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**UNDERSTANDING TEACHERS'
ENGAGEMENT IN INQUIRY-BASED
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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(BA, M.Ed, MRes)

**Thesis submitted to the Open University in fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Faculty of Education and Language Studies**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how a UK Secondary School introduced inquiry as a form of teacher professional development and focuses on the levels of engagement by the teachers in this type of development activity. The approach taken in this investigation centres on a qualitative case study focusing on a deep understanding of teachers' beliefs, conceptions and experiences of inquiry engagement. Data was collected over an academic year by interviewing nine teachers and a senior member of the school leadership team at different stages throughout the academic year; by observing teachers in some of their classes and the staffroom; and by collecting internal documents and external public reports related to the school and the inquiry programme. The data was analysed using thematic coding which facilitated the identification and comparison of significant themes across all data sets.

Findings from the research reveal that despite the school's attempts to engage teachers in inquiry, the latter found it challenging to do so due to various factors. The analysis reveals the emerging factors of the conceptualisation of inquiry, availability of resources and ownership of the inquiry initiative and the impact of school culture on teachers' inquiry engagement. The question of the appropriateness of inquiry as a form of professional development and the way it is facilitated in school emerges as a key theme.

The study claims three main contributions to the field of teacher inquiry. Firstly, it proposes incorporating a micropolitical perspective of the school culture to investigate the realities of teachers' inquiry work. The study argues through empirical illustration that such a perspective is likely to provide us with invaluable insights necessary to understand teachers' conceptualisation of inquiry and their inquiry engagement. Secondly, this study proposes a categorisation of various types of teachers' inquiry engagement. Such categorisation is likely to help us understand how and why teachers engage in inquiry and therefore the best ways to facilitate this type of professional development. Finally, the current study advances a framework illustrating various processes, interacting factors and main considerations in the context of inquiry as a form of professional development for teachers. The framework explains how teachers respond to an inquiry programme and the conditions that facilitate their inquiry engagement or otherwise. This contribution has practical implications for schools and practitioners interested in undertaking inquiry as a form of professional development. It is argued that the practical implications are likely to improve the planning and implementation of inquiry programmes in schools.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALS: Action Learning Sets

CAQDAS: Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis

DfE: Department for Education

Ed.D: Doctorate in Education

EEF: Education Endowment Foundation

Ofsted: Office for Standards in Education

BERA: British Educational Research Association

CPD: Continuing Professional Development

IBPD: Inquiry-Based Professional Development

NFER: National Foundation for Educational Research

OU: the Open University

PGCE: Post Graduate Certificate in Education

RQ: Research Question

TTA: Teacher Training Agency

UK: The United Kingdom

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Setting the scene for the study

Teacher professional development is a rapidly growing area of professional and scholarly interest and, as such, numerous approaches for teachers to learn from and improve their practice have been put forward (Bubb, 2005, p. 23). Each has its own ideological and philosophical underpinnings and understandings of the role of the teacher and what good teaching and learning look like. One of these approaches, and the focus of this study, is based on the premise that teachers are capable of engaging in research activities related to areas of interest or problematic issues in their pedagogical approaches. This type of professional development is called ‘inquiry’ in this thesis, albeit other overlapping and synonymous terms are used in the literature to describe such approaches to teacher professional development. Although there is a considerably large and growing body of literature on inquiry approaches to teacher professional development, we still do not know much about the realities of inquiry engagement from teachers’ own perspectives or about the conditions facilitating and the barriers to teachers’ inquiry engagement. This study, therefore, offers fresh and critical perspectives on teachers’ inquiry engagement which add to and enrich the teacher professional development debates.

Thus, this is a study about teachers and teacher development. In particular, it explores the beliefs and attitudes of a group of secondary school teachers in the United Kingdom (UK) in the context of a newly introduced inquiry programme as a form of professional development. The study also investigates the learning and outcomes as a result of engagement in inquiry as a professional development activity. Broadly speaking, this study aims to find out and help us understand how teachers go about doing this type of professional development, how their understandings and conceptualisations of inquiry develop as they engage in this type of professional development activity, and what the outcomes of their professional development work are.

This chapter sets the scene for the study. In order to do so, this first chapter describes and briefly discusses the motivations to carry out this study and the expected benefits and outcomes. This discussion is then situated within and related to the context of the study.

This is achieved through discussing the main and relevant characteristics of the context within which the participating teachers in this study work. Such contextual factors are normally considered to be significant in understanding the phenomenon under study (Tobin, 2006, p. 9) in educational research. The chapter then considers the intersection between the motivations to carry out the study and the characteristics of the context and highlights the tension between the two. This is followed by the research questions this study aims to answer. Finally, the chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis with an indication of the focus of each chapter.

1.2 Motivations to undertake the study

The decision to carry out the current study stems from a host of personal, professional and conceptual reasons which I discuss in this section. In particular, I briefly outline my personal motivations to undertake this study then focus on two main intriguing aspects of Inquiry-Based Professional Development (IBPD) that also fuel my initial interest and motivation to explore this area of teacher professional development. These are inquiry as a bottom-up approach to professional development and the role of inquiry in nurturing a proactive teacher. In discussing these points, I aim to make the first steps towards establishing the significance and the need for this study.

1.2.1 A longstanding personal interest

The original interest in inquiry as a form of professional development stems from a noticeable discrepancy between the theory and practice related to this type of professional development. On the one hand, the mantra in a teacher education programme I studied was based on the logic that ‘when teachers inquire into their own practices, ...that process benefits teachers’ professional growth and pedagogical activity’ (Borg, 2006a, p. 23). Inquiry-based professional development was offered in this programme as a viable and useful form of professional development for working teachers. On the other hand, once I became a teacher, the realities of classroom life dictated a different understanding and enactment of professional development; one in which inquiry was regarded as a luxury that not many teachers I knew and worked with could afford. It remains a minority activity with a reported lack of engagement of teachers (Borg, 2010a; Hancock, 1997) unless for the purpose of a programme of study. The tension between what is theoretically possible if inquiry is incorporated into teachers’ professional development and the realities of teacher inquiry engagement were, and indeed still are, what kindled my interest in this type of

professional development. Briefly put, this study aims to investigate the contradictions in and tensions between what teachers could potentially achieve when incorporating inquiry into their practice and the observed lack of take-up of inquiry.

A major drive behind carrying out this study, then, is to investigate and better understand the realities of inquiry-based professional development focusing on the teachers' own perspectives. By doing so, it aims to better understand the tension between the theory and practice of inquiry-based professional development. Two particularly attractive aspects of inquiry are among my primary motivations to carry out this study: 1) the active role of the teacher and 2) a bottom-up approach.

1.2.2 An active role of the teacher

One of the key features of inquiry approaches to teacher professional development is the positioning of the teacher as an active knowledge-making professional, rather than a consumer and subject of educational research. (Dewey, 1929) described the potential contribution of teachers to educational research as an 'unworked mine'. The same theme continued with later proponents of teacher research such as (Stenhouse, 1981, p. 104) who argues that 'It is teachers who in the end will change the world of the school by understanding it.' Hargreaves also points out that 'One alternative is to treat practitioners themselves as the main (but not only) source for the creation of professional knowledge' (1999a, p. 125). As (Winch et al., 2015, p. 207) outline, with inquiry 'teachers are the agents and source, and not the objects, of reform. They feel empowered as a result and report becoming energised and more autonomous in their professional judgements.'

This idea of the teacher as an active practitioner who is involved in inquiry which leads to solving problems and better understanding of learning and teaching is motivation for this study. With the potential of inquiry briefly outlined above, this study aims to help us understand how teachers themselves, rather than academic commentators or other stakeholders, respond to being involved in inquiry. This is expected to shed more light on the dichotomy of the theory and practice of inquiry and a better conceptualisation of the value of inquiry in teacher professional development. The fundamental question in regards to the motivation of carrying this out is: if we claim to have a professional development activity that enhances teachers' professionalism and contribute to them being proactive in creating knowledge and understanding of their own practice, then it is worth investigating

these claims and understanding what really happens when teachers are involved in such type of professional development.

1.2.3 A bottom-up approach

One of the core features of inquiry approaches to professional development is the positioning of teachers at the centre of professional development work. As pointed out above, teachers in inquiry-based professional development are seen as knowledge makers; they participate in identifying issues and areas of interest to explore and understand. By doing so, they actively participate in changing and improving their practice by researching it. This means that there is an emphasis on a bottom-up approach to professional development in inquiry-based professional development. Teachers are active participants in change and the development of practice in this approach rather than change and development of practice being imposed from the top by educational management or policymakers.

