing Literacy Lift Off and you observe that the oral language table isn't going well, that bedlam has happened down at the oral language area so that whenever the five or six children move to that table everything.. all hell breaks loose. The way I have dealt with it is that I will do things like, I rotate the teachers so I will move a teacher maybe to another area but say something like 'we all need to do a little bit of everything' and then let her see me modelling the good oral language table."*

Overall, the special education teachers felt that prevention was better than trying to offer unrequested aid and assistance to colleagues in obvious need of advice. To this end, they believed that piloting new approaches with a proven track record of success, on a voluntary basis, initially, could diffuse fear and bring about necessary change in practice. The SETs were also aware that a successful intervention in one classroom could have a snowball effect resulting in changed practice in a particular area of SEN practice throughout the school. Respondent Ind 7 explains.

Ind 7 *"It depends on personalities it depends on relationships so I think it depends on the use of the language also, like so, if you are talking to... if I*

am talking to a teacher and I say we have tried this in another class, we are working this out, if you would like to experiment with us, teachers will go with you. If teachers feel they are being lectured to or being pushed into something they don't agree with, it doesn't work."

Further, having a clear school policy on aspects of practice could, the SETs argued, help in giving aid and assistance to colleagues. Clearly stated policy would provide objective criteria against which practice could be measured and remove the more subjective and personal dimension. Respondent A 22 explains.

A 22 *"There's a distinction between coming to someone with an opinion and with a fact and if you come to them with a fact and say you're doing it wrong because, not using that language but here is how, here is the school policy on that or here is the correct way. If you go in with an opinion, you know your opinion can be offensive, in my opinion you're doing it wrong because I'm a better teacher than you. So, you need to deal in facts. And I think if you approach somebody with something, a piece of knowledge that you have that they don't have, that's different than an opinion. An opinion won't be welcome I don't think."*

The SETs also agreed that as confidence with and experience of team teaching develops, it could provide an easier forum for discussing practice with a colleague and offering advice. Respondent B 31 elaborates.

B 31 *"I think the more we team-teach and the more we co-teach the easier it becomes to discuss with your colleagues, and they see you teaching, you see them teaching. It becomes much easier you know, and different and a huge improvement on maybe when you are teaching as an independent republic it's very difficult for somebody to go in and say. We have history of inspectors coming in and saying 'oh', and we wouldn't want to go back to that. So, it's easier I think when there's more people in the classroom."*

5.3.4. Professional Development arising from collaboration in the form of aid and assistance.

Seeking and giving aid and assistance was a common feature of practice among SETs and was considered important in developing their professional practice. The vast range of learning needs present in schools required the different talents and areas of expertise of all members of the SEN team. Respondent Ind 10 explains.

Ind 10 *"Yes I think it does you know because again you know you are not an expert on everything and there is such a vast area in SEN, the range of needs the children can have like you know it's always great you know to get your colleagues' input."*

Advice giving and receiving also enabled greater continuity in the provision given to the child. Trying something new on the advice of an SEN colleague was considered an effective form of professional development. When the opportunity to seek and give advice is established and valued in a school it can create the desire to be able to discuss and help colleagues and in turn can prompt SETs to be more organised and more knowledgeable. Respondent Ind11 elaborates.

Ind 11 *"It does because as you're sharing information with them (colleagues) it's formulating in your mind and your thinking more clearly about it and sometimes then they might say but how would that work, you know, and then you have to explain it. And sometimes as you are explaining it, you are saying oh yes and I might have to tweak that you know here and there, you know."*

The SETs reported that they were generally the ones to give aid and assistance to their mainstream colleagues in relation to SEN. However, information specific to the classroom context gave the SETs a more rounded picture of the student with special educational needs. Mainstream teachers provided valuable aid and assistance to their SEN colleagues in this regard. Specifically, mainstream teachers could provide information to the SET on the standard of the class and on how well the student was able to access the class curriculum and engage with peers and classwork. Respondent Ind 1 illustrates this point.

Ind 1 *"Well very much so and again, you know, they're kind of, with many teachers and SEN teachers, you know, there can be a divide between the withdrawal room and the classroom, so I think there needs to be that constant link and you need to be constantly aware of classroom issues that a child with special education needs has that you might not have seen in the withdrawal setting and a good example of this would be a particular child I had a number of years ago who in a small group was working fine but in a, in a, in the class setting had a serious attention problem and again I would have worked closely with that class teacher in, in trying to help to alleviate that problem".*

Aid and assistance, similar to storytelling and scanning for ideas was a common form of collaboration and one that was valued by the SETs. The process of aid and assistance generally operated informally between colleagues who shared a good working relationship. Different to storytelling and scanning for ideas however, a more formal approach to seeking and giving assistance was emerging as a result of individual SETs having specific professional knowledge on particular areas of SEN teaching. Significantly, professional expertise now posed an alternative to friendliness as a criterion for seeking assistance among teachers and decoupled requests for assistance and aspersions of incompetence. Difference amongst SEN team members due to expertise was accepted and encouraged. Harnessing individual special education teachers' knowledge and skills for the good of the team augured well for a more collaborative approach to SEN practice in schools.

However, traditional norms of egalitarianism, autonomy and privacy still militated against offering unsolicited advice to colleagues and professional learning arising from aid and assistance, was at the discretion of the individual teacher. Teacher agency took the form of circumvention tactics as SETs worked creatively to give unrequested assistance to colleagues in the best interest of the students with SEN. The professional learning emanating from collaboration via aid and assistance though often specific and purposeful lacked critical discussion and implementation was a matter for the individual teacher.

The special education teachers were very aware of the limitations surrounding the giving and receiving of aid and assistance. The diverse range of learning needs which students present with and the rapid rate of change currently in schools have an impact on all teachers' ability to cope. Having colleagues who are available and willing to give the help required within the school was seen as a positive and realistic way forward for the profession. Asking for advice, they argued, shows professionalism, care and strength of character and should be cast in this light and encouraged. However, the traditional isolation in the profession still posed a considerable challenge.

5.4. Sharing

In this section the special education teachers' experience of collaboration via sharing with fellow SETs and with mainstream colleagues and its impact on their professional development is presented. 'Sharing' in the Irish primary school context differed from that described by Little (1990) in that school assembly, a platform for sharing, was not a regular aspect of primary school life. The opportunity to share aspects of professional practice through class presentations during assembly was not generally available to the Irish primary school SETs.

5.4.1. Sharing as a form of collaboration between special education teachers

Similar to storytelling and scanning for ideas and aid and assistance, sharing between SETs was mostly informal and was more likely to happen between SETs who had a good working relationship and who were teaching the same curricular area i.e. literacy. Resources and information received at CPD courses were commonly shared. Sharing was considered a generous act and accepted as such. Interrogating the resource or information was unusual, though sharing of a particular resource could occasion discussion on its use and effectiveness. The lack of time to develop resources necessary to implement information received at CPD courses was also seen as problematic. Without this time, information shared could not be put into practice and so was lost. Sharing how and why teachers were using certain teaching strategies and approaches happened rarely due to busyness and

teacher autonomy. Respondent Ind 2's comment serves as an illustration of how 'sharing' operates.

Ind 2 *"We certainly share resources with each other. There's a huge amount of resources out there, schools are just bursting with resources, an awful lot of them aren't being used. So we do share resources. We do share ideas, not as much. Teaching strategies I don't think we share very much. And I think actually an awful lot of us don't really have a huge amount of knowledge on teaching strategies. (Laugh)....And also another reason would be I suppose we are very busy during the day and it's just not getting the time to actually really sit down and thrash things out. I think if there was more time for sitting around the table and discussing things, I think an awful lot more ideas would be shared."*

The benefits of sharing were obvious to the teachers and valued by them. However, the opportunity to develop their knowledge of SEN practice through sharing was limited and fragmented. In similar vein to Little's (1990) description, sharing was at the discretion of the individual teacher and not all staff members were willing to share. Respondent Ind 4 explains.

Ind 4 *"Because we do not have, we don't have a culture of sharing of resources and ideas in our school. It's very much, autonomy is the huge thing in our school, everyone just does their own thing. That is the culture, you go into your classroom and you do your own thing. And it's very just, if it does, if there is collaboration it's just individual pockets of collaboration around the school."*

The availability of and access to knowledge amongst colleagues was another factor that impacted on sharing. SEN teams, mainly populated by temporary staff that changed frequently, did not have the chance to build knowledge and expertise. In such cases, sharing was limited to the induction of new teachers into the basics of SEN practice. The following quote from Respondent Ind 6 elucidates.

Ind 6 *"people then are getting appointed to the SEN team who either are young and inexperienced or may have not, may have very little classroom experience, and suddenly, having very little classroom experience, you're asking somebody to deal with low incidence kids with particular, with particular speech and language difficulties where you need, you may need particular training around ELKLAN and would not be aware of the services that are available and then it leads to problems. You're spending a huge amount of time up skilling maybe two to three new colleagues, and that's time lost"*.

However, as discussed previously in relation to aid and assistance, the emergence of a more formal approach to collaboration via sharing was also evident. In some schools shared storage areas for resources were in operation and this more formal approach created greater visibility and

widened access to all staff members. This emerging approach is captured in the comment from Respondent Ind 8 below.

Ind 8 *“We would have, I suppose we would have central storage of various resources that we would use, we would pool our budgets together to buy various schemes and various resource material. So there would be, we do that, yes, because again it goes to the, it goes to the mind set of if we streamline how we teach things and we streamline the resources that go with that we can share the actual, share the burden of preparing resources, you know, for, for different phonic schemes, people can spend hours preparing resources that in essence it can, their enthusiasm can wane because there’s not enough hours in the day to get this, and if that’s happening in isolation then it’s, it’s counter, it’s counterproductive.”*

In a small number of schools a more formal provision for sharing information on practice was available. Opportunities were provided for individual SETs to share information for the benefit of all staff members as Respondent Ind 1 outlines.

Ind 1 *“We’d an example recently of one of our teachers who took back some fantastic comprehension strategies that she shared with, with the staff and this tends to gets shared informally, we have a school drive here, kind of a central school drive, it’s a computer, a computer storage area that all teachers have access to, so anything good that we get or that we find we share, we tend to put up on the, on the school drive so all teachers have access to it.”*

Respondent Ind 12 describes how skills deficits within the SEN team were identified and specific knowledge and skills needed were sought out and brought back to the school.

Ind 12 *“Yes an example of that is we have a Down’s Syndrome child coming to school in September and I had a fantastic lecture by the educational officer from Down Syndrome Ireland and I came back to the school and typed up a lot of things that she had said. And I have met with the teacher who is going to be in that area in September. We went through them. We got a lot of ideas about what we need to do, how he will.. how children with Down Syndrome learn... what we need to have in place for September and everything now is ready, rock and roll ready to go.”*

5.4.2. Sharing as a form of collaboration between special education teachers and mainstream teachers

The sharing of resources and ideas between SETs and mainstream teachers also occurred and was initiated by the special education teachers on most occasions. Again, teachers' personalities and professional working relationships were very important factors in whether or not collaboration via sharing occurred as Respondent Ind 3 points out.

Ind 3 *"...it will just depend on the character, not all will engage in that (sharing). I find it very., when it works it really works."*

In a small number of schools, opportunities to share information in relation to SEN at staff meetings were sometimes provided. An experience of the sharing of information between SETs and mainstream teachers facilitated by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) was also cited. However, according to the SETs such opportunities occur infrequently due to limited resources. Respondent Ind 1 explains.

Ind 1 *"We also share, it can also happen as well on PDST in-school planning days. We had one of them recently here in relation to oral language and teachers met in clusters, in groups and that can be a great area of sharing as well because it's the one time that teachers get to sit down I suppose and actually talk and share in a setting where there are no children and somebody is covering their class. So that, that can be a forum where it happens as well, and it happens informally also at staff meetings where, where teachers share ideas and, and share approaches".*

Providing in-class support also facilitated the sharing of information and resources as described by Respondent Ind 6 below.

Ind 6 *"So we would have, as I said to you, about the five different meetings with class teachers, so in terms of resources, we will change, we will share literacy resources around what we're using, be it particular programmes, we will share speech and language resources, which maybe, which they can actually use within their classroom. There's a whole list of folders of different concepts, so what we do for example with infants, we would give them a list of forty-five concepts that every child should have. So we'll say to them look, just do maybe one a week, over and under, big, small, fat, thin, one a week, but we will share those resources, so what we're doing in the smaller sessions of children's speech and language can be done as part of Literacy Lift Off, can be done throughout the day, be it SPHE, so they're (students) constantly doing it."*

In-class support via team-teaching provided an emerging, albeit indirect, form of sharing teaching skills through the observation of colleagues in the shared space of a classroom as discussed by Respondents B 27 and B 31.

B 27 "I think that the skills set is being shared much more now because we are, there's very few classrooms where you are not now two or three adults in the room and in that sense you are sharing skills. And you are really learning from one another like."

B 31 "And even if you are not sharing verbally we are watching each other and you are sharing it in other ways."

The SETs were also very aware of the growth in online sharing of information by teachers as Respondent A 22 explains.

A 22 "the new teachers that are coming out are a lot more willing, you know they've all their blogs and they're selling their stuff, they're a lot more willing to put stuff out there. And now all of a sudden it's gone from these are my notes and this is my way of doing things to oh I can google it, I can find another set of plans."

This online approach eliminated the personal dimension of sharing as a form of collaboration. Teachers were free to place materials and information online. There was no obligation or duty involved. Similarly, colleagues could choose to use or ignore the information and materials provided without risk of offending a colleague. The SETs agreed that a significant factor in the success of this form of sharing lay in its circumvention of the personal dimension of collaboration via sharing. These issues are captured in the excerpt from Focus Group A's discussion below.

A 22 "there's no personal skill in it. You know, you can put all your information that you want up on the blog and if somebody wants it they can access it but you don't have to go knocking on doors saying sorry actually can I help you formulate the plan."

A 19 "So it's removing the personal element from it."

A 20 "Social media is becoming a cultural norm."

A 19 "Yeah definitely."

A 22 "We don't need those skills, we just take stuff from each other over a computer screen."

A 19 "Yeah."

A 22 "And it doesn't affect you personally because you know, if somebody doesn't take your information on board, you don't know about it, so it's ok. You actually don't feel obliged to anybody."

5.4.3. The development of professional knowledge of SEN practice arising from sharing as a form of collaboration

The sharing of information and resources was seen as very beneficial to developing the special education teachers' work as outlined by Respondent Ind 1.

Ind 1 *"Sharing helps to build up and add to your own repertoire of reserves, resources, materials, methodologies that you can use in your support work, you know."*

Sharing was considered to be particularly important given the paucity of available whole staff professional development opportunities. Respondent Ind 13 elaborates.

Ind 13 *"I think hugely, I think hugely, because with the best will in the world whole staff professional development is.... is very limited and while people may go on courses and courses that are of interest to them, it's very hard for that information to be disseminated down effectively and I think conversations in schools and allowing time for that - and conversations between schools, especially in the same catchment area who deal with the similar kind of clientele, it's hugely effective and there should be more of it."*

The different perspectives of mainstream and special education teachers increased the pool of expertise but opportunities for sharing were limited. The personal dimension of sharing was also noted. Sharing gave personal support to colleagues and minimised the isolation that teachers can feel. Having a colleague to share success with and be affirmed by was also seen as a positive aspect of sharing as Respondent Ind 10 explains.

Ind 10 *"It (sharing) definitely does because you don't feel you are on your own and if you meet a situation and you are kind of unsure, you know it's great to get someone else's perspective. Or share a strategy or you know an idea you know that you can work with.... Yes it definitely does you know it just keeps things fresh and it keeps you kind of, you know it it's interesting and when you have a really good class that goes very, very well and you have somebody as well to share that with. And kind of say well done and vice versa well done to them as well you know and so yes you know definitely it works well."*

Sharing as a form of collaboration reflected the themes previously identified in storytelling and scanning for ideas and in aid and assistance. The informal sharing of resources and information between friendly colleagues was the main form of collaboration. Discussion on teaching approaches was limited due to lack of time and the constraints of teacher autonomy. Overall teacher learning through collaboration via sharing, though valued by teachers, was informal in nature. There was a general lack of organisational support for teacher learning through sharing. Professional development arising from

sharing was at the discretion of the individual teacher and lacked sufficient criticality.

While a more collaborative approach evident in central storage areas for resources that gave access to all members of staff was emerging, the use of on-line platforms to share resources reinforced the individual and impersonal nature of sharing.

Storytelling and scanning for ideas, aid and assistance and sharing tend in the main to operate on the periphery of school organisation, often circumventing its limitations to survive. Joint work, (Little, 1990), as discussed in the following section, differs significantly in that it is more formal in its operation and requires school support.

5.5. Joint Work

Two aspects of the Irish primary school special education teachers' work mapped onto Little's (1990) description of joint work namely the shared compilation of individual education plans for students with special educational needs by SETs and mainstream teachers and the provision of in-class support for students with special educational needs via team-teaching. Both activities provided the opportunity for more formally organised collaboration between the special education teachers and their mainstream colleagues.

Team-teaching in particular offers significant opportunity for the development of professional knowledge of SEN practice through joint planning and evaluation of lessons between special education and mainstream teachers and through the observation of colleagues' teaching in team-taught classes. The possibility of professional learning arising from feedback and critical discussion on teaching is also available.

The first part of this section on 'Joint work' details the special education teachers' collaboration around the development of individual student education plans. The agreed targets to be achieved by the student should guide the teaching of both the SET and mainstream teachers whether support is provided in-class or via withdrawal or through a mix of both.

The second and main part of the section examines special education teachers' experience of providing in-class support for students with special educational needs via team-teaching whereby the SET and mainstream teacher jointly teach selected lessons in the classroom. The impact on professional learning is also discussed.

5.5.1. Joint work between special education teachers on the individual student's plan

The SETs generally compiled the education plans for the students in their caseload without reference to their SEN colleagues. Not teaching the same students limited collaboration on student plans.

In a small number of schools formal meetings took place between SETs to develop and maintain consistency of approach in assessment of students' needs and planning. The SETs analysed assessments and devised learning targets together. This was considered very helpful to newer SETs and also allowed all SETs to know about all the children with SEN in the school.

The acknowledgement of difference among teachers on the basis of specific expertise and the need for a collaborative approach in meeting students' needs was again evident here. The SETs collaborated with colleagues who had specific expertise relevant to the particular child for whom the plan was being compiled. Collaboration with an SEN colleague who had taught the student the previous year also occurred. Respondent Ind 9 explains.

Ind 9 *"I suppose not, because you are working very much on your own but I would seek out we will say advice is probably the wrong word for it, but we would, I wouldn't, look I wouldn't call it collaboration because we are not dealing with the same children. We rarely share a child but maybe I would get a colleague to look at my targets or to offer suggestions you know. Sorry I just wrote as well that I would definitely consult and collaborate with colleagues who taught those particular pupils before because we have a four year cycle so they will have a previous SEN teacher or a previous mainstream teacher who I will definitely consult, you know."*

5.5.2. Joint work between special education and mainstream teachers on the individual student's plan

The involvement of the mainstream teacher in compiling the individual student's plan varied considerably. Meetings most commonly took place between the SET and mainstream teachers at the beginning of the year as part of the data gathering process.

Time and availability were factors especially when both teachers were not involved in in-class support. Mainstream teachers taught their students all day in the classroom. Their lack of non-contact time with students greatly restricted their ability to plan together with the special education teacher. As with storytelling, teachers circumvented the limiting organisational structures by implementing a more informal approach. The SETs spoke briefly to mainstream teachers in their classrooms while the students worked independently on a task. These meetings occurred during the initial

data gathering stage and allowed the SET to obtain relevant information and test results that informed the development of the student's individual plan.

The student's plan was completed by the SET and sent to the mainstream teacher for review. Generally, the mainstream teacher had a more passive role in the process, likened to a box ticking exercise and the completion of the plan was very much seen as the job of the SET.

While the SETs commented that there was no time to regularly sit down and formally discuss the student's plan and progress with the mainstream teacher, there was on-going informal contact about the content of the plan and the student's progress. Respondent Ind 9 explains.

Ind 9 *"No, I tend well I am not saying we don't collaborate I will talk to them before I start the individual student's plan obviously and I will, but its more information gathering than anything else. And which I know isn't the best practice, but I will tend to complete the IEP and send it to them for any tweaking or anything they would like to add or anything that they would like to take out. Because there will be an element of it that will be happening in the classroom and generally speaking, I find that if they even have a flick through it and say 'it's fine, it's fine, it's fine', you know. I think it's probably seen as a box ticking exercise but I think there will be more collaboration going forward now it's with the new model but also again with our inspection you know let's just say the mainstream teachers were reminded that they are primarily responsible for the education needs of all the children. And I think maybe more of them have realised that they need to have more of an input you know so I am not I wouldn't..they have enough work to do in the line of paperwork I won't ask them to do the IEP but I am hoping they will take a closer look at it. Become a bit more involved going forward and..."*

5.5.3. The development of special education teachers' knowledge of professional practice arising from collaboration on the development of individual student plans.

The SETs benefitted from the expert knowledge of SEN colleagues, when required. They valued the information mainstream teachers could offer also. The identification of problems the child was facing in the classroom was particularly important. While posing new challenges, finding solutions to the identified classroom-based problems helped to improve the special education teachers' professional knowledge and practice. Respondent Ind 2 explains.

Ind 2 *"Yeah, it does, yeah. Because hmm...you know its...it makes me think about the child in terms of being in the classroom as well. So another way we would collaborate would be very much if the reading is too difficult and the spelling of the whole thing is too difficult for the child. Then I'm discussing with the teacher what we could do with that group*

or with that child. I'm setting perhaps the homework and I'm reminding the teacher you know maybe on a weekly basis where that child is and you know letting that teacher see the work I'm doing with that child so that you know the child can get praise from their teacher as well. And let the teacher know what they are doing. So that's a very important form of collaboration."

While the special education teachers saw the benefit of working towards a common goal with the mainstream teacher, this joint work was not always realised. Three main factors were responsible. The now ubiquitous factor of teacher personality and working relationships strongly impacted the potential for professional development. The lack of CPD for mainstream teachers in relation to the development of individual student plans limited discussion and critique and instead generally resulted in acceptance of the special education teacher's suggestions without question. Finally, lack of awareness amongst some mainstream teachers of the extent of their responsibility for the child with SEN in their class posed a barrier to collaboration. Despite clear policy statements in this regard (DES, 2000; DES, 2107a; DES, 2017b) a more traditional view of SEN provision, albeit mistaken, placed responsibility for the child with the special education teacher. The appropriate sense of shared responsibility and interdependence necessary for collaboration that builds professional knowledge was thereby limited.

5.5.4. Joint work via team-teaching

In this section, in-class support via team-teaching as detailed in current SEN policy (DES, 2107a; DES, 2017b) is discussed in relation to Little's (1990) joint work. The three forms of team-teaching used by the SETs are explained. Analysis of the significant issues arising from the special education teachers' joint work such as the planning and evaluation of team-taught lessons, the giving and receiving of feedback, offering suggestions for improvement of jointly taught lessons and observation of colleagues teaching are discussed as are the implications for the development of the special education teachers' professional knowledge of SEN practice.

All the SETs were involved in delivering a range of in-class support activities via team-teaching. Three forms of team-teaching were used, each reflecting Little's (1990) description of collaboration as joint work, to varying degrees. The use of station teaching to deliver literacy and maths interventions was most commonly used. Reading groups were also organised by the SETs and employed a form of station teaching. Less frequently, the one teach, one support model of co-teaching (Villa, Thousand and Nevin, 2008) was used by the SETs. All three models of in-class support via team-teaching offered ample opportunity to realise highly effective collaboration that could build professional knowledge of SEN practice. Similarly, in theory, each model had the potential to realise Little's (1990) description of joint work. However, the practice fell somewhat short.

Station teaching was the main form of team-teaching employed by the SETs. Classroom interventions to boost literacy and numeracy levels constituted the most frequent use of station teaching. The focus of these interventions was to enhance the literacy and numeracy levels of all students in classrooms through the implementation of a specific programme over a number of weeks. A special education teacher or teachers would work with the mainstream teacher in the classroom during these sessions. Each teacher worked at a particular station, teaching a specific aspect of literacy or maths to a small group of students. The student groups rotated between all stations and teachers.

Reading groups delivered through station teaching were also used. Children were grouped according to their reading ability using levelled readers. Again, the SET or SETs joined the mainstream teacher in the classroom. Each teacher worked with a small group of students generally in the classroom. However, in some situations, teachers taught their group in different rooms. This arrangement reduced noise. In some cases, the groups rotated between the teachers and in others the same teacher remained with the group for the duration of the intervention.

In both the implementation of the classroom intervention programmes and reading groups, station teaching was the model of co-teaching used and the teaching task was obviously shared between the mainstream teacher and the SET/s. When the teaching took place in the same classroom, colleagues could observe each other teaching. In keeping with Little's (1990) description of joint work, the privacy and autonomy of individual practice yielded to more public practice open to the possible scrutiny of colleagues and with the potential to develop more collective autonomy.

However, station teaching maintained a degree of privacy. Teachers were engaged in teaching at their own station, so observation of colleagues was possible but restricted. The SETs generally preferred station teaching. They felt less exposed and were more in control of the teaching situation and content as the following excerpt from Focus Group B's discussion involving Respondents B 28 and B 27 illustrates.

B 28 *"So in station teaching it's very clear. It's very targeted and you know exactly what you are doing with your small group so it is more comfortable".*

B 27 *"And you have leeway if it goes wrong, you are not as..."*

B 28 *"Obvious."*

B 27 *"Yeah, yeah. If you are not fully prepared if you are co-teaching you really want all your bells and whistles on."*

When teachers had responsibility for only one group for the duration of the intervention and when the small group teaching took place in different

rooms much higher levels of privacy were maintained. In these instances, joint work was not fully realised. A certain level of task interdependence and shared responsibility for teaching was evident but peer observation and scrutiny of teaching was restricted.

B 33 *“It’s more so each teacher takes their own group and they work with that group for six weeks. And they do one planning so it’s more individual but there’s no...there’s no co-teaching a lesson as such in our school.”*

While not as commonly used as the station teaching model all the SETs had experience of delivering in-class support via the one teach, one support model of co-teaching (Villa, Thousand and Nevin, 2008). In this model, all aspects of the lesson were shared between the mainstream teachers and the SETs and equality and parity of esteem were central to its effective operation. The one teach, one support model involved full class teaching by both the SET and mainstream teacher as well as working with small groups on particular group work activities. Usually while one teacher taught the full class, the other teacher monitored and supported the students’ learning paying particular attention to the identified needs of the students with SEN. During small group work activities both teachers rotated amongst groups to question, teach, clarify and give individual support as necessary.

The one teach one support model of team-teaching differed from station teaching in a number of ways. It was more about developing differentiated, inclusive approaches to classroom teaching to better meet the needs of all students, especially those with SEN, and could be used to teach all subjects. Duration was not specified and was generally determined by need. In the absence of a specific intervention programme, teachers developed lessons based on best practice that were reliant on professional knowledge, creativity and experimentation. Central to the one teach one support model of co-teaching was the provision of an inclusive alternative to a withdrawal model of support for students with SEN. As a result, the one teach one support model was less structured than the specific interventions delivered via station teaching and demanded more of the teachers as Respondent B 28 explains.

B 28 *“I suppose it’s more vague, you know. For both teachers to know very clearly where they are at takes that level of planning where we don’t generally engage.”*

However, for some SETs the one teach one support model of team teaching did not operate optimally. There was an absence of joint planning and evaluation. The mainstream teacher taught the class following the class plan and the SET joined in and endeavoured to support the students with SEN. Respondent B 30 describes this situation below.

B 30 *"But no I'm very much finding you go in and you support but you are still, you have your kids and they are in your head and they are who you are in there for. And you are just making sure they are keeping up and sometimes no, you don't know what's going on you might just ask the class. Like I'm in for Aistear and it's great when I can get an idea but there's some days when I come in I haven't a clue what they are going to be starting. Not saying I'm no help but it takes a minute or two to get into it."*

The one teach one support model of co-teaching demanded much higher levels of collaboration than station teaching and privacy was lost. Each teacher's teaching was fully observable. However, feedback and critique on the lessons jointly taught did not fully materialise and the opportunities offered by this form of joint work were only partially utilised. The following quote from Respondent Ind 11 outlines the differences in the planning and operation of station teaching versus the one teach one support model of team-teaching (Villa, Thousand and Nevin, 2008).

Ind 11 *"Now it can vary Andrea right usually for in class or whatever I might be responsible for like the writing station and the class teacher might be responsible for we will say the reading station right so in terms of that I would plan or whatever on my own. And then I would go to the class teacher and she would say yes that is going to work or whatever or we will tweak that and she would do the same with reading. But now that I am going into a class specifically to team-teach the writing, I find we have to jointly plan, we have to meet up or whatever. Because it's not good enough to say well I will start off the lesson and you will do the next bit and I will do the next bit or whatever so I found that element amazing because up to that I was doing... a lot of station teaching, and a lot of parallel teaching, but for the first time ever going in to do just writing with the full class... I think sometimes when support teachers go in-class it's like 'you take that area and I will take this area and we will try and put it all together right'. And that is effective, and it does work but I think when you go in and you say we are doing a writing exercise – everybody (in the class) is doing it- we have to adapt it or whatever. You have to differentiate you can't hide behind it you have to really say 'ok I am going to do this part of it what do you think?, how will we introduce it?' so I loved that part of it ,you know, but it takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of commitment it takes the full support of the teacher but it works so well"*

5.5.5. Joint Planning of and shared responsibility for in-class support via team-teaching

The level of joint planning depended greatly on the type of in-class support being provided and the teachers' understanding of what effective in-class support entailed. In relation to in-class intervention programmes such as Maths Blast and Literacy Lift Off and reading groups delivered via station teaching two systems for planning and organisation operated. Either individual teachers planned the work for their particular station and then shared their plan with the mainstream teacher or the intervention was planned and organised by the SET as described by Respondent Ind 1.

Ind 1 *“Not necessarily plan, the lesson would be discussed and the material would be discussed and the general approach would be discussed and then the way we work it here is that one teacher then would take the lead and they would go away and develop the actual nuts and bolts of the lesson plan and the operation, so everything, the broad parameters I suppose are agree. One lead SEN teacher then would take over and then that shared plan obviously is, is, is given to the others and, you know, they know about what is involved, what's to be covered, what's to happen at each station, how long each station will work for, all the nuts and bolts, if you like.”*

Involvement of mainstream teachers in planning in-class intervention programmes was varied. In the initial stages of the in-class intervention some mainstream teachers were involved in the planning but their involvement lessened as the programme became routine. Some mainstream teachers were not involved in planning at all. The lack of engagement in planning by mainstream teachers was explained by their busy timetables and by a misunderstanding of what joint in-class support required. In such a context planning in-class interventions was seen as the job of the SET. Lack of commitment to collaboration and a preference for withdrawal were also cited as reasons for mainstream teachers' lack of engagement with planning as Respondent Ind 7 outlines.

Ind 7 *“Fear, not interested, some teachers aren't interested to be quite honest they just want the children to be withdrawn, time is a massive barrier. Generally, the SEN teacher going into the classroom (plans the lesson) yes, and some teachers like you to come in with your bag of tricks and just say let's go. Sometimes some teachers view ...that this is the SEN teacher's job to come in with resources and make the resources.”*

When a joint approach to planning was not possible, responsibility for the in-class interventions mainly rested with the SET. The mainstream teacher tended to agree and go with the plan. In such cases the onus was on the SET to ensure that all the resources for the lesson were in place and that it ran smoothly. Respondent Ind 9 explains.

Ind 9 *“Where there isn’t, you just tend to just take responsibility. I am not saying that they (mainstream teacher) will sit there and observe. They will row in and I suppose most teachers are able to, you know, go with the flow, wing it is the wrong word, but you know what I mean... because they see what is going on...They obviously will participate but I suppose the actual detailed planning will be done by the support teacher I have found.”*

Providing in-class support via the one teach one support form of team-teaching (Villa, Thousand and Nevin, 2008) was different from delivering an in-class intervention programme via station teaching. The one teach one support model required significant planning by both the SET and the mainstream teacher on an ongoing basis as Respondent B 26 describes.

B 26 *“We plan after school for two hours, we plan two weeks work at a time and then we meet up again, sometimes we’d end up having to go to each other’s houses and doing it in the evening time. And this woman would be a friend of mine as well like a colleague and friend.”*

For others, the planning task was divided between the mainstream teacher and the SET. Respondent B 25 explains.

B 25 *“We do it half and half. So, if I have two classes of in-class sessions a week with your classroom then I plan one lesson and you plan the other. There’s no time for us to sit down together unless, you know there’s no extra time given. So (X) plans one and I plan the other.”*

A more unplanned and spontaneous approach to providing in-class support was also experienced by some of the SETs. The exchange between Respondents A 17 and A 20 during Focus Group A’s discussion captures the essence of the approach.

A 17 *“Like I had this conversation the other day with the principal, I go in to do in class support 3 days a week but I’m not there on a Monday. So when I go in for in class support I know the chapter she’s on but she’ll give a quick overview so that I’m tuned in to what she’s doing. So you know you haven’t even talked about what you’re doing, what she’s doing, it’s just so messy like, and she’s kind of said well at least they’re used to when you’re in the room so that next year we’ll do it properly. But you know it’s very...”*

A 20 *“But basically there’s no planning, you’re hitting the ground running.”*

A 17 *“Exactly, hitting the ground running, absolutely and luckily enough I’m good at maths so it can work.”*

A 20 *“At the class level.”*

A 17 *“So if you’ve taught at the class level you have more confidence, but if you have somebody in there who has never taught that class level?”*

A 20 *“Exactly.”*

A 17 *“It’s impossible to ask them to act like that.”*

A 20 *“It’s a horrible feeling.”*

Planning for in-class support whether through station teaching or the one teach one support model varied significantly. For some, joint planning by the teachers involved was the norm. For others, the task of planning was shared amongst the participating teachers. In other situations, one SET planned the in-class lesson and shared it with collaborating colleagues. In some cases, a spontaneous approach to providing in-class support dominated by the mainstream teacher’s class plan operated. However, common to all was the issue of time, in particular the constraints teachers felt due to lack of time for detailed joint planning.

5.5.6. Joint Work: Evaluation of the in-class support lesson via team-teaching.

While the SETs were aware of the shortcomings in relation to the planning of the jointly taught lessons, as outlined above, their main concern lay in the lack of appropriate evaluation of in-class support delivered via jointly taught lessons. The form and frequency of evaluation was most commonly informal and irregular though a small number of schools had more formal and regular approaches. Evaluation depended on the type of intervention used, the relationship between the teachers involved and the presence or absence of scheduled time for formal evaluation meetings. For a majority of SETs the lack of time posed a very significant barrier to the effective evaluation of jointly taught lessons. Respondents B 25 and B 24 elaborate.

B 25 *“No, we don’t have time to plan it never mind time to evaluate it after you haven’t planned it (laughing).”*

B 24 *“Yeah, you might say it after the lesson there in the room, but you don’t bring it down to the staffroom and sit over it for half an hour and jointly evaluate it. We haven’t the time.”*

More formal approaches included a timetabled slot every fortnight where in-class interventions were evaluated. Again, such formal evaluation approaches were the exception and though laudable tended to be general in nature. Areas that needed improvement were highlighted, as were those that were working well. Another approach where teachers were individually teaching small groups (satellite groups) in separate rooms as part of a literacy intervention, evaluated the programme through teacher self-review. As the following quote from Respondent Ind 8 illustrates, the teachers trusted each others’ professional judgment and honest evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme with their individual groups. So, while teachers came together to evaluate an intervention the privacy of individual teacher’s practice was protected.

Ind 8 *“I suppose in terms of our satellite teaching yes, there would be, there would planning at the start of the year and we have fine-tuned our scheme that there is, there is a curriculum there that we follow, there’s, there’s a, there’s a graduated progressive curriculum that we follow and then as we would assess regularly, I think it’s on a six week rolling basis that each class would have a live class profile that the teachers would then come together and look and maybe change, tweak the groups in a sense, change personnel, change emphasis and go in the direction where the need, where the need would take them.”*

More commonly, evaluation of the joint lesson was informal in nature and superficial in content as Respondent Ind 9 describes.