What this understanding of the role of the teacher entails is an acknowledgment of - the ever contested - professionalism of the teacher. It positions the teacher as a strong partner and stakeholder in educational development rather than a passive implementer of change proposed from the top. This understanding is another motivating factor to conduct the current study. In this sense, the study aims to investigate what it means for teachers to be at the heart of decision-making and policy-shaping at their local context: the school. The study aims to help understand how this is enacted and operationalised and what value teachers and others gain from this positioning of the teachers.

1.3 Context of the study

This study is based on research carried out in a secondary academy in the UK in the academic year 2013-14. According to statistics by the Department for Education (DfE), there are 5,272 open academies in England at the time of writing up this study (DfE, 2016b). In March 2016, the government announced its intention to turn all publically funded schools into academies. The majority of the existing academies opened from September 2010 onwards following the then Coalition Government's Accelerated Academies Act Programme (Gunter & McGinity, 2014; West & Bailey, 2013).

This section outlines the academies programme with the aim of locating the particular context of the study and highlighting factors that are pertinent to the purpose of this study and to provide a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1994) of the context of this study. Such description brings to the fore contextual factors that will inform our understanding of the phenomenon under study. One of the contributions of this study in relation to the context is to provide insights into the appropriateness of inquiry as a professional development activity in an academy context.

1.3.1 The Academies Programme

The Labour Government introduced the academies programme in March 2000 and they were called City Academies at that time. ‘City’ was dropped when the programme was expanded into non-urban areas (Curtis et al., 2008, p. 14). These are publicly funded schools, independent of the local authorities, have a sponsor that does not necessarily have an education background, and the sponsor is expected to help transform the school through strong leadership. As one Secretary of State for Education explains, ‘The scheme took chronically failing schools away from Local Authorities and placed them under the wing of a sponsor, who was given the freedom and flexibility to implement real change’ (Gove, 2011). The independence from the Local Authorities is one of the main characteristics of the academies programme and according to one of the leading engineers of the academies programme, Lord Andrew Adonis, a significant prerequisite to raise standards and innovate (Adonis, 2008a, p. vi), despite the bewildering fact that local authorities can now act as a sponsor. Most early academies in England went through a metamorphosis from an existing poorly performing or failing school serving a deprived area into an academy. The main goal of this programme was to respond to the crisis of underachievement in schools at that time. The plan was to ‘save’ these schools, rather than to completely abandon them by offering ‘a radical option to help raise achievement in areas of historic underperformance by bringing a new and distinctive approach to school management and governance’ (DfEE, 2001, p. 49). Later, brand new schools with academy status (Husbands et al., 2013, p. 19), started to open in areas where there was a demand for new places for students (Walford, 2014a, p. 263). For some (Machin & Veroit, 2011; Marshall, 2008; Ryan, 2008; Tinkler, 2012), the idea of preserving failing schools rather than closing them down and then opening brand new ones brought to mind the Charter movement in the United States where ‘non-educational institutions took over failing schools and turned them into successful enterprises’ (Tinkler, 2012, pp. 17-18). Another type of school that

are analogous to academies in terms of independence from local authorities are City Technology Colleges. These are ‘private schools [...] run by independent charitable trusts, with the sponsors having a major influence on the way in which the colleges were managed (Walford, 2014b, p. 318).’ The main difference between academies and City Technology Colleges is that the latter, unlike academies, did not start as failing schools. Contrary, they were seen as ‘islands of excellence’ and ‘lights for others to follow’(Whitty et al., 1993, pp. 127-128). Adonis used City Technology Colleges to describe the origins and rationale behind the academies: ‘Academies flowed [...] partly from an analysis of the unambiguous success of the 15 City Technology Colleges run on independent lines with business and voluntary sector sponsors’(Adonis, 2008b). Interestingly, some academies, including Greenleys Park Academy¹, where this study was conducted, changed their names when they converted to academies in an attempt to eradicate the negative connotations associated with the old names.

The academies programme also aimed at taking new radical measures by ‘breaking the cycle of under-achievement’ and low aspirations in areas of deprivation with historically low performance’(Armstrong et al., 2009, p. 118). The then Education Minister, David Blunkett, made the following points at the launch of the Academies Programme that:

In some of the most challenging areas, we believe a more radical approach is needed. Over the next year, we intend to launch pathfinder projects for new City Academies. These Academies, to replace seriously failing schools, will be built and managed by partnerships involving the government, voluntary, church, and business sponsors. They will offer a real challenge and improvements in pupil performance, for example through innovative approaches to management, governance, teaching and the curriculum, including a specialist focus in at least one curriculum area (2000).

It is worth pointing out that such claims continue to be scrutinised and some empirical research and commentaries challenge these claims (see for example Bhattacharya, 2013; Gorard, 2009; Gorard, 2014; Gunter & McGinity, 2014).

Types of Academies

With the succession of governments and changes in regulations, it is now inappropriate to think of academies as one homogenous group. Arguably, there are three types of

¹ All names in this study are pseudonyms in order to protect the identity of the participants.

academies to date (Husbands et al., 2013, p. 22; Tinkler, 2012, p. 6). Figure 1.1 shows a timeline of the development of academies with distinct characteristics of each type:

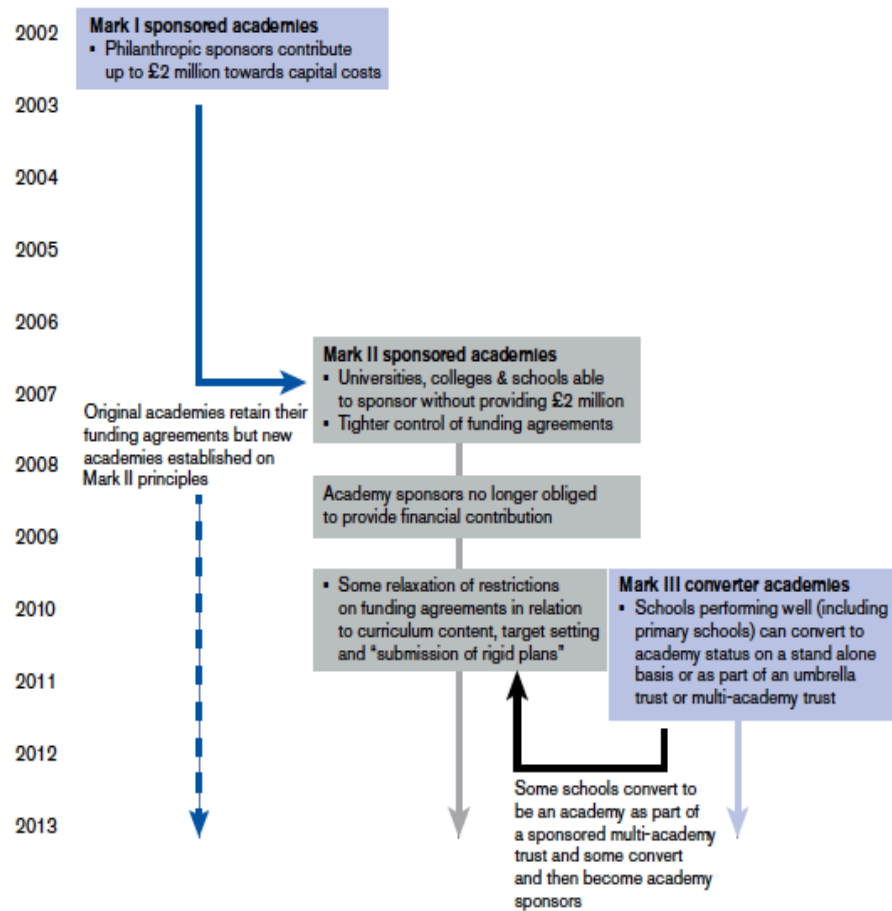


Figure 1.1 Types of academies (Husbands et al., 2013, p. 22)

- *Type 1:* the programme was launched to counter underachievement and failing schools and contribute towards social justice. These academies were required to have a sponsor and the sponsor was required to contribute £2m towards turning around failing schools through strong leadership. The sponsor could be a range of individuals or organisations including ‘individual philanthropists, faith groups, high-performing schools and colleges, businesses, the voluntary sector, and more recently universities and LAs’ (Armstrong et al., 2009, p. 120).
- *Type 2:* The Labour Government leaves office with around 200 open academies. The regulations about the sponsors and their financial commitments are relaxed. Universities and other outstanding schools can become sponsors. Some of the academies that are linked to universities commonly, but not always, use ‘University Academy [name of the academy]’ or ‘[name of the academy] University Academy’ in their names (SUA, 2016; UCAT, 2016).

- *Type 3*: more than 1000 open academies. Other schools - not only secondary - are encouraged to become academies. Outstanding schools can ‘convert’ to academy without the need to have a sponsor.

Greenleys Park Academy

Greenleys Park Academy is a pseudonym for the school where the study was conducted. It was opened in 2010 and, drawing on figure 1.1, it can best be described as a Type 2 Academy. It is sponsored by an Academy Chain which is a ‘sponsor who has opened a number of academies all of whom have at least support mechanisms in common’ (Husbands et al., 2013, p. 99). The school has around 720 students on roll between the ages of 11-18; 44% of students are female. Around 43% of the students are eligible for free school meals and around 28% have a language other than English as their first language.

Two further main points are relevant to the discussion of the context of this study in relation to starting an inquiry-based professional development initiative in Greenleys Park Academy. First, what characterises most academies, including Greenleys Park, is the new or refurbished modern buildings. This was a core idea in the original plan of the academies: using new or refurbished modern buildings to clearly break with the old practices that led to failure or underachievement. During the fieldwork for this study, building work was underway at Greenleys Park Academy and this had its impact on the way teachers engaged in inquiry as will be discussed in later in this thesis. The second point that is relevant to the discussion of the academies is that Greenleys Park Academy, like other academies of the same type, used to be a failing school. After becoming an academy, however, it was rated ‘good’² in October 2012 by the Office of Standards in Education (OFSTED) in the first and only comprehensive inspection so far carried out. According to a senior leadership team member, the teachers ‘were told what to do’ in order to transform the school. In relation to the new inquiry initiative, this ‘being told what to do’ culture had an impact on the way the teachers reacted to the IBPD programme in their school as will be shown in later chapters.

The school expressed desire to start an IBPD programme which coincides with my interest in this type of teacher professional development. The school decided to introduce this

² The Ofsted grade descriptors are: Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement and Inadequate (Ofsted, 2016).

programme on mandatory basis for all teachers in the first year. I was invited to assist in setting up an IBPD in the school and this allowed me to research the programme.

1.4 Aims and objectives

This chapter presented and discussed two significant, yet not homogenous, points about this study. On the one hand, there is inquiry-based professional development for teachers which is characterised by being a bottom-up approach that relies on an active role of the teacher. On the other hand, we have a context characterised by a desire to raise standards and therefore employs rigid accountability and performativity measures. The nut I want to crack in this study is to explore and understand the tension and dynamics of the process of introducing inquiry-based professional development in a context characterised by a discourse of raising standards, accountability and performativity (see Chapter 2).

Therefore, this current study has the following aims. First, it seeks to contribute to our growing understanding of the appropriateness, value and potential of inquiry-based professional development as a professional development activity for teachers. Second, it critically analyses factors that facilitate or impede the implementation of an inquiry-based professional development programme in schools. This aim will be achieved through examining the interaction amongst multiple players who lead and conduct the inquiry initiative in the schools on the one hand and their interaction with the facilitators inside and outside the school. The outcome of this aim is of particular interest to other schools where there is a desire for starting a brand new inquiry culture or improving the one already in place.

Finally, the study problematises the concept and practice of collaboration as experienced in a school-wide inquiry-based professional development programme and unravels the power structures at work where this study is based. The study will provide insights into diverse ways of working together within a school and analyse the effectiveness of these ways. This is not to suggest, though, that this study is a solely evaluative study of an inquiry initiative. It rather aims to explore the realities of being involved in an inquiry-based professional development programme and the factors which help teachers to engage in such programme.

Inevitably, some conclusions will be drawn about the effectiveness of the inquiry programme under study here; however, this study aims to achieve more. It focuses on the

first year in the life of an inquiry programme in a school in the UK (see below). It is suggested that it takes a few years to establish a functional and fully-fledged professional development programme (Fullan, 2007, p. 68) such as an inquiry-based professional development which makes it implausible to 'evaluate' the first year of the initiative as such. What this thesis aims to accomplish, then, is to investigate the academic rhetoric of the potentials of inquiry-based professional development and drill down into the realities of being a teacher involved in a school-mandated inquiry programme in a context characterised by high levels of accountability and performativity. This is achieved through following the participants throughout the first academic year of the life of an inquiry initiative, examining various evidence of their engagement or lack of it in this activity

1.5 Research Questions

Based on the above discussion, the current study aims to answer and enrich our understanding of the following questions:

1. To what extent and how do teacher's beliefs and perceptions about inquiry change after engaging in a school-supported inquiry project?
 - To what extent do teachers value inquiry as a professional development activity?
 - How do teachers respond to the role of researching their own practice?
 - What critical events throughout the inquiry project impact on teachers' beliefs about research engagement?
2. What do teachers perceive to be the outcomes of carrying out their own inquiry projects?
3. What aspects of context affect teachers' active engagement in inquiry? How?
 - What aspects of context facilitate teachers' engagement in action research?
 - What aspects of context impede teachers' engagement in action research?

1.6 The focus of the study

This study explores how teachers understand and respond to a mandated inquiry-based professional development programme in an urban secondary academy in the UK. The particular inquiry approach that the school wanted to use was action research. The generic term ‘inquiry’ is used here to encompass professional development activities for teachers that involve the teachers themselves investigating their teaching in a systematic, reflective and principled manner in order to improve it (see Chapter 2). There is no shortage in the literature relating to areas of inquiry-based professional development for teachers or rhetoric about the value and advantages of inquiry -based professional development for teachers. However, little is known about how teachers, in general, engage in, react to, feel about, conduct, and how they themselves evaluate inquiry as a professional development approach and what factors may contribute to creating a sustainable inquiry culture in schools. This study aims to provide a better understanding of the role of inquiry in teachers’ professional development and in-service teacher education by looking beyond the rhetoric and focusing on what the teachers themselves think and feel about being involved in this type of professional development activity.

The fieldwork in this study lasted for one academic year: September 2013 to July 2014. This relatively prolonged time spent on fieldwork, as opposed to one-off or parachute type of other studies, is intended to strengthen the study by spending more time with the participants in their own work context and as a result having more opportunities to understand their views and reaction to the inquiry programme. This is vital in order to understand (a) the value of inquiry in professional development for teachers and then (b) how best to –and not to- approach this activity and facilitate it and sustain it in schools. One of the aims of this research, therefore, is to examine the rhetoric around teacher inquiry engagement by taking a case study approach to investigate teachers’ interactions, learning, understandings and beliefs about inquiry engagement as a professional development activity. As I will explain in Chapter 3, a case study approach is appropriate for the purpose of this particular study as it allows for data to be collected from a multitude of sources. This aided in asking critical and revealing questions, and ultimately reaching a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. These issues will be revisited in more detail in later chapters.

1.7 Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is comprised of seven chapters. The goal of the current chapter was to introduce the study, provide a necessary discussion of the motivations to carry out this study and juxtapose these against the realities of the context of this study. It also outlined the aims and objectives and the research questions this study wants to answer and provided a closer look into the particular focus of this study. Chapter two critically discusses the literature relevant to this study. It concentrates on two themes: school culture and Teacher Professional Development. In particular, it discusses macro and micropolitical aspects of the school and teacher beliefs and cognition in relation to inquiry engagement as an approach to professional development. Chapter three describes the methodology that guided the design of this study and explains the particular methods employed in the data collection stage. Chapter four provides a thorough description of the inquiry programme. Chapter five provides findings related to the nature of the inquiry programme while Chapter six presents and critically discusses the findings in this study with a theoretical interpretation and discussion of the results. It brings together the various threads and findings in an effort to make sense of the outcomes of this study by providing a framework for teacher inquiry engagement. Chapter seven highlights and reminds how the research questions were answered and what the main contributions of this study are. It then concludes with some reflections, limitations and indication of future research.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the two main themes that are essential to both the conceptual framework and the design and analysis of this study. Firstly, I consider school culture and examine macro and micro aspects of school culture as a way of understanding life in the school and argue for an inquiry approach in schools that incorporates micropolitical aspects of teacher professional development for a more meaningful and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. As I will demonstrate in the next chapters, employing a micropolitical perspective to investigate teachers' inquiry engagement is still a novel way of researching teacher's inquiry engagement as an aspect of teacher professional development and thus the thesis aims to advance this approach. What this entails is a reconceptualisation of teachers' work within a rich and complex environment and a re-examination of their local situation to elucidate deeper factors that contribute to the success or otherwise of professional development activities in school. By doing this, I aim to highlight the significance of context in this study and argue for an approach that not only acknowledges the context of the professional development activities in which teachers engage but also takes context seriously as a unit of analysis. Rather than taking a historical approach, the discussion in this chapter will cover the main themes related to micropolitics in schools. Secondly, I will examine two aspects of teachers' Continuous Professional Development (CPD): teachers' beliefs and action research. These are essential concepts in the theoretical positioning and design of this study. I will outline the significance of teachers' beliefs and cognition and argue for a research approach that focuses on beliefs in order to better understand teachers' engagement or lack of it in a specific teacher development activity. This specific teacher development activity is action research. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the history, development and characteristics of action research as the inquiry-based professional development approach in which teachers in this study were expected to engage.