Ind 9 *“No not really to be honest there might be a very brief ‘how do you think that went’ or ‘tomorrow we will go back over that’ or ‘we are pitching it way too low we need to..’ and that is about the height of the evaluation”.*

Student learning outcomes and suitability of materials were areas that would be commented on, though not consistently or formally. Planning and teaching were not generally evaluated. In relation to planning, it was seen as a routine activity that teachers just do and one that did not merit closer inspection. Teachers might make reference to their own teaching of the lesson but would not comment negatively on a colleague’s teaching. However, affirmation of a colleague’s work posed no difficulty. Respondent Ind 10 explains.

Ind 10 *“I would more focus on I think ‘I could have done a little bit better on this’, or, ‘I think you know, I should have done ..’, and then usually the teacher would come along and say, ‘yes I know, I will do that the next day’ and then you know so I will kind of.... I think it’s about how you deal with it”*

While reference might be made to the unsuccessful nature of the lesson no reference would be made to the teaching and instead the solution proffered was to try something different. The sensitive nature of evaluation is captured in the comment from Respondent Ind 3 below.

Ind 3 *“I think it was just a case of okay that didn’t go great we’ll go on and try something else tomorrow. Again, I think it’s down to the planning and all that. I don’t think it’s been done, in my experience to date it hasn’t been done properly. Like I said it’s not easy to say well, because you know with regard to... Do we evaluate each other’s teaching? absolutely not. We would share information like ‘oh I think this is good’ but not necessarily tying it into what’s just been done in the lesson. So that’s a difficult area.”*

A number of specific factors also influenced the superficial nature of the evaluation. Lack of time was cited. Teachers just tidied up and left the classroom after the jointly taught lesson and moved on to the next teaching

task. In those hurried minutes, in-depth discussion was impossible as Respondent Ind 3 explains.

Ind 3 *“I mean discussions will happen depending on I suppose the strength of the lesson. I mean if it’s thrown together you just look at the clock and go right 12 o’clock we are out of here... Or you would sit down and say oh well I really saw how well he did with that or that worked well. I mean there could be, not necessarily a very formal process, it would be a case of you know we’d be at break afterwards and say that worked really well. It (evaluation) hasn’t been tied down strongly enough if you ask me to be honest.”*

The SETs were aware of the importance of effective evaluation of in-class support via team teaching. The informal approach to evaluation that was very dependent on the good will of colleagues was criticised as the excerpt from Focus Group B’s discussion describes.

B 28 *“It makes the whole thing (team-teaching) completely ad-hoc, and always will be. That won’t change or improve and you are relying on the goodwill of teachers.”*

B 25 *“And someone to stay back for ten minutes at three o’clock with you.”*

B 27 *“Yes, yeah, to engage in this way.”*

B 28 *“It’s stressful because you’re aware it’s (evaluation) best practice, you are aware that it should be done. You are aware that you are not doing it properly and to the best of, you know so that brings a stress to teachers to be leaving at the end of the day knowing that you didn’t quite do that right.”*

The negative impact of a lack of appropriate evaluation was acknowledged by the SETs. Improvement to subsequent lessons was limited and teachers’ professional development was constrained as Respondent A 16 explains.

A 16 *“Yeah and it’s just, it’s the absence of that, so that the next time because we haven’t done the reflection and we haven’t sat down and thought about it, the next time we’re planning we’re going in blind again saying what will we do, just ok this was good let’s try it, you know. And it’s just very ad hoc.”*

A lack of time for reflection on their work resulted in misspent energy as teachers continually pursued new approaches and ideas without taking time to consider their impact and value. The parsimony that constrained time for reflection appears to have the unintended consequence of limiting the development of more productive teaching behaviours that could potentially deliver more effective use of teaching time. This paradoxical situation is captured in the following exchange among SETs during Focus Group A’s discussion.

A 16 *"The joint planning, I think we're all trying to do, everybody is trying to do, the class teachers I think are aware of what we're trying to do on the planning side, but the evaluation afterwards is not happening."*

A 17 *"No."*

A 15 *"No."*

A 16 *"And again it's because of time constraints."*

A 19 *"Yeah."*

A 16 *"We just barely get time to plan the lessons so the idea of going back to sit down and say right let's chat about that lesson is far away from reality because you're thinking of your next lesson, you know and you have to plan for the next one."*

A 19 *"Yeah you don't look backwards very often."*

A 17 *"No."*

A 22 *"I agree with what we're saying here about we're trying to do too much and achieving too little, things are getting half completed in our school all the time".*

A 20 *"All the time yeah."*

A 22 *"We dive in to an idea and we dedicate 3 or 4 weeks to it and it filters out, fades away, we never really sit down and say how did that go and are we going to do it again or are we going to make changes to it because there's something new in the pipeline, somebody has come in with a new idea. Sounds great, let's go after that."*

The lack of time was not the only obstacle to effective evaluation of and critical reflection on teaching. The necessary giving and receiving of feedback between colleagues posed a very significant challenge.

5.5.7. Joint work: the issue of giving and receiving feedback

According to the SETs, the main barrier to more in-depth and meaningful evaluation of and critical reflection on jointly taught lessons lay in the teachers' lack of experience and knowledge of giving and receiving feedback amongst colleagues. There was no history of such interaction amongst teachers. Schools were considered to be very political in nature and this militated against the giving and receiving of honest, constructively critical feedback. The traditional view of teaching as private practice was antithetical to constructive feedback among colleagues. Respondent Ind 2 explains.

Ind 2 *"No, I think it's just more I've received compliments and we've talked about how we feel a lesson is going but no I don't feel I've ever, ever got any constructive feedback from a colleague. I haven't asked for it either*

so it would be interesting to sit down and go 'let's have, let's do this and see how, you know, what do you really think? But no I haven't ..I think it's just we are not used to it. Hmm... just isn't in the culture of our schools to do that...but it can actually be a really good thing, but I think we are terrified of it. We are so used to working solo and we are just not used to working in teams or like working together we are just not used to it so we can't possibly be good at it yet because we haven't done it enough."

Previous difficult or negative experiences of receiving feedback posed a definite barrier to teachers giving each other feedback on a shared lesson. In agreement with Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), for many teachers, the observation of their teaching followed by feedback was associated with stressful and potentially punitive school inspections. The monitoring of team-teaching by the principal followed by negative criticism was a disincentive to engaging in constructive peer feedback as Respondent Ind 5 explains.

Ind 5 *"...my principal took it upon himself to come in and watch us teaching and he doesn't give constructive criticism, he just kind of gives criticism."*

Again, personality and working relationships played a significant role. In the main, the SETs were afraid to give or request feedback on the jointly taught lesson in case offense would be caused and the future relationship would be damaged. As a result, when feedback was given it mainly related to the outcomes achieved by the child not the teaching and was of a neutral nature. Allowing for all the barriers outlined, the special education teachers felt that the lack of professional development in giving and receiving feedback as a regular feature of professional practice was the greatest. Respondent A 20 explains.

A 20 *"I also think we've never been taught to reflect or to critically evaluate, like we don't have these words, we don't have the skills, if you have it as part of your personality, you're lucky."*

Further, as illustrated by Respondent Ind 5 below, the SETs felt that investment in developing the necessary interpersonal and language skills required for giving constructive feedback to all teachers was needed.

Ind 5 *"I think it's all to do with your relationships and how important it is and the culture of the school. Depending on whether they are open to collaboration and we are not trained either in how to give constructive feedback. And for some people... I can say things I think about them and I'm very aware of the person that I'm speaking to and I'll think, okay, would I like it if someone said that to me? Other people are not, and they just say things straight out. So, I kind of feel we should nearly be given a list of things, this is how you constructively say..."*

The SETs were very conscious that the lack of evaluation and critical reflection on teaching was an area that required urgent attention. Teachers

needed to be able to justify their professional practice in light of increased questioning and criticism from parents.

A 16 *“The tide is turning so quickly now as a profession, we have the parents coming in to us questioning our profession. And unless we learn to stand together, you know you’re facing a lot more criticism from the parental body, you know so we need to be able to give it and take it from each other as well.”*

Also, the SETs agreed that their lack of confidence in critically reflecting on their practice was out of step with the current focus on developing students’ skills of thoughtful self-questioning. Respondent A 17 elaborates.

A 17 *“And children are being taught to question and you know we’re not being taught, you know to reflect, reflection on your behaviour, why are you doing that? Why did you do that?”*

In order to bridge the gap between the need for evaluation and critical reflection on practice and its absence the SETs employed a number of circumvention strategies.

5.5.8. Circumvention tactics: an alternative to direct evaluation and feedback

Awareness of the complexity surrounding the evaluation and feedback process caused the SETs to develop other means of improving joint lessons and ensuring the success of interventions. This strategy of circumvention was previously seen in relation to aid and assistance when the SETs deemed it necessary to give unsolicited advice in order to best meet the needs of students with SEN. In relation to compensating for the lack of more direct and organised evaluation and feedback, some SETs carried out termly or yearly reviews of in-class interventions in a general manner. A prevention strategy was also used. In-class interventions were very carefully planned and this generally ensured that the lessons ran smoothly. Respondent Ind 12 explains:

Ind 12 *“Well we discuss on how to improve lessons at review meetings so we decided after last year’s Literacy Lift Off that we would all take a group of children and do all the Literacy Lift Off activities within that group rather than station teaching. And at our review meeting we decided that this was not effective for various reasons that people didn’t get round to doing oral language or didn’t get round... The class teacher also felt that she didn’t get enough time with all her students. So, we have gone back to the original method but do we constructively criticise each other’s teaching? and the answer would have to be no. But I have to say it’s so carefully planned down to the last minute detail that it would be hard for somebody not to do a good job.”*

The SETs felt that making suggestions to improve joint lessons was easier than engaging in feedback because it was not personal. Suggestions were more general in nature often referring to issues of timing, amount of material to be covered and resources required. Again, interpersonal skills and relationships were key. The SETs endeavoured to make suggestions in a non-threatening and acceptable manner. Suggestions were often made informally just before the lesson commenced or at the end by both the SETs and mainstream teachers. The SETs were particularly sensitive to the suggestions of mainstream teachers. They were mindful that they were working in the mainstream teacher's classroom with their students. Respondent Ind. 10 elaborates.

Ind 10 *"Yes I have definitely I think so you know again it might be something like even just one of the most important things I think you know when you go into somebody else's classroom as you are a visitor there and you have to be aware of their styles of discipline and you know their rewards. So, I think, you know, again the suggestions I suppose, you know, as an SEN teacher going into the classroom, you know, I think you know you have to kind of listen to your colleague, definitely. And again I always try if I am giving some sort of a suggestion, I always try and show that I have, you know, I have tried that out or I have done that and be it introducing more drama or be it, you know, the teacher might suggest we do some writing I'm very flexible if they change tack, you know, and you know want to do something different for a week or whatever."*

Positivity and flexibility dominated the process of making suggestions. Where strong differing suggestions emerged, the SETs used a variety of strategies to reach a resolution. However, all the SETs agreed that it was unusual for this to happen as strong positions were generally not taken. It was very important in the resolution process that teachers were seen as equal and respected. Consensus was the preferred outcome. When consensus couldn't be reached, compromise was employed and might involve, for example, piloting each suggestion and combining the best of each, as the way forward. Where compromise failed autonomy prevailed resulting in each teacher using his/her preferred approach. Respondent Ind 11 describes the process of reaching agreement on different suggestions.

Ind 11 *"What usually happens in our case is if they are two colleagues that get on extremely well it's not a problem. If they are two colleagues that one maybe more senior or junior, you can kind of sometimes see that. What usually happens is, if I was involved I would say 'ok well let's pilot your idea and let's pilot your idea and then afterwards we will come back' or whatever and sometimes if one idea really falls flat on its face but there might be an element of it that you can use maybe we kind of incorporate it. Say 'oh well both of those were really good' or whatever 'and we will*

definitely use that now going forward' and it just diffuses a lot of tension, yes."

Occasionally however, less positive factors came into play in the resolution process. Seniority or a power differential that perceived the mainstream teacher to have the final say could sway the decision. In such situations, acceptance was the usual response.

5.5.9. The development of the special education teachers' professional knowledge of SEN practice arising from joint work via team-teaching

All the SETs agreed that participating in in-class support via team-teaching developed their professional knowledge of SEN practice. The more holistic view of the child gained from working in the classroom helped the SETs to better meet the exact needs of the child. They got to know the child better. Working in a mixed ability classroom gave the SETs a wider perspective. They could see what was expected for the child's age and class level. The special education teachers got a clearer view of the students' strengths and difficulties when they observed them engaging in classroom tasks and activities with their peers. When the special education and mainstream teachers shared their observations of the child, more effective interventions and greater teacher professional knowledge emerged. Respondent Ind 11 describes the benefits of participating in in-class support via team-teaching.

Ind 11 *"It does because sometimes I find when you withdraw the children you kind of get caught up with, you know, your targets and what you are trying to achieve and when you go back into the classroom setting you see what is expected for their age and their level. And you can say 'ok my expectations are a little bit too low' or 'they are too high' or 'do you know... I would find that would be the greatest, that I would see you know...I think when you see them in class you see them with their peers you see their level of ability, it is very evident. Where, if you take them out in a group then usually the ability of the group or whatever is the same. But if you see them in their class you can see, little do you know there might be like, you might say 'oh wow that was a really good sentence that they gave'. And I mightn't expect as much of them in my own kind of setting and then I would say 'ok, you know, that child is capable of more and I think we should push them a little bit more so in that sense."*

When consistency in teaching approaches between the SETs and mainstream teachers resulted, a more coherent strategy for meeting the needs of students with SEN evolved as explained by Respondent Ind 5.

Ind 5 *"We do hand-writing and we all go in, so you are learning what is the phrase for example for the letter C, like up to the top down and kick out. It's going to be the language that we all use. And so, it's consistent*

language that they will receive from junior infants all the way through when they are making their C, up to sixth class. And we are going in teaching it in every class so that all the children will have the same language. It's consistent and you are learning it as well."

Joint work via co-teaching afforded the SETs the opportunity to observe their colleagues' teaching. All the special education teachers agreed that peer observation was a significant and valued source of professional development. Respondent Ind 12 explains.

Ind 12 *"Yes I think you learn a lot from watching somebody else teaching, what works, what doesn't work, and you will then try it out yourself."*

It was also a new experience for the SETs, one that heretofore was not commonly accessed in their schools. The SETs benefitted from observing different styles of teaching and noting differences in how colleagues managed discipline. Watching particular situations unfold in the classroom and the associated actions and reactions of another teacher was particularly enlightening. Noticing how other teachers moved around the classroom and used their voices all provided a rich and varied range of learning experiences for the special education teachers. The personal control of their learning, that observation offered, was also valued. The SETs could select an aspect of the observed teaching that impressed them and experiment with it in the privacy of their own practice until mastery was established. According to the SETs, involvement in team-teaching also had the potential to help teachers to work together towards a shared goal and to develop the communication skills necessary to work effectively with colleagues. When team-teaching worked well, isolation and loneliness were lessened, and the SETs benefited from camaraderie and from the appreciation they received from colleagues when they were of help. Respondent Ind 10 describes some of the professional and personal benefits from providing in-class support via team-teaching in the following quote.

Ind 10 *"Yes I do I think it's great because you learn as I say I learn something new every day. ...I think there is you know a great sense of comradeship between you and your colleague and I think the children pick up on that. ...you are seeing a situation unfold in front of you, and how the teacher dealt with it and, it does help you in that sense and I think, you know, you definitely get loads of ideas and again it's a privilege to go into people's classrooms...and for them to share that kind of information with you, it makes your job a lot more rewarding and less lonely and less isolated..."*

5.5.9.1. Barriers to professional development from joint work

The factors that facilitated the special education teachers' learning from team-teaching also had the potential to hinder it. If the teaching styles and approaches to classroom management of the teachers involved were totally at variance, team-teaching a class was rendered impossible. Where teachers had very different expectations of the children academically and/or behaviourally, a significant barrier to team-teaching could also result. The different frames of reference held by the mainstream and SETs, that offered the possibility of professional enrichment, could also complicate and obstruct the process of team-teaching.

According to the special education teachers, team-teaching required detailed planning and the teachers involved needed to be very clear on their roles during the lesson in order for it to run smoothly and provide opportunities to develop knowledge of SEN practice. Otherwise the team-teaching experience could be frustrating and potentially negative.

Personality and the quality of the working relationship between the team-teaching partners was again a key factor. If teachers did not get on well together it could be difficult to team-teach. Different teaching styles and approaches could cause problems. Team-teaching partners needed to be aware that mistakes would occur and that no teacher's practice was perfect, and that learning could also result from observing practice that they would not seek to emulate. Respondent Ind 9 describes some of the significant barriers to effective professional development from team-teaching, identified by the SETs.

Ind 9 *"my expectations might be very different to some colleagues so style is I suppose is a barrier can be a barrier. Relationships as I said because you are nervous and you are self-conscious do you know what I mean different expectations of children what is acceptable what is not acceptable and I mean that from a behavioural point of view and I also mean from a curricular point of view you know. The language, and what is acceptable from the point of view of, you know, a standard. Different frames of reference then as wellit doesn't always have to be a barrier. It can be a plus, but it can be barrier too you know"*.

All the SETs strongly agreed that mutual respect and trust were required to reap the benefits of team-teaching and observation. Trust and respect were deemed to be even more important than usual when teachers were beginning to team-teach. The move from individual practice to team-teaching constituted a very significant change for teachers with attendant personal costs. Teachers, SETs and mainstream, feared relinquishing the safety of their own classrooms where their professional practice was largely unquestioned and their pride intact. They could feel intimidated, self-conscious and lack confidence when asked to teach in front of colleagues. They could doubt their competence when faced with the wide range of activities that can be used in a team-taught class.

For teachers, unaccustomed to team-teaching, a range of potential fears existed. The fear that they were being watched and judged by colleagues was common. Underlying anxiety that their weaknesses would be revealed and that their colleagues would think less of them was also encountered. Fear that team-teaching partners would betray them and speak negatively about their teaching behind their backs was particularly strongly felt by the SETs, a theme that is developed in Chapter 7 and outlined here by Respondent Ind 3.

Ind 3 *“Fear of being judged, or ridiculed, or maybe a previous experience. So, I think it’s all about judgment and I think as well, it’s the fear of it, because teaching can be seen as quite an isolated job in that you are in your own room. So, to have somebody else in it’s like ‘oh are they judging me?’ ‘Are they judging how I’m doing it’, or ‘the kids are you know, they are not engaged’. Or, you know, it is about fear, it’s about pride and it’s about fear of maybe, again it also depends on the character, how you can work with the person.”*

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter has presented data on the collaboration Irish primary school SETs are involved in through the lens of Little’s (1990) four forms of collaboration namely storytelling and scanning for ideas, aid and assistance, sharing and joint work. Importantly, given the current policy context (DES, 2107a; DES, 2017b) the opportunity each form of collaboration affords the SETs to develop their professional knowledge of SEN practice is discussed.

This study’s focus on the collaboration that Irish primary school special education teachers are involved in is timely. Current education policy (DES, 2107a; DES, 2017b) in relation to special education needs strongly favours a more collaborative approach amongst teachers to ensure the provision of a truly inclusive education for students with SEN. SETs and their mainstream colleagues are expected to work collaboratively to meet the needs of students with SEN in the most inclusive manner possible. To this end, providing in-class support through team-teaching is the preferred delivery model, where appropriate. It replaces the former strong reliance on the withdrawal of students with SEN from their classrooms to receive support teaching. SETs and their mainstream colleagues are, as a result, required to implement a highly sophisticated level of collaboration in keeping with Little’s (1990) conception of joint work.

Support for special education teachers to implement policy requirements comes, in the main, via a bring-back model of CPD (Sugrue, 2002). While not distinctly conferring the status of facilitators of change on the special education teachers or placing them directly in a helper/mentor role (Little, 1990) they are tasked with bringing back current information and skills in relation to SEN teaching to their schools, chief among them being the

development of collaborative practice. However, the capacity of schools to facilitate them in this endeavor has been largely ignored.

Collaboration cannot operate in a vacuum. How schools work with this SEN policy (DES, 2107a; DES, 2017b) is therefore interesting and has definite implications for the future of SEN practice and more broadly for how schools operate. Developing collaborative practice around SEN provision has the potential to change schools dramatically.

Collaboration offers SETs the opportunity to develop their professional knowledge and to build effective and consistent SEN practice throughout the school. In the current Irish education context, developing school-based teacher collaboration seems a very worthy objective that resonates with policy. However, to be effective, teacher collaboration must challenge the norms of privacy, autonomy and non-interference that have traditionally defined the profession of teaching (Little, 1990) and so the worth of collaboration is counterbalanced by its complexity. The findings detailed in this chapter give us a timely insight into the ways in which SETs are coping with this complexity.

The special education teachers' collaboration through storytelling and scanning for ideas demonstrated an awareness of the need to collaborate with colleagues in order to best meet the needs of students with SEN. Allied to this was the belief that collaborating with colleagues developed their knowledge of SEN practice. The special education teachers' informal storytelling and scanning for ideas bridged the gap between traditional individual private practice and the policy driven move to collaborative practice. Through informal contact with colleagues the SETs circumvented the limitations of school organisation, most notably, the lack of formal discussion time for teachers. However, their innovative communication system often operated in the shadows as it was not always encouraged by principals. While storytelling and scanning for ideas was valued as a form of professional development by the SETs, it was not equally available to all staff members. Personality and the quality of working relationships decided who was chosen to participate in storytelling. The information delivered was received without professional discussion and scrutiny and its use was at the discretion of the individual teacher.

Aid and assistance, as a form of collaboration, revealed the traditional, autonomous and egalitarian nature of teaching. While responding to requests for aid were generously acceded to, offering unrequested advice to a colleague was generally avoided lest it be seen as making a judgment on a colleague's professional competence. Again, the SETs creatively and generously tried to circumvent this restriction when they deemed it necessary to advise a colleague in the best interests of the student with SEN. Traditionally, seeking advice from colleagues carried the threat of presumed incompetence and was restricted to trusted colleagues. While reticence remains, the findings show that teacher expertise is now also guiding requests for advice and aid. SETs are seen to have a different role to

mainstream teachers and to have specific knowledge of SEN teaching. Within the cohort of special education teachers in some schools, individual SETs will have honed particular expertise in an area of SEN. Acknowledgement of different areas of expertise amongst staff members makes requesting advice on SEN more acceptable and most importantly disrupts the restrictive attribution of incompetence to requests for assistance from colleagues.

While the emergence of expertise promises a more collaborative future, collaboration through Sharing peeped into the more traditional state of private practice. It was largely restricted to sharing resources. There was a paucity of sharing teaching methods and ideas and there was no particular forum available to the special education teachers to facilitate discussion on teaching practice. Central storage of information and resources was developing in some schools but sharing resources via on-line platforms was also increasing and providing a very individual focus that avoided the personal dimension. Interestingly, the emerging joint work of team-teaching provided some scope for the sharing of knowledge, ideas and skills.

The special education teachers' experience of joint work in the form of team-teaching was most illuminating. While on the surface teachers were sharing the task of teaching, closer analysis revealed that the essence of Little's (1990) joint work was not fully reflected in their practice. The SETs displayed admirable courage and commitment in taking on the task of providing in-class support and thereby relinquishing the privacy and safety of teaching in their own classrooms. Observing colleagues teaching and being observed by colleagues was a daunting departure from individual practice. Working within the existing school based organisational structures and limited by them, the SETs adapted and succeeded in pioneering significant change towards collaboration.

However, the lack of time for planning and evaluating jointly taught lessons coupled with the dearth of professional development on the skills of collaborating with colleagues, particularly the ability to give and receive constructive feedback, posed an insurmountable challenge. It revealed an organisational system that has insufficient regard for the potential of school based professional development opportunities and their ability to transform practice through evaluation and critical reflection. Allied to the unsupportive organisational structures is a long established and highly embedded network of workplace relationships that have an unspoken but ubiquitous and unflinching hold on how teaching practice operates.

Together these two very significant factors pose a considerable threat to the future development of collaboration that builds the special education teachers' professional knowledge of SEN practice and constrains their ability to influence effective and consistent SEN practice throughout the school. This is particularly regrettable at a time when Cosán, the national framework for teachers' learning, (Teaching Council, 2016) seeks to affirm and accredit a broad range of learning activities including school-based teacher led research and experimentation. The confluence of emerging thinking on continuous

professional development and current policy on SEN provision (DES, 2107a; DES, 2017b) provides a uniquely fertile environment for SETs to share, discuss and scrutinize information and ideas with colleagues and test their effectiveness through experimentation.

Irish primary school SETs are working at the forefront of a major policy change that, in pursuance of more inclusive schools, requires teachers to collaborate and through collaboration to develop their professional knowledge of SEN practice. The findings presented in this chapter provide ample evidence that the SETs are visibly collaborating with colleagues, but collaboration is far from ingrained practice. Instead, collaboration operates on the surface of teaching and while providing some professional development it fails to deliver the depth and quality of professional knowledge available through more authentic collaborative practice.

The reasons for the somewhat superficial approach to collaboration and the tentative circumvention strategies required of the SETs in order to develop collaborative SEN practice in their schools are examined in the following two chapters. In the next chapter, the school based organisational factors that influence the informal and tentative approach to collaborative SEN practice pursued by the SETs is explored. Chapter seven concludes the findings with an examination of how the emotional and relational aspects of collaborative SEN practice impact the special education teachers' working relationships and their ability to collaborate with colleagues. An account of the special education teachers' views on how collaborative SEN practice in Irish primary schools can be improved concludes the chapter.

Chapter 6: Organisational factors that influence the development of teachers' collaborative SEN practice and associated professional knowledge

6.1. Introduction.

The preceding chapter described the forms of collaboration Irish primary SETs are involved in and its impact on the development of their professional knowledge of SEN practice. The findings reveal that while the SETs were engaging in a considerable amount of collaboration, it was predominantly informal and tentative in nature and its impact on their professional development and on the development of SEN practice throughout the school was highly variable, fragmented and insufficiently critical. This chapter examines how certain organisational and leadership factors influenced the special education teachers' collaboration with their colleagues and the development of professional knowledge of SEN practice.

In relation to the organisation and operation of schools, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue that teacher collaboration is greatly facilitated in schools where a collaborative whole school focus exists. In contrast, the findings from this study convey a confusing and dissonant picture of schools. While firmly rooted in a traditional system of autonomous, individual teaching practice SETs are tasked with developing a collaborative approach to SEN practice in response to a policy directive (DES, 2107a; DES, 2017b). Instead of a strong foundation of collaborative practice on which to build SEN practice, a bifurcated approach exists. Two systems appear to operate in schools, one that looks forward with an awareness of the need for teacher collaboration and appeases current policy on SEN, the other rooted in tradition feeds on the past in an effort to protect the present from the demands of potentially transformative change. The special education teachers' daily challenge is to move deftly between both realms as they carry out their work. The result is an informal, tentative approach to developing collaborative SEN practice involving creative strategies that circumvent the barriers to change posed by unsupportive aspects of school organisation and leadership.

Dichotomy is not the lot of the SETs alone. School leaders are tasked with managing the daily operations of the school and maintaining the status quo while at the same time leading change. The current shift to collaborative SEN practice constitutes a significant change in schools and one that, as the findings evince, relies on the knowledge and skills of the principal. However, there is no obligation on principals to undertake relevant professional development to assist them in meeting the challenge and to equip them with the knowledge and skills to effectively support the agency of the SETs.

Section one looks at the organisational environment of the primary schools in which the SETs are tasked with working collaboratively with colleagues to

best meet the needs of students with SEN. The challenges and opportunities that the organisational environment of the school poses for the SETs as they endeavor to develop collaborative SEN practice are discussed.

The second section discusses the pivotal role the school leader plays in relation to teacher collaboration around SEN. The barriers to collaboration posed by less effective leadership are explored and the leadership behaviours that enable collaboration, most especially curricular knowledge and people management skills are detailed.

Finally, the conclusion summarises the significant findings and outlines the issues arising.

6.2. The organisational environment of the Irish primary school: a challenging foundation for collaboration

Hargreaves and Fullan's (2012) description of the culture of collaboration within schools that produces fertile soil for teacher collaboration is very distant from the foundation for collaboration available to the Irish SETs who participated in this study. According to the data, the development of a collaborative whole school approach to SEN is very much a work in progress and one that rests almost exclusively on the special education teachers' shoulders. As they grapple with the policy demands of developing more collaborative SEN practice, the special education teachers face the reality of a school operating system and a model of teaching practice that in many ways is covertly antithetical to the development of collaborative practice. A confusing reality results, that defines the tentative and informal way SETs approach collaboration.

In this section, the specific aspects of school organisation that significantly impacted the special education teachers' efforts to enact their agency and develop collaborate SEN practice with their colleagues are discussed. Firstly, the lack of a shared professional knowledge base on collaborative SEN practice and the lack of structured support and planning for its implementation are detailed. An exploration of the uneasy juxtaposition of teacher collaboration and traditional individual, autonomous practice in schools follows. The perception of the SEN team, issues of territoriality, the rotation of roles and the professional status of the SET within the school are then examined. An investigation of the cohesion amongst SETs within the SEN team concludes the section.

6.2.1. A shared professional knowledge base for collaborative SEN practice: vital yet rare

There was a notable absence of an established system for staff discussion in schools that enabled staff members to develop a shared professional knowledge base that would guide the implementation of a collaborative approach to SEN practice through the identification of common problems and agreed solutions. The lack of staff discussion and the minor role played by SEN on the staff meeting agenda evidences a serious lack of support for SETs in their efforts to implement the policy directed change to a collaborative whole school approach to SEN practice. Without an established system for staff discussion on SEN practice, the SETs were unsupported in their role as change agents. Respondents A 21 and A18 describe the constraints faced by the SETs.

A 21 *"I feel that, in my personal situation as well like the capacity isn't there, the willingness to hear and learn is there, you know teachers, they do want to know about it (collaboration), but again it's a time constraint..."*

A 18 *"It's always back to time."*

A 21 *"There's no forum."*

Without structured support, the SETs found their role as change agents particularly challenging and at times ineffective as the following excerpt from Focus Group B's discussion describes.

B 24 *"Schools are kind of swimming around hoping they are doing it right, it's such a massive new model that it should have been given time, professionals coming in and relaying exactly how it should be done..."*

B 29 *"Definitely."*

B 24 *"...and not relying on SETs to bring it back because its hard delivering sometimes to class teachers that they have accountability."
(all agreeing).*

B 30 *"And even the courses they offered then were only offered to one member of staff and you know whereas it should be a whole staff sitting down because we are going back and saying, 'well you have to do the classroom support first.' Because before this you would just say, 'well he's still at three, out he goes'. Whereas, you know, when you are the person giving that information it's hard for them (mainstream teachers) to take you as seriously as they would if a DES inspector came out and said 'this is the new plan and this is what you are doing.'"*

In all schools there was a paucity of whole staff discussion on SEN and how collaborative SEN practice throughout the school can be improved and made more inclusive and how collaborative whole school approaches to teaching students with SEN can be developed. Respondent Ind 10 explains.

Ind 10 "Whole school approaches to teaching students with SEN..., again that might be just where we will come back from a course and say this is the latest or this is what people have suggested, so again, it would be just a forum that I would kind of say, well I was at this course and this has been said. Again, you know, so not really anything other than that."

In the majority of schools SEN would sometimes be mentioned at staff meetings, but briefly. It was more about imparting information regarding a current SEN related issue than having a discussion about SEN practice within the school. Such information giving would generally occur prior to and after standardised testing or when prompted by a significant policy change such as the introduction of in-class support. Staff discussion when it occurred was generally prompted by external drivers instead of a strong sense of internal ownership of the SEN and collaboration agenda. Respondent Ind 5 elaborates.

Ind 5 "...it's not so much a discussion it's like ... we had a staff meeting, we had two teachers who went on a course for collaboration and they came back and talked for less than five minutes about it. So, it is covered but it's not really explained, if that makes sense."

The lack of an established forum for discussing practice limited the development of a professional knowledge base for collaborative SEN practice in the special education teachers' schools. Instead the view of teaching as an individual rather than a collective endeavour dominated and challenged the SETs efforts to share information on policy change and gain agreement on how collaborative SEN practice needed to develop. The following excerpt from Focus Group A's discussion elucidates.

A 15 *"You are doing the course for yourself."*

A 20 *"Yes."*

A 15 *"It's your course, you've decided to do it."*

A 20 *"Yeah."*

A 21 *"Yeah."*

A 15 *"It's can we pick up some incidental learning over the tea break, absolutely, and my general feeling in my staff room is that the majority of the teachers would love to know what's going on."*

A 18 *"Yeah."*

A 15 *"I think they just don't have the time to be thinking about what we're doing, do you know what I mean, they have so much else going on."*

A 17 *"Well I have mixed feelings about that because I'm in a small school, I'm the third of six of us to do this course and none of it has been implemented. So, what's that about? and it has recently been done. That is a worry and I'm not blaming the individual teachers, but I do think it comes back to, it's not coming from top down and nobody wants to go in and change the world when there's no backing behind them."*

In the absence of an established forum for discussing professional practice, the SETs efforts to start a discussion on developing collaborative SEN practice met with reluctance and at times suspicion. This situation is captured in the excerpt from Focus Group A's discussion below.

A 17 *"..after the first block I went back with some of the new thoughts and it was kind of like, you know, looking at the watches at the staff meeting, 'will she ever shut up,' do you know?"*

A 16 *"Yeah."*

A 18 *"Yeah."*

A 19 *"Very disheartening."*

A 20 *"I also found that people are sceptical about your motives 'oh, are you going for principal?"*

A 14 *"Yes."*

A 19 *"Yeah."*

A 20 *"You know, you'll be after my job."*

There was a strong focus on developing individual teaching practice in keeping with norms of self-reliance (Roshenholtz, 1991) as distinct from the development of professional practice through the collective endeavor of staff members. A fragmented approach to professional practice resulted. Teachers' thoughts and energies were centred on their individual classes rather than on the school as a whole as Respondent A 16 describes.

A 16 *"And maybe it is an individual kind of a thing. Like you're doing it for yourself or it's the individualism again of teaching or you know some people can't see past their own classroom. While they might be experts in 2nd or 3rd class and experts in their own field. They don't even see the greater good of the school or you know we'll do this next, and they'd be*

like 'sure amn't I killed doing whatever in my room, aren't I great'. And they are wonderful but you know, brilliant, but I don't value that, I think you have to do stuff for everybody."

The lack of collective responsibility for students, in particular for those with behavioural difficulties, emphasised the individual nature of teaching and placed teachers in unnecessarily difficult and vulnerable positions as Respondent B 27 explains.

B 27 *"I think that when you come across behavioural issues too, you really see when you're a team and when you aren't. Like if there's, I often see kids coming up and you go 'I hope I don't have Mathew next year', and if you don't you are like 'phew! okay great'. And whatever he does out on yard or the issues that happen you'd be like 'okay I'll go to X because she's his resource teacher and the class teacher and that's it.'" Yet whereas the school accountability for that child has to be there and I think that's something that's shifting or needs to shift a little bit, in that it's almost a sigh of relief if you don't have that child to deal with. And then when you do, you are crying out for help"*

For the majority of SETs, there was an absence of capacity in their schools to develop discussion around collaborative SEN practice. However, in a few schools some efforts at developing a strong professional base akin to Lortie's (1975) technical culture were emerging. Though focused on practicalities and infrequent, as comments from Respondents B 25 and A 19 respectively demonstrate, it was a laudable beginning.