2.2 School Culture

In this section, I will discuss two aspects of culture in a school environment: macro and micro political aspects of school culture. These are essential concepts for understanding the forces that operate within and outside a school. The macropolitical aspect that I will discuss here is mainly related to performativity: a now entrenched feature of state-funded schools in the UK and especially in the English context. The other aspect of culture to be discussed in this chapter relates to micropolitics: the study of interests, power and conflict within a school to understand how the school functions and how individuals within the school make sense of various activities related to their professional development. Such aspects of macro and micro political aspects of school culture will be related to teachers' CPD and how these aspects of culture impact on teachers' understanding and engagement in inquiry as a CPD activity.

2.2.1 Macropolitics of the school: standards, accountability and performativity

It is safe to say that a major turning point in the UK education landscape was the policies and philosophy associated with the Education Reform Act of 1988 (Ball, 2008; Perryman, 2009; Perryman et al., 2011). Following this Act, centralised curriculum, assessment processes and inspection regimes were brought to the fore as central tenets of educational policy and practice. These regimes controlled both education processes in schools and the teachers responsible for that education. Standards, in relation to national benchmarks, became significant and a discourse of 'raising standards' proliferated afterwards (Ball et al., 2012; Ball et al., 2011). This was intensified by the use of performance indicators, inspections and league tables which all functioned in a seemingly objective and disinterested way (Ball, 2008, p. 150). However, behind the appearance of objectivity and focus on performance is diminishing trust in the teacher and his or her ability to carry out various aspects of their practice adequately. In practical classroom terms, this resulted in a discourse of 'how to': how to meet the demands of policy makers and raise standards. Some of the everlasting effects of the 1988 Reform Act that are also significant in understanding the context of the current study are illustrated below:

- establishment of a 'National' Curriculum;
- suspicion of teacher professionalism and the 'politics' of teachers and the need for systems of control and accountability;

- offering parents ‘choice’, that is, the right to express a preference, among state schools submitted to the disciplines of the market;
- devolution of control over budgets from Local Educational Authorities to schools;
- enhancement of the roles and responsibilities of both governors and headteachers through Learning Management Systems (LMS), (Ball, 2008, p. 80).

The first two points are particularly relevant for this study. The move towards a centralised system in the form of a national curriculum was an attempt to make educational practice more accountable. This, however, resulted in increasing regulation (Perryman et al., 2011, p. 181) and as ‘loss of autonomy and the erosion of both the place and the value of [teachers’] ‘professional judgement’ as (McAteer, 2013, p. 8) points out. The state, instead, stripped away a great deal of teachers’ autonomy and independence by prescribing what should be taught to students through the introduction of the National Curriculum.

‘Performativity’, it follows, is a technology of power composed of public league tables, targets and inspection reports that regulate practice (Ball, 2000). Teachers view these as high stakes due to the potential for judgements to be made about the quality of teaching or a school’s success (Ball, 2003). Ball (2008) sees the advent of a new discourse of accountability along with a shifting set of roles and identities regarding what it means to be a teacher. He critiques, ‘the notion of being an educational ‘professional’ is ... redefined with notions of ‘autonomy’ and the ‘right to be critical’ replaced by ‘disinterestedness’ and ‘accountability’ (Ball, 2012b, p. 162). The result is a mixing of key messages regarding pedagogy to teachers in schools, which has over time become ever more acute.

Accordingly, schools are held to account by market-driven policies and standards-driven reforms (Leo et al., 2010). Pressure has mounted to perform well in league tables and during increasingly rigorous inspections. (Ball, 2008, p. 52) summarises some of the outcomes and effects of performativity culture on teachers:

- increased emotional pressures and stress related to work;
- the increased pace and intensification of work;
- changed social relationships. There is evidence of increased, sometimes intentional, competition between teachers and departments. There is a concomitant decline in the sociability of school life. Professional relationships become increasingly individualised as opportunities for communities and professional discourse diminish

and relationships are made amenable to and redefined as a ‘contract’ form or ones of ‘contractual implication’ within and between institutions;

- an increase in paperwork, systems maintenance and report production and the use of these to generate performative and comparative information systems;
- increased surveillance of teachers’ work and outputs;
- a developing gap, in values, purpose and perspective, between senior staff, with a primary concern with balancing the budget, recruitment, public relations and impression management, and teaching staff, with a primary concern with curriculum coverage, classroom control, students’ needs and record keeping.

As a result, and certainly in the context of external pressures, the ‘transmission’ model of teaching and learning (Biggs & Moore, 1993) has definite appeal as it presents fewer perceived risks (Ritchie & Rigano, 2002) and it allows teachers to operate within a more comfortable zone of power and control. Others use ‘technicians and pedagogical clerks’ (Banks et al., 2005, p. 339) and ‘deliverology’ to describe teachers’ roles and work: ‘the delivery of improved systemic and institutional performances and the achievement of examination benchmarks by individual schools’ (Ball et al., 2012, p. 514).

In this study, macropolitics represented by performativity is necessary to understand the context in which the participants work. What is more significant, though, is their interactions within the school: the micropolitics of the school.

2.2.2 The Micropolitics of the School

School micropolitics is a significant aspect of this study for several reasons. First, this study seeks to understand how a group of teachers deal with and respond to a professional development activity newly proposed and mandated by their school. In order to better understand teachers’ engagement or lack of it in this activity, a more ‘microscopic’ analysis of the day-to-day activities and interactions is arguably crucial to understand teachers’ overall engagement in the new initiative. Another reason relates to the versatility of ‘micropolitics’ as a field of research. It encompasses diverse elements such as power, change, resistance and participation (see below); all of which are necessary to understand teachers’ uptake and participation in a newly introduced activity that is mandated by the school. Furthermore, and for the purpose of this study, investigating teachers’ inquiry engagement from a micropolitical perspective constitutes one of the theoretical contributions of this study as investigating teachers’ inquiry engagement from a

micropolitical perspective is still rare. (Eilertsen et al., 2008) is the main study that explicitly points out the ‘absence of micropolitics’ in the literature on teacher inquiry. Micropolitics as a unit of analysis has been employed in socio-educational studies that primarily investigate the school as an organisation with foci on interaction amongst people in the school, power relations and other related areas.

The interest in micropolitics as a unit of analysis in contemporary educational research is a relatively new topic. It draws on ideas and concepts put forward by educational sociologists, system theorists and other thinkers and theorists who developed ideas related to power relationships within organisations. In the next section, I will limit my discussion to micropolitics in relation to schools; the discussion is informed by literature related to this particular field of inquiry. Of particular significance in this regard is Stephen Ball’s ‘groundbreaking’ (Blase, 1991c, p. xi) work *The Micro-Politics of the School* (1987, reprinted 2012) and a special issue that appeared in the *School Leadership & Management* journal in 1999 as these are the most pertinent sources to understand school micropolitics. In this overall discussion, I demonstrate that the micropolitics of the school is a useful and powerful lens that would facilitate better and deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study in the school. To begin with, a clarification of what is meant by school micropolitics is necessary.

Understanding school micropolitics

Unlike other key terms and concepts in this study (see below for example), ‘micropolitics’ is relatively more straightforward to pinpoint as the literature on school micropolitics does not seem to conflict or disagree on its meaning. To begin with, I start with a general definition of micropolitics offered by The *Oxford English Dictionary* as, although it is not exclusively about schools, it is still relevant to the ensuing discussion:

Politics on a small or local scale; esp. (the study of) the political principles governing or *issues arising from the interactions of a relatively small social group*, a limited aspect of behaviour, etc., rather than society as a whole. (emphasis added). (Dictionary, 1989)

This definition sets out a significant premise of micropolitics: the focus on the interaction of a small group, rather than an emphasis on a whole system of education, for example. This type of focus is effective in trying to understand participants’ day-to-day practices, decisions, interactions, conflict, participation and power relationships. Focusing on the micropolitics, in this sense, means taking into consideration minute details and interactions

within the field as these are thought to be illuminating to the understanding of the phenomenon under study. The ensuing question is: what is the value of this focus? One of the main benefits of focusing on micropolitics, as I will establish below, is that this approach can provide invaluable insights in regards to how practitioners respond and deal with change and innovation in their professional context. For the purpose of the current discussion, and in relation to this study, micropolitics is seen as an effective approach to examining teachers' interactions and response to a newly introduced professional development activity within their professional context.