B 25 *"I think the new model made it a bit more collaborative for us this year because rather than saying okay she definitely has four hours, she definitely has three hours, we had to sit as a staff, a much smaller staff and decide where our resources should be going for this year because we now had two fulltime SETs and we were still obviously catering to all those children but we now had leeway. So, we had to sit down as a staff and discuss what was best. So, it was more collaborative, the timetables were more collaborative, the allocation was a more collaborative process than it had previously been."*

A19 *"Do you know it really is and you know we might have, the odd time, we might have a review and we will be fairly soon on the way the new model is being implemented and all that. And, it's fairly open, you know, it is. And its facilitated by the principal like, you know."*

Allied to the lack of an established forum for discussing practice and building a professional knowledge base around collaborative SEN practice was the lack of an organised system for experimentation with and piloting of teaching initiatives and interventions. Experimenting with different teaching approaches was very much at the discretion of enthusiastic individuals and there was a lack of systematic school level scrutiny and evaluation. The following excerpt from Focus Group B's discussion involving Respondents

B 25, B 28 and B 31 elaborates.

B 25 *"Our principal would encourage that(experimentation) and as would our inspector when he visits, he said 'well okay just make sure you are piloting it, that you check'. But then the timing around it is obviously difficult. So, I don't know how much we evaluate at the end how that pilot worked, we might just go 'yeah we'll continue on' or 'no it's not working we'll change it'. There isn't a whole pile of evaluation, but they would be good for trying new things. It isn't seriously developed but it is developing."*

B 28 *"It's encouraged."*

B 31 *"That's what I was going to say it's not actually a formal system, but it's certainly an expectation, and a culture in the school where whoever has you know the enthusiasm and interest and new knowledge and wants to impart it or wants to set up some new project its 'look please go ahead and you know we'll row in with you as best we can' and yeah, I think we are allowed to do really whatever we like as long as it's going in a good direction and you can explain how."*

B 28 *"But that's down to leadership."*

B 25 *"Yeah absolutely."*

B 28 *"It's a favourable environment."*

The paucity of time available for discussion and the mismanagement of time, in particular the Croke Park hours, were considered a factor in the lack of established systems for discussing and developing a shared professional knowledge base and experimenting with and evaluating teaching initiatives. The lack of effective use of the Croke Park hours to develop collaborative SEN practice was particularly noteworthy given that these hours were established, albeit contentiously, to enable discussion. Respondents A 14 and A 22 explain.

A 14 *"I think Croke Park was introduced before this whole chat about collaboration came on board and it was originally meant to be very collaborative. But individual schools took it the way they took it and it ran away with itself again now."*

A 22 *"There's a lot of stuff in school that people say Croke Park, you know there's so much, you can fill those 36 hours so easily. And I could argue some of it is wasted but I find maybe what's wasted is maybe, in our situation a conversation would get prolonged. So, what takes 20 minutes ends up taking an hour."*

Developing collaborative SEN practice is a particularly challenging task for the SETs in their role as change agents in the aforementioned environment. A

central feature of the current policy is the provision of in-class support for students with SEN requiring SETs to work collaboratively in classrooms with their mainstream colleagues. The absence of a shared professional knowledge base to guide the implementation of such collaborative SEN teaching is particularly unhelpful especially since their mainstream colleagues have less opportunity to avail of CPD on the topic and are generally less well informed on matters of SEN practice. Instead of an agreed implementation plan, the data shows that the development of collaborative SEN practice is largely dependent on solo runs by individual SETs with very different responses, ranging from rudeness to indifference to interest as the following three quotes from Respondents Ind 3, Ind 2, and Ind 12 respectively illustrate.

Ind 3 *"With some members of staff absolutely, it's (collaboration) wonderful, with other members of staff it is just you know 'show them (the SEN teachers) the door'. I've had experience of going to the (classroom) door, 'she's not in, you can take this one' or 'here's her book, we are doing this page in the Spell Bound', and you are just sent off with it. So it's a case of, or you can go to the door and you can knock and you tentatively stick your head around the door going 'sorry is such a one here?' 'No' and you just pull the door out again. So, you know the rooms you can go into and you know the rooms you can't. And when it's good it's great but when it's bad it's horrid, as they say!"*

Ind 2 *"I would actively avoid collaborating with some of them. And those with whom I am collaborating, say you know, where we are doing maybe reading groups, my personal relationship, if it's not a good one, will hinder me from collaborating. The feeling that when you are talking to your classroom colleague that they just don't want to know, they just think that you've nothing else for doing, and that they know all about it anyway and they've nothing to learn. So that goes on and that hinders me from collaborating because I have come up against, you know, trying to develop collaboration with colleagues where I'm just getting, you know, a blank wall."*

Ind 12 *"...how we started was we found people who I knew would be open to it (collaboration) and then they would be talking about it to other colleagues. And then suddenly someone would... 'well I think I would like a little bit of that' or 'I think I would quite like some power hour in my room' ... and so, it's spread around so that it's really ninety nine percent of the teachers now in our school are enjoying some kind of collaborative teaching".*

SETs are well placed to work as change agents due to the flexibility inherent in the role (they do not have full responsibility for a class as is the lot of their mainstream colleagues) and by virtue of their access to CPD in special educational needs teaching. However, tasking them with knocking on doors to spread the gospel of collaboration often with perilous and unrewarding consequences is at best haphazard. The seemingly ad hoc and unplanned

approach to developing collaborative SEN practice, reliant on a contagion effect whereby successful pockets of in-class support spread throughout the school, clearly explains the informal, personality and relationship-sensitive approach used by the SETs, as discussed in the previous chapter.

6.2.2. Collaboration and autonomy: strange bedfellows or a perfect marriage?

The data tells us that while the understanding of teaching as an individual, autonomous practice still remains strong, a majority of teachers value collaboration with colleagues. Some SETs felt that all the teachers in their schools valued collaboration while other SETs felt that collaboration was valued by some and not by others. A few SETs felt that collaboration was not valued in their schools.

However, when asked how teaching was understood in their schools a minority of SETs stated that teaching was seen as a collaborative activity. The majority of SETs stated that teaching was understood in their schools as individual practice with pockets of collaborative practice taking place while others explained that teachers differed significantly in their schools with some understanding teaching as a collective and collaborative team activity, while other teachers saw it as individual, autonomous practice.

For those teachers who have an understanding of teaching as collaborative practice, valuing collaboration is obvious as Respondent Ind 1 outlines.

Ind 1 *“There is now a good history of collaboration and sharing in the school and this would include development of teacher knowledge of SEN, again through collaboration on interventions like First Steps, like the school improvement plans for literacy and numeracy, it forced us together to kind of work and now I suppose we’ve come through that period and now I suppose teachers would, kind of, often comment, how did we ever operate in any other way”*

For others, the nature of the collaboration may explain the interesting juxtaposition of valuing collaboration while honouring individual, autonomous practice. Respondent Ind 10 explains.

Ind 10 *“I think people really appreciate when they are struggling with something in the class or with a child or with something, you know, behavior of a child and is there a need for assessment etc. I think you know that they appreciate you talking to them and they appreciate, you know, and you appreciate them asking you as well. So the collaboration definitely it’s a two way thing I think, you know, and it is valued I think”*

As the latter quote illustrates a more superficial and piecemeal form of collaboration as distinct from a collaborative way of working that interrogates practice allows these somewhat contradictory positions to

reside together. The unlikely juxtaposition also brings to mind, Little's (1990) observation that some forms of collaboration can actually reinforce isolation and make individual practice more comfortable.

6.2.3. The SEN Team: Separate and subservient or integrated and equal?

To further complicate the pioneering role of the SETs in relation to developing collaborative SEN practice, the data revealed that, in a majority of schools, the SEN team was seen as a separate unit. This was not the awareness of the different role played by the SETs, as discussed in the previous chapter, that facilitated requests for aid and gently ruffled the egalitarian norms that suggested teachers were equal and the same. Separation arose from being perceived as apart from the rest of the school and supported notions of territoriality.

Asked if the SEN team was seen as separate from or part of the whole school, the majority of special education teachers reported that the SEN team was seen as separate from the whole school as Respondent Ind 2 explains.

Ind 2 *"I think in general as a staff, no, I think SEN is just seen as a separate thing that the SEN teachers do."*

Some SETs reported that the SEN team was seen as different because they stand different to mainstream teachers but not separate and a few SETs reported, without equivocation, that the SEN team was seen as part of the whole school.

6.2.4. Territoriality

Territoriality and an associated negative power dynamic, both consequences of a separatist view of SEN teaching, were most keenly felt in the special education teachers' efforts to work collaboratively with mainstream teachers. Some SETs felt that there was a full partnership approach with mainstream teachers in teaching students with SEN. Others worked in partnership with some mainstream teachers and separately from others. However, in some schools a divide between SETs and mainstream teachers was robustly maintained and, in some cases, in-class support was sometimes misunderstood as the special education teacher coming in and teaching the class for the mainstream teacher. Respondent Ind 7 explains.

Ind 7 *"Some yes, as I have mentioned previously, some work together, some mainstream teachers are just happy if the SEN team come in and teach the class"*

In more extreme cases the mainstream teacher was seen to have the greater power and could mandate the SET to carry out assigned work with the student without any consultation or planning. Respondents Ind 5 and

Respondent Ind. 12 describe situations in which the mainstream teacher dominates the collaboration.

Ind 5 *"I suppose there isn't a lot of teacher collaboration and when there is teacher collaboration the mainstream teacher still sees themselves as the boss in the room, and that is difficult."*

Ind 12 *"We don't always make the decision that the SEN teacher would require. We always make the decisions that the class teacher would require. So, most of the time we are at one, but I think, on the occasions that we are not, the class teacher's decision would be final."*

Despite the difficulties that SETs experienced in their efforts to develop collaborative SEN practice, there was strong agreement that when in-class support worked well, it lessened the divide between SETs and their mainstream colleagues. Participating in in-class support helped the SETs to be more integrated into the mainstream work of the school and developed a partnership approach between special education and mainstream teachers to meeting the needs of students with SEN.

However, a further territorial divide between SETs and their mainstream colleagues was keenly felt in relation to non-teaching time available to SETs for collaboration purposes in some schools. Apart from the confusion as to whether such time was allowed by the DES, what its exact purpose was and the reluctance of many principals to allow it, a further barrier existed. The reaction of mainstream teachers determined whether or not SETs would avail of an hour of non-teaching time for collaborative planning. The excerpt below from Focus Group B's discussion illustrates the tension between SETs and their mainstream colleagues with regard to the non-teaching hour. A perception amongst mainstream teachers that the role of the SET is to assist them, as distinct from both teachers in equal but different roles working together to develop collaborative SEN practice is also revealed.

B 29 *"I take the hour on a Friday afternoon to plan but it's not very collaborative."*

B 25 *"We don't take it"*

B 30 *"We wouldn't either, it would be like 'why do you get an hour and we don't get an hour?' We (SETs) don't take it."*

B 26 *"Yeah where's my hour?"*

B 29 *"That hour is golden time, the children are going playing board games or art you know, something they like doing so they (mainstream teachers) are actually, well not teaching the kids for that hour so they don't seem to mind that we have that."*

- B 27 *"I think the inspectorate encourages that collaboration time, they look for it on your timetable to see where you are having that. And then again it's professional judgment you know, let's say Irish we would need to work on it, after our WSE we decided to put fifteen minutes of that hour into going into the classroom on a Friday and doing active games in Irish because that was the need then. But always I think, I believe you are entitled to it..."*
- B 25 *"Yes under the new..."*
- B 28 *"It's collaborative time rather than planning you know, individual planning time."*
- B 27 *"That is something we need to be mindful of and I think different classroom teachers are much more willing to see that you are coming together because you are nearly coming with a bag of tools to them and saying ..I learnt this from X. So you nearly feel you have to be a little bit equipped going into classrooms that you will be able to share something with them. I think if they know you are coming together (SETs) and then something comes from that it's really encouraging to keep it going. Whereas, if they (mainstream teachers) thought you were sitting in your room and planning around YouTube or whatever..."*

6.2.5. Rotation Policy

A balanced, fair and transparent approach to the rotation of mainstream teacher and special education teacher roles greatly helped collaboration. When working in a SEN role was open to all teachers, it prevented jealousy of those in the role and the perception that it was an easier job given to those favoured by the Principal. Respondent Ind 11 explains.

Ind 11 *"I think you know sometimes people, teachers, can view support teachers as having an easier time. And they do in the sense that they are not going up and down to the yard dropping off the kids. They are not hearing all the squabbles at lunch- time. They are not getting hot and heavy when December comes to put on this production or whatever."*

A rotation policy that, within reason and taking account of teachers' talents and preferences, expected all teachers to teach all classes created a greater sense of equity amongst teachers that helped collaboration. While it was deemed important that teachers were given time to develop their expertise in SEN and in so doing develop the SEN team, it was also important to have movement between SEN and classroom practice. Mainstream teachers who had previously worked in SEN were more open to collaboration with their SEN colleagues and more knowledgeable. Communication was easier because they understood the language and procedures associated with SEN teaching. Respondent Ind 11 outlines the benefits of a transparent rotation policy.

Ind 11 *"But I know after the next three years I will be out and it's somebody else's turn but I know when I go back into the classroom I will adapt a lot of what I used, but I will so appreciate when they (SETs) are coming in and being able to collaborate and all of that. But the system that exists in a lot of schools, you are a support teacher you get on the course and that is it you are there for the rest of whatever... I think teachers love fairness they are always on about fair pay, fair this, fair that, and sometimes learning support is viewed as an easy option it's something that maybe 'oh you get it when you are a senior teacher, I am so junior I am never going to get it', do you know. So I think if you rotate you see what it's like, you know what it's like and then you kind of, you move on and then every time you are rotating you are learning something that you can use with the classes."*

A transparent rotation policy existed in some schools as Respondents A 19, A 22, A 21 and A 15 describe in the excerpt for Focus Group A's discussion below.

A 19 *"Yeah we'd have a big school yeah so we would change generally every year or 2, something like that."*

A 22 *"And we would every year yeah."*

A 21 *"And we have a 2-year policy as well."*

A 15 *"We're kind of 5 years in SEN, you're asked to do 5 and if you want an out, you know it will be facilitated but I think people want into the SEN. And then with us, we were given a choice what we wanted, the 3 classes we wanted, and they try to facilitate that."*

However, in many schools a rotation policy did not exist and teachers' patience and resilience had to compensate as Respondents A 20, A 16, A 17 and A 18 explain.

A 20 *"In my own experience from teaching in the school 12 years, 2 years ago was the first time there was any great movement. I myself moved because I wanted to move so any maternity leave that came up, any chance I could move I moved. But we all didn't move until 2 years ago and I think it has been the biggest factor in collaborative, working collaboratively because everyone got a chance to see and there was no expectation that you're this teacher, you're that teacher. So I think it was the single biggest thing in our school for working collaboratively was enforced movement, ruffled feathers, people didn't like it, they got on with it."*

A 16 *"There's no movement unless you jump into somebody else's shoes, which is what I did."*

A 17 *"Yeah the same."*

A 16 *"We all did yeah."*

A 18 *"Jumped at the chance of."*

A 20 *"Any chance you could get, maternity leave or."*

A17 *"There's no expectation to move."*

6.2.6. The professional status of the special education teacher within the school

The special education teachers' difficulty in developing collaborative SEN practice in their schools was further complicated by the diminishment of their professional status. The sanctity of the role of the SET was more porous than that of the mainstream teacher. Some special education teachers experienced significant erosion of their teaching time and professional status. They were regularly asked to carry out non-teaching duties and to step in as substitutes for their mainstream colleagues. The comments from Respondents Ind 5 and Ind 2 below illustrate these issues.

Ind 5 *"the role of the classroom teacher is seen as greater than the role of the SEN teacher. And sometimes SEN teachers in our school are treated like that you'd be sent off to matches or put in supervising a class when the teacher is gone somewhere. Or last month, I was an SNA for the day. When we have open day, I cut fruit, put them on lollipop sticks with cheese or cocktail sticks with cheese so it's (SEN teaching) not valued for what it actually does".*

Ind 2 *"Way too many interruptions to our working timetable, you know, a lot of absenteeism in the staff, a lot of choir, a lot of football, a lot of going here, there and everywhere and SEN teachers being pooled onto buses and thrown into classrooms"*

Apart from the reduction in teaching time, in itself a serious issue, such activities imply that the work of the SETs is of less value than that of the mainstream teachers. This perception seems particularly unhelpful to the development of collaborative SEN practice between equal professionals and to the SETs role as change agent.

6.2.7. Working within the special education team: support to face the external challenges?

While commonly referred to as the SEN team, the extent to which the teachers, therein, worked together, varied. In some schools SETs worked to a shared plan and benefitted from a high degree of uniformity in practice. Echoing Little's (1990) point that interdependence fostered collaboration, the data revealed that strong teams often developed in response to the

complex and diverse range of needs presenting in the schools. For those working as members of strong SEN teams, having the support of colleagues helped them to make changes to SEN policy within the school and to implement best practice. Respondent Ind 8 explains.

Ind 8 *“In our case, very much as a team, because we have to, we have to in order to, to implement best practice. I just think it does, you dilute effectiveness if you, if you go your separate ways or, or it (SEN teaching) occurs in isolation.”*

Respondent Ind 2 describes how delivering in-class support programmes played a significant role in strengthening the SEN team and developing collaborative practice, a view supported by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012).

Ind 2 *“so I find we are working as a team there and now we are doing the reading groups and we’ve done lots of it this year, you know, we’ve done 24 weeks of it or something. I feel it has really bonded us as a team.”*

However, strong team support was not the lot of all SETs. Some special education teachers reported a mix of working with SEN colleagues and working separately from them. SETs worked as a team around in-class provision and shared resources. However, each SET’s individual caseload was taught without reference to SEN colleagues and without an agreed plan for practice. Respondent Ind 3 elaborates.

Ind 3 *“I suppose with the team-teaching there’s two teachers going into a room. So, they would work together. But with regards to, it’s quite individual with their own work.”*

A few teachers worked as separate individuals at all times within the SEN team as Respondent Ind 4’s comment reveals.

Ind 4 *“They (SETs) work separately as individual teachers”* (024, p.13).

Overall, the data suggests that the organisational environment of the Irish primary school is not immediately conducive to embracing collaborative SEN practice and poses a significant challenge to the SETs endeavoring to so do. While information is given briefly at staff meetings, there is a very significant lack of meaningful whole staff discussion around the issue of developing collaborative SEN practice despite the availability of Croke park hours to facilitate such conversations.

Instead, the task of developing collaborative SEN practice in Irish primary schools resides mainly with individual special education teachers who understandably use a soft, informal and incremental approach. Given the limited power inherent in their role, it appears that SETs punch above their weight. There is evidence of growing collaboration amongst special education teachers, and between special education teachers and their mainstream colleagues. However, it varies significantly from school to school

and within schools. In many schools, contradictions abound as teachers acknowledge the value of collaboration while maintaining traditional individual practice and SETs tasked with implementing significant policy change have their professional status eroded by the imposition of non-teaching tasks. The perception of a separate SEN team and the associated issues of territoriality and power further complicate and confuse.

However, despite the challenges, the Irish primary school also offers many opportunities. Pockets of collaborative practice within schools seem to provide a foundation for the development of a collaborative whole school approach to SEN provision. However, the lack of structured support and planning for the development of a strong, shared professional knowledge base, akin to Lortie's (1975) technical culture, to guide the development of collaborative SEN practice poses a significant barrier. The failure to generalise pockets of good practice throughout the school through systematic experimentation and evaluation equally limits success and provokes serious questions about the pivotal issue of leadership.

6.3. Leadership

In keeping with Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), principals who supported and encouraged teacher collaboration and demonstrated professional collaboration themselves were the strongest support for special education teachers in collaborating with their SEN and mainstream colleagues. In contrast, however, principals who exhibited very controlling and negative behaviours greatly limited the development of collaboration while a laissez-faire approach to leadership resulted in an inconsistent and unfocused approach to collaboration that frustrated the SETs.

In order to support the development of collaborative SEN practice that builds professional learning, the data highlighted two aspects of leadership practice, that were particularly important. According to the special education teachers, principals needed to demonstrate up to date curricular knowledge and actively support teacher professional development. However, it was people management skills, specifically the ability to bring teachers together and build and sustain a team approach to SEN teaching that the SETs considered vital. Crucial to achieving a team approach were the knowledge and skills to manage complex discussion and reach agreement on the development of collaborative SEN practice. Understanding the need for sensitive change management and supporting teacher initiative were also considered necessary.

6.3.1. Curricular Knowledge

The special education teachers who participated in the study expressed the need for principals to have up to date knowledge of SEN and collaboration in particular. It was felt that all principals should be seen to be effective teachers and understand modern, inclusive teaching methodologies and

interventions and their relevance to the needs of the students with SEN in the school. Respondent B 25 explains.

B 25 *“I think for the leader as well it’s important to have SEN experience. On every document they are the end line but most of them have no experience on what it’s like to teach in SEN.”*

The SETs stated that principals should also be aware of the demands of implementing different teaching approaches and have the requisite skills to effectively manage and support them. Principals’ lack of knowledge of teacher collaboration and team-teaching in particular and their corresponding inability to support these initiatives posed a significant barrier to the special education teachers’ ability to develop collaborative SEN practice in their schools. Respondent Ind 5 explains.

Ind 5 *“And I also think that it would be extremely beneficial if all school leaders did an aspect of the SEN course, the postgraduate diploma in SEN and then they would have a deeper understanding of how important it is and what actually... I think a lot of the time maybe because in my school I’m not allowed to discuss it because my principal mightn’t like that I would know more than him. And it can be kind of a power thing.”*

Further, Principals’ lack of a clear understanding of how collaboration can be used to develop teachers’ professional knowledge of SEN practice and build consistent effective SEN practice throughout the school limited the special education teachers’ opportunity to experiment with and discuss aspects of practice. Respondent Ind 4 elaborates.

Ind 4 *“I think that the leaders need to have leadership, need to have an understanding of the benefits of collaboration. They need to... so they need to understand the benefits... they need to understand how it can be achieved and they need to understand how to promote it how to facilitate it how to encourage it and how to make it part of, you know, school life, policy of the school, in order, you know, in order for to develop professional knowledge of SEN teaching in school.”*

Greater knowledge of the demands and benefits of collaborative SEN practice, the SETs believed, could increase the Principals’ awareness of the importance of creating dedicated time for discussion, planning and evaluation of professional practice. All the SETs agreed that designated, policy compliant, time for discussion in the special education teachers’ timetable was a necessary way forward, as was the effective use of the Croke Parks hours. Appropriately managed time for discussion on SEN practice would enable the SETs to collaborate more effectively with both SEN and mainstream colleagues and also limit the anxiety caused by lack of appropriate reflection and planning, as described by Respondents Ind 9 and Respondent Ind 2, respectively.

Ind 9 *“You know even in Croke Park hours where it’s planned and it’s you know, we might have allotted time where we will collaborate, we will say, with our mainstream colleagues and a lot of them won’t be available. They have too much else to do or they have, and I appreciate they do have a lot of other stuff to do, but I wonder is it because they don’t see the value in it you know”*

Ind 2 *“I suppose to support teacher collaboration you need to make sure that you are creating appropriate and sufficient time slots within the working week to give people a chance to collaborate, to talk, to maybe discuss and to understand that this can’t be done you know in these big giant steps... ‘Let’s all team-teach, come on the inspectors want it, you’re team-teaching, you’re team-teaching”. I have personal experience of that in my first year in SEN. Just being told ‘don’t get too excited, there’s going to be loads of team-teaching’...when it was never done before in the school.”*

The need for Principals to actively support their own and the teachers’ continuing professional development in SEN was also strongly indicated. A number of suggestions were made including the encouragement of teachers to engage in courses through incentives such as release from school to attend full day and half -day courses. Inviting experts into the school to talk to teachers and work with them in developing collaboration and SEN practice was also seen as an effective support for the development of professional practice in SEN.

However, though important, the Principal’s knowledge of and support for current curricular matters alone was insufficient. People management skills were deemed to be of paramount importance in supporting the development of collaborative SEN practice.

6.3.2. People management skills

The special education teachers were unequivocal in stating the importance of having school leaders with effective people management skills. The success of developing a collaborative approach to SEN practice lay in the principal’s ability to bring individual teachers together to work as a team. Understanding the demands that collaboration made on teachers and supporting them through the change to collaborative SEN practice was crucial, as was support for the SETs initiative taking. The SETs were also aware of the difficulties associated with the role of principal and the need for appropriate professional development and support. These issues are developed further throughout this section.

6.3.2.1. Team Building

The importance of having a shared team plan for implementing a collaborative approach to SEN practice in the school, developed through discussion between the principal and staff members was strongly indicated by the SETs. Achieving such a shared team approach required principals with excellent interpersonal, communication and people management skills.

According to the SETs, the development of collaborative SEN practice in a school was hugely dependent on principals who had the necessary skills to enable teachers to work together. Principals needed to develop trust and support among staff and model effective collaboration and teamwork in their own practice. Respondent Ind 3 likened this process to that of supporting children to work together and learn from each other in the classroom.

Ind 3 *“So I think to have the people skills of being able to bring a group together and to encourage them to work together and to foster a positive environment, it’s almost like you know a classroom for our teachers. It’s the exact same way as we try and encourage the children to work together in their groups. And outside of their group, you know, peer tutoring, all that stuff, it’s the same process can apply to the adults as well. But, unfortunately...”*

According to the SETs, teacher collaboration required principals who were able to establish healthy environments where people could work safely together. Meetings that reflected a team culture where teachers could discuss teaching and learning, be supported when sharing ideas and be allowed to express views without fear of reprisal were vital to developing collaboration. Respondent Ind 9 explains.

Ind 9 *“And again I am just going to say communication skills... very, very important and very basic. I suppose a leader who would model collaboration as well would look for a team decision as opposed to just making a decision and informing the staff, you know. And just I suppose being able to foster an environment where people feel they can speak their mind, we will say at a staff meeting or at a team meeting and not just be looking at the floor, you know, and I think a leader can do that by seeking... seeking staff’s input, you know, involving them in decision making.”*

Central to effective meetings, according to the SETs, was the principal’s ability to manage the various personalities and the different opinions that could emerge and reach a consensus through effective interpersonal negotiation and, if required, conflict management skills. Respondent Ind. 12 elaborates.

Ind 12 *“I think, what’s the word for it... human resources, working with people, how to work with people, how to deal with people, how to manage people, how to discuss things, how to listen, those kind of things I think*

are very, very important. Especially when you are dealing with a wide variety of people with differing ideas and as our nature as teachers we are very bossy and opinionated people anyway, so how to deal with all the different opinions and come to a consensusHow to manage people would be a great help."

However, the special education teachers reported that though desirable, such leadership was rare. More commonly, the absence of discussion resulted in the unquestioned acceptance of the principal's vision for the school or lack thereof and in professional practice, shaped by individual teacher compliance and the vagaries of various personalities, instead of professional conversations and collaborative innovation. Respondent Ind 5 explains.

Ind 5 *"I find in my school, if I approach him with something that he hasn't decided on... it's better for you not to do that."*

6.3.2.2. Supporting teachers through change

The SETs were acutely aware of the complexity of changing from individual to collaborative professional SEN practice and the demands collaboration makes on teachers. They felt it was very important that principals understood this also and had the knowledge and skills to help teachers manage the demands that change of this nature made on them.

To this end, principals needed to be cognisant of the emotional aspect of collaboration. All the SETs agreed that difficult personal relationships and personality issues were a common stumbling block and they were all aware of colleagues with whom they would have difficulty collaborating. Support from the principal in such cases was vital.

The newness of collaboration was also problematic. Teachers tended to be wary of change. They were suspicious and fearful of collaboration because of the associated exposure of individual teachers' professional practice, particularly in the case of team-teaching with colleagues as outlined by Respondent Ind 9.

Ind 9 *"I think there is a good bit of emotion tied up with collaboration particularly when it's new, when relationships are developing so a manager who can manage the emotions that might be stirred up by you know new collaborative relationships would be a skill that would be very important you know."*

Principals needed to allay teachers' fears and support them in taking the necessary risks that change, in this case, collaboration, demands. Being observant and having the ability to listen were considered of paramount importance for principals in this regard. Seeing where good collaboration was happening in a school and providing positive reinforcement by acknowledging and praising the teachers involved would, the SETs contended, strengthen teacher collaboration. Even more

importantly, principals needed to support teachers when attempts at collaboration failed. This required knowledge of how to give constructive feedback, how to guide teachers to work as team members and how to solve conflict. As well as guiding and supporting teachers in the early stages of collaboration, principals needed to encourage and acknowledge teacher initiative in relation to the development of collaborative SEN practice throughout the school. Respondent Ind 2 explains.

Ind 2 *“The skills that they (principals) need are the skills of managing people, of setting up safe, you know, and healthy environments where we can work together, of allowing people express their views and perhaps offer their services or show new ideas, share ideas. And manage the people who are stepping in and in one fell swoop destroying any little seedling that might be starting to grow. So that’s the first main skill. I think it is the management of people in the staff.”*

6.3.2.3. Supporting Teacher Initiative

Leadership that valued the professionalism of teachers and gave them the opportunity and responsibility to shape policy and practice in the school, enabled collaboration between SETs and their colleagues. Collaboration was enhanced when principals gave appropriate freedom and flexibility to teachers to discuss and collaborate on practice. Teachers appreciated being free to spend a few minutes on the corridor discussing some aspect of their SEN work with a colleague. They also valued the freedom to leave their classrooms for short periods and go into a colleague’s classroom to discuss an important issue. The flexibility to occasionally alter their timetable at short notice to discuss an urgent matter in greater depth with a colleague was also seen as particularly helpful. Respondent Ind 11 elaborates.

Ind 11 *“I think first of all they have to let go of the reins a little bit because you can’t be a really successful principal and know everything about all of the courses that are going on. You just can’t be, because of the running of the school and all of that. So, I think once you realise that your SEN team or whatever, they are working together they might know a lot more about it than you... but they are not... they are making decisions for the benefit of the children not making a decision to overthrow their principal, it’s not a power struggle or whatever. I think that one is crucial. I also think understanding, you know, allowing the teachers just to get on with it, they know what they are doing or whatever. There needs to be trust there, you need to be able to trust your teachers. That as I said, if you see two colleagues talking, that they are not skiving or talking about the principal.”*

In contrast, the data shows that the role of principal is sometimes misunderstood by its incumbents as the person who knows everything and who knows best. At its worst, this belief can cause principals to resist good change if they haven’t introduced it and to have the final say on proposals

even if the evidence contradicts their position. This situation is captured in the comment by Respondent Ind. 3, below.

Ind 3 *“...if it’s okay with her then we can go with it. And generally, she’s not too bad, but she’ll have to be very much part of it, and you know will have to be very aware of everything that’s going on. So, I suppose what I’m trying to say is we are not necessarily allowed work on our own initiative on that front, we have to get the nod from above. Sometimes we can feel stifled by it because we are not able to go with a feeling and go with it straight away. But when we are allowed to practice new things it works very well...but I think that you know (laugh) as time goes on people learn maybe not to discuss too much outside, and maybe with a colleague, you know, I would get on well with a number of the mainstream teachers, so if they wanted to try something new we might try it quietly and not make too big a thing about it. And come back and say this worked very well for us, we tried it there recently (laugh) and be prepared to take the fallout if it so happens”*

Very controlling Principals who micromanaged all aspects of teachers’ work, who frowned upon teachers taking time to talk together as a waste of teaching time and potential insurrection, who cautioned SETs not to annoy class teachers by encroaching on their teaching time to discuss SEN matters and those who only ‘very grudgingly’ gave time, prevented true collaboration that builds professional knowledge of SEN practice taking place. Respondent Ind 9 explains.

Ind 9 *“This year, having fought for it for a number of years, we have finally been allowed to timetable an hour on a Friday for team collaboration. It’s the first time ever and it was given very grudgingly. Other than that, what has happened traditionally is, if we need to meet, we will cancel students, which is not ideal. And again, a lot of the collaboration comes after school hours and it’s... we (SETs) would seek it ourselves, do you know.”*

While acknowledging the professionalism of the SEN team and granting them the freedom and flexibility to advise on and revise SEN approaches and policies according to best practice was highly valued by the special education teachers, freedom without the support of the Principal, frustrated them. In such scenarios while individual teachers were free to introduce and implement new ideas and strategies, success was dependent on their ability to motivate colleagues, to join them in the endeavor. In schools where teachers didn’t see the value in participating, the task was impossible. In other schools, very good practice happened on a small scale only known to those involved. Such unsupported initiative taking generally resulted in inconsistent practice and a lack of sustained innovation. Respondent Ind 7 described the lack of a coordinated approach in the comment below.

Ind 7 *“Yes but it has to be initiated by the SEN and class teacher themselves like there is no barrier put in the way, but it’s generally if the*

relationship between the class teacher and the SEN teacher is good. There is no coordinated effort."

Overall, according to the SETs, a collaborative style of leadership that brought teachers together and acknowledged and supported initiative was most effective for developing collaborative SEN teaching and building professional knowledge. Respondent Ind 9 describes the benefits of a collaborative style of leadership as distinct from a dictatorial approach.

Ind 9 *"I think a leader needs people skills to bring people along. And nobody likes a dictatorial style of leadership. If, a leader has the people skills to bring people along it goes an awful long way. Relationships that are developed from the top down, someone with a supportive rather than a directive style of leadership. I hear the phrase 'looking over our shoulders' used unfortunately quite a bit at the minute and that is not a style of leadership that... I don't think is helpful. I think leaders who have skill to acknowledge effort or success or maybe even experimentation you know makes staff feel valued or appreciated or respected or even trusted."*

6.3.2.4. Preparation and Support for Leadership.

As outlined above, the development of a collaborative approach to SEN practice in Irish primary schools requires principals who are equipped with a range of sophisticated interpersonal, organisational and curricular skills. The SETs were cognisant that the demands of effective leadership in relation to collaboration were many and that the role was particularly onerous for teaching principals, as illustrated in the excerpt from Focus Group A's discussion below.

A 14 *"And it's very hard for teaching principals".*

A 22 *"Yes."*

A 14 *"We got a new principal this year now and she's fabulous but she, I don't know if she ever goes home, do you know what I mean. It's her first year so hopefully next year it will be... but she is under so much pressure."*

A 22 *"I agree, my principal is an excellent principal, excellent leadership but she is a teaching principal and she is swamped."*

A 19 *"Yeah."*

A 16 *"Absolutely."*

A 22 *"It's a horrendous job."*

The SETs felt that many teachers entered the role of principal because of the lack of alternative options to gain geographical mobility and promotion. Respondent A 20 explains.

A 20 *"I think more and more people are ending up in leadership positions, not out of choice but because it's their only way to move. If you're up the country and you want to move down, especially to our district over here, everyone has to come down as a principal. They're not suited for it."*

The lack of appropriate leadership skill in relation to supporting the development of collaborative SEN practice was ascribed in part to a prior deficit in training for principals, as the excerpt from Focus Group A's discussion conveys.

A 16 *"I think it's because training in leadership is only new into Irish education. People fell into leadership roles."*

A 17 *"For all sorts of reasons."*

A 15 *"Next in line, kind of."*

A 18 *"Yeah purely for wrong reasons."*

A 19 *"Yeah."*

A 16 *"And then it's only a recent addition to have actual training in leadership."*

A 17 *"But it's not mandatory either."*

A 20 *"No and that's a problem still, that it's not mandatory."*

A 17 *"Yeah."*

A 20 *"What other managers are allowed manage without being made, be accountable for their position, like it's ridiculous."*

However, the SETs agreed that training alone could not guarantee the quality of leadership required. Personality and emotional intelligence, they argued, played a significant role. Respondents A 17, A 20, A 5, A 19 and A 22 discuss.

A 17 *"It's not all about training either, it's about personality."*

A 20 *"Personality, yeah."*

A 15 *"They have to fit into the job."*

A 19 *"Yeah."*

A 15 *"There's a lot of existing people in roles, in leadership roles that don't*

have any of those.”