Moving on from the general meaning offered by the dictionary to more relevant accounts, two further explications of micropolitics merit consideration here. Firstly, (Ball, 1987) emphasises *conflict* as a key feature of school life and that attempting to gain some understanding of the school necessitates understanding these conflicts. He argues that:

I take schools, in common with virtually all other social organizations, to be arenas of struggle; to be riven with actual or potential conflict between members; to be poorly coordinated; to be ideologically diverse. I take it to be essential that if we are to understand the nature of schools as organizations, we must achieve some understanding of these conflicts. (Ball, 1987, p. 19).

Conflicts, again actual or potential, may have different sources in the school. Some of these sources are related to differing and conflicting beliefs and understandings among teachers about various aspects of school life such as teaching, learning and professional development and conflict in interests, to mention but a few. For the former, a teacher might hold certain beliefs and understandings about a certain teaching strategy or professional development activity that are at odds with those of other teachers within the school. This is why introducing a change –such as a new professional development activity - is often likely to bring these conflicts to the fore and we are left with varied degrees of participation and often a gap between the intent of educational change and reform and the actual implementation, as (Hoyle, 1982, p. 249) explains. In this regard, it can be argued that conflicts, natural phenomena of school life, constitute an aspect of school micropolitical life that is worthy of investigation if we want to reach an adequate understanding of what goes on when a new professional development activity, for example, is introduced; how conflicts arise and how they impact the implementation of the intended change. This is significant for this study as it is about investigating how teachers respond to a newly introduced mandated professional development activity in their school as outlined in Chapter one.

The other meaning of micropolitics to be considered here is the one offered by (Blase, 1991b) who reviews the then emerging literature in this area and provides a relatively comprehensive definition of the term in relation to schools and school life. Like the previous point made by (Ball, 1987), some of the relevant points put forward by (Blase, 1991b) will be unpicked later in the chapter. He maintains that micropolitics is:

the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations. In large part political actions result from perceived differences between individuals and groups, coupled with the motivation to use power to influence and/or protect. Although such actions are consciously motivated, any action, consciously or unconsciously motivated, may have political 'significance' in a given situation. Both cooperative and conflictive actions and processes are part of the realm of micropolitics. (Blase, 1991b, p. 11)

Here, we have other foci within micropolitics. Power is usually of paramount significance in studies that employ a micropolitical perspective. (Blase, 1991b) distinguishes between two types of power in his definition: formal and informal. The former is to do with the power associated with certain positions along the school power hierarchy, such as the power a headteacher has compared to that of a head of year. The latter form of power is informal; it refers to ways in which some individuals or groups 'seek to use the resources of power and influence to further their interests' (Hoyle, 1982, p. 88). A senior core subject teacher's opinion may be more influential, for example, regarding a newly proposed school policy than that of a novice teacher. Therefore, it can be argued here that although both are working teachers in these hypothetical, but not completely unfamiliar, examples in the same school, the senior teacher has more power than the other teacher, maybe due to years of service, subject taught, background, personal relationships within the school, the internal politics of the school, among other potential reasons. What makes micropolitics a worthwhile and exciting perspective is that it enables the investigator to unveil such delicate issues within the school and then interpret them in light of the wider school, and possibly the community or societal framework in order to better understand teachers' work and response to certain changes or activities.

Another point underscored in the definition above and elsewhere in the literature (Hoyle, 1982), is that of goals and interests. One way to understand how and why teachers do what they do and how they respond to initiatives the way they do is to attempt to understand their motivations behind their actions. Variations in interests might lead to conflicts, which ultimately reveal a considerable amount of internal school micropolitics. The aim in doing

all of this is to shed as much light as possible on why some teachers ‘buy into’ a particular activity or change process whereas others do not.

One final point I want to make about micropolitics is that it can be a messy field of research as it is to do with areas of professional life that are not straightforward to capture, even by the most vigilant of researchers, or not often discussed or spelt out in public. Gossip, for example, is one area that is investigated in studies that take a micropolitical perspective (Ball, 1987; Ball & Vincent, 1998; Hoyle, 1982). For an ‘outsider’ researcher, being able to access such sensitive and private information about the organisation as gossip is arguably anything but straightforward. Micropolitics, therefore, is a useful way of analysing interaction and phenomena in schools. Another example of the challenge and messiness of micropolitical studies can be found in interview-based studies, popular in qualitative educational research. In such studies, participants are asked questions revolving around the area of investigation; however, it is not necessarily reasonable to ask valid questions about and expect reliable answers to how power, resistance and participation, for example, work within the school (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of reliability). What the researcher might get is cues and prompts that he or she can relate to other bits of the data upon systematic and reflective analysis of the data. This has implications for the design of studies that claim to investigate their research questions from a micropolitical perspective. I will discuss this point in more details in Chapter 3. Here I point out that the design of an educational study from a micropolitical perspective needs to take into account that a prolonged fieldwork engagement is necessary to begin to understand the natural context of the school and its micropolitics so that the investigator can then start to relate these issues to the phenomena under study. I see this area as largely dependent on the researcher’s adequate understanding of the school he or she studies and then his or her systematic and reflective skills in analysing their micropolitical-rich data.

In light of the above discussion of micropolitics, it is safe to conclude that micropolitics is concerned with the aspects and details of school life that are not necessarily discussed in public; with ‘daily interactions, negotiations and bargains’ (Lindle, 1999, p. 171), and how things really work, not as they are planned or intended to work (Flessa, 2009, p. 331). In particular, and as discussed above, a few aspects of micropolitics are of particular relevance in this study and thus will be further discussed below. These are (1) power, (2) change and (3) resistance and conflict. Figure 2.1 captures these aspects of school micropolitics. I now unpick these elements in turn.

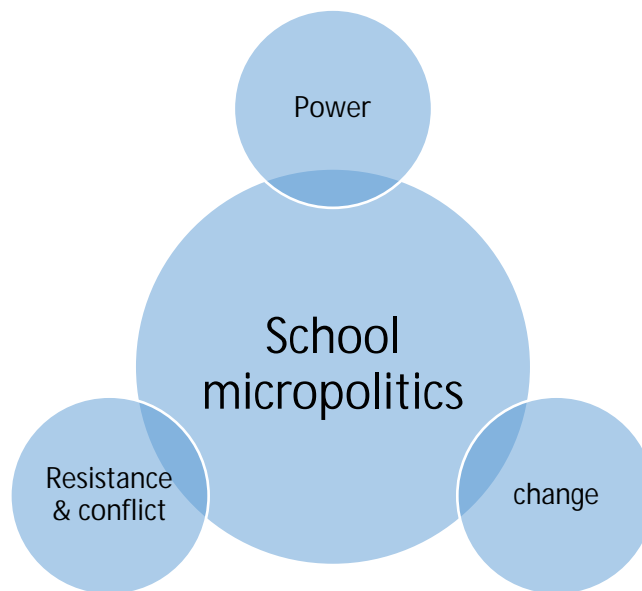


Figure 2. 1: Aspects of school micropolitics

Power

(Foucault, 1997, p. 51) defines power as ‘a whole series of particular mechanisms, definable and defined, which seem likely to induce behaviors or discourses.’ The implication here is that there is a relationship between power on one side and behaviour and discourse on the other. This is a significant point for this study as one of the hypotheses in this study is that power has an impact on the way participants engage in an activity proposed by the school.

There are also a few reasons behind focusing on power as an aspect of school micropolitics. First, in the context of school micropolitics, power can be conceptualised as a main source of much of school micropolitics. For example, (Sarason, 1990) argues that:

Schools and school systems are political organizations in which power is an organizing feature. Ignore [power] relationships, leave unexamined their rationale, and the existing system will defeat efforts at reform. This will happen not because there is a grand conspiracy or because of mulish stubbornness in resisting change or because educators are uniquely unimaginative or uncreative (which they are not) but rather because recognizing and trying to change power relationships, especially in complicated, traditional institutions. is among the most complex tasks human beings can undertake.(1990, p. 7)

It is worth pointing out here though that this study aims to understand rather than change power relationships. Understanding these relationships is a main step towards understanding teachers’ engagement or lack of it in a professional development activity.