A 19 *“No.”*

A 22 *“And that are swamped because of it themselves.”*

A 15 *“Leaders need emotional intelligence, in my opinion that’s the key.”*

A 19 *“Ah it is huge, yeah.”*

A 15 *“The key to being an effective leader.”*

The range of sophisticated interpersonal, curricular and organisational skills required for principals to effectively lead and support the development of a collaborative approach to SEN practice, as identified by the SETs, places heavy demands on any one individual. A distributed approach to leadership seems much more consonant with the range of requirements. Informal leadership roles, in particular, as described by (Harris, 2008) would support the SETs in their role as change agents and enable them to discuss and develop a shared professional knowledge base with colleagues that would guide implementation. However, though capable of meeting many of the needs identified by the SETs, distributed leadership was not considered a panacea. Difficulties associated with the necessary change in mindset and the unwillingness of existing principals to delegate were cited and discussed by Respondents in the following excerpt from Focus Group A’s discussion.

A 16 *“I think there’s more awareness around training around leadership now. And there are more and more courses coming on board. And it’s slowly starting to take effect.”*

A 19 *“It’s hard to know though would a course do it, it’s back to the emotional intelligence and you can’t teach that.”*

A 18 *“It’s back to the motivation.”*

A 16 *“I think the course isn’t a course in isolation. I think the effective courses are courses that take the leadership within the school as opposed to just a person.”*

A 19 *“Yes.”*

A 16 *“And focuses on the leadership within the school. And I think it’s a mindset change that we all have to go through in education that leadership is not a person in school and just try to build on that.”*

A 19 *“The only small problem with that is that if you have a principal that’s not willing to delegate, not willing, doesn’t have that personality, you can’t really do anything about it.”*

6.4. Conclusion

This chapter examined the school environmental and leadership factors that impacted on the development of collaborative SEN practice in Irish primary schools. A pastiche of dissonance, contradiction and endeavour emerged. The policy directive (DES, 2107a; DES, 2017b) guiding the shift to collaborative SEN practice constitutes a significant change in the way teachers teach and pupils with SEN learn. However, the long-term implications are even greater. As teachers become more accustomed to collaboration, its current strict association with the SEN agenda could yield to a general acceptance of collaboration as a way of teaching and relating to colleagues and replace the traditional norms of isolation and private, autonomous practice. Yet this potentially transformative policy lacks appropriately structured support.

While the benefits of collaboration for teachers and students are well documented (Rosenholtz, 1991; Vescio et al., 2008; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Vangricken et al., 2015) the potential that the current policy offers, in this regard, is largely ignored. The shift to collaborative SEN practice is taking place in many schools where teachers value collaboration but where the traditional model of individual, autonomous teaching practice remains and where environmental and leadership factors fail to support the change. The lack of whole staff discussion around this very important policy and practice issue is both problematic and confusing. While superficial information on the change to collaborative SEN practice was given, the necessarily searching conversations needed to develop a shared professional knowledge base that would guide implementation were not realised in all schools.

Instead, a significant policy and practice change is being implemented in many schools by SETs with limited power and whose professional status is often eroded by the performance of non-teaching tasks. Added to this, issues of personality, territoriality and a power imbalance between mainstream and special education teachers, fuelled by a view of the SEN team as a separate unit, complicates efforts to develop collaborative in-class support. Though the SETs plough a lonely furrow and at times a very unfriendly one, their efforts are not in vain. As we saw in Chapter 5, SETs are now involved in a significant amount of collaboration with pockets of innovative practice developing. However, collaborative SEN practice throughout schools lacks consistency and its impact on professional practice is limited.

The lack of support for the special education teachers' efforts to develop collaborative SEN practice could be ascribed to a strategy of omission by design that superficially satisfies policy and maintains the status quo. A demanding change to teachers' professional practice in a contentious environment might more safely be introduced by stealth in the hope that a bottom-up approach (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012) might result. While wise counsel advises a gradual approach, unplanned change that is personality dependent and that delivers mixed results is unworthy of the importance of the task and the professionalism of those involved.

However, the data points to a telling inadequacy, elsewhere, suggesting that omission by default may be a more likely explanation. The absence of effective leadership skills in the areas of people and change management and in supporting teacher initiative seem largely responsible for the unplanned and informal nature of the implementation process. The need for principals with collaborative styles of leadership who could build and nurture a team approach and develop a shared professional knowledge base for collaborative SEN practice was strongly expressed by all teachers. In contrast, negative, controlling behaviours and laissez faire approaches posed strong barriers to developing collaborative SEN practice that builds professional knowledge and stymied the special education teachers' efforts to fulfill their role as change agents.

What emerges strongly from the findings in this chapter is a sense of missed opportunity. The current policy directing more collaborative SEN practice offers schools the opportunity to engage in reflective, inquiry focused discussion on practice and to bring together and benefit from the knowledge, skills and experience of all staff members and to support teacher initiative. Failure to realise this opportunity is attributed mainly to a lack of people management skills, evidencing the vitality of the human and emotional aspects of collaboration.

This area is further developed in Chapter 7 with a focus on the interaction between the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and teachers' professional working relationships.

Chapter Seven: Teachers' Professional Relationships and the Emotional and Relational Dimension of Collaboration: a complex interaction that requires support.

7.1. Introduction

The previous chapter gave us an insight into the organisational factors that influenced the informal and tentative nature of the collaboration that the Irish primary SETs were involved in. In this chapter, the powerful impact of the emotional and relational aspects of collaborative SEN practice on the special education teachers' professional working relationships and on their ability to collaborate with colleagues is discussed. The dominant and ubiquitous position that this dimension holds in relation to the future of collaborative SEN practice that builds professional knowledge of SEN is outlined.

Collaborative SEN practice and good professional working relationships are mutually reliant. However, collaborative SEN practice makes different demands on teachers' working relationships to those made by the traditional norms of individual practice (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). In doing so, collaborative SEN practice threatens that which it most needs to succeed.

The exposure inherent in collaboration is particularly distinguishing. Collaboration requires teachers to reveal aspects of their professional practice whether orally in discussion or visibly as in the more demanding joint work of team-teaching (Little, 1990; Murawski, 2009). Exposure brings into sharp focus questions about trust in one's colleagues and heightens the fear of possible betrayal (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Professional confidence and competence come under closer scrutiny and self-doubt, previously cushioned by the safety of private practice, can result (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

The importance teachers attach to having positive and friendly professional working relationships with colleagues is well documented (Hargreaves, 2001; Nias, 1989). However, while such relations can provide a foundation for collaborative SEN practice, fear of upsetting the relationship can limit the depth of the collaboration and stymie the development of professional knowledge (De Lima, 2001; Hargreaves, 2001). Positive relationships can be tested in the light of the interdependence that effective collaboration requires, and negative relationships can become more visible and difficult to manage.

When teachers work collaboratively the chance of different opinions emerging and the associated potential for conflict is much greater than when teachers work separately and independently. Indeed, conflict is a feature of

community (Achenstein, 2002). However, conflict can pose a serious threat to relationships and as a result is feared by teachers. Consequently, conflict avoidance strategies operate that can dilute the quality of the collaborative endeavor and reduce the potential for professional knowledge development (Little, 1990; DeLima, 2001; Achenstein, 2002). Addressing the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and giving teachers the skills to discuss aspects of practice and manage any challenging issues that emerge is therefore vital to the development of effective collaborative SEN practice in schools.

Section one presents data on the impact that the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration had on the special education teachers' professional relationships and on their ability to collaborate with colleagues. The associated issues of teacher confidence, competence, trust and betrayal are then examined. The section concludes with an analysis of the role that conflict plays in defining how collaborative SEN practice operates and how professional knowledge is built.

In section two the special education teachers' views, on how best they can be supported in collaborating with colleagues is explored. The lack of training in the skills of collaboration, in particular, the interpersonal skills, was seen as a serious impediment to effective collaboration and one that required urgent attention in light of the current model of SEN provision (DES, 2107a; DES, 2017b) now operating in schools. To this end, accessible and focused continuous professional development and school based organisational support were recommended.

The chapter concludes with a summary of the main findings and related issues.

7.2. Teachers' professional working relationships and collaboration: a challenging emotional and relational dynamic

All the SETs agreed that their professional working relationships with colleagues had a highly significant impact on their ability to develop collaborative SEN practice as Respondent Ind 13 states.

Ind 13 *"I think it (professional working relationships) has a colossal impact on the degree to which collaboration can take place, definitely"*

According to the SETs, professional and personal relationships were closely linked and difficult to separate. Good working relationships enabled collaboration. Respondent Ind 10 explains.

Ind 10 *"I think so, yes, the professional working relationship it's closely linked I think with your personal working relationship, it's very hard to divide"*

the two. But I think if, you know, because we have good working relationships that does lend to more collaboration and more willingness to put yourself out there and ask a question or look for advice.”

Professional working relationships built around personal friendships were greatly valued and seen to facilitate collaboration. Feeling comfortable with and liking a colleague were seen, by the SETs, as necessary conditions for effective collaboration. Consonant with (Murawski, 2009) the self-selection of partners for team-teaching was strongly recommended because of the ease in collaborating with friendly colleagues. Respondent Ind 9 elaborates.

Ind 9 *“...we generally have good professional relationships amongst all staff but I think the personal relationship is a factor too and I think it enhances collaboration and I would always you know seek out a collaboration partner from mainstream colleagues because I have probably a personal relationship as well as a professional. Or a better professional relationship with them, but in general we have an open working relationship and a lot of people, not everyone, is open to new things but a lot of people are open to change and open to collaboration but again, I think it has to be self-selecting, you know.”*

While collaborating with friendly colleagues made collaboration easier there was no evidence of challenging discussions or honest critique or more in-depth evaluation as a result. It was more that good relationships made the change to collaborative practice more comfortable. The SETs spoke of the ease of working with like-minded, willing colleagues with whom they had friendly working relationships. These were not the strong, solid friendships that survived the test of robust, challenging discussions on practice issues and thrived on the positive outcomes of disagreement that advanced practice (De Lima, 2001). Relationships were more delicate and untested and resonated with Hargreaves' (2001) description of friendliness that had to be protected and that carried the associated risk of group think.

All the SETs agreed that the lack of compatibility with colleagues and difficult personalities made the task of collaborating much more difficult. However, though desirable it was not always possible for the special education teachers to work with friendly colleagues. The following comment by Respondent Ind 9 captures the situation.

Ind 9 *“I am talking about in-class support, I would be probably uncomfortable in maybe a third of the classes for different... for some of the reasons that I have already outlined, do you know what I mean...”*

Working relationships can be very non-professional and difficult past histories can impact. In challenging situations teachers need to be able to manage their personal feelings and get on with the collaborative teaching task, though this was not considered easy. Respondent Ind 2 explains.

Ind 2 *"... working relationships can be very non-professional. And you know problems can arise, all sorts of issues, underlying issues, likes and dislikes, past histories, good experiences and bad experiences. Those that you like and those you are not too gone on, completely impact on how you collaborate with the staff because at the end of the day, you know, you can't really collaborate unless you are comfortable talking to the person. You trust that person, and that even if you don't personally really like the person you are professional enough to park that and get on with the job."*

Trying to get colleagues with difficult personalities who were opposed to change to collaborate was very challenging. Working in classrooms where SETs felt unwelcome was very demanding and required a very careful and sensitive approach. Colleagues who held a superior view of their approach to teaching also made collaboration very difficult. These issues are illustrated in Respondent Ind 3's comment below.

Ind 3 *"I mean within every staff there's friendships and people that work better together and stuff like that, so there's some you might, to try and push yourself out of your comfort zone, to go to somebody you mightn't necessarily go to but you'd have to be very, very aware of how to approach that person. You know your friends will say, 'oh if you need it come on in', or 'if you need to', or 'don't pay any attention to me' type thing, which is easier for you to do. But if you are entering into a classroom where you may not be received with open arms, the way you approach that is very important."*

The importance of friendly working relationships added a very personal, emotionally driven and somewhat fickle dimension to the development of collaborative SEN practice. A more stable approach was possible in a small number of schools where teachers shared a common purpose to provide the best teaching and learning opportunities for students and where a strong professional work ethic, mutual respect and good relationships with the principal prevailed. However, this scenario, described by Respondent Ind 8 below was more the exception than the norm.

Ind 8 *"Our mission statement is that we care, and I think that is the ethos that is just, it's woven into the fabric of the school, it comes from the principal and it comes all the way down, there's a genuine care for students and there's a genuine need to see the positiveit's the atmosphere that's created in the school and the value that's placed on them (teachers) as a professional, on them as a colleague, and on them as a friend, and it's the value and how they impart that philosophy to the kids, that, that cements the school together and I think that's a testament to the school, that less and less teachers leave ..."*

7.3. Teachers' professional confidence and competence

The emotional and relational demands of collaborative SEN teaching arrangements, particularly the exposure that team-teaching requires, can raise new questions about professional working relationships. The fear of exposure triggers questions about teachers' professional confidence and competence. Teachers can have anxieties about their own professional practice and fear having any weakness exposed and criticised through the process of working collaboratively with colleagues. They may experience a fear of failure and a fear of not being expert enough in the new collaborative teaching arrangement. Respondent Ind 4 explains.

Ind 4 *"...I think the competence and the self-confidence nearly go hand in hand, if they are competent and confident, they'll be happy enough to go with it. But if you are lacking in confidence you are not going to open the door to it. I believe that part of the reason teachers are afraid to engage with collaboration and you know co-teaching is that they might be, they might have anxieties or worries about their own professional practice and they might be worried that they might be, you know, criticised."*

Having their teaching observed by a colleague, in a collaborative team-teaching situation can be particularly challenging. A long history of teaching in isolation broken only by the arrival of a DES Inspector to observe their teaching casts a long shadow. The coupling of observation with judgment is deeply embedded and unhelpful to the development of collaborative SEN practice and honest, equal professional working relationships (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Teachers can feel that the spotlight is on them in a team-teaching situation and, that their colleagues are now their judges. The fact that in most cases, the SET knows more about collaboration and team-teaching than the mainstream teacher can heighten fears and tensions around in-class support and further strain working relationships. Respondent Ind 3 elaborates.

Ind 3 *"You can maybe feel, am I being judged or is this going to be more like teaching practice. Again, if it's not marketed properly it will be seen as that I'm coming in to watch you teaching or to, you know, so if you are not confident in your own work you will immediately feel that you are under observation."*

While for most teachers their fears around professional competence are anxiety driven and unfounded, for some professional competence is an issue. The competence of colleagues becomes more important and obvious for collaborating teachers. Teacher incompetence within the confines of the individual's classroom has limited impact on colleagues. However, successful collaboration is dependent on the competence of colleagues (Little, 1990).

Further, in collaborative practice, it is very evident if someone is incompetent as captured in Respondent Ind 7's comment below.

Ind 7 *"There is no place to hide."*

All teachers agreed that general incompetence was not a common issue. However, a lack of knowledge of and skill in using a wider range of teaching methodologies appropriate to effective in-class support and particular interventions was a consideration. Teachers hide their incompetence. They don't generally ask for help. If teachers don't have the professional confidence to ask how some aspect of team-teaching is delivered, they can engage superficially. The ensuing lack of joint involvement can create difficult professional working relationships to the detriment of effective collaboration that develops professional knowledge of SEN practice. Respondent Ind 1 describes how fear of the aspersion of incompetence negatively impacts collaboration and can limit the active engagement of mainstream teachers in the collaborative teaching intervention.

Ind 1 *"Yes, I would have seen that on numerous occasions here throughout the years, you know, there's a fear of maybe of, fear of failure, a fear of not being expert enough in this area, a fear, particularly in an in-class setting, if there's in-class work going on, a fear that they're being judged, you know, that, you know, I'm judging on how they're approaching it and how they're disciplining their children, and I think I mentioned before as well, there's a fear of having any weakness exposed. So definitely those would be the factors, as I would see it... You get some colleagues that they just want to leave the whole process to you, you would often get the comment - not so much now - but you would in previous - well look, you know, you're the expert, you just write up the IEP and you just give it to me and that'll be fine or if it's a whole class intervention that we're doing or in-class work basically they don't want to know, again you organise it, you decide it, you divide it up and I'll let it happen in the room but again there's a kind of reluctance to be involved in a kind of meaningful way."*

When SETs were required to team-teach in a class grade that they were unfamiliar with and had not previously taught they lacked confidence. A good professional working relationship with the mainstream teacher was very helpful in providing the necessary information and support. The following excerpt from Focus Group B's discussion captures the issue of confidence and support in a team-teaching situation.

B 24 *"You have to stand over what you say as well."*

B 25 *"Yeah especially if you are in a class like when we started team-teaching this year it was fifth and sixth class and I had never taught fifth or sixth class before, so I was very much out of my comfort zone. And looking to the teacher an awful lot for guidance. So, you are kind of just going in and going... right fractions sixth class, how do we add them, how do we*

multiply them, you know. So it does but as you build a relationship with that teacher then you know you can, if you haven't taught the grade before its definitely very difficult to have the confidence in what you are saying because you haven't actual experience of it."

B 24 *"Sometimes people are afraid to say I haven't done fractions in twenty years, if you are feeling not very confident about some subject matter that takes a little bit of bravery and friendship probably as well."*

B 33 *"Or the confidence to ask for notes..."*

B 24 *"And relationship..."*

B 33 *"...can I have your notes ahead of time so that I can plan."*

It is understandable that issues of professional confidence and competence will raise their heads in a change from private to more public teaching practice. These emotional and relational implications of the move to collaborative SEN practice for teachers threaten their highly valued friendly working relationships and bring the need for trust and the fear of betrayal into sharp focus.

7.4. Trust

There was strong agreement from all the SETs that trust was a very significant issue in relation to teacher collaboration most especially when working in a classroom in a team-teaching arrangement. The greater the exposure, the greater the need was for trust. New collaboration relationships were difficult because trust was not established and took a considerable amount of time to build. The SETs were also aware that even when established, trust was always fragile, as Respondent A 17 states.

A 17 *"...it can be eroded so easily by just a comment."*

When trust was present teachers felt safe working with their colleagues and were enabled to take the necessary risks associated with a new approach to teaching. Trust was enhanced when colleagues shared a common purpose for the collaborative endeavor. However, without trust teachers felt vulnerable in a co-teaching situation. Their vulnerability stemmed largely from a fear of making mistakes. The SETs felt that collaborating colleagues needed to be professional and respectful in managing any mistakes that occurred and not personalise the issue. Colleagues needed to be open and honest and tell each other if something was wrong and work together to solve the issue. Respondent Ind 2 describes how trust operates.

Ind 2 *"You must trust that we can be professional with each other. That we are not going to be gossiping about one another. That you know we can*

watch each other fail miserably or excel excellently and you know deal with that appropriately. There is a huge trust issue. You must feel comfortable and safe in working with somebody and hmm...you know if you feel attacked in any way it's going to damage your relationship with that person. It's going to be very difficult to work with them."

7.5. Betrayal

The absence of mutual trust between colleagues led to instances of betrayal that damaged the special education teachers' professional working relationships and their future prospects of developing collaborative SEN practice. Teachers felt betrayed when a colleague with whom they had been team-teaching, negatively discussed an aspect of their teaching with another colleague behind their backs. Respondent Ind 7 explains.

Ind 7 *"A discussion with another colleague, in a sense 'oh I saw her doing this... I thought she was better at this' you know".*

Similarly, if a teacher made a negative reference about a colleague's teaching to a parent, serious betrayal was felt. Such betrayal could also reflect the individualistic nature of the profession that fostered an unhealthy sense of covert competition and jealousy between teachers. These issues are discussed in the following excerpt from Focus Group A's discussion.

A 16 *"Or equally, and in collaboration when you're working you're co-teaching and you're bringing a new idea or a new method to the front and you're using it as part of your co-teaching, that it's not used against you again so that the teacher isn't sitting in front of parents again saying oh the results are down because X teacher is in my room teaching English."*

A 18 *"Oh God yeah."*

A 16 *"It's that element that is going to affect collaboration."*

A 14 *"Yes."*

A 15 *"You're talking about very... I think very few teachers that would fall into that bracket, I would imagine."*

A 16 *"You'd be surprised."*

A 17 *"You'd be surprised, yeah."*

A 19 *"That comes back to compatibility as well, do you know."*

A 22 *"Yeah."*

- A 17 *"But what about when you hear it back from parents then."*
- A 19 *"That's it, yeah the parents."*
- A 17 *"I've heard that on a number of occasions and I'm like, oh my God."*
- A 20 *"Does that go back to the individual nature of teaching and teachers wanting to see themselves as the best teacher and not looking at the greater good of collaboration and that kind of thing?"*
- A 22 *"Yeah, somebody who is not a team player."*
- A 17 *"Yeah exactly."*
- A 19 *"And there's probably one on every staff."*

If confidence was broken and a problem or vulnerability shared with a colleague was discussed with others, feelings of betrayal resulted. The SETs felt betrayed when colleagues agreed to do something and failed to follow through. Respondent Ind 10 describes such a situation.

Ind 10 *"I think to hear this, something that you had talked to them about, back third person from somebody else, do you know what I mean, or that you know you might just have been having a chat with somebody about something or a difficulty you are having and all of a sudden then, somebody else rows in all kind of gung-ho to sort the situation out, when you were like dealing with it yourself. So, I think you know just that the trust, you know that if you ask somebody to keep something between the two of you that it is, you know and vice versa. So, I mean that is kind of where you would feel kind of betrayed by a colleague, that, or they didn't bother helping you. They promised they would do something for you and then you are still waiting you know to get whatever manual or those resources that they promised you or whatever, do you know what I mean."*

The inappropriate sharing of information about a student that was given in confidence also constituted betrayal for the SETs. They felt betrayed when colleagues did not expend equal effort in the collaborative endeavor and one teacher was doing most of the work and the planning. Respondent Ind 1 elaborates.

Ind 1 *"Disclosure of confidential information would be a big thing to me, particularly if it was just, the teacher was, was being informed of this confidential issue simply because a child was in their care and they needed to be aware of this, but that it shouldn't be openly discussed or mentioned, and if that was disclosed to a third party well then obviously that would be a let down again. I think failure to engage fully in a joint intervention, you know, would, you know, would, would be a, I feel would*

be a problem as well, you know, and that would be a sense of, of betrayal or let down also.”

Teachers also felt betrayed if they spent time and energy giving information or explaining a resource or strategy to a teacher and no subsequent attempt to use the information was made, as outlined by Respondent Ind 2 below.

Ind 2 *“If I felt I had made a huge effort to help that colleague develop their practice and they just weren’t doing any of it because they couldn’t be bothered.”*

Betrayal was keenly felt when colleagues refused to respond to a request for help as Respondent Ind 13 describes.

Ind 13 *“For me the biggest... the most important characteristic is that we’re a team and that we’re working together, so the greatest betrayal for me is that when I ask for help in something that I’m told no... that’s what affects me deepest.”*

Behaviours exhibited by mainstream teachers that diminished the SETs were also cited as instances of betrayal. In situations where a special education teacher was publicly corrected or verbally attacked by a mainstream colleague in a classroom with children present, a sense of acute betrayal was felt. In such instances the disrespect shown could damage the SET’s subsequent relationship with the students. Respondent Ind 3 explains.

Ind 3 *“So, I think it’s about how you respect each other within the class, so that would be a big you know, if you were publicly humiliated or corrected. You know we are all open to making mistakes or maybe saying you know 1791 instead of 197. If you are publicly corrected and maybe you know feel embarrassed or judged, that can be extremely difficult. It’s very hard to come back from that too as well you know because you’ve lost the children as well if you feel, if they pick up on the dynamic and it isn’t good.”*

More openly aggressive situations such as the one described by Respondent Ind 2 below, where the SET was blamed for a child’s struggles in the classroom by a mainstream teacher who had refused to engage in the IEP process and was insufficiently aware of the student’s level of need, caused a keen sense of betrayal.

Ind 2 *“to have this colleague attack me in front of children to open my door and to start shouting ‘What are you teaching these guys? They don’t know anything.’ So, I’ve had that. ‘I mean I asked him today what two and two was and he doesn’t know,’ but I have had to actually, you know, go into this person’s classroom and, you know, call them out and say ‘have you not actually read the IEP. These children have special needs.’ I’ve had that. So, you know, yeah you can feel very betrayed and let*

down by a personal attack by another teacher who hasn't bothered to actually just really look at what you are doing, who just sees you as being completely in charge of this child's mathematical knowledge or whatever. And then when they see the child struggling in class is blaming you for it."

The cancellation of an in-class session by the mainstream teacher when the SET arrived at the door diminished the value of the team-taught lesson and by association, the SET, and demonstrated a lack of professional respect. Respondent Ind 9 explains.

Ind 9 *"Maybe feeling that you are doing most of the work and in particular the planning and that to a small extent, more so with me is cancelling, you know and seeing maybe a colleague, maybe they don't mean it, but communicating- but really what you do isn't seen as particularly valuable- 'Look I am going to cancel for today because I have something to finish, I have a bit of English to finish' or 'a bit of Irish', not seeing the value in the input. Or not seeing the value in co-taught lessons and how valuable they are for the kids, do you know what I mean."*

7.5.1. Reaction to betrayal

The SETs used three strategies, namely prevention, avoidance and confrontation in response to betrayal. As a preventative measure, SETs chose to collaborate with colleagues with whom they had a good personal relationship where possible. Prevention also took the form of very thorough planning of collaborative in-class interventions. When all teachers worked to a specific plan spontaneous interaction was minimised and thereby the risks of betrayal.

Avoidance was the most common tactic employed when trust was broken. Teachers tended to disengage quietly and would be reluctant to collaborate or work in a meaningful way with that colleague again. They would be wary of that person forever more and if forced to collaborate with them a more formal approach where everything would be written down would be employed. Respondent Ind 1 elaborates.

Ind 1 *"Well I suppose there are two options and I suppose you could confront head on and I suppose I would have done that on occasions, or I suppose the second option really would be that you would kind of, you know, you'd would just maybe disengage quietly and in your own mind you wouldn't be as open with that person again, you wouldn't be, it would affect your professional relationship with them and maybe it would affect your I suppose willingness to work collaboratively with them again and I suppose because teachers don't like open conflict and we all work in a caring environment, we all work closely together, you don't want to come to work where you're in open conflict with a particular person, so I think the second option is what most teachers go for, myself*

included, that we tend to more, we tend to quietly disengage from that person who has betrayed us and maybe not actively seek to work with them as closely again as opposed to confronting them, ironing out the issues and getting it sorted and moving on. I think as a teaching profession we're particularly poor at confronting, we tend to go for the second option of disengaging quietly."

In other cases, a mix of avoidance and confrontation was used. The instance of betrayal was diplomatically referred to in the hope of opening conversation. However, if their offending colleague did not engage, the betrayal would not be pursued further. Instead, collaboration would continue in less than ideal circumstances. Addressing a specific instance of betrayal more generally at a meeting instead of directly on a one to one basis was also used as the following quote from Respondent Ind 6 illustrates.

Ind 6 *"...if I feel betrayed by someone, I won't go, go at them one to one because I don't think it's probably fair because you're probably letting down the person that they told, and they probably won't go to them again. However, if you are doing in-class programmes that, you're going to have to say it at a meeting of the whole group, 'look, I know you're not happy with that and I have heard...' but you, you're talking, on a whole group level, you're not being specific"*

In a very small number of cases, direct confrontation was used. However, a very soft approach was employed. The SETs spoke of taking time to gather their thoughts and then calmly addressing the issue as Respondent Ind 4 explains.

Ind 4 *"I would approach the teacher in a really, really nice not aggressive or do you know feeling hurt. I would approach the teacher and say 'oh by the way and I am not making comments on you or anything, but I just heard or whatever something and I know where you are coming from, or whatever. And could you explain how do you really feel about that, could you explain it to me'... and maybe you will get you know, to see what they exactly mean because sometimes you might hear something that is not true as well, it could be a variation of it. And then say well you know whatever, deal with it and then move on... yes."*

The special education teachers' use of prevention and avoidance when dealing with betrayal and the consequent loss of trust demonstrates their aversion to confrontation and highlights the value they place on peaceful professional working relationships. However, the pursuit and maintenance of professional harmony is not without cost. Post betrayal, most relationships remain fractured with negative consequences for the advancement of collaborative SEN practice. Further, fear of conflict is not limited to issues of trust and betrayal. It has wider ranging implications, most notably the dilution of open, honest discussion and critique that is necessary for the development of professional knowledge.

7.5.2. Reasons for betrayal

The frustration and stress caused by the lack of sufficient support and guidance for teachers on how to work collaboratively with colleagues in relation to SEN practice created fertile ground for betrayal. Respondent B 28 explains.

B 28 *"I think that the root of all of this (betrayal) is that there's no mechanisms in place for any of this (collaboration/team-teaching) so we are kind of being blindly brought along this road of...this is how to do it, this is how to work it, without having the proper mechanisms in place. So, if we do have a grievance or if we do have something that has gone wrong there isn't anything in place to give a proper outlet to express that. So, I think with all of this is we are all just fumbling around just doing our best to make it happen, to make it happen appropriately. And then with all the best will in the world human nature might take over and it's come out the wrong way at the wrong time and in the car park on the way home and it should never have happened. There should always be a safety net for everybody involved."*

The individual, competitive nature of school life and the absence of collective responsibility could also fuel betrayal amongst colleagues. This issue is teased out in the following excerpt from Focus Group A's discussion.

A 22 *"I think we've already touched on it, I think it is, some of them are competing with their colleagues at work, which I always think is ludicrous."*

A 20 *"Yeah I agree."*

A 22 *"Because like I said we're not, we're in a profession where there aren't that many rungs of the ladder."*

A 20 *"No."*

A 14 *"No."*

A 22 *"You're not really going anywhere. So sabotaging somebody else to, but I think they do..."*

A 14 *"Yeah."*

A 18 *"They don't have a sense of school pride."*

A 17 *"No they don't, it's all about the parents at the gate."*

A 16 *"Yeah."*

A 17 *"And wanting them to think, I'm the best teacher."*

A 20 *"It's down to personality again."*

A 19 *"It's a personality thing yeah."*

A 18 *"Yeah."*

A 22 *"Just some people aren't team players and they never will be."*

A 18 *"Yeah."*

A 17 *"Jealously as well, I mean a certain element of jealousy that, because somebody made a comment to me recently and I was quite surprised, but I just felt it was kind of jealousy on the teacher's behalf that other teachers were gone doing something else and they didn't get the opportunity."*

7.6. Conflict

The influence of school based organisational factors on the lack of staff discussion necessary for the development of collaborative SEN practice was discussed in Chapter 6. However, the barriers to discussion on collaborative SEN practice are not solely organisational in nature. When the, albeit, limited opportunities for discussion present, openness and honesty are not always characteristic. Instead, constrained communication patterns operate, thoughts are often left unspoken and issues unresolved. The reason for this paucity of open honest discussion, as revealed in the data, is that teachers are generally conflict averse and, in the main, work in schools where conflict is feared and avoided. Respondent Ind 1 explains.

Ind 1 *"...we don't like conflict, we don't, maybe if something needs to be said that will offend a person we don't, we tend to sugar coat it I think, so we avoid those difficult situations."*

Effective collaborative SEN practice requires honest discussion amongst teachers. Open, honest discussion increases the risk of disagreement and conflict. Indeed, when appropriately managed, different and conflicting opinions around challenging issues of teaching and learning can advance practice (Achinstein, 2000). However, as the data shows, the potential benefits of conflict to teachers pale when measured against the emotional and relational costs to their professional working relationships. The SETs saw the benefit of open, honest discussion for the development of collaborative SEN practice and the need for and inevitability of disagreement, especially when aspects of practice were evolving and changing. Respondent Ind 1 explains.

Ind 1 *"Ah yeah, yeah, and it's how our interventions and our practices have evolved here throughout the years and I would have given examples of,*

of how, particularly in-class work, would have evolved and that would, that was because people said 'well look, this isn't working' or 'we could do this better' or 'what about if we changed something.'

However, they cautioned that such honest discussion though essential for teachers' professional development was not a regular feature of practice in most schools, as Respondent Ind 2's comment illustrates.

Ind 2 *"...it's (constructively critical discussion) essential. I mean if that could be done it would be wonderful. Continuously improving practice...I think teaching is one of those jobs that you are constantly learning about and trying to improve your practice. And it would be wonderful if aspects of your practice could be discussed more with your colleagues."*

In a small number of schools, the positive management of disagreement was developing. Conflicting views were not taken personally. Instead, as Respondent Ind 8 explains, disagreement was seen as a process through which the school was better able to meet the needs of the children.

Ind 8 *"There may have been some heated debates at certain meetings, but again it comes down to what's the driving force behind this and if it is creating an environment where we care and we want to provide the best, the best provision for the children, then any criticism or any sort of contentious issue shouldn't damage relationships if it's not meant personally."*

However, for the majority of SETs, conflict was not generally associated with challenging discussion and difference that led to positive outcomes. Instead, conflict was seen as something negative that was taken very personally by teachers and could irreparably damage professional working relationships. Respondent Ind 5's comment below aptly captures this situation.

Ind 5 *"...you are constantly worried about the relationship that you have with people you are working with....it's such a small environment you are working in, it's not as if you can say it and then... you know you are meeting them every day across the table, or having a cup of coffee. And if you say something and you are not very delicate in the way that you bring it up it can be extremely damaging and irreparable."*

As a result, challenging discussion and disagreement were avoided or diluted. For the majority of SETs the avoidance of unpleasant experiences, personal hurt and damaged relationships was the paramount concern and prompted the use of a number of tactics. Problems and difficulties were ignored as Respondent Ind 11 explains.

Ind 11 *"I think definitely yes I think sometimes people can be a little bit- I am not going to say anything I didn't see it it's not happening."*

Some special education teachers reconciled themselves to the fact that it was safer to accept certain aspects of practice than to address them. Others ventured to discuss aspects of practice, but the complex and sensitive nature of the communication did not always produce positive outcomes as the following quote from Respondent Ind 10 illustrates.

Ind 10 *"...some people are going to look on it as a nine to three job and 'I am not putting myself out there and I am not opening myself to anything, so I will just keep going with my head down' basically you know for fear of criticism possibly or discussion. So again, and then others you know will do their best, but they can still rub people up the wrong way or whatever so it's a bit of a mine field I think, you know, because collaboration can be tricky."*

Respondent Ind 5 explains how teachers also avoided conflict through limited collaborative teaching.

Ind 5 *"Because our school doesn't foster a lot of collaboration per se as in the way that I feel collaboration should be, there isn't a huge conflict."*

In the absence of open, honest discussion, disagreement was indirectly communicated through lack of support and enthusiasm and through non-verbal communication as Respondent Ind 11 stated.

Ind 11 *"...in terms of a staff meeting or whatever, what people would tend to do is listen and they might say, hmm ok, they wouldn't openly disagree so you would know that they are disagreeing but they are not saying well I know that is wrong I am not doing that."*

Occasionally however, more extreme behaviours were displayed as Respondent Ind 2 describes.

Ind 2 *"It depends who is in the room, if it's between two people that's a matter for the two people involved but for me hmm... it can either be managed very well where you know issues are teased and tangled out. Or it can be managed extremely poorly where someone slams down the book and might storm out of the room. I've experienced all that."*

Overall, when faced with disagreement or conflict the SETs favoured reaching a friendly accommodation of opinions and maintaining peaceful professional working relationships. Facing the rigor of challenging constructively critical discussions with the attendant risk of damaging relationships was unappealing and avoided. Respondent Ind 1 explains.

Ind 1 *"By our nature we avoid conflict and I would have mentioned this before, we prefer to allow time, I think we prefer to allow time for that person to realise themselves that something needs to be changed, so I*

suppose that was effected here, it was reflected in our move from purely withdrawal to more in-class and that wouldn't have happened just over night, sometimes you sow the seed, you hope that teachers will buy in, they'll see it working, so rather than confronting them and saying, you know, we need to change this, we need to do it now, you need to give them time to maybe come to realise themselves that maybe change is required and we tend to follow that approach. As to having the difficult conversation, you know, with being, being confrontational about it, being upfront and saying no, we need to change it now, we need to do it now for these reasons... if conflict arises... I suppose really the approach here is that we try and come to an amicable consensus, I've mentioned previous times we tend to avoid conflict, most of us now, not all of us, some of us, some members of the team and the staff are, you know, quite confident and would have that difficult conversation and, but we tend to come to an amicable consensus."