Another reason that power is relevant is that the initiative investigated in this study is of a top-down nature, meaning that it is mandated by the school (represented by the headteacher and senior administrative team) on the teachers. The teachers in this study were not consulted on the type of professional development activities they wished to do; rather, they were expected to comply with what the school asks them to do. In addition, the structure of the initiative itself lends itself readily to an investigation of power relationships. In this regard, teachers were expected to work collaboratively but with varying roles: some as leaders and facilitators while others as participants and implementers (see Chapter 4) with a senior school leader as an initiator and leader of the whole initiative. Another rationale for the significance and relevance of power is put forward by (Foucault, 1980) who proposes that power relationships 'are among the best hidden things in the social body'. He explains that:

power is 'always already there', that one is never 'outside' it, that there are no 'margins' for those who break with the system to gambol in. [...]. To say that one can never be 'outside' power does not mean that one is trapped and condemned to defeat no matter what. [...] I would suggest rather [...] power is co-extensive with the social body, [...] that relations of power are interwoven with other kinds of relations [...] for which they play at once a conditioning and a conditioned role, that these relations don't take the sole form of prohibition and punishment, but are of multiple forms [...] that there are no relations of power without resistance, the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at point where relations of power are exercised .
(Foucault, 1980, pp. 140-141)

This means that power is pervasive and inescapable and therefore it must be accounted for in order to reach a meaningful analysis of the phenomenon under study in an organisation. With this in mind, the potential of power relationships playing out and having an impact on teachers' inquiry engagement is likely to be high. Another significant point in the way Foucault conceptualises power is that it is embedded in the very structure of the organisation and thus power relationships impact and are impacted by other relationships, processes and discourses. This particular point is significant in this study as it aims to disentangle factors that contribute to teachers' engagement or lack of it in an activity mandated by the school. A further aspect of power according to Foucault touches upon in the quote above is that not all power is negative power of domination and subjugation. As (Ball, 2012c, p. 30) discusses, 'Power is not merely prohibitive it is productive, a lot of the time it "makes us up" rather than grinds us down'.

One way to understand power in the context of micropolitics is by using Hoyle's (1982) distinction between two types of school power: authority and influence. This is a distinction referred to earlier in this chapter. Hoyle contends that:

Authority is legally supported form of power which involves the right to make decisions and is supported by a set of sanctions which is ultimately coercive. *Influence* is the capacity to affect the actions of others without legal sanctions. (Hoyle, 1982, p. 90)

This distinction is not insignificant, especially for the purpose of this study. It is a distinction between the power that administrators such as headteachers and deputy headteachers have because of the nature of their position and that other teachers may occasionally have. By coercive, Hoyle refers to the point that the power associated with the headteacher and the senior leadership team is binding and can be forced on teachers and supported by the nature of their position in the school. For example, a headteacher has the authority to initiate change, alter practices or simply request that teachers do things differently. Unlike authority, influence is more to do with the ability of a teacher or a group of teachers to achieve their own personal or professional interests by exercising the power of their influence. It is derived from personality, expertise, access and resources and what distinguishes it from authority is that it is 'embedded in the school rather than located in an abstract legal source, and is not 'fixed' but is variable and operates through bargaining, manipulation, exchange and so forth' (Hoyle, 1982, p. 90). Teachers might lobby the leadership team to change a certain policy or to introduce another one, for example. When it comes to professional development activities, they might respond differently to what is expected by those who have authority simply because they know they might have some influence over matters related to their own practice and professional development. In this sense, the time when a school, or those who have authority in the school, introduces or mandates some new professional development activities is a fertile time in which it is likely to see these types of power at work (Blase & Björk, 2009; Lindle, 1999). This suggests that at such periods in a school's life, the role of authority and influence in facilitating or impeding a professional development activity becomes more prominent and this leads to not only understanding these roles but also designing and facilitating the professional development activities with these roles in mind. Change, in relation to micropolitics, is the subject of the next section.

Change

In this section, I discuss *change* as an area worthy of investigation in a study that takes a micropolitical perspective. What I want to establish here is that when change is introduced, a micropolitical perspective can help us understand why or why not change is successful. To reiterate, this study investigates a new initiative in a secondary school, a new way of doing professional development, or in other words a change in the nature of professional development. As already outlined above, the time when an organisation attempts to introduce change is a fertile time to explore the micropolitics of that organisation as that will likely facilitate understanding the implementation and take up of individuals and groups within the organisation of that change (Blase & Björk, 2009; Lindle, 1999).

It is widely admitted that change is one of the most challenging aspects of school life and that the reality of implementing and sustaining change remains disparate from what school leaders, educators or governments plan and wish. (Sarason, 1990, p. 35) for example makes a significant point about change when he argues that:

‘Like almost all other complex traditional social organizations, the schools will accommodate [change] in ways that require little or no change. This is not to say that the accommodation is insincere or deliberately cosmetic but rather that the strength of the status quo—its underlying axioms, its pattern of power relationships, its sense of tradition and, therefore, what seems right, natural, and proper—almost automatically rules out options for change in that status quo’

This suggests that change in schools is far from being straightforward. It represents a disruption to established ways of doing things. Not all teachers are necessarily keen on stepping out of the comfort zones of their established practice; therefore, change is not easy to implement and sustain. However, what matters for the current discussion is not whether change is desirable or not or how change can be initiated or sustained, for example. Rather, what matters is how the micropolitics associated with change in teacher professional development can help us understand how teachers deal with change and how they buy in to new initiatives or not. In this sense, (Ball, 1987, p. 28) argues that ‘change [...] brings to the surface those subterranean conflicts and differences which are otherwise glossed over or obscured in the daily routine of the school life’. He also warns against equating the change in policy with change in practice (1987, p. 40). As indicated above, Ball tends to emphasise conflict as a focus of a micropolitical study. Nevertheless, I want to argue in this study that conflict is only one facet of micropolitics that is associated with change. Conflict is probably inevitable in any organisation and it is intensified at times of

change especially when individuals and groups deem that their interests or the interest of their organisation –the schools- or others’ interest, such as students’, are at risk. However, focusing solely on conflict ignores other facets of change such as passive resistance, buy-in, and collaboration. Indeed, ‘the number and dynamics of factors that interact and affect the process of educational change are too overwhelming to compute in anything resembling a fully determined way’, as (Fullan, 2007, p. 64) reminds us. This is another indication that change is not only about conflict. Change is not easy, but at the same time, it is not all negative or at least should not be conceptualised as such. On that account, a micropolitical perspective facilitates uncovering not only conflicts but also other facets of micropolitical life associated with change. Besides the value of exploring micropolitics for the purpose of educational research, (Blase & Björk, 2009) demonstrate that this idea plays a vital role when schools attempt or undergo a process of change. They maintain that micropolitics ‘facilitate and support as well as impede and inhibit educational change and reform’ (Blase & Björk, 2009, p. 241). Conceptualised in this way, change is an opportunity to employ a micropolitical perspective in order to understand what actually happens when a school attempts to instigate change.

Resistance and Conflict

A micropolitical perspective also facilitates exploring resistance and conflict: another significant aspect of school micropolitical life. As established above, change is one of the most challenging aspects of school life. Therefore, it is often met with resistance (Zimmerman, 2006, p. 239) and conflict might ensue. Few explanations are put forward in the relatively small literature on teachers’ resistance and conflict. Table 2.1 below summarises the main arguments put forward in explaining why teachers resist change:

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Failure to recognise the need for change. (Greenberg & Baron, 2000; Zimmerman, 2006)• Unsuccessful previous attempts to change. (Fullan, 2007; Greenberg & Baron, 2000; Zimmerman, 2006)• Threats to expertise and proven abilities. (Zimmerman, 2006)• Lack of trust. (Zimmerman, 2006).• Teachers might feel that the change represents a threat to their school environment. (Scherz, 2004).• Inadequate understanding of the rationale and intended achievements. (Scherz, 2004).• Fear of revealing inadequacies and weaknesses. (Scherz, 2004). |
|---|

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Old guards: the teachers who take it upon themselves to preserve the integrity of its culture. They oppose risk-taking, spontaneity, and chaos with conservation, thoughtfulness and order. (Scherz, 2004). |
|---|

Table 2. 1: Reasons behind teachers' resistance

What needs to be stressed here is that these reasons are not and cannot be considered exhaustive or universal. Reasons to resist and have conflict vary depending on the coexistence of multiple variables and conditions within the school. And as schools and their populations are unique and unpredictable, it is unlikely to have universal conditions for resistance and conflict. This also does not mean the list above or other hypotheses are unnecessary. On the contrary, such hypotheses can provide a general framework and guidelines for understanding why teachers resist change and why conflict sometimes happen in schools. For example, a newly appointed deputy headteacher in charge of professional development in the school might find that his or her proposals and ideas are often challenged by teachers, especially the 'old guard' (see above). Those teachers might think that there are established ways of doing professional development, and therefore attempting to deviate from these ways might constitute a threat to these established ways or simply involve taking unnecessary risks or requiring that teachers do more than they do already or learn something they are not necessarily keen or prepared to learn, or they do not consider a priority to learn within their busy timetables. Despite these attempts to understand the causes of teachers' resistance, the actual causes of resistance and conflict in a given study might be different. This suggests a host of factors that might be behind what is observed.