7.6.1. The Irish primary school: a constant, conflict averse workplace?

The avoidance of conflict and the strong focus on maintaining amicable agreement amongst staff members was explained with reference to the nature of the school workplace. The SETs agreed that the school was very different to other workplaces and tended to be seen more as a place where children went to school than a place of employment for teachers. The teachers' close proximity to students at all times in the workplace influenced the way teachers behaved and interacted with one another. This uniqueness of the school workplace is captured in the excerpt from Focus Group A's discussion below.

A 22 *"Yeah you see, I think what makes us unique is that we work every day in the presence of children."*

A 17 *"Children yeah."*

A 22 *"That changes the atmosphere."*

A 17 *"The dynamics."*

A 22 *"The dynamics, everything, there's generally a child in your vicinity at all times during the day. So, whether it's a natural thing or not, you behave differently because of that you know. Whereas, a fiery person getting something off their chest in another area of work would not be able to do that in a school so much. There is an awareness of children present at all times."*

The human resource management systems that operate in other workplaces were significantly underdeveloped in the school workplace resulting in a lack of focus on the role of teacher as colleague and school employee. There was

also a lack of incentives for teachers to engage in professional development activities. These issues are explicated in the discussion between Respondents A 20, A 17, and A 22.

A 20 *"I would agree 100% that here is no reason why a school cannot be seen as a workplace. And I have a big issue with this. Like, I think I got more professional training in my student job in a company, you know what I mean, you go in, you have your induction, you have your health and safety training, you have ongoing personal development. We had none of that. We have no incentives for, like monetary incentives or progression incentives for development, for saying I'll do that course, I'll do that."*

A 17 *"I think it's because we've been in school all our lives and there's been no differentiation between school and work. I even say to my kids in the morning I've to go to school. I don't say I've to go to work, do you know."*

A 22 *"I don't think it's worthwhile drawing distinctions though between a school teacher and somebody who's an employee of Google. I think that, I think it's a different world. You know because one is profit driven and one isn't and that changes everything."*

A 20 *"But the skill set, the HR that's needed, it's the same."*

The absence of such human resource systems and supports lessened the sense of teachers in a school being part of a school workforce or team and indirectly reinforced the view of the teacher as an individual practitioner and teacher of children as Respondent A 16 outlines.

A 16 *"A lot of things that came up in the child protection policy were issues for teacher protection...one to one teaching... the dangers it poses for us. I said that at a meeting, and it was... 'we're talking child protection here, what's that got to do with it'...and I thought, okay, I know where I stand."*

The small staff numbers in schools relative to other workplaces also influenced teacher interaction and in particular their avoidance of conflict. Employee relations in the school workplace were, as a result, very fixed and very personal. The following excerpt from Focus Group A's discussion elucidates these issues.

A 15 *"But you'd be amazed in a staff room, how a staff room that could be very, very tight, if two people had a little tittle tattle as I would call it..."*

A 19 *"It only takes one."*

A 18 *"Yeah."*

A 15 *"A little whatever in their own rooms or their own whatever, it can*

absolutely destroy a staff room."

A 19 *"Yeah."*

A 15 *"It's all consuming."*

A 19 *"As big a school as it is, there's still only going to be 25, 30 people in it, that's maximum so like it's not like you're going into the canteen down here in Galway where you are going to stay away from those."*

A 18 *"Yeah."*

A 15 *"But even what it does is, you have a situation where people then all of a sudden, X is sitting there, well if I sit there now I'm as good as saying I'm on that side."*

A 18 *"Yeah."*

A 15 *"But I'm extremely friendly with the other person as well, but to me again, it comes back to the 40-year thing".*

A 20 *"Yes."*

A 16 *"Yeah."*

A 15 *"You start in that staff room and unless something happens, you're in that staff room for... And it's different and I choose my phrase, it's different in the private sector because you could be gone next week."*

A 16 *"That's right."*

A 15 *"They could be gone next week and that's it. But in the jobs that we're in it's those people for life."*

A 16 *"And that's why I think we're not good at openly critiquing each other."*

A 20 *"Absolutely yeah."*

Teachers once settled in a school tended to remain there, often for the duration of their careers. Opportunities for professional progression and mobility were extremely limited. For some teachers, school life took on a family dimension as Respondents B 29, B 30, B 24 and B 25 discuss below.

B 29 *"...there's no movement in our profession. I mean I'm in the same place for the last thirty years. Whereas maybe, if you were in the private sector you'd be moving more."*

B 30 *"And it's harder to move, it is."*

B 29 *"Nobody is looking for us to move."*

B 24 *"You are placed where you are, I started in my school when I was twenty and like everything major in my life has happened there, met my husband, got engaged, got married, had my children and had my twenty-first birthday and thirtieth. You know, everything has happened there. I'm working along thinking maybe I should look for somewhere else, no, you know you get..."*

B 25 *"You get into your comfort zone."*

B 24 *"...yeah, exactly."*

B 29 *"But there isn't that opportunity."*

7.6.2. Conflict Resolution

The lack of development of the school as a workplace for teachers was further evidenced by the lack of established conflict resolution mechanisms as the excerpt for Focus Group B's discussion conveys.

B 24 *"There's no policy in the school like, if you have a problem with a staff member or you want you know, there's no actual policy I don't know..."*

B 25 *"It's all back to the leader. You know, she isn't doing whatever and then your poor leader is left wondering what he does next or she does next."*

Avoidance and friendly consensus were the main conflict resolution strategies adopted by the SETs. When these approaches failed, the alternatives were sparse. A colleague might informally act as a mediator/peace maker between two strong colleagues with differing positions. In a group, the majority view would be accepted. For most teachers, resolution to conflict was a personal and mostly silent event as Respondent Ind 11 explains.

Ind 11 *"I have seen it in practice. Usually what happens is one person disagrees with the other, then there is a silence, then they kind of go away retreat or whatever and then at some stage they will come back and they still have to deal with it but they have maybe had time to process it or whatever. And it's not as raw you know, something happens it's raw and people are emotional and all that..."*

Respondent Ind 8 described a more formal system for managing disagreement and potential conflict at meetings.

Ind 8 *"It happens organically at staff meetings, it happens organically within our meetings as well in that, if something is taking too much time and we can't get to the, to the real crux of the matter, we don't trash it out. We'll go 'right, this is something that we can't seem to come to an agreement on, now let's go off and think about it, let's try and change our perspective on it and come back and feed back again' and then I*

think that validates peoples' willingness to question and to bring alternatives to a situation because they know that it's going to go through – I don't like to say 'due process' because it sounds very official, but it's, it's the way it occurs organically."

The Principal could be asked to intervene. However, this course of action was not widely used largely because of the absence of a clearly established procedure for conflict resolution and the dominance of personal bonds of friendship amongst staff members in the school workplace. The following excerpt from Focus Group A's discussion explains.

A 25 *"So even if me and X have a big disagreement ultimately it comes down to what your leader is going to do about it as well. So if I know X and the principal are best friends and I have an issue with X and I go to the principal giving out, I know she is going to do nothing about it. So you know you're automatically blocked, there's only one person at the top of that chain who is either going to try and sort it out for you and work through it with you or they are going to take the other person's side or its going to make something bigger out of it, you know."*

Q *"So is what I'm hearing here that you are very dependent on a human being called a principal...?"*

A 25 *"who has no system to follow."*

The need for professional development in relation to conflict management and resolution mechanisms was seen as necessary by all the SETs. The lack of attention to teachers as employees in the school workplace was contrasted to the training received by employees in other work environments as captured in the following excerpt from Focus Group A's discussion.

A 16 *"I came from a business background and we were religiously sent off on team building, conflict with your team..."*

A 17 *"Conflict management."*

A 20 *"Yeah."*

A 17 *"Presentation skills"*

A 18 *"Will it solve an issue with your principal because it doesn't change personalities?"*

A 16 *"No, but what it does is, it gives you a forum."*

A 17 *"Gives you the way to maybe, you know..."*

A 16 *“address and approach things and you know all that team building, there was security built around it to say ‘right ok we’re here for a purpose, you know there has to be interaction’ and it just got over those difficulties that you might be having with individual personalities.”*

However, the SETs were aware of the difference between the school workplace and a business environment. While the school as a workplace required urgent attention the essence of the life of the school that distinguished it from other workplaces also needed to be maintained. For the SETs, managing the emotional and relational aspects of collaboration constituted a major challenge. The new SEN policy (DES, 2107a; DES, 2017b) and the requirement for collaborative SEN practice, in particular team-teaching, added increased urgency to the need for support. Crucially, the SETs expressed the need to be supported in developing professional working relationships that would enable them to work together effectively and disagree on aspects of practice without causing irrevocable damage to personal relationships. Respondent B 28 elaborates.

B 28 *“I think it’s slightly different, I think it has to be. I think that the nature of the job that you are doing and the personalities that are involved in it, I don’t think it would suit a primary school to be a clinical business type workplace. But I think that what we don’t have is a balance. I think we have to have a balance between having a personal relationship and a professional relationship. And being able to separate the two and being able to engage in professional conversations that involve disagreement and involves you know, having to work through things together. But you know, I think that the nature of primary schools, you know, it has to be a warm environment, it has to be you know, those kinds of things it’s essential to maintain, those kind of positive attributes, that we do have. We do have that because in general we tend to be quite nice people, you know, that’s the kind of people we are. (Laughing) But you know I do think that it’s not a case of just taking business principles and just applying them to a primary school. We have to look at it as a unique workplace. But work better to have better working relationships.”*

Most vital to the development of collaborative SEN practice was support for the development of teachers’ interpersonal skills and collaborative, team- focused leadership that provided school based organizational support for discussion, collaboration and professional development. However, such support was dependent on funding from the DES, predicated on awareness of the need to develop the capacity of the school as a workplace and commitment to its realisation. In the next section the views of the participants on the support necessary to meet the emotional and relational challenges posed by a collaborative approach to SEN teaching are discussed.

7.7. Support for collaboration: managing the emotional and relational dimension

In considering how collaboration could best be supported, all the SETs agreed that there was a definite need for teachers to develop a skillset around the emotional and relational aspects of collaboration given that these skills enabled teachers to work together more effectively. The development of interpersonal and team building skills, the skills needed to give and receive feedback particularly in the team-teaching situation and the language and skills to partake in constructively critical discussion with colleagues were considered to be of utmost importance. The special education teachers' need for the development of the softer, human qualities and skills conveyed a striking need for a kinder more enabling professional working relationship between teachers and a much stronger and more clearly defined understanding of teaching as a shared activity born of and sustained by a common purpose.

However, the SETs were adamant that the possession of good interpersonal skills alone would not suffice. They argued that leadership and organisational aspects of the school workplace would have to develop in tandem. Opportunities for teachers to meet and discuss and develop collaborative SEN practice using effective interpersonal and team building skills would have to be created and supported.

The SETs welcomed the autonomy to decide on students' level of need and on the means by which their needs could best be met, afforded them by the current model of SEN provision (DES, 2017). However, they feared the collaborative decision-making process and the flexibility required amongst staff members. They were also challenged by their role as change agents. The task of sharing information on collaborative SEN practice with their classroom colleagues was particularly daunting for some. Respondent Ind 12 explains.

Ind 12 *"...the ball is going to be completely in our court now and we are the ones that are going to have the power and the autonomy to allocate support in schools. So, I'm just wondering how it's going to be monitored and supervised and what guidance is going to be really given. What's going to be challenging for SEN teachers is educating mainstream, our mainstream colleagues, as to their role because I really do feel that they don't really realise that they are responsible for the children in their class, and that is before any intervention. I think DES has been preparing us (SETs) but no one has been really listening and classroom teachers haven't had a chance."*

The SETs were critical of the lack of sufficient information and support from the Department of Education and Skills prior to the implementation of the current SEN policy (DES, 2107a; DES, 2017b) and the inefficacy of the bring

back model of continuous professional development for teachers (Sugrue, 2002) as outlined by Respondent Ind 10.

Ind 10 *"I think we are kind of shooting in the dark as well to a certain extent and I mean there is going to be a huge amount of collaboration and decision making, again it's kind of going to rest now on the staff.... and I think, I mean the least there should have been, would be... like an in-service training day for learning support and resource teachers and principals, you know. Not just because it doesn't work if you just have the principal go to a course, you need to hear it yourself you need to ask your own questions, you need to feel you are included. You know they are talking of this new model as including the teachers' opinion now in such way that has never been done before. But yet they haven't given us the training in it so again, it's roll it out and nobody seems to know in two years what is going to happen and that is huge because you are setting up expectations now."*

7.7.1. Interpersonal skills

According to the SETs, developing teachers' interpersonal skills, particularly their communication skills, was key to achieving collaborative SEN practice. Advice and support for staff members on distinguishing between the professional and the personal aspects of practice was also considered necessary for effective collaboration to take place. The SETs felt that professional development support needed to be focused on helping staff members to express themselves clearly to colleagues using appropriate professional language that brought teachers together and didn't cause hurt or offence. Respondent Ind 7 explains.

Ind 7 *"Well interpersonal skills, organisational skills, patience, time as I have mentioned previously, the language, the use of language... I am going to trial this out, we are going to pilot it, we are going... if I organise this will you organise that...or what could we do together, the use of we instead of you."*

As Respondent Ind 12 outlines below, the SETs felt that teachers needed to be educated in how to listen to each other and to provide the space and opportunity for colleagues to talk at meetings and during professional discussions and to problem solve.

Ind 12 *"...you would need to be a good listener you need to be good at organising, diplomatic, I am trying to think now, good at being able to find alternative routes to solving problems so a good problem solver and a good listener I think."*

Sensitivity to colleagues' difficulties and anxieties and the ability to approach tender situations with diplomacy and tact was considered very important for

the success of collaboration. The following quote from Respondent Ind 11 elaborates.

Ind 11 *"I think we have to have really good communication skills. I think you have to be very sensitive to people's needs. Sometimes somebody might be having a bad morning or you don't know what is going on in their home life or whatever. I think you need to be really respectful when you are going into their classroom so you can get things done in a nice way without you know being very militant."*

Central to the development of interpersonal skills, the SETs argued, was self-awareness. Shifting teachers' focus from the current emphasis on student and curriculum-focused information to their own personal development was new and without precedent. Relying on individual teachers to voluntarily attend personal development courses was not an appropriate way forward. Instead, the SETs favoured a more supported whole staff development process within individual schools where all staff members could focus on the development of their interpersonal skills at the same time. The following excerpt from Focus Group B's discussion illustrates these issues.

B 31 *"I think it might be, there might be a little step before CPD for collaborating for teachers and that would be input on self-awareness. I don't think you could go straight into- these are our collaborative skills, if you are not aware of yourself and how you are interacting with people and your own personality. If you were interested in getting the job done, and this other person is interested in people it's not going to work and it's going to cause friction in collaboration."*

B 26 *"It's a very personal thing as well, I don't know if you put on a course in the education centre next week on interpersonal skills how it would go. If you put one on maths and the senior classes you'd have it booked out straight away."*

Q *Why do you think that is?*

B 31 *"Self-awareness."*

B 26 *"Yeah, self-awareness."*

B 28 *"People wouldn't go because they think they have all the interpersonal skills that they need (laughing)."*

B 25 *"But as you said, we are more focused on the kids so if they are telling us to go to something that is going to develop the kids no problem we'll all sign up. But if you are saying go and develop yourself, you wouldn't, you may not be as pushed to do it."*

B 28 *"I also think that you need to learn how to develop yourself within your own setting, so I think it would be good that interpersonal skills would be taught to everybody in your own school all simultaneously".*

Despite the importance of interpersonal skills in the school workplace, the SETs agreed that their initial teacher education programmes did not equip them with these skills. Current CPD programmes failed to address the shortcoming, with the exception of a module on the Postgraduate Diploma in SEN programme for special education teachers. Instead, the focus of CPD courses was on the structural aspects of collaboration such as strategies and interventions that could be used to provide in-class support. Supporting teachers in developing the interpersonal skills that would help them to work together to effectively implement the various interventions was not addressed as Respondent Ind 11 states.

Ind 11 *"I actually haven't seen any course really for skills like that."*

7.7.2. Team-building skills

Support and guidance for teachers on how to work together as a team, on how to share knowledge and experience and acknowledge their colleagues' individual talents was also considered essential for collaboration. Central to this was helping teachers to understand the benefits of a work culture where all teachers worked and learned together in pursuance of the shared purpose of developing professional practice. Equipping teachers with the skills and knowledge to develop and support such a culture, specifically, to understand the importance of building and maintaining trust and respectful professional relationships and cultivating open-mindedness was considered paramount. Respondent Ind 3 explains.

Ind 3 *"Hmm...I think a respect for both parties. You know to be seen as two people working together for the same reason, rather than necessarily dealing with egos, and for a more open attitude to changes in teaching and learning. And to be more open to hear how others are doing it, respect... other people, like you might come at something very enthusiastically and excited, you have to respect that they may not have, they may not have had that experience or have no experience of it so to respect that and to engage in, give them the information, give them the time to make their decision for it. And respect the choice they make. So, it's about mutual respect really."*

Guided by a shared purpose and team focus, teachers needed support in developing the skills to plan common goals and evaluate them honestly and be frank when things went wrong. Teachers needed to be supported in working creatively together to find alternative routes to achieving common outcomes when opinions were divided. Respondent Ind 13 elaborates.

Ind 13 *"I think teachers need to be able to truly collaborate. So that means being able to work equal, as equal partners with equal voices, with both involved in all aspects of planning, teaching and assessment – both must be able to work jointly as a team, must be open to listening to others opinions, open to the possibility that there are many ways to achieve one goal, both must be clear communicators who can establish expectations together and they must have volunteered to participate and I think both must be compatible."*

Teachers needed to be encouraged to see problems and mistakes as a natural part of practice that can guide meaningful change and improvement and not something shameful to be hidden. Respondent Ind 1 explains.

Ind 1 *"I think, you know, you need to, we need to be able to acknowledge other people's strengths, you know, sometimes we're not the right person for that, maybe there's somebody else on the team that can do it better, so I think, you know, you need to sometimes say well look, well, you know, I'm not great at that, maybe, you know, you're particularly good at that, maybe if you take that I'll work on something else."*

The special education teachers agreed that there was urgent need for high quality CPD in collaboration, in particular the interpersonal and teambuilding skills for teachers to work together professionally. The challenges involved were not lost on the SETs as Respondent Ind 13's statement evinces.

Ind 13 *"It's actually a mammoth task (collaboration) so we certainly need people to train us in these skills."*

7.7.3. Team-teaching skills

As well as general team-building skills, the SETs felt that whole staff training specifically focused on collaboration in team-teaching was urgently required. In-class support via team teaching was the most demanding and potentially beneficial form of collaboration with regard to building professional knowledge of SEN practice. However professional development for this complex and sensitive activity tended to be very informal as Respondent Ind 6 explains.

Ind 6 *"At the moment, it's very informal like where I might say 'Oh we do Literacy Lift Off' [reading intervention programme] 'What's that? Can I come and have a look at it? and they might come and look at the books. 'Oh, that's the books, right.'"*

Learning the skills of collaboration lacked a sufficiently formal and supportive system. Instead, it happened largely through trial and error as described by Respondent Ind 1.

Ind 1 *“You can get CPD on, you know, on a variety of issues but actually CPD on specifically teaching you how to, you know, what the skills are for collaboration, how to do it, how to organise it, what are the pitfalls, I think that’s something you just learn on the job, almost like an apprenticeship. You know, you learn these skills by actively collaborating, you make the ten mistakes before you get it right and it’s, it’s kind of, it’s, you’re honing and your developing your practice constantly over time and you do become more proficient at it.”*

Respondent Ind 2 explains that the informal, trial and error process of implementing team-teaching can have both positive and negative outcomes for teachers.

Ind 2 *“Yes well one’s prior experience is always a factor. But one may have had no experience as well and you know it’s going to be a factor but let me focus on prior experience. Yeah absolutely, for me personally I’ve had horrendous experiences and I’ve had good experiences so I know what can be disastrous. And I know what can be really done very well.”*

Overall, in their recommendations for professional support, an awareness of the significant change required to operationalise collaborative SEN practice was evident. For true collaboration to take place, changes in the way teachers interact and in the way teaching is understood and operated are required. Reflective of this awareness, the SETs placed a very strong focus on developing the softer interpersonal skills that individual teachers required in order to develop collaboration that built professional knowledge of SEN practice.

However, there was an equally strong awareness that the organisational aspects of schools needed to support the individual teacher’s endeavor. To this end, the school needed to be developed as a site for teacher professional development through collaboration where teachers could use their interpersonal, teambuilding and feedback skills regularly and meaningfully to develop a shared professional knowledge base to guide collaborative SEN practice. Success in this regard was dependent on effective leadership and support from the Department of Education and Skills.

7.7.4. School-based organisational support for collaboration

School-based support for collaboration, considered key to the development of collaborative SEN practice was, according to the SETs, highly dependent on the principals’ knowledge and skills. The need for principals to have the requisite interpersonal skills to work collaboratively with staff and to develop a team culture in schools was considered essential. Specifically, principals needed to be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to develop a culture of teacher learning through collaboration in schools. According to the SETs, principals needed guidance on how to encourage and facilitate professional conversations about collaborative SEN practice, wherein teachers could safely share their views without fear of negative

repercussion and develop a shared professional knowledge base. Principals also needed help in actively supporting teachers' experimentation with and evaluation of collaborative practice. Respondent Ind 10 explains.

Ind 10 *"Well, I think again we need some direction on it [collaborative SEN practice] you know we are all kind of doing our best, but you know we need support obviously you know from our principal from our school and you know. Ideally, I think you know we need to be able to feel that we can build this into our timetable as well and not feel it's a stolen moment and feel guilty about it. So, I think collaboration needs to be recognised as worthwhile and talked about maybe again. I probably talked more about collaboration in the last hour or two than I have with my colleagues in twenty years, you know what I mean. You are doing it but you are not really talking about it or evaluating it and that you know we need to kind of I suppose we need to kind of look at evaluating it and you know I suppose praising ourselves when we are doing a good job you know with collaboration. And then seeing where we could maybe, you know, do it a little bit more or what areas, you know, could we collaborate more."*

The SETs also agreed that time for planning and evaluating collaborative lessons and for collaborating more generally with colleagues was of paramount importance. To this end, principals needed to allow discrete time for collaboration in teachers' timetables and needed to use the Croke Park hours effectively and efficiently to develop and support teacher collaboration. For many teachers the lack of effective organisation of these hours constituted a waste of precious time and relegated collaboration to an activity dependent on time snatched from teaching. Respondent A 15 explains.

A 15 *"If they're serious about it [collaborative SEN practice] then you structure time in your school day timetable and until that happens, I don't see collaboration becoming a mainstay."*

The correct use of School Self-Evaluation (DES, 2012) by principals was also seen as helpful to developing more collaborative working relationships amongst teachers. However, the implementation of SSE varied significantly between schools and not all leaders were adept at developing its team building potential. Where School Self-Evaluation was working, the SETs were very positive. It gave teachers the opportunity to discuss aspects of practice and the more teachers engaged with it, the better they became at reviewing and reflecting on their practice. Respondent Ind 1 describes the benefits of an effective school self-evaluation process.

Ind 1 *"School self-evaluation has been huge in our school, it's been brilliant because, as I said previous times, it's forced us to work together and our whole school practices that have evolved from this are also embedded in our, in our support work with special education needs pupils, in the class*

or in the withdrawal setting, and everybody would have had a chance to engage in that and be part of that and be, have, offer their opinion and critique it.”

However, for the majority of SETs, their experience of School Self-Evaluation did not develop collaborative working relationships amongst staff members or build a team culture, due to its ineffective management as Respondent Ind 7 states.

Ind 7 *“It [SSE] should do [help to develop collaborative SEN practice] if it’s managed and coordinated right, but not necessarily.”*

Instead, it was seen as a superficial exercise and something that had been imposed on schools. Principals and teachers did not know how to use school self-evaluation optimally and lacked the skills necessary for effective evaluation and critique of practice. Respondent Ind 2 describes the poor operation of the school self-evaluation process.

Ind 2 *“If it was all done properly yes, of course it would, but the reality is the school self-evaluation has been imposed on schools and I just know from talking to teachers but especially in my own school nobody knows what they are doing. It’s like just ticking these boxes. I mean I have experience where we’ve all had to fill in a questionnaire and then we never see it again. It’s not happening. Evaluation is not happening. I don’t think it’s happening on the ground. School self-evaluation. So, where’s the problem now in maths? Problem solving? Right so we’ve identified the problem, nothing, it’s not being done properly... But would on-going teacher involvement help develop confidence in discussing and critiquing SEN practice, absolutely it would.”*

As with the Croke Park hours (DES, 2011) the SETs deemed School Self-Evaluation (DES, 2012) to be a valuable resource that could develop collaborative SEN practice, if used appropriately. Support for principals in effectively implementing School Self Evaluation (DES, 2012) would allow teachers to discuss and critique aspects of practice from both a SEN and mainstream teaching perspective and thereby develop teachers’ professional knowledge of collaborative SEN practice in their own schools.

While policies such as School Self Evaluation, the Croke Park hours and the new model of SEN practice (DES, 2107a; DES, 2017b) were potentially beneficial, the lack of associated professional development for teachers rendered them less effective. It was argued that the Department of Education and Skills continually made demands on schools without supporting schools’ capacity to effectively and efficiently respond as Respondent A 20’s comment illustrates.

A 20 *“If the Department [DES] is going to enforce collaboration they have to be seen to be working collaboratively and at the minute, they’re not.”*

They're throwing circulars and policies at us at 3 o'clock on a Friday evening when they know nobody will get back to them and anything new is just thrown out there... so until it starts from the department down how can we collaborate, you know."

According to the SETs the Department of Education and Skills need to address capacity building at school level if collaborative SEN practice is to develop. To this end, providing grants for professional development on team building would be a helpful development as Respondent A 20 explains.

A 20 *"And I would think, you know the teaching reputation in Ireland, in our schools, I think everyone is like in agreement that the level of teaching in Ireland is of a very high standard. So, as teachers, we are very good. So, I don't think the Department [DES], while they do need to do a certain amount, why can't they give a team building grant.... like they have to see, the teachers aren't the issue in Ireland, it's the system."*

The SETs were in agreement that a lot of good work had been done in relation to developing collaborative SEN practice. However, the quality depended on the level of appropriate future support as explained by Respondents A 16 and A 18 in the excerpt from Focus Group A's discussion below.

A 16 *"And I think the message is, you know we all agree that it's good but there's a lot more to be done with it. And from here on out it depends on how it's dealt with how effective it will be."*

A 18 *"Yes."*

A 16 *"It's happening, it's going to continue to happen, but the effectiveness will depend on what supports we get."*

7.8. Conclusion

Collaboration affects teachers' emotions and professional working relationships and they in turn affect collaboration. The complicated and sensitive nature of this somewhat amorphous interconnection requires our attention, not least because it is a key element in the development of successful collaboration that advances professional knowledge of SEN practice.

Echoing Hargreaves (2001), the special education teachers' professional working relationships tended to be delicate and superficial and had to be carefully treated. They were not the strong relationships that supported collective responsibility for teaching and enabled critically constructive debate. In the main, the special education teachers' professional working relationships were more reflective of the accommodation of a group of

individuals rather than the operation of a team. The protection of relationships was a silent but virulent factor that was pervasive in the school workplace. Strongly felt by teachers, its invisibility enhanced its power to stealthily moderate change and maintain the status quo.

Collaboration challenges teachers' professional relationships in ways that private practice does not (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). The exposure inherent in team-teaching with a colleague and the risks associated with sharing opinions and values in discussions on practice were new for the teachers. Awareness of professional confidence and competence increased and questions about the trustworthiness of colleagues and the fear of betrayal came to the fore. The need for open honest discussion and in particular the evaluation of team-taught lessons delivered a risk of conflict that individual private practice avoided. Consonant with Hargreaves (2001) the consequent fear of damaging relationships posed by conflict limited the level of discussion and evaluation that the special education teachers were willing to engage in.

School workplace factors such as small staff numbers and the lack of mobility within the profession significantly impacted the nature of the special education teachers' professional working relationships and emphasised the personal and emotional dimension of collaboration. The lack of sufficient focus on and support for the school as a workplace, where employees were professionally enriched and developed, led to a dearth of skills necessary for teachers to collaborate effectively. The lack of appropriate, interpersonal skills that enable teachers to plan, evaluate, discuss and debate aspects of practice and give feedback was a notable consequence. The absence of skilled leadership capable of building a collaborative team approach to professional practice and establishing procedures for discussing and critiquing practice and for managing and resolving conflict compounded the problem and exacerbated teachers' fear of developing collaborative SEN practice that builds professional knowledge.

While teachers' fear of conflict is understandable, the negative consequences have far reaching effects particularly as a school's approach to conflict, impacts its capacity for organisational learning (Achinstein, 2002). This is a time of change in Irish primary schools, a juncture at which organisational learning in relation to collaborative SEN practice is vital. The new model of SEN provision has the potential to transform teaching practice if implemented effectively. However, lack of experience of working as a school community of teachers, the absence of skills and structures that support collaboration, the nature of professional working relationships and the fear of conflict pose serious challenges. While a number of good initiatives have been put in place, lack of guidance and support on their implementation and a lack of focus on the schools' capacity to change have increased teacher frustration and positioned the DES as the external enemy. This unfortunate situation can unite teachers in the wrong cause and divert their energy from the necessary and beneficial internal changes (Achinstein, 2002).

The shortcomings in professional practice that were highlighted through the special education teachers' efforts to develop collaborative SEN practice that supports the development of inclusive schools are urgent and strong and will not go away. A significant rethinking of the previously unquestioned norms of private practice and egalitarianism, a serious review of leadership and of the school as workplace and the nature of teachers' working relationships is required. Teachers need support in understanding and accepting conflict as an essential part of community and collaboration and realise that accepting easy consensus limits their ability to change and ultimately leads to staleness and loss of necessary perspective (Achinstein, 2002). Instead of avoiding conflict, teachers and principals need to find a 'space for dissent' (p.442) and learn how to work with it to develop practice while simultaneously developing supportive professional relationships.

Building effective collaborative SEN practice in Irish primary schools is complex and demanding. Its management requires careful consideration most especially since the emotional and relational aspect of collaboration shines a probing light on teachers' professional working relationships. The assiduous avoidance of this dimension of teacher collaboration at both policy and practice levels adds to the challenge.

Supporting the school as a workplace and acknowledging the importance of teachers' professional working relationships in developing collaborative SEN practice is a brave step that requires courageous policy makers and competent leaders. Ignoring this challenge sacrifices transformative educational practice at the altar of mediocrity and fails both students with SEN and their teachers.

Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusion: the glass half full?

8.1. Introduction

A significant milestone on the journey towards the provision of inclusive education was reached with the introduction of a new model for the allocation of special educational teaching resources into Irish mainstream primary schools by the Department of Education and Skills in September 2017 (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) following a lengthy lead-in period. A significant difference between the previous General Allocation Model (DES, 2005) and the current model (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) lies in the fact that additional teaching supports are now deployed according to the identified needs of the students rather than being dependent on a diagnosis. A continuum of support operates incorporating Whole School and Classroom Support for All, School Support for some and School Support Plus for a few. The continuum of support situates effective provision for students with special educational needs very definitely within an inclusive whole-school framework and gives much greater flexibility to schools in identifying and responding to students' needs while ensuring that the students with the highest levels of need receive the highest levels of support.

While welcome, the current model requires schools to be highly collaborative in their approach to inclusive SEN provision. In collaboration with their colleagues, teachers and principals have to decide how provision for students with SEN can be enhanced through the effective implementation of a whole school approach and how best special educational teaching resources can be used to effectively meet students' needs. A core team of special education teachers is expected as distinct from a group of individual SETs and there is a much clearer focus on the role of mainstream teachers in SEN provision. Joint consultation and decision-making amongst the relevant teachers with regard to the identification of students' needs and the choice of the appropriate level and form of support is now required (DES, 2017b).

However, the greatest and most visible change lies in the move from a reliance on the withdrawal of students with special educational needs from their classrooms to receive supplementary support, to more in-class provision. The special education teacher is now tasked with providing a range of teaching approaches. The provision of in-class support via team-teaching constitutes a significant departure from the previous individual and small group teaching carried out by the SET in the privacy of the support room and requires significant levels of collaboration with their mainstream colleagues. Successful in-class support via team teaching offers rich possibilities for the development of special education teachers' professional knowledge and allows them to share their knowledge of SEN teaching with their mainstream colleagues and ultimately advance consistent SEN practice throughout the school.

Implementation of the new policy rested largely on the shoulders of the SETs. The expectation that they would work as agents of change within their schools was largely due to the confinement of resources and expertise to special education teachers (Kinsella and Senior, 2008; Rose et al. 2015). Their new role placed a significant onus on the special education teachers particularly in relation to their work with mainstream colleagues who had not had the same professional development opportunities. Spreading the gospel of collaboration was the new task for SETs and one for which they were insufficiently prepared and supported.

While SEN policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) focused on the worthy aim of developing more inclusive education for students with special educational needs, insufficient attention was paid to the capacity of the school workplace to support the sophisticated level of collaborative SEN practice envisaged and to maximise the opportunity to develop teachers' professional knowledge of SEN practice. The change in SEN policy is considerable and demanding. It is also empowering in that it offers teachers the opportunity to work together to develop more collaborative SEN practice in their schools. Crucially, the special education teachers' knowledge, skills and experience place them in a key role in relation to policy implementation. However, to date their valuable experience and perspectives on teacher collaboration and its potential to build school-based teacher learning has not been fully explored.

Therefore, the aim of this research was to analyse the way in which collaboration between special education teachers and their teaching colleagues in Irish primary schools operates and its ability to build and sustain the special education teachers' professional knowledge of SEN practice?

Specifically, the research answered the following questions:

- What forms of collaboration are the special education teachers and their teaching colleagues (both special education and mainstream teachers) engaged in and what is their effect on the way the special education teachers' professional knowledge is built and sustained?
- How do contextual factors affect collaboration between special education teachers and their teaching colleagues?
- How does the interaction between the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and teachers' professional working relationships affect collaboration between special education teachers and their teaching colleagues?
- What supports do special education teachers need in order to build their professional knowledge through collaboration with colleagues and thereby advance collaborative SEN practice in their schools?

A very interesting picture emerged from the research. Introducing any form of change is demanding but the task of the special education teachers in developing a collaborative approach to SEN practice was particularly difficult. The historical separation of special and mainstream education (Griffin and Shevlin, 2011) cast a long shadow. The special education teachers' task was further complicated by the fact that traditional norms of teaching as autonomous private practice, supported by norms of egalitarianism and non-interference (Little, 1990), provided the context for the development of collaborative approaches to SEN teaching in most schools. Insufficiently collaborative school organisation, most notably the lack of an established forum for discussing collaborative SEN practice and providing a shared professional knowledge base to guide its implementation hampered the special education teachers' agency. Leadership that failed to facilitate and support teacher collaboration presented further difficulties. The complex and demanding interaction between the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and teachers' professional working relationships posed yet another layer of significant challenge for the special education teachers in their attempts to develop collaborative SEN practice. The nebulous concept of the school as a workplace and site for the development of teacher professional knowledge and a predominantly bring-back model of teacher learning (Sugrue, 2002) that ignored the capacity of schools to manage change completed the implementation scene.

The sections that follow discuss the nature of the collaboration that the SETs were involved in and the positive agency they demonstrated in their efforts to implement a policy compliant collaborative approach to SEN teaching in their schools. The influence of the schools' organisational environment on the special education teachers' endeavours, most notably the lack of staff discussion on issues of collaborative SEN practice, and leadership unsuited to supporting teacher collaboration, is addressed. The interaction between the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and teachers' professional working relationships in particular the importance of effective communication skills and the complex issues of trust, betrayal, professional respect and conflict are examined. A detailed outline of the special education teachers' recommendations for the supports needed to develop collaborative SEN practice follows. The study's original contribution to knowledge is then detailed and the concluding comments explore the practical implications of the research for the development of collaborative SEN practice in Irish primary schools.

8.2. The nature of the collaboration special education teachers are involved in and its impact on their professional knowledge of special educational needs teaching

Despite the challenges, what emerges very clearly from the study's findings is the amount of collaboration that all the special education teachers were involved in and how their collaboration aligned with Little's (1990) four forms of collaboration namely- storytelling and scanning for ideas, aid and assistance, sharing and joint work. In keeping with Little's (1990) study, the nature of collaboration that the special education teachers were involved in was strongly defined by its informality. Collaborative endeavours were very influenced by teacher personalities and the quality of professional working relationships. Teacher professional learning and the development of SEN practice throughout the school were fragmented as a result. While teachers bravely engaged in providing in-class support via team-teaching, the lack of sufficiently probing evaluation and the avoidance of peer critique failed to deliver deep professional learning and consistency in practice throughout the school. If focused solely on outcomes, Little's (1990) argument that collaboration attempts can sometimes facilitate teachers in procuring information and support when required while maintaining their privacy of practice and assiduously avoiding the full rigors of collaborative SEN practice, could apply.

However, this would not take into consideration the task that faced the special education teachers and the early stage in the process of changing to a collaborative approach to SEN practice. More importantly it would belie the effort and commitment to collaborative practice evident in the work of the special education teachers and ignore the foundations being laid. Against a challenging backdrop, the special education teachers who participated in this study demonstrated courageous agency as they navigated significant contextual challenges (Priestley et al. 2012). Faced with a daunting task, the SETs used creative circumvention strategies and demonstrated professional commitment to collaboration.

In keeping with Little's (1990) study, storytelling and scanning for ideas was a very definite feature of the special education teachers' workplace interaction. Consonant with Little's (1990) model, the special education teachers' storytelling and scanning for ideas was mainly informal and general in nature. However, at times it was more specific and focused when the SETs sought out a colleague to discuss a particular issue relating to a student. At times, storytelling countered professional isolation and anxiety, gave reassurance and built comradeship.

The special education teachers' awareness of the limitations of individual professional practice and the contrasting benefits of a collaborative approach to SEN teaching was evident in their use of storytelling and scanning for ideas. Echoing Little's (1990) study, the informality of storytelling and

scanning for ideas allowed the SETs to operate a form of collaboration without specific organisational support. Through storytelling the special education teachers gave and received information about the children they were teaching and sought to develop their professional knowledge through accessing the different perspectives and opinions of friendly colleagues. The special education teachers' willingness to take reasonable risk as they snatched moments on corridors, an action frowned upon by many principals, and the use of personal time during lunch breaks and after school demonstrated the value they placed on discussion and the restriction posed by the lack of formally organised discussion time in their schools.

The informality and, when required, stealth of the special education teachers' collaboration with selected friendly colleagues resonated with Little's (1990) argument that collaboration via storytelling and scanning for ideas maintains teachers' individual independence and autonomy and does little to develop teacher interdependence. Mirroring Little's (1990) description and critique of storytelling and scanning for ideas, the special education teachers' collaboration took place at a safe distance from their classrooms and its informal nature protected teachers from peer scrutiny of their professional practice. The informality of the collaboration supported an unexamined trial and error approach to professional learning that was solely at the discretion of the individual teacher. Interestingly, the SETs while attesting the importance of storytelling and scanning for ideas agreed with Little (1990) in relation to the limited professional learning that it delivered and its dependence on the professional competence of colleagues.

Despite the limitations for developing teacher interdependence and professional learning, as outlined by Little (1990), that were evident in the special education teachers' storytelling and scanning for ideas, the SETs demonstrated courageous and creative agency and importantly, pointed to the need for more collaborative future professional practice. Hindered by the social and material environments in which they worked (Priestly et al., 2012), the SETs demonstrated reflexivity and creativity. Through storytelling and scanning for ideas they countered the environmental constraints that challenged their agency (Biesta and Teder, 2007; Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2013). They provided a means for developing a more collaborative approach to SEN teaching through the facilitation of informal discussion on professional practice and the provision of support and reassurance when needed.

The special education teachers' attempts to collaborate with colleagues through the seeking, receiving and giving of aid and assistance strongly align with the themes identified by Little (1990), Rosenholtz (1991) and Lortie (1975). Consonant with Little (1990) and Lortie (1975) there was a strong expectation that when help was sought from colleagues it would be forthcoming. However, the fear that a request for help could be interpreted as a lack of professional competence, a theme identified by Little (1990), was strongly felt by the SETs and prompted caution. Consequently, the special education teachers tended to ask for assistance from friendly colleagues with

whom they had a good working relationship to avoid any negative consequences. However, the findings diverged somewhat from Little's (1990) study in the identification of an emergent and potentially significant change in collaboration amongst teachers in relation to requesting aid and assistance. Instead of a sole reliance on trusted friendly colleagues for advice, the SETs now specifically sought out SEN colleagues whom they deemed to have particular expertise on aspects of SEN teaching mainly gleaned from external professional development courses. The acknowledgement of colleagues with specific expertise established difference among teachers and while not directly threatening the traditional egalitarian norms (Little, 1990) it signalled a challenge to the view that all teachers are the same and broadened the base for seeking aid and assistance from colleagues. Importantly, acknowledgement of colleagues' expertise in a particular area of SEN teaching gave a license to teachers to openly ask for advice and help without fearing a possible attribution of incompetence. An alternative to private, professional practice in the form of collaboration that provided the means for individual teachers to share their knowledge and get recognition and status within the school, similar to Clement and Vandenberghe's (2000) ascribed autonomy, was emerging.

However, despite tentative change in requesting advice, long honoured rules of engagement between teachers in relation to giving advice applied. True to Little's (1990) study, requesting help whether from a friend or colleague with expertise was at the discretion of the individual teacher. Offering unsolicited advice was generally avoided. The fear of being seen to pass judgment on a colleague's professional knowledge and cast an aspersion of incompetence strongly prevailed and guided teacher behaviour (Rosenholtz 1991; Little, 1990). Lortie's (1975, p. 195) description of the good colleague's behavior as "[l]ive, let live and help when asked" operated. When the needs of a student required giving a colleague unsolicited advice, the special education teachers faced a dilemma. Again, echoes of Lortie's (1975) study were audible. In keeping with the description of "the good colleague" (p.194) the SETs feared imposing their views on a fellow teacher and were very cognisant of a fine line between offering advice and telling a fellow professional what to do. In keeping with Rosenholtz' (1991) analysis, the special education teachers preferred professional aloofness to the risk of social estrangement that any perceived challenge to a colleague's competence could occasion.

However, with the application of creative agency (Biesta and Teder, 2007; Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2013) and professional generosity the SETs endeavoured to circumvent the limitations of egalitarian norms by generating acceptable ways of imparting the necessary information that did not imply any judgment on their colleague's professional competence. They engaged colleagues in conversation in the hope that the opportunity to impart the necessary information would emerge. Teaching stations were rotated so that effective teaching could be observed. Offers to model new evidence-based strategies in the classrooms were made. However, consonant with autonomy and private practice, application of the delicately imparted information remained solely a matter for the recipient (Little, 1990).

Professional learning was dependent on a trial and error approach that relied on the individual teacher's ability to accurately identify the problem, implement the solution and assess the outcome (Lortie, 1975). Even when help was requested, and specific and purposeful information was imparted it did not generally entail a discussion on practice thereby supporting Little's (1990) argument that aid and assistance as a form of collaboration could indirectly support and maintain an independent and individual professional culture.

Consonant with Little (1990), aid and assistance was a common feature of teachers' practice and valued by them as a source of professional development. The SETs saw benefit in trying something new on the advice of a colleague and believed that aid and assistance received from colleagues helped provide continuity and consistency in the teaching of students. However, the findings also show an evolution in the special education teachers' experience of aid and assistance from that presented in Little's (1990) study. Despite acknowledging the benefits, the special education teachers recognised the limitations surrounding aid and assistance as a form of collaboration that developed their professional practice. The SETs were very aware that meeting the diverse range of needs exhibited by students required colleagues with different knowledge and skills who were able to help each other freely. They argued that seeking advice should be affirmed in schools and viewed as a demonstration of professionalism. The SETs believed that it should be professionally acceptable to offer unsolicited advice without the fear of negative consequences. When give and take was established in a school it created a desire in teachers to become more knowledgeable and organised and in a better position to help colleagues. While the special education teachers' views in relation to giving and receiving aid and assistance is broadly suggestive of an awareness of the benefits of a professional learning community where collective responsibility develops within a culture of respect and care for each other (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012) their behaviour was firmly rooted in their present antithetical reality.

Tension between evolving and traditional teacher behaviour was also evident in sharing as a form of collaboration. Traditional approaches to sharing dominated. As with storytelling and aid and assistance and consonant with Little's (1990) study, sharing was informal in nature, reliant on individual teachers' generosity and generally confined to colleagues who had a good professional working relationship. The sharing of resources and information received at professional development courses was most common. The more personal and professionally revealing sharing of ideas and teaching strategies was rare. While, in keeping with Little's (1990) study, some discussion could arise as to the effectiveness of a particular resource, sharing did not facilitate any critical discussion on professional practice.

Considerable barriers to sharing also existed. The busyness of the school day and teacher autonomy prevented teachers from sitting down together to share and discuss aspects of their professional practice. Lack of time to develop resources also prevented sharing, as did a lack of knowledge and

expertise within the SEN team, a point that hinted at the absence of a strong professional knowledge base akin to a shared technical culture (Rosenholtz 1991, Lortie, 1975). The informal and individual nature of sharing as a form of collaboration was a further constraint. Sharing was at the discretion of the individual teacher and, as Little (1990) pointed out, not all teachers were willing to share.

While the informal sharing of non-contentious resources and information at the discretion of individual teachers dominated, a more formal approach to sharing was emerging. Shared storage areas ensured that resources were visible and available to all teachers irrespective of friendship and good professional working relationships. Simultaneously however, impersonal on-line sharing of resources maintained a strong focus on the individual teacher's professional autonomy.

While evident in all forms of collaboration, the courageous agency of the SETs is most visible in their efforts to engage in joint work (Little, 1990) through the provision of in-class support via team-teaching. As Little (1990) reminds, joint work has a significant public dimension and is more formal than the other forms of collaboration. Also, joint work requires interdependency between the teachers and organisational commitment that the more informal forms of collaboration can avoid. True to Little (1990), the special education teachers relinquished the long-held norms of privacy and non-interference as they embraced peer observation of teaching. However, despite the considerable achievement of working in classrooms their efforts were not sufficiently reflected in the outcomes achieved. The deep collaboration and professional learning possible through joint work (Little, 1990) did not fully materialise.

The interdependence and organisational commitment required for joint work (Little, 1990) was lacking, as evidenced by the diluted nature of the shared planning between special education teachers and their mainstream colleagues. In the main the SETs planned the in-class interventions with variable input from mainstream teachers. Generally, responsibility for the lesson rested with the SETs and the mainstream teachers agreed to work with the plan.

However, it was in relation to the evaluation of the team-taught lessons that the lack of a strong professional knowledge base around collaborative SEN practice and the resultant professional uncertainty (Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1991) was most apparent. While a small number of schools had formal time allocated to evaluating in-class interventions the dominant form of evaluation was informal in nature and superficial in content. Interestingly, the teaching of the lesson was exempt from scrutiny. While a lesson might be considered unsuccessful no reference would be made to the teaching for fear it could be interpreted as a negative comment on a colleague's professional practice. The SETs were aware that the evaluation of and critical reflection on the team-taught lesson required significant improvement. However, instead of interrogating the problem the solution was generally to try something

different. Here again the sanctity of norms of non-interference and egalitarianism dominated (Little, 1990). It appears that consonant with Rosenholtz (1991, p.73) the SETs were willing to live “professionally orphaned” lives rather than risk engaging in an evaluation process that could indirectly question a colleague’s professional competence or expose a lack of knowledge. Discussion on practice was not a regular form of professional engagement. Specifically, the teachers’ lack of knowledge and experience of giving and receiving feedback on a lesson stymied the special education teachers’ efforts at improving team-teaching and diluted the rich professional development opportunities offered by peer observation.

Undaunted by the impediments and committed to improving team-taught lessons the SETs once again honoured their agency by using a number of creative circumvention strategies (Biesta and Teder, 2007; Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2013). They took the lead and publicly evaluated their particular area of the team-taught lesson in the hope of a contagion effect. The SETs planned the in-class interventions in detail in an effort to ensure smooth and successful outcomes. Instead of jointly evaluating the team-taught lesson with colleagues the special education teachers made informal suggestions as to how the lesson could be improved and aimed for consensus or friendly compromise. Echoing Hargreaves’ (2001) study, the SETs, in applying their circumvention strategies, were keenly aware of their colleagues’ personalities, protective of their working relationships and committed to conflict avoidance at all times.

Though team-teaching operated, teaching was in essence seen as autonomous, individual private practice protected by norms of egalitarianism and non-interference (Little, 1990). While, in keeping with Little’s (1990) analysis of joint work, team-teaching provided the structures within which collective autonomy could develop, its actual operation still paid deference to individualism. Teachers worked together but not interdependently. Consonant with Little’s (1990) analysis and in further divergence from the optimal operation of joint work, the teachers were responding to an externally imposed policy initiative more than working together to improve practice. The process of teachers examining their practice with a view to attaining agreement on guiding principles, values and approaches as described by Little (1990) was largely absent. While teachers were willing to affirm aspects of colleagues’ teaching, the strong endorsement of professional practice arising from the scrutiny provided by effective evaluation and critique, as described by Little (1990) was not in evidence.

From a professional development perspective, challenges to team-teaching such as lack of time, conflicting teaching styles and behaviour management approaches, personality issues, lack of trust, fear of professional exposure and the judgment of colleagues posed problems for the teachers (Villa, Thousand and Nevin 2008; Murawski, 2009). More positively, participating in in-class support via team-teaching allowed the SETs to see how the child with special educational needs worked in the classroom and to benefit from

the different perspectives of the mainstream teacher. When consistency in practice between the special education and mainstream teachers ensued, a more coherent approach to meeting the students' needs could evolve. Learning through observation of colleagues' teaching was considered a particularly powerful form of professional learning. It was a new experience for the teachers and one that was not previously a common feature of practice. Teachers liked having control of their learning. They could observe a particular strategy or approach and practice it in the privacy of their own classrooms. Here again, Lortie's (1975) analysis of the individual trial and error approach to teacher learning comes to the fore. Even with the opportunity to observe and discuss teaching approaches offered by team-teaching, professional learning took place in private. The special education teachers felt that team-teaching helped them to work towards a shared goal and develop the communication skills necessary to work with colleagues. They benefitted from the camaraderie and the appreciation of colleagues when they were of help and professional isolation and loneliness were lessened (Hargreaves, 2001).

Overall, what emerged strongly from the data in relation to Little's (1990) four forms of collaboration was that the special education teachers saw the benefits of collaboration, but their efforts to develop collaborative SEN practice were greatly limited by the lack of capacity within their school to support their agency. However, despite the overall lack of support, emergent collaborative practice and professional development was evident in the SETs valiant attempts to share stories, seek information, make suggestions for improvement of team-taught lessons and in their acknowledgement of colleagues' expertise.

However, though praise-worthy and valuable, the special education teachers' collaboration yielded in the main, informal and fragmented learning. Consonant with Hargreaves' (2001) work, the development of professional knowledge was constrained by the vagaries of individual personalities and delicate professional working relationships that required careful minding. Learning was at the individual teacher's discretion resulting in variable quality and impact and reducing the possibility of consistent application throughout the school. In keeping with Little (1990) there was a lack of critical engagement with the information shared and the topics discussed, and critique of teaching was notably absent.

Permeating all forms of collaboration was the agency of the special education teachers evident in their use of various circumvention strategies. While highly laudable and noteworthy the need for such circuitous behavior requires consideration. The reasons for the special education teachers' tentative circumvention strategies lay in two areas: the lack of school-based organisational support for the development of collaborative SEN practice that develops professional knowledge; and the powerful and ubiquitous issues surrounding the interaction between the emotional and relational aspects of collaboration and teachers' professional working relationships. The following section discusses the organisational factors that impacted on

the special education teachers' efforts to develop collaborative SEN practice, in particular, the lack of discussion that builds a strong shared professional knowledge base and the need for leaders to have the knowledge and skills to support teacher collaboration that builds professional knowledge. The subsequent section will discuss the impact of the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration.

8.3. Organisational factors that influence the development of teachers' knowledge of SEN practice through collaboration.

The organisational environment of the primary school posed considerable challenges for the special education teachers in their efforts to develop a policy compliant, collaborative approach to SEN practice. The lack of staff discussion and agreement on implementation of the SEN policy change, the gulf between the traditional, individual autonomous model of teaching and the proposed shift to collaborative SEN practice produced hard ground for negotiation. The limited power of the SETs to work as agents of change coupled with the lack of structured organisational support available to them accentuated the difficulty of their task.

The lack of staff discussion and agreement on an implementation plan for how the school would deliver a collaborative approach to SEN practice was both challenging and illuminating. In the face of a very significant change to a sensitive area of practice, discussion was largely limited to imparting information in response to the demands of an external force. Contrary to Rosenholtz' (1991) findings in relation to collaborative schools, the SETs experienced an absence of opportunities for substantive interaction amongst teachers that enabled them to discuss and debate aspects of SEN practice relevant to the policy change and to recognise common problems and explore collaborative solutions. At a very basic level the SETs were bereft of a sense of belonging to a "community endeavor," evolved through involvement in decision-making and the development of explicit shared teaching goals (Rosenholtz, 1991, p.45). Support from the more sophisticated forms of school organisation as in established communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) was unavailable to the SETs. In the main their experience was of isolated practice and not of a community characterised by 'dense relations of mutual engagement' (Wenger, p. 74) around collaborative SEN practice. Nor was there a sense of 'joint enterprise' arising from a 'negotiated response to their situation' (p. 77) or a strong 'shared repertoire' (p. 82) of teaching approaches and activities to confidently guide and support the enactment of collaborative SEN practice in their schools. Neither had they the support of schools that were recultured as professional communities of learning where instead of isolated practice teachers work interdependently in highly effective collaborative teams to continuously improve learning through common goals (Eaker, 2002; DuFour and DuFour 2011). Communities of practice and communities of learning were very different forms of school

organisation from the special education teachers' experience and could not be used to capture or reflect their subjective experience of developing collaborative SEN practice. Changing the perception of the task of developing collaborative SEN practice in their schools from the work of the SET to a "community endeavour", while challenging, seemed a more realistic vision.

The lack of effective organisational support resulted in a lack of confident internal ownership of collaboration and the changing SEN agenda. Instead, the response of the special education teachers' schools to the SEN policy change was, in the main, a frustrated and fragmented reaction to an external imposition. In the absence of substantive discussion and an agreed implementation plan, change rested almost exclusively on the shoulders of the special education teachers, few in number and without structured in-school support with the exception of a small number of schools where more collaborative practice operated. The difficulty of the special education teachers' task was compounded by a perception of the SEN team as a separate unit working alongside the rest of the school and by the special education teachers' widely varying levels of partnership with mainstream teachers in meeting the needs of students with SEN. The more fragile professional status of the SETs evident in the erosion of their teaching time to attend to non-teaching duties and to provide substitution for mainstream teachers added to their difficulty. The paucity of well-established SEN teams with strong cohesion amongst members further diminished the special education teachers' chances of successful agency in developing collaborative SEN practice.

Despite the considerable school based organisational barriers, solo runs by pioneering SETs exhibiting courageous agency produced pockets of good collaborative practice within an overall pastiche of more superficial, piecemeal collaboration. However, the opportunity that the SEN policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) offers for school wide interrogation and transformation of SEN practice was not embraced and the response remained more redolent of a box ticking exercise. Regrettably, this overall result did not reflect the significant effort expended by the special education teachers.

The schools' response to the development of collaborative SEN practice could, at first glance, be attributed to a clever strategy of superficial collaboration that appeased policy while maintaining the status quo. However, closer analysis of the findings suggests a more unfortunate explanation. A picture of school staffs inexperienced in positively managing change, that habitually respond to imposed change through a strategy of compliance with the least amount of disturbance, emerges. A mix of apathy, ennui and crucially a lack of awareness of a different more enabling way of operating resulted. In contrast, a process such as that described by James et al., (2007) was required in order to facilitate the agency of the SETs in their attempts to implement a more collaborative policy compliant approach to SEN practice in their schools. James et al. (2007) describe an approach

whereby, through reflection on practice, accepted ways of working were agreed and applied consistently and consonantly amongst staff members. The collective authority of the staff was evident and, following careful consideration, suggested changes were incorporated into existing professional practice if deemed to improve students' learning.

The current SEN policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) offers schools the opportunity to engage in reflective, inquiry-focused discussion on SEN practice. It invites leaders and teachers to work together and harness the knowledge, skills and experience of all staff members to develop collaborative SEN practice and to support teacher initiative in this regard. The School Self-Evaluation process (DES, 2012) and Cosan, the national framework for teacher learning (Teaching Council, 2016) promote internal review and professional reflection on practice and the Croke Park hours (DES 2011) provide time for discussion. However, managing these resources effectively in a way that supports the development of collaborative SEN practice is crucial but cannot be assumed. Opportunities that enable teachers to work together in a climate of collaboration need to be created through effective discussion and reflection on practice that acknowledges the collective authority of the staff (James et al. 2007) leading to the development of a strong, shared professional knowledge base and associated teacher certainty and professional confidence (Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1991). Unfortunately, it appears that the necessary school capacity for such effective change management has not developed in tandem with the arrival of the SEN policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) in Irish primary schools prompting questions regarding leadership in schools, specifically, its impact on the development of collaborative SEN practice and on the agency of the special education teachers.

Consonant with a distributed model of leadership, the special education teachers' agency was focused on the development of a team approach to SEN practice. However, their comments, in the main, reflected a current reality redolent of a traditional, hierarchical model wherein power and the practice of leadership were vested solely in the principal (Harris, 2008; Spillane, 1999). The SETs placed responsibility for the lack of staff discussion on the new SEN policy and the absence of a shared approach to the implementation of collaborative SEN practice firmly with the school principal. Indeed, the defining feature of effective leadership, according to the special education teachers, lay in people management. To assist their agency, and consonant with the Ontario Leadership Framework (2013) and the Quality Framework for Irish primary schools (DES, 2016), the SETs required principals, who could bring teachers together and develop a shared team approach to collaborative SEN practice in their schools. To this end, the organisation and management of effective and enabling staff discussion was considered central. According to the SETs, principals needed to possess the skills and knowledge to create and sustain healthy environments where teachers could discuss teaching and learning, express views and share ideas without fear of reprisal and where conflicting opinions could be appropriately managed. The special education teachers' comments reflect the need for more collaborative

school cultures as outlined by Hargreaves and Fullan, (2012) where there is broad agreement on values and where secure staff relationships allow constructive professional disagreement to take place as teachers share knowledge, skills and ideas with a view to improving professional practice. In further agreement with Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) the SETs attested to the centrality of leadership in the development of such collaborative school cultures. In particular, the special education teachers' comments highlight the need for principals who are able to build "trust and respect with and among their teachers" and establish new norms and behaviours that nurture collaboration (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, p.113). Interestingly, the identification by school principals of their critical need for professional development in conflict management and resolution and in building a collaborative culture with staff, revealed in the recent report commissioned by the DES (Fitzpatrick Associates, 2018), resonates with the views of the SETs and with the literature.

In keeping with Slater's (2005) study, the SETs believed that leaders who through their actions modelled collaboration and teamwork and the underpinning emotional behaviours were best positioned to facilitate teacher collaboration. However, for the majority of the SETs interviewed, the reality of school leadership fell far short of what they required. The necessary leadership skills to support collaborative SEN practice were more the exception than the rule. While a small number of SETs benefitted from collaborative leadership, the majority experienced a range of behaviours that constrained their attempts to implement policy compliant collaborative SEN practice. Interestingly, the leadership behaviours experienced by the SETs reflect those exhibited by principals in schools with individual, isolated cultures in Rosenholtz' (1991) study. Some SETs reported experiencing negative, controlling leadership behaviours. All aspects of teachers' work were micromanaged and the necessary initiative taking and experimentation that developing collaborative SEN practice required was strictly limited. Principals who resisted suggestions for improvement and change lest acceptance would be interpreted as a diminution of their power and authority also posed difficulties for the SETs. A laissez-faire approach, where principals allowed SETs the freedom to introduce new ideas and approaches but were, themselves, uninvolved, a position ascribed to the lack of a strong technical culture and a lack of competence in Rosenholtz' (1991) study, frustrated the SETs. Without support from the principal, the SETs had to motivate colleagues to join them and carry full responsibility for the initiative. The outcome was generally frustrating and insufficiently focused collaboration attempts that failed to deliver a sustained, shared approach to collaborative SEN practice.

With the exception of a small number of schools, the SETs lacked rich zones of enactment (Spillane, 1999) in which to develop collaborative SEN practice. The SETs attributed this deficit to principals' lack of curricular knowledge. The failure of principals to understand the opportunities and demands that collaboration presents also proved problematic. In particular, principals' lack of knowledge of how team-teaching works and how effective collaboration

can build consistent SEN practice throughout the school, impacted negatively on the special education teachers' efforts to develop more collaborative SEN practice. Appropriate support to help staff through the fear of collaboration, to give constructive feedback and guidance when collaboration attempts failed and to reinforce good collaboration was sorely missed by the SETs as they grappled with their nebulous and unsupported role as agents of change. The lack of scheduled time for discussion on SEN practice was a significant impediment. Principals' often inefficient and ineffective use of Croke Park hours (2011), an available resource tailored to such purpose, served to further heighten the SETs frustration.

The needs of the SETs in relation to the development of collaborative SEN practice present compelling evidence of the need for a distributed model of leadership (Spillane, Halverson and Diamond, 2004; Harris, 2008) to be developed in Irish primary schools. Coping with the demands of effective teacher collaboration and optimising its potential for professional learning required different areas of knowledge and expertise. Crucially it required structured discussion on how collaborative SEN practice would be delivered so that teachers shared a professional knowledge base and felt professionally confident and competent in managing a significant change in their practice. The traditional hierarchical view of leadership residing in one person proved incompatible with the diverse nature of the task.

What was required was a distributed approach to leadership described by Spillane, Halverson and Diamond, (2004, p.11) as "a practice distributed over leaders, followers and their situation." Instead of confining leadership to one person in the role of principal, leadership practice is flexibly organised within the school in the way that provides the most effective response to the issues and problems that emerge. Through informal leadership role, teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills are enabled to work together with colleagues to solve particular pedagogical problems and issues when they arise. Importantly, such an approach to leadership would offer appropriate support for the agency of the SETs. The special education teachers' professionalism and initiative taking could be acknowledged and the opportunity provided for them to use their specific knowledge and experience to work with colleagues and inform decisions on SEN policy and practice in their school. Quality interaction between formal and informal leaders within the school facilitates the sharing of knowledge and replaces the more traditional form of the leader-follower relationship (Harris, 2008) that posed significant difficulty for the SETs. By such means, issues around the principal's lack of knowledge of collaboration could also be overcome within an effectively operated distributed model of leadership. Most importantly, through colleagues' interactions "a reciprocal interdependency" emerges (Spillane, 2005, p.146). Each person benefits from the different knowledge, skills and perspectives that their colleagues bring to the leadership task. Through such reciprocity, collective leading emerges and the cognition of the group exceeds that of any one member (Spillane, 2005). Such a democratic, broad based approach to leadership practice could enable teachers to work together and harness and affirm the specific strengths of

staff members in relation to the development of a school-wide approach to collaborative SEN practice that would develop teacher confidence and support necessary experimentation and reflection.

While this study establishes the centrality of people management skills to the development of a collaborative approach to SEN practice in Irish primary schools, it is not solely about the leaders' competence therein. The dominant and ubiquitous position that teachers' professional working relationships hold in relation to the future of collaboration that builds professional knowledge of SEN merits equal investigation. Crucially, the powerful impact of the emotional and relational aspects of collaborative SEN practice on the special education teachers' professional working relationships and on their ability to collaborate with colleagues requires serious consideration.

8.4. Teachers' professional working relationships and the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration

Congruent with Hargreaves's (2001) study, the SETs placed a high value on positive, friendly professional working relationships and attested to the inextricable linkage between professional and personal relationships. According to the special education teachers, collaborative SEN practice relied on good professional working relationships but also tested them. The emotional dimension of collaboration highlighted the nature of the teachers' professional relationships in a way that the traditional individual model of teaching camouflaged. As argued by Little (1990) exposure of teachers' professional knowledge and practice was a distinguishing feature of effective collaborative SEN practice. However, the necessary revelation of aspects of their professional practice through discussion, sharing and especially through the joint work of team-teaching during which colleagues observe each other teaching, proved problematic. In keeping with Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), observation proved particularly demanding and could easily, albeit mistakenly, be perceived as changing the role of colleague into that of judge. Issues of self-confidence and professional competence came to the fore and teachers feared not being expert enough in team-teaching strategies. In such circumstances, it was not unusual that teachers preferred to self-select team-teaching partners. Feeling comfortable with a colleague eased the challenges of collaboration (Murawski, 2009). However, given the reality of Irish primary schools, it was not always possible to work with friendly colleagues. The challenges of working collaboratively with colleagues with incompatible personalities and difficult past histories required the SETs to manage their emotions and engage in the task without the necessary support and skills.

The SETs were acutely aware of the need for trust particularly when interactions involved professional self-revelation and of the vulnerability experienced when trust was absent or not yet fully established. The SETs understood the importance of sensitively managing the issues and mistakes

that inevitably occur when collaborating with colleagues in a way that advances practice, maintains trust and protects relationships. They were conscious that trust takes time and commitment to build and can be easily shattered.

However, it was the lack of trust evident in the betrayal felt by the SETs that was most illuminating. Interestingly, contractual, communications and competence betrayal as described in Hargreaves' (2002) research were replicated in the experiences of the SETs. They described instances of contractual betrayal when colleagues were not sufficiently committed to the collaborative task and did not meet the required professional expectations. Most acute, though, was their experience of communications betrayal resulting from colleagues' malicious gossiping with colleagues and parents about the collaborating partner and the inappropriate sharing of information that was given in confidence and competence betrayal through the diminution of colleagues in front of students.

The manifestations of betrayal experienced by the SETs seriously contravened Tschannen and Hoy's (2000) definition of trust in terms of reliability, competence, benevolence, honesty and openness. Their colleagues' lack of professionalism displayed questionable reliability and competence. However, the lack of benevolence, honesty and openness, obvious in the acts of betrayal, were most significant. It was in these infractions of trust that the special education teachers' expectations of good will and their confidence that no harm would be caused to them by their colleagues, described by Tschannen and Hoy (2000), as benevolence, proved unsafe. Their colleagues' honesty that according to Tschannen and Hoy (2000) ensures truthful, responsible behaviour was no longer assured. Openness, defined as the sharing of relevant information based on a reciprocal trust that neither the information nor the giver would be exploited (Tschannen and Hoy, 2000) was no longer guaranteed.

The significant absence of trust evident in the incidents of betrayal pose a definite barrier to the development of collaborative SEN practice that is compounded further by the special education teachers' reaction to betrayal. Echoing Hargreaves' (2002) study, prevention, avoidance and personal psychological distancing techniques were the main strategies used by the SETs. They tended to quietly disengage from collaboration with the betraying colleague and avoid the offending colleague thereafter. Others withdrew from collaboration with all colleagues as far as possible and if and when necessary, only collaborated with friends. The SETs also described making their peace with the experience as far as possible and moving on from it. Sennett (1999) gives an insight into why these softer reactions to betrayal are used. He argues that restoring trust in another is a reflexive act that requires individuals to face their own vulnerability. However, it is not a purely personal action. It involves a social dimension. Consonant with Rosenholtz' (1991) study, Sennett advises that social structures that do not promote reliance on others in a crisis fuel an absence of trust and organisations that instead promote autonomy and independence create a

sense of vulnerability. In light of Sennett's (1999) argument, the acts of betrayal cited by the SETs reflect an individualistic, autonomous approach to professional practice that is not immediately conducive to the SETs efforts to develop of a collaborative approach to SEN practice in their schools.

At the heart of teachers' professional working relationships, evident in their collaboration attempts and linked to a lack of trust, was a fear of conflict. Consonant with Hargreaves' (2001) study, the SETs generally viewed conflict and disagreement as negative and something to be avoided. Professional disagreement necessary to reap the benefits of different perspectives and develop professional knowledge through changes and improvements in teaching was not generally embraced. Instead, their awareness of the threat that conflict posed to their professional working relationships constrained their approach to collaboration (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

While the importance to collaboration of friendly relationships was strongly made by the SETs, corresponding evidence of the positive effects of such friendly relationships on their ability to manage in-depth evaluation, honest critique and challenging discussion was lacking. Indeed, consonant with Hargreaves' (2001) study, facing the rigor of challenging constructively critical conversations with attendant risk of damage to their professional working relationships was assiduously avoided by the special education teachers. In the main, these were not the strong solid working relationships that survived the test of challenging discussions and thrived on the positive outcomes of disagreement that advanced practice (Achinstein, 2002). Instead, relationships generally reflected weaker forms of friendliness that tended to reinforce similar views and positions (Hargreaves 2001). A small number of SETs referred to the benefits of having especially good personal relationships with some collaborating colleagues. However, Hargreaves' (2001) argument that, in strong friendships, disagreement is valued, and trust protects the teachers from the fear of damaging their relationship, was not generally borne out. The SETs position aligned more closely with Avila de Lima's (2001) argument that fear of damaging personal relationships poses a barrier to the more questioning and challenging approach needed for schools to continuously improve.

The maintenance of peaceful relationships and the attainment of an amicable consensus or a friendly accommodation of opinions when required, was of paramount importance to the SETs when collaborating with colleagues, through team-teaching in particular. In keeping with Hargreaves (2001), differences between teachers in relation to practice were tolerated through avoidance and politeness. In an effort to maintain friendly working relationships and to survive more negative and challenging ones, a suite of conflict avoidance strategies was used by the SETs in their collaboration endeavours. Constrained communication patterns, a paucity of open, honest discussion, acceptance of negative aspects of practice, denial of problems, avoidance of possible hurt, subtle, non-verbal communication of disagreement all succeeded in reducing conflict. However, these strategies

also diluted the quality of the collaboration and crucially limited its professional knowledge development potential.

The provenance of the SETs quiescent, conflict averse approach to collaboration is not purely interpersonal. Its roots can also be traced to the school workplace. As previously discussed, professional geographies that establish norms of individualism or collaboration, political geographies that define interpersonal communication in terms of status and power and physical geographies of time and space play a significant role in determining the nature of teachers' relationships with their colleagues (Hargreaves, 2001). The SETs were also very conscious of the limited mobility available for Irish primary school teachers. Consequently, the pattern of spending the majority of their work lives in one school, often with a small number of colleagues was common. As a result, employee relations tended to be fixed and personal. Conflict in such circumstances, the SETs argued, was rightly feared as the consequences could have an inescapable, detrimental effect on personal and professional working conditions thereafter.

The lack of an established and trusted mechanism for conflict resolution added further credibility to the teachers' fear of conflict. When avoidance and friendly consensus failed a variety of ad hoc arrangements such as colleagues acting as mediators and acceptance of a majority view were seen as crude measures that failed to deliver reassurance. There was also a lack of trust in the principal's ability to intervene successfully. Principals were not generally seen to have the requisite skills and training in conflict resolution, evident in the taking of decisions without negotiation and the use of delaying tactics. Here again, the inadequacy of a hierarchical model of leadership requiring one person in the role of principal to meet the diverse and dynamic needs of staff members is apparent. A distributed model that could facilitate and support staff in developing an effective approach to conflict resolution agreed by all would seem a more appropriate mechanism.