2.3 Summary of school culture

So far in this chapter, I introduced and discussed two aspects of school culture: macro and micropolitics as main concepts in this study. I outlined some of the core components and characteristics of both macro and micro politics. In particular, the discussion focussed on school micropolitics, power, change and resistance to change. The discussion in this chapter is aimed at highlighting the significance, and multifacetedness of micropolitics in investigating aspects of teacher professional development. One main argument in this study is that employing micropolitics to investigate inquiry engagement is likely to enrich our understanding of how teachers conceptualise and respond to inquiry. I turn now to discuss two aspects of CPD: teachers' beliefs and conceptions and teacher inquiry.

2.4 Continuous Professional Development

In this second section of the chapter, I discuss the second main conceptual framework relevant to the study: Continual Professional Development or CPD. A conceptual framework explains ‘the main things to be studied [...] and the presumed relationships among them ’(Miles et al., 2014, p. 20). With this in mind, the discussion will focus on CPD: its definition and main approaches. The discussion will then focus on the one type of CPD that is the focus of this study: action research. The final part of the chapter will be dedicated for a discussion of teachers’ beliefs and conceptions in which the worthwhileness of teachers’ beliefs and conceptions in investigating their inquiry engagement will be established.

2.4.1 Defining CPD

CPD as a concept is common to familiar in various professions. In teaching, in particular, it used to be known as ‘in-service training’, or INSET to differentiate between this type of training and development and the one teachers had to undertake prior to starting their career – ‘pre-service’ or ‘initial’ teacher training. As Gray (2005, p. 5) explains, ‘CPD embraces the idea that individuals aim for continuous improvement in their professional skills and knowledge, beyond the basic training initially required to carry out the job’. She also highlights the point that INSET, unlike CPD, is characterised by delivery rather than outcome; hence the change of terminology signifies a change in focus from provider to the teacher himself or herself.

The basic principle behind CPD is that teachers as professional practitioners need to engage in various forms of activities to improve their skills and knowledge and remain competent in their teaching. CPD starts with initial training and spans teachers’ entire career. Various terminologies are used in the literature to describe CPD such as staff development, professional learning, and in-service training. However, CPD refers to all types of learning opportunities that help teachers improve their teaching (Bubb & Earley, 2007). A number of definitions of CPD have been put forward in the literature and will be synthesised here for the purpose of identifying the main characteristics of CPD. Day (1999b, p. 4) argues that:

professional development consists of all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school and which contribute through these to the quality of

education in the classroom. It is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purpose of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues through each phase of their teaching lives”.

According to Day, CPD can be formal or informal learning, individual or collaborative, that is aimed at improving all aspects of teaching and learning teachers’ practice, students’ quality of learning and school effectiveness. CPD is a career-long commitment.

Another definition of CPD is offered by Bolam (1993, p. 3) who argues that CPD is

Any professional development activities engaged in by teacher which enhance their knowledge and skills and enable them to consider their attitudes and approaches to education of children, with a view to improve the quality of teaching and learning process.

Similarly the emphasis here is on improving knowledge and skills in order to become a more proficient teacher who better meets the demands of his or her pupils. In later work, (Day, 1999b, p. 267) emphasises that CPD refers to the range of activities teachers engage in after qualifying to teach and that these activities ultimately contribute to an improvement in the quality of student learning:

CPD embraces those education, training and job-embedded support activities engaged in by teachers, following their initial certification. Such activities are aimed primarily at adding to their professional knowledge, improving their professional skills and helping them to clarify their professional values so that they can educate their students more effectively.

(Richards & Farrell, 2005, p. 4) explain that professional development refers to general growth and ‘teachers’ understanding of teaching and themselves as teachers’. This includes enhanced understanding of learners and how they learn, and other effective ways of teaching.

A final definition is offered by (Bolam, 1993, p. 220) who suggest that:

CPD is a learning process resulting from meaningful interaction with the context (both in time and space) and eventually leading to changes in teachers’ professional practice (actions) and in their thinking about that practice.

From the definitions above, it can be argued that CPD is a career-long commitment to improving teaching and learning through enhancing teachers’ skills and knowledge. It is

carried out individually or collaboratively, formally or informally, through a variety of activities that will be explored below.

2.4.2 Models of CPD activities

Various models of CPD activities are undertaken by teachers and schools depending on the suitability and perceived effectiveness of such approaches. The demands and priorities of the local contexts alongside the perceptions of those involved in and carrying out CPD activities help shape and determine the CPD model and activities to be undertaken. CPD activities can be of different types serving different purposes (Kennedy, 2005, p. 236). For the purpose of the current discussion, and building on the work of (Kennedy, 2005), two broad types of CPD will be discussed in order to situate the specific type of CPD which is the focus of this study. These two types are deficit and growth CPD. Most CPD activities can be conceptualised using the two broad categories.

In the deficit model of CPD, the assumption is that there are weaknesses in teachers' knowledge or skills and the purpose of CPD is to remedy such weaknesses (Kennedy, 2005). Some examples of deficit CPD activities include training normally in the form of workshops, award-bearing courses, cascade and standards-based (Kennedy, 2005). Generally, these courses used CPD to attempt to remedy perceived weaknesses in an individual teacher's performance and tended to be set within the context of performance management. CPD here is generally delivered to the teacher by an expert; the agenda is determined by the deliverer and the teacher is viewed as a participant in a passive role.

On the other hand, the growth model of CPD situates teachers as active learners having ownership of their own professional development and being engaged in meaningful activities that they themselves perceive as necessary to enhance the quality of their work (Lieberman, 1994; McLaughlin & Zarrow, 2001). One example is communities of practice which is defined as 'groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise [...]. People in communities of practice share their experiences and knowledge in free-flowing, creative ways that foster new approaches to problems' (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, pp. 139-140). One of the main benefits of communities of practice as identified by (Boreham, 2000) is that they 'offer [teachers] an opportunity to negotiate competence through an experience of direct participation' (Wenger, 2000, p. 229). Another model of growth CPD, and the one further explored in this study, is inquiry-based CPD. In this model, teachers are positioned as active learners

involved in researching their practice for the purpose of improving it. Various forms of inquiry-based CPD exist in the literature and these will be explicated later in this chapter. However, for the purpose of the current discussion, action research is one of the most prominent types within the inquiry-based CPD model. Action research ‘has practitioner development and transformation as its main aim’ (Weiner, 2002, p. 5) as teachers themselves develop the CPD agenda through identifying areas within their practice worthy of investigation and further improvement.

The impact of different CPD models and activities vary from teacher to teacher and from school to school. In an attempt to synthesise what makes CPD impactful, (Walter & Briggs, 2012) analysed 35 evidence-based studies and identified seven aspects of CPD that make the most difference for teachers. These are:

- Concrete and classroom-based
- Collaborative
- Involve outside expertise
- Teachers involved in selecting their own CPD
- Involve mentoring and coaching
- Sustained over time
- Emphasises pedagogical leadership in supporting teachers’ development.

As I will establish later in this chapter, inquiry-based CPD is likely to have these aspects.

2.5 Varieties of Teacher Research Approaches

There is no shortage in the field of education of terms used to describe the various approaches to conducting research by teachers in the literature. Among the terms used are: action research (Elliott, 1991; Zeichner, 1993a), practitioner research (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001), collaborative inquiry (Bray et al., 2000), critical inquiry (Aaron et al., 2006), self-study (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001), exploratory practice (Allwright, 2003); teacher research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 1999b; MacLean & Mohr, 1999) and lesson study (Lewis & Hurd, 2011). On the one hand, the emergence and mushrooming of various approaches can be interpreted as a sign of growing interest in practitioner-led inquiry. On the other, however, this poses some issues regarding whether and which approach is more appropriate to the specific context in which teacher research is intended to become integrated into a teacher’s practice. A guiding principle is to refrain from an obsession with any particular approach or any argument that regards any research approach by teachers as more superior or appropriate for all times and all contexts.