The close proximity to students at all times also influenced the nature of teachers working relationships and left little space for any sign of disagreement. According to the SETs, the school was seen more as a place where children are educated than a place of employment for teachers. The human resource dimension of school management, they argued, was significantly underdeveloped and there was a lack of focus on the teacher as colleague and school employee. Instead, their professional identity was strongly forged as a teacher of children. Interestingly, Nias' (1989) study reflected similar teacher sentiment. "Everybody goes around patting the children on the back with great enthusiasm and saying how wonderful they are, but nobody pats you on the back and says how wonderful you are" (p.147). The limited opportunity for professional progression and the absence of financial incentive to develop their professional practice served to further limit dynamic collaborative interaction in favour of a safer and more routine approach.

Achinstein's (2002) argument that a school's approach to conflict, impacts its capacity for organisational learning and that while teachers' fear of conflict is understandable, the negative consequences have far reaching effects was strongly reflected in the special education teachers' attempts to develop a collaborative approach to SEN provision in their schools. Similarly, her contention that schools that avoid conflict, generally have limited mechanisms for public debate resulting in the privatisation of conflict through informal systems, accurately described the situation that challenged most SETs. The lack of staff discussion on implementing collaborative SEN practice, in favour of more informal arrangements between teachers, heightened the possibility and fear of personalised conflict. As a result, teachers generally avoided questioning their professional practice and the available opportunity to develop professionally through joint critical reflection was at best diluted and frequently denied.

Achinstein's (2002) advice that teachers need support in understanding and accepting conflict as an essential part of community and collaboration is very relevant to the present situation in relation to SEN policy. Indeed, her caution that those supporting a shift to more collaborative practice can fail to recognise the role of disagreement and conflict associated with community appears to have been overlooked in relation to the introduction of the current SEN policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b). Enabling teachers to work together, to engage in critical reflection and to tease through issues of conflict is crucial for the development of professional knowledge. To this end, teachers and principals need to be encouraged and helped to find a "space for dissent" (Achinstein, 2002, p.442) in which a "dialogue of differences" (p.422) can be voiced and supportive professional relationships can be developed.

8.5. Meeting the challenges of collaboration: the special education teachers' recommendations

In keeping with Achinstein (2002), the special education teachers were unequivocal in their statement of the need to address the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and the disabling fear of conflict in an effort to help teachers to work together more effectively, as required by the new model of SEN provision. In particular, support in developing the language and skills to participate in constructively critical discussion on practice with colleagues and to give and receive feedback in the team-teaching situation were considered necessary. Echoing Friend and Cook (2013) the SETs were very conscious that communication was an active and creative process that involved both content and relationship. Accordingly, the special education teachers called for guidance for teachers and principals on how to express themselves clearly on professional matters without causing hurt, to listen, to provide space and opportunity for colleagues to speak at meetings, to respond effectively to the anxieties of colleagues and to distinguish between professional and personal relationships and understand that professional critique was not a personal attack. Despite the need

described by the SETs and Friend and Cook's (2013) advice that communication competence is largely a skill set that is learned and that benefits from ongoing refinement, continuous professional development in this area was not available to the SETs.

The special education teachers also recommended that teachers and principals receive guidance on how to work together as a team. However, developing specific skills of teamwork was reliant on teachers and principals understanding teaching as a shared activity arising from and sustained by a common purpose as distinct from private individual practice. Similarly, reflective of Sennett's (2003) description of professional respect in relation to a concert performance, the SETs recognised the benefits of a work culture where all teachers worked and learned together in pursuance of the joint purpose of developing professional practice. Only within such an environment, they asserted, could teamwork truly develop and flourish. Such a collaborative conception of teaching would allow focus to be placed more meaningfully on the importance of building and maintaining trust and respectful professional working relationships. The need for all team members to share their professional knowledge and experience and to receive acknowledgement for their individual strengths and talents would become clearer. Joint planning and evaluation of common teaching goals and learning outcomes would be less daunting. Mistakes could be more easily accepted as learning experiences that strengthened practice. Problem-solving skills could be learned and used more routinely to help find effective outcomes when disagreement developed thereby diminishing the power posed by conflict avoidance measures.

As well as focusing on teamwork generally, the special education teachers recommended that specific attention be paid to equipping teachers with the skills necessary to provide in-class support via team-teaching. The current trial and error approach with limited available support was considered ineffective for such a demanding and potentially beneficial form of collaboration. Instead the provision of focused guidance and support to whole school staffs on how to plan, teach, evaluate and give feedback on team-taught lessons in a way that developed collaborative SEN practice was strongly made.

The special education teachers were very aware that a focus on teachers' professional development alone was insufficient. Appropriate leadership skills and enabling organisational structures had to be developed in tandem, so that teachers' newly acquired skills could be used. To this end, the creation of opportunities for discussion was paramount. Leaders needed to be equipped with the skills to encourage and facilitate professional conversations and demonstrate commitment to developing a culture of teacher learning in their schools. Correct use of the existing resource that is School Self-Evaluation (DES, 2012) was strongly recommended given its provision for evaluation of and reflection on selected aspects of school practice. The aforementioned need for principals' wise and informed use of

Croke Park hours (2011) to provide necessary time was reiterated. Interestingly, the quality framework (DES, 2016) against which schools are assessed attests the importance attached to SSE and to the use of Croke Park hours to advance collaborative reflection. Unfortunately, the special education teachers' experience falls far short of the practice reflected in the statements.

Finally, the relationship between the DES and primary schools was criticised. According to the SETs, demands were continually made without adequate support for schools to develop their capacity to respond. Instead, the special education teachers advised that the DES should attend to capacity building at school level through grants to schools for continuous professional development on team building, the development of specific teacher welfare policies and practices that would guide school workplace operations and closer monitoring of principals' work in this regard.

8.6. Original contribution to knowledge

Reflecting back on the findings and their relationship to the literature and to policy brings this study's contribution to knowledge to the fore. The absence of empirical research on the special education teachers' experience of developing collaborative SEN practice in their schools constitutes a gap in knowledge. This study fills that gap by providing an analysis of the nature of the collaboration that SETs are involved in and the variables that influence how they collaborate with their colleagues. Given that the current SEN policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) tasks schools with developing a collaborative approach to SEN teaching, such knowledge is particularly timely and worthwhile.

In its confirmation of the applicability of Little's (1990) model of teacher collaboration to a new situation, namely the collaboration between Irish primary school special education teachers and their colleagues, this study makes an original contribution to knowledge. The utility of Little's model was evident in its provision of a conceptual framework that enabled our understanding of the collaboration Irish SETs were involved in. Crucially, Little's (1990) framework for collaboration provided a means of distinguishing between informal forms of collaboration that protect teaching as independent private practice and collaboration that opens teaching practice to peer critique and builds teacher interdependence around the task of teaching. Little's model also allows a distinction to be made between the professional development arising from the informal forms of collaboration that tends to be solely at the discretion of the individual teacher and the professional development that arises from the more formal joint work that involves peer scrutiny and critique of aspects of professional practice.

Through the use of Little's (1990) model this research makes a significant contribution to knowledge with regard to the forms of collaboration that the Irish primary school SETs are involved in and the professional development they derive. The Irish primary school special education teachers' experience

of collaboration aligned with Little's four forms of collaboration namely-storytelling and scanning for ideas, aid and assistance, sharing and joint work. While joint work described a formal approach to collaboration, storytelling and scanning for ideas, aid and assistance and sharing were informal forms of collaboration that were valued by the SETs and were a regular feature of their professional practice. They operated without specific organisational support. In keeping with Little's analysis, the collaboration was informal and protected the privacy of the individual teacher's practice from scrutiny. Stories from practice, ideas, information and resources were shared and requests for assistance were answered with generosity. However, access to informal collaborative interactions between colleagues was constrained by teacher personalities and the quality of professional working relationships. The professional learning that arose from the informal collaboration between the SETs and their colleagues was not subject to critique. Both the sharing and the subsequent use of information were at the discretion of the individual teacher.

As well as confirming the application of Little's (1990) model to the new situation of Irish primary school special education teachers' collaboration with their colleagues, this research makes a further contribution to knowledge by extending Little's model in relation to our understanding of informal collaboration. In the Irish situation, informality was an outlet for the special education teachers' creativity and agency and crucially demonstrated their need for purposeful practice-focused collaboration with colleagues while simultaneously demonstrating the deficits in the school system. As well as general storytelling that shared information and provided personal support and reassurance, the Irish primary school SETs engaged in specific and purposeful storytelling that informed their teaching of a particular student. Their commitment and professionalism were evident in their willingness to use personal time for such informal collaboration when required. Respect for students was paramount and only stories that assisted the student were shared.

The Irish primary school special education teachers' experience of 'sharing' provided further confirmation of Little's (1990) analytical continuum of teacher collaboration. Sharing was at the discretion of the individual teacher. Implementation of the information received via sharing was the preserve of the receiving teacher. Professional learning arising from sharing as a form of collaboration was on a trial and error basis, without critique and consequently fragmented and highly variable. Sharing of impersonal resources and information was most common and did not involve an examination of curriculum or professional practice.

The study also provides a new perspective on Little's (1990) model in regard to aid and assistance and expanded our understanding of this form of collaboration. While confirming that teachers feared asking for help in case it was perceived as a lack of competence, the study demonstrated the emergence of a deviation from this well-established pattern. The acknowledgement of individual colleagues' expertise in specific areas of

special education enabled the SETs to request their help without fear of the associated aspersion of incompetence. The research also confirmed the special education teachers' avoidance of offering unrequested aid and assistance lest their action would be interpreted as a judgment on their colleague's competence. However, the research extended Little's model in its revelation of the SETs dissatisfaction with this unwritten rule of engagement because of the constraint it placed on their ability to ensure that the needs of students with special educational needs were effectively met. It appears that potentially transformative changes in relation to collaboration via aid and assistance and norms of non-interference (Little, 1990) are happening quietly spurred by the challenges of SEN practice.

The provision of in-class support via team-teaching by the SETs and their mainstream colleagues represented a more formal approach to collaboration similar to that described in Little's (1990) model as joint work. The application of Little's model revealed that while team-teaching observed the significant physical elements of joint work, specifically that practice was made public by virtue of two or more teachers working together in the classroom, the optimum outcomes were not achieved. Collective responsibility for the lesson among participating teachers was not fully realised. Evaluation of the jointly taught lesson was informal and superficial. There was an absence of critical reflection on relevant issues around curriculum and instruction and their consequences, ascribed mainly to lack of experience and skill in sharing honest feedback with colleagues on how the lesson went. Beneath the veneer of a sophisticated level of collaboration, teaching operated more as an individual than a collective endeavor and norms of non-interference were upheld as far as possible. The application of Little's (1990) analysis of joint work in relation to the Irish primary school special education teachers' collaboration demonstrated that, at this time, in-class support via team-teaching was more a necessary response to an external policy directive than a deliberate decision by the teachers to work in concert to develop professional practice. Echoes of contrived collegiality (Hargreaves, 1994) resounded. Consequently, the change to in-class support via team-teaching was introduced in a very tentative and non-threatening manner by the SETs. In their role as change agents the sharing of their knowledge of team-teaching with their mainstream colleagues was often challenging. While the success of implementing team-teaching and embracing a shift from private to public practice is a very worthy achievement, the application of Little's model revealed that the associated professional learning that has the potential to improve the practice of teaching was not fully achieved.

Contributing further to the discourse on collaboration the study identified the significant variables that influenced the forms of collaboration that the Irish primary school SETs engaged in and explained the tentative expression of their agency. In concurrence with the work of Lortie (1975) and Rosenholtz (1991) this study demonstrated that the lack of critically reflective and inquiry-oriented discussion amongst staff members on the implementation of a more collaborative approach to SEN practice deprived

the SETs and their mainstream colleagues of a strong shared professional knowledge base to guide their practice. Without an agreed plan and shared goals, reliance on the support of friendly, helpful colleagues and creative circumvention tactics shaped the SETs efforts to introduce change and significantly diminished the outcomes of their agency. Measured against James et al.'s (2007) model of collaborative practice, the Irish SETs and their colleagues lacked the consistent application of agreed ways of working and the incorporation of suggested change based on collective and careful consideration of staff members. Instead, informal, fragmented approaches to collaboration resulted that failed to sufficiently interrogate and improve collaborative SEN practice and realise the opportunity for rich professional learning.

Significant responsibility for the lack of a strong guiding professional knowledge base in relation to the development of collaborative SEN practice was ascribed to an unsuitable model of leadership. This study revealed that a traditional hierarchical model of leadership that viewed the principal as the exclusive source of leadership and power in relation to school matters was the dominant model in the special education teachers' schools. Though widespread, it was unsuited to supporting the SETs agency in developing a collaborative approach to SEN practice. While some SETs spoke of principals who were collaborative, in the main, the leadership' behaviours encountered by the SETs as they endeavoured to act as change agents and implement policy compliant collaborative practice strongly mirrored those described by Rosenholtz (1991) as the characteristics of principal in schools with individualistic, isolated cultures. In stark contrast, the study also demonstrates that the leadership behaviour required by the SETs to support the development of collaborative SEN practice strongly concurred with the core literature on distributed leadership (Spillane, 1999; Spillane 2004; Spillane et al. 2005; Harris, 2008). Informal leadership roles that provide teachers with the opportunity to show initiative and take appropriate responsibility (Harris, 2008) would have allowed the SETs to openly discuss collaborative SEN practice with their colleagues and share their knowledge and solve identified problems. Support from principals who understood what the change to collaborative SEN practice required and provided the necessary social and material resources (Spillane, 1999) would have greatly assisted the special education teachers' agency. Spreading the practice of leadership over leaders, followers and the situation (Spillane et al. 2004) would have enabled greater shared responsibility for the development of collaborative SEN practice within the schools, a crucial development that the traditional hierarchical model failed to achieve.

This research made a further original contribution to knowledge in its confirmation of the relevance of Hargreaves' (2001) findings to Irish primary school special education teachers' working relationships. Close friendships were more the exception than the rule. Instead, the SETs demonstrated a strong desire for friendliness with colleagues that significantly impacted on all forms of collaboration that they were involved in. Fear of disrupting friendly working relationships inhibited the professional debate and

disagreement that was required to develop professional knowledge of collaborative SEN practice.

The applicability of Hargreaves (2002) findings in relation to trust and betrayal to the Irish primary school teachers' experience constitutes another original contribution to knowledge. As they attempted to implement a more collaborative approach to SEN practice, the special education teachers encountered instances of contractual, communications and competence betrayal as discussed by Hargreaves (2002). The SETs reaction to betrayal also aligned with Hargreaves' (2002) findings.

In keeping with Hargreaves (2001), this study demonstrated that conflict and disagreement were viewed negatively and as far as possible, avoided by the SETs. Teachers preferred consensus and did not embrace debate of their ideas. Avoidance of conflict impacted the forms of collaboration used and the professional learning they offered. Similarly, the findings from this study corroborate Achinstein's (2002) analysis in relation to collaboration and conflict. The emotional dimension of collaboration comes into focus when teachers are expected to work together. Effective collaboration that builds professional knowledge exposes teachers to a level of peer scrutiny and debate that individual practice protects them from. Collaboration thereby increases the risk of conflict and consequently tends to be avoided by teachers. Achinstein (2002) argues that policy makers need to be much more cognisant of the complexity of the collaborative process and realise that creating situations that require teachers to work together is insufficient to guarantee effective collaboration. Instead, teachers need to be helped to understand conflict and be able to manage it while maintaining a culture of care within their community. While the recent policy advocating a move to more collaborative SEN practice in Irish primary schools (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) failed to follow Achinstein's advice, the views of the SETs in relation to the way forward strongly endorse her argument.

In summary, the use of Little's (1990) framework to analyse Irish primary school special education teachers' collaboration with their colleagues delivered thought-provoking findings that made an original contribution to knowledge. Following publication of a working group report, a policy of SEN provision that requires sophisticated levels of collaboration to work optimally towards achieving the aim of inclusive schools (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) was introduced into Irish primary schools. Implementation largely relied on the agency of the special education teachers due to the confinement of SEN knowledge and experience to them. As demonstrated in this research the SETs showed admirable commitment and creativity in their agency. However, insufficient attention was paid by policymakers to the capacity of the school workplace to support them in implementing change to collaborative SEN practice, especially in-class support via team-teaching. The lack of an agreed professional knowledge base to guide the move to more collaborative SEN practice limited the SETs in their role as change agents. A traditional, hierarchical model of leadership unsuited to building teacher collaboration compounded the SETs difficulty in implementing change.

Consequently, their efforts to develop collaborative SEN practice in their schools were tentative, informal and highly influenced by issues of personality and professional working relationships. Despite their valiant attempts what resulted was an informal, fragmented approach to collaboration that provided instances of good collaboration but failed to provide optimal professional learning and consistency of collaborative SEN practice shared by all members of staff.

The research demonstrated that a distributed model of leadership (Spillane, 2005; Harris, 2008) with appropriately supported informal leadership roles was better suited to the development of a more collaborative approach to SEN practice in Irish primary schools. Greater awareness of and support for the interaction between the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration and teachers' professional working relationships was required. Acknowledging the complexity involved in working collaboratively and supporting teachers in understanding the very human issues of trust, betrayal and conflict and the benefits of engaging in constructive professional debate on issues of practice without damaging professional relationships needed urgent attention.

8.7. Concluding comments

Having established the study's original contribution to knowledge this final section explores the practical implications of the research, specifically how the main themes from the research can inform the development of collaborative SEN practice in Irish primary schools. Collaborative SEN teaching to create inclusive schools will not happen merely by the introduction of a policy and the physical act of having the SEN teacher working in the classroom with the mainstream teacher. Developing collaborative SEN practice requires significant change in how teachers teach and in how schools are organised and led. Though a complex and demanding shift from traditional individual professional practice, there is strong evidence of a willingness to embrace collaborative SEN practice from the special education teachers who participated in the study.

The special education teachers' awareness of and support for collaboration was clearly evident in the courageous agency they demonstrated. The development of a parallel communication system to discuss aspects of SEN practice with colleagues, the acknowledgement of colleagues with specific expertise, their generosity in giving advice to colleagues and their sensitivity, professionalism and, at times, bravery in giving unsolicited advice to colleagues in the interests of the children with SEN evince their professional commitment and initiative. Their courage in moving from the safety of private practice in the learning support room to teaching in classrooms with their mainstream colleagues was impressive. Their efforts to improve in-class support in the absence of an established system of joint evaluation, critique and reflection and the value they placed on discussion, spoke to a developing sense of collective responsibility.

The informal practices of the special education teachers provide valuable information on how more effective structures and practices could be developed and sustained at school level. However, harvesting information from the informal practices of teachers and learning from them requires informed, empowering leadership, professional development in the necessary social and relational skills and support for school-based teacher professional learning through ongoing collaborative inquiry and reflection.

A collaborative leadership style, confident in modelling and supporting collaborative behaviours and aware of and sensitive to their affective underpinnings, is essential in this regard (Slater, 2005). Traditional, hierarchical models of leadership that worked with individual private teaching practice cannot be expected to automatically transition to leadership that develops a collaborative, reflective, team-focused approach. A distributed view of leadership that focuses on leadership practice as “a product of the interactions of school leaders, followers and their situation” is urgently required (Spillane, 2005, p.144). Specific, ongoing professional development and support for principals in relation to the practice of leadership is vital if the aspirational statements contained in the quality framework for Irish primary schools (DES, 2016a) in relation to the continuous improvement in practice via teacher collaboration and professional development is to be realised. Optimistic statements regarding the development of self-awareness through personal and collaborative reflection, the creation and motivation of staff teams and working groups to lead development in key areas and a collaborative, flexible and sensitive approach to the management of change (DES, 2016, p 27, 28) will not transform leadership practice in schools. Without the necessary assistance, such rhetoric is confusing and unfair to both leaders and teachers and serves only to confuse and disappoint.

Given the current policy drive towards collaborative SEN practice, the fact that the menu of courses available does not reflect the needs expressed by the special education teachers in this study is worrying and prompts questions about the nature of CPD provision. Given the importance of social resources in assisting teachers to implement change in their teaching (Spillane, 1999) the lack of focus on support for the development of teachers' interpersonal skills that enable them to collaborate more effectively with colleagues, merits urgent attention. Understanding the emotional dimension of effective collaboration and the complex issues of professional respect and trust combined with team-building, conflict management and problem-solving skills are fundamental to the introduction, development and sustenance of collaborative SEN practice in Irish primary schools. Teachers and principals need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills to engage in professional conversations, discuss aspects of practice, give opinions without peril and manage any challenging issues that may emerge. Without such knowledge and skills, the vital tasks of planning, evaluation, reflection and critique central to developing professional knowledge of collaborative SEN practice throughout the school is diminished. The need for a more

flexible and responsive policy of Continuous Professional Development that assists teachers and principals in acquiring the specific support they need at a particular time and in a way that works best for them is indicated. Consideration of a funding model that supports greater choice and independence for schools in this regard is merited.

Providing CPD in the foundational interpersonal skills and social resources (Spillane, 1999) though vital for the development of collaborative SEN practice is insufficient. As the special education teachers pointed out, the school workplace has to provide teachers with the opportunity to use these skills, most especially in discussion on aspects of SEN practice with colleagues and in the ability to give and receive feedback on team-taught lessons, as part of a process of ongoing improvement. If the current policy of providing a collaborative approach to SEN practice in Irish primary schools is to flourish and the associated benefits of developing teachers' professional knowledge of SEN practice is to accrue, a strong focus on school-based teacher learning that assists leaders and staff in establishing the structures, knowledge and skills to incorporate inquiry and reflection into their regular practice, is required.

In keeping with a knowledge in practice conception of learning (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999) principals and teachers urgently need to be supported in using and developing their skills and knowledge to examine and reflect on aspects of collaborative SEN provision, within their classrooms and schools with a view to generating knowledge that is contextually relevant and improves SEN practice. Inquiry into how the delivery of in-class support via team teaching can be developed would prove fertile ground at present. Issues around joint planning and evaluation of and the giving and receiving of feedback on co-taught lessons would be a worthy focus as would the optimisation of teacher learning from observation of colleagues teaching. The understanding of professional working relationships, issues of trust and professional respect, and learning how to work with necessary disagreement and resolve conflict when it arises would equally merit attention and have the potential to deliver substantial benefits for the practice of SEN teaching. Effective facilitation of such school-based collaborative teacher learning holds the key to its success. University consultants and other relevant external experts with appropriate credibility can bring a necessary range of different perspectives, skills and knowledge to the inquiry and reflection process. They can provide support and a framework for inquiry and reflection that is not internally available. Crucially, their external status could also dilute the intensity of practice issues and emotions that may arise. Associated critical examination of relevant research further assists in bridging the knowledge-practice divide and can provide enabling knowledge that supports the teachers' use of applied strategies and approaches (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999).

Regular ongoing support until the inquiry and reflection process becomes self-sustaining is vital. Such an approach constitutes an alternative to the current predominantly one shot (Conway et al., 2009) model of CPD

provision. Associated planning and implementation requirements and costs pose a challenge that CPD policy needs to engage with particularly in light of the laudable inclusion of school-based learning in the Cosán framework (Teaching Council, 2016). Without effective support, school-based teacher learning through inquiry and reflection will remain an aspiration locked in print. The longer-term benefits to the education system of schools functioning as well-developed sites for teacher learning provides a worthy rationale for action. Developing school-based teacher learning can ultimately lead to teacher engagement with the construction of professional knowledge (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999) and confer on teachers, greater professional competence and confidence thereby increasing the capacity of schools to positively inform, interpret and manage ongoing change.

In the shorter term, an appropriately guided and supported approach to school-based teacher learning, as outlined above, has the potential to create a learning environment consonant with Spillane's (1999) characteristics of an effective zone of enactment. Such an environment would support the positive agency demonstrated by the special education teachers in this study. Instead of trying to find friendly colleagues with whom to collaborate, they would have access to colleagues who were also implementing a collaborative approach to SEN teaching as part of the school's implementation plan. A school focus on understanding collaboration and, in particular, their efforts at developing a collaborative approach to SEN teaching would enable the special education teachers to share their knowledge and skills with colleagues. The ready availability of the necessary resources to facilitate the implementation process would reduce unnecessary workload.

Schools would also be better equipped to support the SEN teachers in their role as agents of change and allow learning to follow from the bring-back model of CPD (Sugrue, 2002) and from individual teacher's knowledge, experience and expertise. Crucially, an appropriately supported approach to school-based teacher learning would encourage teachers to harness their professional energy and take appropriate collective responsibility for and ownership of the development of collaborative SEN teaching in their schools. Empowered and informed, the proactive agency of the special education teachers in developing a collaborative approach to SEN teaching could replace their current frustrated and fettered response to an externally imposed change.

Reflecting on the special education teachers' endeavours to implement a collaborative approach to SEN provision in their schools from an ecological view of agency (Biesta and Tedder, 2007), they demonstrated individual reflexivity and creativity in the face of significant environmental constraints. They showed courage in working with possibilities and sensitively countering the barriers and limitations presented by their social and material environment (Priestley et al., 2012). In their agency the special education teachers demonstrated high levels of professional commitment to the development of collaborative SEN practice and a lot of genuine endeavour.

However, very significant disablers within their zones of enactment (Spillane, 1999) produced diluted outcomes, not commensurate with the special education teachers' efforts or the possibilities offered by the introduction of a collaborative approach to SEN provision. An insufficiently supportive school organisational environment posed many challenges, most notably: the lack of appropriate structures, skills and knowledge to engage in searching discussion on aspects of practice with colleagues; the uneasy relationship between individual autonomous practice and collaborative SEN practice; leadership that lacked the knowledge and skills necessary to develop teacher collaboration; and the challenging interaction between teachers' professional working relationships and the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration.

However, facing the challenges from a position of relative powerlessness, the special education teachers demonstrated sensitive and courageous agency. Their efforts to develop a collaborative approach to SEN teaching delivered very interesting insights into the process and provided concrete recommendations for the future. What emerged strongly from the special education teachers' experience was the very significant change to traditional teaching practice that the introduction of a policy of collaborative SEN practice constitutes and its potential to transform teaching in Irish primary schools. More powerful still was the revelation that the change to collaborative SEN practice is ultimately a very human journey. It requires a coherent system of support reflective of the essential emotional and relational dimension of the process.

The traditional individual approach to teaching, that values peaceful and harmonious working relationships, promotes fearful and tentative interaction amongst teachers, is risk averse and limits the collaborative development of professional knowledge of SEN teaching (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Teachers can become weakened professionally and the resultant delivery of a fragmented response to external demands fails the system, the schools the teachers and the students.

In contrast, developing a collaborative approach to SEN provision in Irish primary schools requires a kinder, more enabling professional working relationship between teachers that nurtures their professional development and supports them through the challenges of ongoing change. Central to establishing collaborative SEN teaching in Irish primary schools are leaders with the necessary organisational and social knowledge and skills to understand, model and support effective collaboration.

A professional working environment is needed where teachers' individual expertise and initiative are affirmed and where collective responsibility and collective autonomy can develop as an alternative to private individual practice (Hargreaves, 2001; Clement and Vandenburghe, 2000). The success of effective collaborative SEN practice requires ongoing school-based inquiry and reflection that supports teachers' professional learning and affirms their professionalism. The cultivation of strong professional relationships that can

withstand the necessary interrogation of practice that inquiry demands, and that embody the complex and very human issues of trust, respect and conflict is vital. To this end, teachers and leaders need to understand the importance of mutual dependence and be supported in cultivating positive reliance on colleagues (Sennett, 1999, p.140-142).

The implications of this research for practice are immediate. Without the aforementioned changes in the way teachers work and in the way that schools are organized and led, the current move to inclusive education for all and the associated vision for future professional practice in relation to special educational needs (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b; UNCRPD, 2016) cannot be fully achieved. The very fundamental changes to curriculum, assessment and classroom pedagogy that inclusion entails as detailed in General Comment No. 4 (UNCRPD, 2016) and evident in current SEN policy (DES, 2017a; DES, 2017b) demand that teachers see teaching as a collective team activity in their schools and not the preserve of each individual teacher. Understanding teaching as the collective and primary task of the school creates the conditions necessary for the assimilation of new knowledge and new teaching approaches that inclusion requires, the continuous evaluation of their implementation and the incorporation of consequent changes. It enables team-teaching and encourages teachers to work effectively as members of multi-disciplinary teams in order to provide an inclusive education for students with the most complex needs. A collective approach to teaching also supports the development of an inclusive school culture that provides peer support for teachers as they adjust to changes in professional practice (UNCRPD, 2016).

Implementing the changes needed to achieve a collaborative and collective approach to teaching requires a significant review of teacher education programmes at initial and in-service levels. Importantly, moving to an understanding of teaching as the collective activity of all the teachers in a school requires that initial and in-service teacher education programmes work in tandem as candidate teachers spend a considerable amount of time in schools while engaging in the practicum element of their course work. CPD and initial teacher education programmes need to equip teachers and student teachers with the skills of collaboration. They need to have the knowledge, skills and opportunity to discuss aspects of practice with colleagues, to engage in team-teaching and provide constructive feedback that improves subsequent lessons, to understand conflict and use effective problem-solving and conflict management strategies. They need to understand models of leadership particularly distributed leadership and the function of informal leadership roles. Since leadership impacts on the working lives of all teachers, it is important that knowledge of leadership is not limited to existing and aspirant principals. Crucially, initial teacher education and continuing professional development programmes need to develop teachers' and student teachers' understanding of the school as a workplace and provide guidance on how to build and sustain healthy professional working relationships with colleagues.

In similar vein, this study demonstrates that further research that explores teachers' lived experience of collaboration is urgently required in order to effectively empower teachers to engage in collaborative professional practice that is vital to the implementation of current policy on inclusive education for students with special educational needs (DES, 2017a). The paucity of current research on the interaction between teachers' professional working relationships and the emotional and relational dimension of collaboration needs immediate attention. A fair and balanced approach to research on leadership that investigates current leadership practice from the perspectives of principals and teachers is also timely. In particular, the suitability of various models of leadership for the development of collaborative professional practice that delivers inclusive education for all students, irrespective of the genesis or complexity of their needs, merits scrutiny.

For now, the current policy guiding SEN provision in Irish primary schools (DES, 2017) is benign in its aim to deliver a truly inclusive education to students with SEN and progressive in its focus on collaborative SEN practice. The benefits of a collaborative approach to SEN teaching in Irish primary schools are many but the change is demanding at both personal and professional levels. The cost is magnified when the necessary support particularly in relation to CPD is not present. On a positive note, Cosan (Teaching Council, 2016) recognises school-based professional learning. Also, the quality framework for primary schools (DES, 2016) reflects the special education teachers' views on the importance of school based professional development and teacher collaboration in its statements on highly effective practice for both principals and teachers. However, there remains a worrying gap between the statements and the detail of how teachers and leaders will be supported in achieving them.

A velvet revolution is merited. However, given the current quiescent and delicate nature of teachers' professional working relationships and the lack of sufficient, appropriate support, the immediacy and unity of any form of revolt is unlikely. The hope is that the special education teachers' current attempt at a velvet transformation fuelled by courageous, sensitive agency and born of a belief in the need for collaborative SEN practice will eventually receive the support it deserves and prevail. Time will tell.

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Appendix 1

Individual Interview Schedule

This study seeks to understand the collaboration that exists between Special Educational Needs (SEN) teachers and between SEN teachers and their mainstream colleagues. The impact of the collaboration on SEN teachers' learning in relation to SEN practice will be explored. The influence of schools' organisational factors and teachers' professional relationships on teacher collaboration will be examined.

Introduction

In this interview I would like to discuss the collaboration you are engaged in with your SEN colleagues and with your mainstream colleagues. I would also like to talk about the impact of the collaboration on your teacher learning in relation to SEN practice. I would like to hear your thoughts on how schools' organizational factors and teachers' professional relationships influence teacher collaboration. Finally, I would like you to share your views on how collaboration can be supported in schools.

By **SEN practice** I mean knowledge that helps you to teach students with SEN more effectively and more inclusively, knowledge that helps you to better meet their learning needs and help them achieve better learning outcomes.

By **collaboration** I mean discussing aspects of SEN practice with colleagues, teaching together and experimenting with aspects of practice with a view to improving SEN practice in the school.

SECTION 1 (*general information*)

- What type of Special Educational Needs (SEN) post do you hold?... (Learning Support, Resource, Other)
- Do you teach the full range of children with SEN (high and low incidence needs) or high incidence only or low incidence only?
- Is support for students with SEN provided on a predominantly withdrawal or in class basis?
- Do you teach students (a) individually, (b) in small groups (c) via in-class support?
- Do you envisage changes in your work as a result of the new model currently being introduced? Can you elaborate?
- How many years are you working in SEN teaching?
- To date, where have you received your knowledge of how to teach students with SEN from?

SECTION 2 (*Nature of the collaboration taking place and its impact on professional development*)

Collaboration with SEN and mainstream colleagues

- Can you describe the forms of collaboration you engage in with your SEN colleagues?
Can you describe how this happens... when/where?... or, can you give me an example?

Sharing stories from practice

- Do you and your **SEN colleagues** tell each other stories about what happens in your classrooms?

If yes, can you describe how this happens...when/where? ... or, can you give an example, if possible?

Does this form of collaboration develop your work as an SEN teacher? **If yes**, how? **If no**, why not?

Or

- **If no**, can you tell me why this doesn't happen?

- Do you and your **mainstream colleagues** tell each other stories about what happens in your classrooms?

If yes, can you describe how this happens...when/where? ...or, can you give an example, if possible?

Does this form of collaboration develop your work as a SEN teacher? If yes, how? If no, why not?

Or

If no, can you tell me why this doesn't happen?

- Do you think sharing stories about your work it is an effective form of professional development?

Aid and assistance

- Do you and your **SEN colleagues** ask each other for advice on aspects of SEN practice?

If yes, Can you describe how this happens... when/where? ... or, can you give an example, if possible?

Does this form of collaboration develop your work as an SEN teacher? If yes, how? If no, why not?

Or

If no, can you tell me why this doesn't happen?

- Do you and your **mainstream colleagues** ask each other for advice on aspects of SEN practice?

If yes, can you describe how this happens...when/where? ... or can you give an example, if possible?

Does this form of collaboration develop your work as an SEN teacher? If yes, how? If no, why not?

Or

If no, can you tell me why this doesn't happen?

- Is it professionally acceptable for teachers to offer assistance/advice to their colleagues without being asked? If not, why not?
- Do you think that the process of asking for and receiving advice from colleagues is an effective form of professional development?

Sharing

- Do you and your **SEN colleagues** share ideas, teaching strategies and resources with each other?

If yes, can you describe how this happens...when/where? ...or can you give an example, if possible?

Does this form of collaboration develop your work as an SEN teacher? If yes, how? If no, why not?

Or

If no, can you tell me why this doesn't happen?

- Do you and your **mainstream colleagues** share ideas, teaching strategies and resources with each other?

If yes, can you describe how this happens...when/where? ...or, can you give an example, if possible?

Does this form of collaboration develop your work as an SEN teacher? If yes, how? If no, why not?

Or

If no, can you tell me why this doesn't happen?

- Do you think that sharing is an effective form of professional development?

IEP

- Do you and your **SEN colleagues** collaborate on IEP Planning and ongoing assessment of progress in relation to student target achievement?

If yes, can you describe how this happens...when/where? ... or, can you give an example, if possible?

Does this form of collaboration develop your work as an SEN teacher? If yes, how? If no, why not?

Or

If no, can you tell me why this doesn't happen?

- Do you and your **mainstream colleagues** collaborate on IEP planning and assessment of progress in relation to student target achievement with you?

If yes, can you describe how this happens...when/where? ... or, can you give an example, if possible?

Does this form of collaboration develop your work as a SEN teacher? If yes, how? If no, why not?

Or

If no, can you tell me why this doesn't happen?

In-class support (joint work)

- Do you provide in-class support for students with SEN?
- Can you describe the type of in-class support you were/are involved in?
(Prompts if required: small group teaching, joint teaching of the whole class/team-teaching, providing support for students with SEN only)
- Does participating in in-class support develop your work as an SEN teacher?
If yes, can you give an example?
- What is it about in-class work that helps teachers to develop their teaching?
Or
If no, can you tell me why it doesn't?

- Does participating in in-class support develop your knowledge of how to **more fully include** students with SEN in their classrooms?
If yes, can you elaborate or give an example?
Or
If no, can you tell me why it doesn't?
- In lessons where in-class support is provided, do all the teachers involved plan the lesson together?
If yes, can you describe how the planning takes place?
Or
If no, why not?
- Is there shared responsibility for the lesson among all the teachers involved?
- Do all the teachers involved evaluate the lesson together afterwards?
- What aspects of the lesson are evaluated?
(Prompts if required: Is there evaluation of planning, suitability of materials, differentiation, quality of teaching, student learning outcomes, assessment)
- Are there particular aspects of the lesson that are not evaluated?
If yes, why are these aspects not evaluated?
- Do you have the opportunity to give honest, constructively critical feedback on how the lesson went?
If yes, can you elaborate or give an example?
- Does giving honest, constructively critical feedback to your colleagues help you to reflect on your work as a SEN teacher? How does that happen?
Or
If no, what is it that prevents you?
- Do you receive honest, constructively critical feedback on how aspects of lesson you were responsible for worked, from your colleagues?
If yes, can you give an example?
- Does receiving honest, constructively critical feedback from your colleagues develop your work as a SEN teacher?
If yes, how can you give an example? **If no**, why not?
Or
If no, why do you think this doesn't happen?

- Do you have the opportunity to make suggestions to improve subsequent lessons? If yes, can you give me an example? Does this develop your work as a SEN teacher? In what way? If no, why not?
- Have you benefitted from the suggestions of other colleagues? If yes, can you give an example? Did this develop your work as a SEN teacher? If yes, in what way? If no, why not?
- If colleagues have different opinions on how to improve the lesson how is that managed?
- How are decisions on improving subsequent lessons made?
- Do you think that giving and receiving feedback on aspects of practice among colleagues is an effective form of professional development? Can you elaborate...?
- Do you think that observing colleagues teaching is an effective form of professional development? Can you elaborate...give an example?
- What are the barriers to teaching in front of colleagues?

SECTION 3 (*Organisational factors that influence collaboration*)

Whole-school focus

- Does your school provide you with the opportunity to share knowledge from the postgraduate diploma in SEN course or from other sources in relation to SEN practice with SEN colleagues?
If yes, how did this happen...can you give an example?
- How did this impact on your teacher learning/professional development?
- Did it impact on SEN practice throughout the school? If yes, how? If no, why not?
Or
If no, why not?
- Does your school provide opportunities for you and your **SEN colleagues** to experiment with different teaching strategies to better meet the needs of students with SEN?
If yes, can you give an example?
- How did this impact on your professional development?
- Did it impact on SEN practice throughout the school? **If yes**, how? If no, why not?
Or
If no, why not?
- Does your school provide you with the opportunity to share knowledge from the postgraduate diploma in SEN course or other source/s with **classroom colleagues**?
If yes, can you give an example?
- How did this impact on your professional development?
- Did it impact on SEN practice throughout the school? If yes, how? If no, why not?
Or
If no, why not?
- Does your school provide opportunities for you and your classroom colleagues to experiment with different teaching strategies that would better meet the needs of students with SEN in their classrooms?
If yes, can you give an example?

- How did this impact on your professional development?
- Did it impact on SEN teaching throughout the school? If yes, how?
Or
If no, why not?
- What school organisational factors support you in collaborating with your SEN colleagues?
- What school organisational factors hinder you/prevent you from collaborating with your SEN colleagues?
- What school organisational factors support you in collaborating with your mainstream colleagues?
- What school organisational factors hinder you/prevent you from collaborating with your mainstream colleagues?

Additional questions, if necessary

- Do you think any or all of the following have an impact on school-based teacher collaboration?
- The way the timetable is organised? Can you elaborate on that please?
- Designated time for joint planning, evaluation and discussion? Can you elaborate on that please?
- The system for rotating classes and SEN posts among teachers? Can you elaborate on that please?
- A fear of changing the way things are done? Can you elaborate on that please?
- Is there time allocated for whole staff discussion on how SEN practice throughout the school can be (a) improved? (b) can be more inclusive?
- Is there time allocated for whole staff discussion on how whole-school approaches to teaching students with SEN can be developed?
- Is the development of teachers' knowledge of SEN practice through collaboration with colleagues valued in your school?

- How is teaching understood in your school? Is it seen as each teacher's individual, autonomous practice or is there a collective, collaborative team approach to teaching in the school?
- How does the understanding of teaching that you have described influence the development of SEN practice in the school through teacher collaboration?
- Given the current focus on developing CPD for school leaders, what do you think are the skills leaders need in order to support teacher collaboration that develops professional knowledge of SEN teaching throughout the school?
- Do teachers (SEN and mainstream) actively seek opportunities to develop their SEN teaching through collaboration and experimentation with colleagues?
- Is the SEN department /team seen as a separate unit within the school?
- Do SEN and mainstream teachers work in partnership or separately in relation to teaching students with SEN? Can you elaborate please?
- Do SEN teachers work together as a team or separately as individual teachers?

SECTION 4 (*impact of teachers' professional relationships on collaboration*)

- Does the type of professional working relationship that exists between teachers in your school have an impact on collaboration? Can you elaborate... or give an example?
- Is teacher self-confidence an issue in relation to collaborating with colleagues? Can you elaborate...or give an example?
- Is teacher competence an issue in relation to collaborating with colleagues? Can you elaborate... or give an example?
- Is there a trust issue in relation to collaborating with colleagues? Can you elaborate...or give an example?
- What would cause you to feel betrayed (let down/disappointed) by a colleague you were collaborating with?
- In such a situation, what would you do?
- Is it acceptable to discuss aspects of SEN practice in a constructively critical manner with a view to continuously improving practice with colleagues at whole school level?
- Is this type of discussion a regular feature of professional practice in your school? If yes, how is it organized?
- Does a fear of damaging relationships constrain or prevent open honest discussion of the challenges and problems in relation to SEN practice with colleagues? Can you elaborate on this...give an example?
- Is it professionally acceptable to openly disagree with colleagues on matters of SEN practice or express a contrary opinion? Can you elaborate on this...give an example?
- Is fear of conflict a disincentive to honest conversations about SEN practice among colleagues? Can you elaborate on this...give an example?
- If conflict occurs during collaboration and discussion how is it managed? Can you elaborate on this...give an example?
- Does ongoing teacher involvement in the School Self Evaluation (SSE) process help to develop teacher confidence in discussing and critiquing aspects of SEN practice with colleagues? If yes, how? If no, why not?

- Is teachers' prior experience of collaborating a factor in the effective development of teacher learning through collaboration and experimentation?
- What skills are required to collaborate effectively with colleagues in a way that develops teachers' knowledge of SEN practice?
- Did your initial teacher training equip you with these skills?
- Is CPD in these skills available to you?

SECTION 5 *(how collaboration that develops the professional practice of SEN teachers can be developed)*

The new model of SEN provision that is currently being introduced requires schools to utilize the additional teaching supports allocated in line with the schools educational profile ' to support the meaningful education and inclusion of students with SEN' and to deploy and effectively manage the additional teaching supports allocated in line with the assessed learning needs of students with SEN (NCSE, 2014, p.5).

- How prepared are teachers and principals for the level of collaboration and decision making that this new responsibility and flexibility will require?
- What needs to be done at an organizational level to further develop schools as sites for teacher professional development through collaboration?
- What needs to be done to support teachers to collaborate more effectively with colleagues?

Thank you.

Appendix 2

Focus Group Schedule: Section 1.

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Theme: The nature of collaboration that SEN teachers are involved in (mapped onto Little's model: storytelling, aid and assistance, sharing and joint work) and its ability to develop their professional knowledge of SEN practice in schools.

Storytelling (*sharing stories from practice*) between SEN teachers

The informal sharing of stories from practice between SEN teachers occurs regularly and is an effective form of professional development. The informal sharing stories takes place on corridors, at lunch breaks etc. While invaluable to teachers it could be seen as a waste of teaching time by principals.

- Story sharing breaks the isolation, it reduces fear of collaboration and builds camaraderie
- Where SEN teachers in a school taught the same children the opportunity to share stories from practice was maximised. Practice of SEN teachers working only with specific classes to minimize disruption limited storytelling amongst SEN teachers
- Where SEN teachers taught only literacy or numeracy, expertise was developed but it limited sharing stories from practice and could fragment the SEN team
- Respect for child was paramount in the stories shared
- Through informal story telling SEN teachers can get advice from an SEN colleague who had previously taught the child
- Hearing a story about a child might affirm their views about the child and the approach they were using
- In other more general storytelling SEN teachers might talk about a strategy they used that worked well or they might seek reassurance about something they were doing
- Hearing a story from another SEN teacher's practice may prompt reflection and cause you to check your own knowledge and skills.
- Inability to answer a question posed by a colleague in the story exchange could prompt action to find the answer.

Storytelling (*sharing stories from practice*) between SEN and mainstream teachers

SEN teachers believed that the sharing of stories between SEN and mainstream colleagues was an effective form of professional development that developed their work as SEN teachers. Sharing stories generally occurred while on yard duty with a classroom colleague and when picking up and dropping off SEN students. Sharing of stories was dependent on good relationships with the classroom teacher. Working in-class with a small number of mainstream teachers could increase the opportunity for sharing stories from practice.

- SEN teachers can become detached from the classroom context. Knowing what the child has difficulty with, in class can inform the SEN teachers work and give a bigger picture of the child
- Hearing the difficulty class teachers may have with differentiation and group work also develops the SEN teacher's knowledge of what SEN practice requires

Storytelling

Questions

- What are your thoughts on the findings?
- What is it about informal storytelling around practice that makes it a valued, common practice
(a) amongst SEN teachers? (b) between SEN and mainstream teachers?
- Is it limitations as a form of professional development?
- Is its importance as a form of professional development sufficiently recognised
(a) in schools? (b) in the education system?

Aid and Assistance between SEN teachers

Seeking and receiving aid and assistance was seen as an effective form of professional development. All SEN teachers had experience of asking for and being asked for advice within the SEN team and of giving and receiving assistance. Seeking and giving advice was considered important in developing the work of the SEN teacher because the vast range of learning needs required the different talents and areas of expertise of all members of the SEN team.

- Asking for and receiving aid and assistance was generally informal in nature. However, in a small number of schools with established SEN teams, individual SEN teachers were actively up-skilled in specific areas of SEN practice with a view to aiding colleagues.
- Asking for and receiving aid and assistance was hugely dependent on the personalities of the teachers and their professional working relationship.
- Availability of and access to knowledge amongst colleagues was another factor.
- Fear of being seen as not knowing was a disincentive.

Aid and assistance between SEN teachers and their mainstream colleagues

- Generally mainstream teachers, especially those without SEN experience, ask SEN teachers for advice. SEN teachers are seen as the experts. Sometimes SEN teacher will go in and model a strategy or intervention for the mainstream teacher.
- SEN teachers tend to ask mainstream teachers for information about the SEN child within the class context more than advice on practice (i.e. how well student is able to access the class curriculum and engage with peers and classwork).
- Where a student has very complex needs the mainstream teacher and SEN teacher tend to collaborate more and give each other more aid and assistance in meeting the child's needs.
- Giving advice to mainstream colleagues and answering their questions helps clarify the information for the SEN teacher.

Unsolicited Advice

- Teachers do not generally offer advice to colleagues unless they are asked for it. All teachers are equal, and teachers don't want to be critical of colleagues.
- If advice was necessary for the good of children with SEN, a teacher would have to be very sensitive and try to get around it in a nice way

Aid and Assistance

Questions

- What are your thoughts on the findings?
- Do norms of egalitarianism (professional equality, we're all primary teachers) and professional autonomy limit your opportunity to develop your professional knowledge of SEN practice in school?
- Do norms of egalitarianism and professional autonomy limit the opportunity to develop knowledge of SEN practice throughout the school?
- What are the benefits of egalitarianism and professional autonomy?
- What are your thoughts on offering unsolicited advice to a colleague?

Sharing between SEN teachers

Sharing was seen as an effective form of professional development for SEN teachers.

- Sharing was at the discretion of the individual teacher. Not all staff members were willing to share
- Sharing was more about sharing resources and information and less about discussing how and why teachers were using certain teaching practices and approaches
- Sharing teaching strategies was seen as more problematic and less common
- Some schools had shared storage areas and systems for sharing information throughout the school

Sharing between SEN teachers and Classroom Teachers

The sharing of resources was most often, initiated by SEN teachers. In class support aids the sharing of information and resources between SEN and mainstream teachers. Observation was seen as an indirect form of sharing. Information relating to SEN was shared at staff meetings sometimes.

- Incidental, unintended sharing occurred by virtue of working in same building – teachers can hear and see what their colleagues are doing
- Involvement of both mainstream teachers and SEN teachers increased the pool of expertise as both have different perspectives
- The limited availability of whole staff CPD makes in school conversations and sharing hugely important

Sharing

Questions

- What are your thoughts on the findings?
- What are your thoughts on sharing as a form of collaboration?
- What are the limitations to sharing as a form of professional development in relation to SEN practice
(a) for the individual SEN teacher (b) throughout the school?
- Does sharing receive sufficient recognition as a means of developing professional knowledge of SEN practice in schools?

4) Joint Work (teachers teaching together i.e. in-class support via team teaching)

All SEN teachers were involved in some form/s of joint work and considered it a very effective form of professional development in SEN practice.

- Interventions of specific duration to improve literacy and numeracy were frequently used and delivered via station teaching
- The use of leveled readers was also used with teachers teaching smaller groups within the classroom or taking groups in different rooms simultaneously. In some cases, the group stayed with the same teacher, in other cases the groups rotated.
- Less commonly, interventions based on best practice and reliant on teachers' creativity and experimentation were developed and used. In these instances, either station teaching, small group teaching or team teaching using the one teach one assist model, was used
- Delivering in-class support could involve one class teacher and one SEN teacher working together as in team-teaching for the academic year or up to three SEN teachers working with the class teacher in the classroom on a particular programme using station teaching for a specified duration (generally a few weeks)
- Station and small group teaching was much more commonly used than team-teaching

Professional Development from joint teaching (in-class support)

- All SEN teachers agreed that participating in in-class support developed their work as SEN teachers. It made them more aware of how the child works and interacts in the classroom. They learned from observing colleagues and having to think harder about their own teaching
- It helped them develop more inclusive approaches to SEN provision. Through joint teaching a range of methodologies involving small group work and oral language work could be used in classrooms. Mixed ability groups provided really good peer models for students with SEN
- In team-teaching, both teachers can discuss the same experience- this gives a much better picture of the child and produces richer discussion and solutions

Joint Planning

- The level of joint planning depended greatly on the type of in-class support being provided and the teachers' understanding of what effective in-class support entailed

- Team-teaching required significant planning by both SEN and mainstream teacher but other forms tended to be planned by the SEN teacher or by each teacher individually as in a station teaching situation
- SEN teachers generally planned the in-class support lessons with varied help from class teachers. Responsibility for the lesson mainly rested with the SEN teacher. The onus was on the SEN teacher to ensure all the resources for the lesson were in place and that it ran smoothly

Joint Evaluation

- Evaluation was an area that the SEN teachers felt could be improved. Its form and frequency varied from formal and regular to informal and irregular. It depended on the type of intervention used, the relationship between the teachers involved and the presence or absence of formal evaluation meetings. More commonly, evaluation of the joint lesson was informal in nature and superficial in content 'that went well'
- Student learning outcomes and suitability of materials were areas that would be commented on
- Planning and teaching were not generally evaluated. While reference might be made to the unsuccessful nature of the lesson 'that didn't go great' or 'that child didn't get it' no reference would be made to the teaching and instead the solution was to try something different
- Team-teaching allowed for more in-depth evaluation of the joint lesson between the SEN and class teacher involved than station teaching.

Giving and Receiving Feedback on joint lesson

- Teachers were afraid to give feedback to colleagues in case offense would be taken and the future relationship would be damaged. Schools were considered to be very political in nature and this militated against the giving and receiving of honest, constructively critical feedback
- For some, a very good relationship with a colleague allowed for the sharing of honest feedback but this was the exception
- Also, a fear that your feedback might reveal that you didn't know or understand something was a barrier
- Training in developing the necessary interpersonal skills and in the language of giving constructive feedback was required

Making Suggestions to improve Joint lessons

- Making suggestions to improve joint lessons was easier because it was not personal. Suggestions were more general in nature often referring to issues of timing, amount of material to be covered and resources. They happened informally just before the lesson commenced or at the end. Flexibility dominated and the response was generally to 'give it a go'

Potential of giving and receiving feedback developing professional knowledge of SEN

- Though their experience of giving and receiving feedback was limited SEN teachers saw it as a potentially effective form of professional development but difficult to achieve and would require considerable change in professional practice and intensive skills training
- Done properly giving and receiving feedback could nudge thinking and make teachers more aware of their own practice
- Breaking the link between giving feedback and criticising a colleague was paramount
- May be more acceptable if seen as benefitting the children by helping to meet the diverse range of learning needs in schools

Observing colleagues as a form of developing professional knowledge of SEN practice

- All teachers considered the observation of a colleague teaching to be an effective form of professional development that had the potential to improve practice
- Teachers could benefit from observing a different style of teaching and noting differences in how colleagues managed discipline
- Noticing how other teachers moved around the classroom and used their voices all provided learning for the SEN teachers
- The active nature of the learning was important-doing and learning from doing was much better than attending a course
- Mutual respect and trust were required if observation was to work fully
- Team-teaching was seen to provide better professional development opportunities because of the sharing of the teaching and the potential this carried for breaking down barriers
- Station teacher in contrast could limit professional development through observation as each individual teacher was engrossed in their own station

Barriers to teaching in front of colleagues

- Teachers are not accustomed to teaching in front of colleagues and they are not comfortable with it
- Teachers can feel intimidated and self-conscious, lack confidence and doubt their competence
- Teachers can feel that they are being watched and judged
- Teachers fear that their weaknesses will be revealed and worry about what their colleagues will think of them

- Teachers fear that colleagues will talk negatively about their teaching behind their backs
- Teachers fear relinquishing the safety of their own classrooms where their pride is intact
- Personalities and relationships of the teachers is again to the fore. If teachers don't get on well together it can be difficult to team teach.
- Also, if teaching styles and approaches to classroom management are totally different it makes it difficult to co-teach a class. Having different expectations of the children both academically and behaviourally can also pose a barrier. Mainstream and SEN teachers have different frames of reference which can both enrich and impede teaching in front of colleagues
- Lack of respect and trust between the teachers is a significant barrier
- The context of the DES inspector at the back of the room is a further disincentive. Prior negative experience of being observed as a student teacher and receiving very poorly delivered critical feedback

Joint Work

Questions

- What are your thoughts on the findings?
- Is the outlined informal approach to evaluation sufficient to help SEN teachers develop their knowledge of SEN practice (b) to develop good SEN teaching and learning throughout the school?
- Would a more formal approach to evaluation of and feedback on, joint lessons deliver (a) better development of SEN teachers' professional knowledge of SEN (b) better SEN teaching and learning throughout the school?
- Is giving receiving feedback on all aspects of the joint lesson including teaching necessary for developing professional knowledge of (a) SEN teachers (b) SEN practice throughout the school?
- Can teaching continue as individual private practice?
- Is developing knowledge of SEN practice in schools through teacher collaboration important?
- How else might the gap between effective joint practice and individual private practice be achieved?

IEP Process: Collaboration with SEN teachers

- SEN teachers generally compiled the IEP for the students in their caseload without reference to their SEN colleagues
- In a small number of schools formal meetings took place between SEN teachers to develop and maintain consistency of approach in assessment and IEP planning
- SEN teachers consulted with SEN colleagues if they had particular expertise or had previously worked with the child

IEP Process: Collaboration with Mainstream teachers

- SEN teachers found it difficult to secure the time necessary to plan together with a mainstream teacher. Instead collaboration around the IEP was often more informal in nature. SEN teachers spoke to mainstream teachers during initial data gathering stage and got information on test results that informed the IEP process
- The IEP form was completed by the SEN teacher and sent to the mainstream teacher for review. Generally, the mainstream teacher had a more passive role. While SEN teachers commented that there was no time to regularly sit down and formally discuss IEP and target progress there was ongoing contact about the content of the IEP and the student's progress
- Professional Development arising from collaboration on IEP
- Expertise from SEN colleague available if required
- SEN teacher has greater awareness of the class-based needs of child
- Good when SEN and class teachers are working to a common goal
- Mainstream teachers are good at identifying class-based problems that pose new challenges. Finding solutions helps SEN teachers to fine tune practice

IEP Process

Questions

- What are your thoughts on the findings?
- Does the IEP process help develop teacher collaboration?

Focus Group Schedule: Section 2

Organisational Context of Primary School

THEME 1: The primary school environment: a challenging foundation for collaboration

The data identified teacher autonomy, time management and the appointment and rotation of teachers as the main structures and policies that support or hinder teacher collaboration that builds professional knowledge of SEN practice in schools. However, though specifically addressing structures and policies, the data very clearly demonstrated the dominant influence of leadership in this area

Teacher Autonomy

Collaboration was enhanced when principals gave teachers appropriate autonomy and flexibility to discuss and collaborate on SEN practice. SEN teachers valued being free to spend a few minutes on the corridor or in a classroom discussing an important issue related to practice. Support for initiative taking and freedom to develop SEN policy and practice were also valued.

Time Management

The need for designated time in the SEN timetable for teachers to discuss, plan and evaluate practice with colleagues was vital for collaboration to flourish. Effective use of Croke Park hours to enable teachers to develop collaborative practice was suggested. Effective time management would reduce the need for discussion of practice at lunchtime and after school and in front of children in busy classrooms.

Appointment and Rotation of Teachers

A balanced, fair and transparent approach to the rotation of teachers between classes greatly helped collaboration between SEN and classroom teachers. When working in an SEN role was open to all teachers, it prevented jealousy of those in the role and the perception that it was an easier job and given to those favoured by the Principal. A rotation policy that, within reason and taking account of teachers' talents and preferences, expected all teachers to teach all classes created a greater sense of equity amongst teachers that helped collaboration.

While it was deemed important that teachers were given time to develop their expertise in SEN and in so doing develop the SEN team, it was also important to have movement between SEN and classroom practice. Class teachers who had previously worked in SEN were more open to collaboration with their SEN colleagues and more knowledgeable. Communication and collaboration were easier because they understood the language and procedures associated with SEN teaching.

The primary school environment: a challenging foundation for collaboration

Questions

- What are your thoughts on the findings?
- How can the primary school organizational environment support and develop teacher collaboration?

Developing a collaborative whole school approach to SEN

The development of a collaborative whole school approach to SEN is very much a work in progress according to the data.

- There is a lack of whole staff discussion on SEN and the minor role played by SEN on the staff meeting agenda bodes poorly. It was more information sharing than discussion
- While a majority of teachers value collaboration with colleagues, the understanding of teaching as an individual, autonomous practice still remains strong
- The data also shows that there is a distinct difference in how the SEN team is viewed within schools. In some schools the SEN team was part of the whole school while in others it was seen as a separate unit. In-class support was lessening the divide
- The value attached to the work of SEN teachers varied with some teachers experiencing significant erosion of their teaching time to attend to other tasks (standing in for absent classroom colleagues, accompanying classes on tours and to matches etc.)
- Collaboration between SEN teachers and their mainstream colleagues varied significantly– in some cases the classroom teacher was seen to have more power than the SEN teacher and had the final say
- Collaboration amongst SEN teachers also varied significantly

Developing a collaborative whole school approach to SEN

Questions

- What are your thoughts on this finding?
- How can schools' develop a more collaborative whole school approach to SEN?

THEME 2: Leadership

- School principals need to be equipped with certain characteristics and skills to support teacher collaboration that builds professional knowledge of SEN teaching throughout the school. A collaborative style of leadership that supported staff discussion, current curricular knowledge and emotional intelligence were considered vital
- School principals need to demonstrate collaboration themselves
- They need to understand the importance of staff discussion and create time and space for teachers to discuss aspects of practice in safety and develop a shared vision for SEN teaching in the school
- They need to value teachers' professionalism
- Leaders need to have up to date knowledge of teacher collaboration, SEN and inclusive teaching methodologies. They need to be able to affirm good collaborative practice and give constructive feedback when it fails
- Leaders need emotional intelligence demonstrated in effective people management skills (excellent interpersonal, communication, listening and team building skills, ability to manage difficult personalities), change management skills (collaboration is a change and people find change difficult and need to be supported) and self -awareness (ability to manage their own emotions)
- Only a small number of principals possess these vital skills

Leadership

Questions

- What are your thoughts on this finding?
- How can leadership that develops teacher collaboration be improved/changed?

THEME 3: School support for sharing externally generated professional knowledge of SEN practice and for generating and sharing school based professional knowledge of SEN practice

(1a)

- The research found that there was no established system in place in schools to enable SEN teachers to share the professional knowledge of SEN teaching they have received at courses or other sources with their SEN and mainstream colleagues
- Instead, information is shared informally with friendly, like-minded colleagues and offered to colleagues who seek advice. Some SEN teachers have Friday afternoon meetings at which they can share information with other SEN teachers. SEN teachers share information with mainstream teachers through modeling in-class programmes and by sharing notes and lists of resources from courses attended
- However, such informal sharing of professional knowledge does not is not supported by a framework for questioning and evaluating the information and developing more effective SEN teaching through peer critique
- Teachers have an appetite for developing their professional knowledge of SEN but the lack of an organised system limits the sharing of knowledge and could reinforce the acceptance of information without sufficient critique
- Schools lack a systematic approach to experimenting with different SEN teaching methodologies, evaluating their effectiveness and disseminating the knowledge gained throughout the staff. Lack of such a systemic approach limits the development of SEN teachers' professional knowledge through collaboration with colleagues
- Instead, experimentation happens more informally. Individual teachers may choose to experiment or not with a colleague. Experimentation generally takes the form of making changes to published interventions/programmes, using different resources, responding to a particular problem and developing creative approaches to team teaching
- Pockets of good practice exist within schools as a result of teacher experimentation However, most schools lack a formal system for disseminating the professional knowledge gained throughout the school and developing whole school approaches to SEN teaching, as appropriate

School support for sharing externally generated professional knowledge of SEN practice and for generating and sharing school based professional knowledge of SEN practice

Questions

- What are your thoughts on this finding?

- How could this situation be improved/changed?

Focus Group Schedule: Section 3

Teachers' professional working relationships and collaboration

THEME 1: The impact of teachers' professional working relationships on collaboration

- Teachers' professional relationships have a highly significant impact on collaboration. Professional relationships built around personal friendships were greatly valued and seen to facilitate collaboration. However, lack of compatibility with colleagues and difficult personalities made the task of collaborating much more difficult. All teachers agreed that it was very difficult for teachers who didn't get on well together to collaborate
- Mainstream teachers who viewed the classroom as their territory and who wished to maintain their professional privacy proved particularly difficult to work with.
- In schools where teachers shared a common purpose to provide the best teaching and learning opportunities for students, collaboration was easiest and most effective
- A strong professional work ethic, mutual respect, good relationships with the principal and a history of collaboration among staff, greatly assists the move to collaborative practice. However, this was more the exception than the norm.

Confidence

- Confidence was considered essential for teacher collaboration. Teachers need to be very confident about their teaching ability and be extrovert in order to co-teach, in particular. Collaboration forces teachers out of their previous professional privacy and the exposure can be threatening for some
- Teachers can have anxieties about their own professional practice and fear having any weakness exposed and criticised through the process of working collaboratively with colleagues

Competence

- Teacher competence is an issue in teacher collaboration. There is nowhere to hide in collaborative teaching. Colleagues may not be generally incompetent but may lack skills required for particular intervention and team-teaching. If teachers don't ask for help, the quality of the intervention programme can be affected.

Managing the problem of teacher incompetence

- Teachers hide their incompetence. They don't generally ask for help
- Colleagues regularly turned a blind eye to incompetence. It was never directly discussed with the teacher. Instead, various compensatory strategies were used. Rotating the groups in a station-teaching situation in the hope that the underperforming teacher would learn

Trust

- There was strong agreement from all teachers that trust was a very significant issue in relation to teacher collaboration most especially when working in a classroom in a team-teaching arrangement. The greater the exposure, the greater the need was for trust
- When trust is present teachers feel safe working with their colleagues and can take the necessary risks associated with a new approach to teaching. Without trust teachers feel vulnerable
- Starting a new collaboration relationship can be difficult when trust has not been established

Betrayal

- SEN teachers felt betrayed when colleagues agreed to do something and failed to follow through.
- They felt betrayed when colleagues did not expend equal effort in the collaborative endeavor and one teacher was doing most of the work and the planning.
- Teachers felt grievously betrayed when colleagues negatively discussed an aspect of their teaching behind their backs or shared a problem told in confidence
- Inappropriate sharing of confidential information about a child was also seen as betrayal
- Disrespectful behaviour- verbal attack by a colleague (in relation to SEN) in front of children.
- Last minute cancellation of in-class support

Reaction to betrayal

- The three tactics of prevention, avoidance and confrontation were used by SEN teachers in response to betrayal
- Very thorough planning of collaborative in-class interventions ensured that all teachers could work to a specific plan. This minimised spontaneous interaction and risks of betrayal
- Teachers tend to disengage quietly and would be reluctant to collaborate or work in a meaningful way with that colleague again
- In a small number of cases SEN teachers would speak to the Principal and advise that they didn't want to collaborate with the offending party again
- In a very small number of cases, confrontation was used in but soft approach
- Addressing a specific instance of betrayal more generally at a meeting instead of a one to one basis was also used

The impact of teachers' professional working relationships on collaboration

Questions

- What are your thoughts on the findings?
- How can teachers be helped to work together to the common purpose of providing the best possible/most inclusive education for students with SEN?
- How can more effective professional working relationships be developed?
- How can trust be developed amongst colleagues?
- Why do colleagues betray trust?

Theme 2: Communication and Conflict

(1a) Communication

Teachers were aware of the value of open honest discussion and of hearing different opinions.

- However, they cautioned that it required very careful management and was not a regular feature of practice in most schools. Open honest discussion is generally confined to teachers who are friends and often takes place outside school. Where regular, scheduled SEN meetings took place there was room for discussion and grievances could be aired. At staff level more general issues can be discussed. A neutral issue about practice could also be discussed i.e. how a child could be better included in the playground but not a particular issue that could pinpoint a teacher or teachers.
- Openly disagree with colleagues on aspects of SEN practice. SEN teachers were aware of the need for disagreement and its inevitability when aspects of SEN practice were evolving and changing. However, in most schools, disagreement was feared because colleagues could react negatively. As a result, disagreement was avoided or diluted. Teachers resisted the urge to share their opinions if there was any chance that they could be misinterpreted.
- One to one disagreement was generally avoided. Instead, discussing the issue in a group was favoured. Disagreement was also indirectly communicated through lack of support and enthusiasm or through non-verbal communication. Overall, awareness of the importance of disagreement but harmonious working relationships won out. Lack of time, opportunity and skill in disagreeing.

Conflict

- The data revealed that SEN teachers are generally conflict averse and in the main, work in schools where conflict is feared and avoided. Conflict is seen as something negative and is taken very personally by teachers. However, for the majority of SEN teachers the avoidance of unpleasant experiences, personal hurt and damaged relationships was the paramount concern and resulted in the use of a number of tactics. Problems and difficulties were ignored 'turn a blind eye'. SEN teachers reconciled themselves to the fact that it was safer to accept certain aspects of practice than to address them. Teachers avoided potential for conflict through limited collaborative teaching and through the self-selection of colleagues for joint work
- When faced with disagreement coming to 'an amicable consensus' is deemed preferable 'to having the difficult conversation'. When more extreme behaviours are displayed silent retreat is used in the hope that communication could reopen at a later stage
- Fear of conflict was most evident between SEN teachers and their mainstream colleagues. Here SEN teachers avoided potential conflict and instead worked on the basis that nothing succeeds like success. When suggesting new teaching strategies or interventions to better meet the needs of students with SEN they implemented the practice with willing classroom colleagues. The hope was that the visible success of the programme would encourage unwilling colleagues to come round to the change. Even in situations where it is evident that the needs of the child with SEN are not effectively met in the classroom, SEN teachers find the issue 'difficult to broach' with the classroom teacher

Conflict Resolution

- When avoidance and friendly consensus failed the lack of established conflict resolution procedures was very obvious. Instead, a colleague might informally act as a mediator/peace maker between two strong colleagues with differing positions. In a group, the majority view would be accepted. The Principal could be asked to intervene. However, this was dependent on the skill of the principal in conflict resolution.

Way forward

- Effective leadership was deemed necessary if open honest discussion on practice was to develop and if teachers' fear of conflict was to be abated. To this end, principal would need to model, explain and encourage honest conversation within the school
- Teachers would need to have appropriate support and protection in order to attempt open honest discussion and manage conflict

Communication and Conflict

Questions

- What are your thoughts on this finding?
- How could this situation be improved/changed?
- How can open honest discussion on all aspects of practice be developed?
- How can teachers learn to disagree without damaging relationships?

THEME 3: Support for Collaboration

- The data revealed that the SEN teachers felt that there was a definite need for teachers to develop a skillset around collaboration. It was considered necessary for teachers to have good organizational skills as collaboration required greater organization than individual teaching
- Collaboration also required knowledge of current approaches to teaching and assessment
- However, by far the most important was the development of interpersonal and team building skills. The need for the softer, human qualities and skills conveyed a striking need for a kinder more enabling professional working relationship between teachers and a much stronger and clearly defined understanding of teaching as a shared activity born of and sustained by a common purpose.
- Interpersonal and team building skills required - the language and skills to make your point clearly without causing hurt or offense, listening skills, ability to give and receive feedback
- Distinguish between professional and personal aspects of practice, discuss issues of practice openly
- Develop a work culture where all teachers are learning together, good problem-solving skills to deliver alternative solutions when there are differing positions
- Acknowledging that there are many ways to achieve a goal
- Accept different opinions, open-mindedness
- Working together for a shared purpose
- Willingness to share knowledge and skills
- Willingness to trust
- Have respectful relationships with colleagues
- Acknowledge colleagues' talents, fears and vulnerabilities

Support for Skills of Collaboration

- Initial Teacher Education did not develop these skills
- CPD: Plenty on interventions, but nothing on developing interpersonal skills and team building skills
- Need for CPD in interpersonal and teambuilding skills for whole school staffs- model how to plan, teach and evaluate collaboratively taught lessons and how to critique and give and receive feedback
- Instead skills of collaboration learned through trial and error. Good prior experience help but bad prior experience damages
- SSE can develop collaboration if properly implemented by principals. It can give opportunities for honest discussion particularly if mixed cluster groups of class and SEN teachers are used
- However, for most SSE is just a tick box exercise

Support for Collaboration

Support for Skills of Collaboration

Questions

- What are your thoughts on this finding?
- How could this situation be improved/changed?

New Model

- When asked how well equipped they felt for implementing the new model, a small number felt confident while the majority of SEN teachers felt unprepared
- Feeling prepared was mainly due to a collaborative culture in the school and experience of effective collaboration with colleagues. Schools where decisions were made using the NEPS continuum of support and where all SEN teachers taught all children with special education needs felt better prepared. However, for schools where students with high and low incidence were divided between L.S and resource teachers respectively, the new model posed extra challenges
- While SEN teachers welcomed the autonomy to decide on students' level of need and on the means by which their needs could best be met, they feared the decision-making process.
- SEN teachers worried about the flexibility needed particularly in light of overloaded timetables. The need for transparency in allocating support for students with SEN was seen as paramount and the question of parental pressure was raised.
- SEN teachers were aware of the potentially seismic nature of the change 'cultural change in the long term' and believed that success was critically dependent on effective leadership.
- SEN teachers were critical of the lack of information and support prior to implementation and the felt that this fuelled fear and argued that much more training and support for whole staffs was needed?

New Model

Questions

- From your experience of implementing the new Model, what are your thoughts on this finding?
- Has implementing the new Model developed teacher collaboration?
- How could implementation of the new model be improved?