The focus of this study is on teachers learning from their practice by integrating an aspect of inquiry process into their teaching practice; whether this form of inquiry is called action research, practitioner research, self-study, or any other approach. Therefore, in this study, inquiry-based professional development is conceptualised as an umbrella term to encompass the varieties of teacher-led inquiries of which action research is a prominent one and the particular approach to be investigated as it is the particular approach to inquiry-based professional development to which the participants in this study were exposed. Although action research as an approach to conducting research by and with teachers is discussed in detail below, it is useful at this stage to clarify what is meant by 'research' or 'inquiry' in the rather general terms of teacher research/inquiry. For this purpose, Borg (2010b) offers a set of criteria in his definition of teacher research that helps in conceptualising and defining any research activity pursued by teachers. Although Borg uses the term 'teacher research', much of what comes in his definition seems to apply to other approaches of research conducted by and with teachers. He defines teacher research as a:

systematic inquiry, qualitative and/or quantitative, conducted by teachers in their own professional contexts, individually or collaboratively (with other teachers, and/or external collaborators), which aims to enhance teachers' understandings of some aspect of their work, is made public, has the potential to contribute to better quality teaching and learning in individual classrooms and which may also inform institutional improvement, and educational policy more broadly. (Borg, 2010b:395)

Borg's definition starts by stating that it is a systematic and principled process, not just another type of reflective or thoughtful teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999b). This kind of teacher research transcends the qualitative/quantitative paradigm war (Gage, 1989) by emphasising that teacher research can be either qualitative or quantitative or a mix of both. Another characteristic is that it is either individual or collaborative. Research by teachers is conducted to improve understanding of practice and continuously learn from it, which ultimately results in better quality teaching and learning. The dissemination of the outcomes of teacher research is an essential part; however, it does not have to be the same as academic research which is mainly disseminated through journal publication. In fact, this is an area where the rhetoric of academic research is clear and has its impact on various approaches to teacher research. A common piece of advice for teachers starting out in this tradition is to publish their enquiries just like other academic researchers do, despite the fact that teacher inquiry is not generally carried out for the same reasons as academic research (Borg, 2010a). What is noticeable here is that the norms and traditions of one type

of research (academic research) are imposed on another (teacher research). This can be explained by the lack of a reference point for teacher research and the link between academic institutions and practitioners. Teachers can start disseminating and sharing their research experiences locally to create a bank of cases or evidence that is of great value to their schools/institutions. Another way is to network teacher research (McLaughlin et al., 2008, pp. 193-195) with other professionals by other means such as blogging, creating online forums, presenting in local or regional conferences, establishing partnerships with other schools or any other means that are feasible and appropriate in the context where teacher research is conducted. There are also now a growing number of journals which welcome contributions mainly from teachers doing action research or any other type of systematic investigation of their practice such as *Networks*, *ELT Journal*, *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning*, and *English Teaching Forum*.

The particular type of teacher research that I want to discuss and experiment with in this study is *action research*. As an approach, action research is claimed to have all the characteristics of teacher research discussed above and it has gained more currency and acceptance in diverse fields (Herr & Anderson, 2005). This is not to imply that action research is better or of higher status than any other approach; in fact, my iterative argument throughout this study is that there is no one approach or paradigm that is 'better' than any other. What needs to be considered is an appropriate approach to the specific context taking into account the affordance, support and culture of the context where inquiry is intended to be introduced and implemented and whether or not teachers themselves are willing to be inquiry-engaged. Teacher research, action research and other approaches of practitioner-led enquiries are usually distinguished from each other (Borg, 2013), sometimes set as rivals, one against the other (see for example Allwright, 2005). Each term 'connotes different purposes, positionalities, epistemologies, ideological commitments, and, in many cases, different research traditions that grew out of very different social contexts' (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 3). For example, (Bailey, 2001, p. 491) claims that classroom research refers to the *context* where research is carried out and that it can be done by researchers and/or practitioners other than teachers. However, excluding teachers as the initiators of research in 'classroom research' is not inherently logical and indeed other commentators tend not to exclude teachers from this type of research. Whereas, for her, in the case of teacher research and action research, the *agent* is what defines the process in the former while the *process* is the main characteristic of the latter. In this sense, action research, at least conceptually, has the advantage of the

possibility of collaboration with outsiders which is a key aspect in the current study. Another attraction to action research is represented in its emphasis on conducting the inquiry through cycles of investigation and dissemination which facilitates both accountability and reliability of the investigation. In comparison with other types of teacher research, action research is characterised by being a process in which teachers inquire about problems and take informed actions to solve them, by being change-oriented (Pine, 2009, p. 30). Another distinction between various types of practitioner research and action research is offered by McAteer (2013) who maintains that although all types of practitioner research and action research involve examining theory and practice, action research in particular involves ‘ongoing and evolving action as part of the process’ (McAteer, 2013, pp. 11-12)

An informed and disciplined degree of distinction is necessary in discussing the various approaches of research done by teachers; however, too much compartmentalisation is not necessarily helpful. After all, these various approaches belong to a paradigm of research that is characterised by practitioners being involved in investigating their practice independently or in collaboration with outsiders in order to learn from and improve it. Different approaches are more appropriate in different contexts; it is not the approach itself that matters as long as the investigation is conducted systematically and rigorously and has the improvement of practice as its primary target.

2.5.1 Introduction to action research

Action research is a well-established research paradigm (Pine, 2009) in multiple disciplines notably education, health and management among others. In this study, I will use the term ‘paradigm’ while being wary of the ‘paradigm war’ arguments and their consequences (Gage, 1989) that have plagued educational research such as the claim that action research is not worthy of pursuits. In doing so, I will argue against an unhealthy tradition in educational research characterised by a tendency to ‘marginalise or rubbish’ (Furlong, 2004, p. 351) a certain approach or paradigm in order to justify the existence and worthiness of another (see for example: Ludema et al., 2001). This is a tricky task, particularly when it comes to discussing the power relationships embedded in action research and the influence of other paradigms on action research. However, I will be guided in this argument by a general principle that different research traditions, approaches, and methods are used for different purposes and in different contexts (Furlong, 2004; Yin, 2009). The relationship between the various traditions and paradigms does not

have to be antagonistic or evoking ‘war and hostility’. I will return to this point later in this chapter.

In education, there are numerous signs and examples of the maturity of action research in the field. The journal *Educational Action Research* has become one of the most important hubs for researchers and practitioners interested in action research to report their studies and discuss methodological issues associated with the theory and practice of action research. *Educational Action Research* is supported by CARN (Collaborative Action Research Network), which was established in 1976 following the Ford Teaching Project in the UK and has become now an international network (Somekh, 1991) for action research professionals and enthusiasts. Nowadays, there is hardly any book or handbook that claims to discuss educational research that does not discuss action research (see for example Adams, 2010; Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Dornyei, 2007; Lodico et al., 2010). There are also to date two main action research handbooks; one of them is dedicated to *educational* action research (Noffke & Somekh, 2009; Reason & Bradbury, 2008 with the first edition in 2001). In education, action research has become more institutionalised and mainstreamed in both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees (Koshy, 2005; Ponte et al., 2004). A tendency and orientation towards professionalising insider practitioners has resulted in many Masters dissertations to adopt an action research approach and to the creation of a new doctorate in education (Ed.D) programme in which professionals study their own contexts to improve it and make a difference (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Herr & Anderson, 2005). What needs to be stressed here is that action research has passed the stage of legitimising its existence; it has currency in both academic and professional circles.

In this chapter, the discussion will focus on exploring some of the underlying assumptions of action research through tracking milestones in its history and development. Afterwards, I will concentrate on some salient philosophical assumptions pertinent to the theory and practice of action research in educational settings. Then, I will discuss some variations of action research that have resulted from various interpretations of the term ‘action research’. Embedded in the discussion is an attempt to problematise power relationships and some critique of action research.

2.5.2 *Origins and Development of action research*

Kurt Lewin

Kurt Lewin is credited for coining the term ‘action research’ in 1944. He was particularly interested in intergroup relations. One of Lewin’s main legacies regarding action research is represented in his notion of the ‘spiral’ process of action research (Pine, 2009, p. 72) which involves ‘a circle of planning, executing, and reconnaissance’ (Lewin, 1946, p. 38). The basic Lewinian spiral action research process which proceeds through an iterative act of planning, acting and reflecting –see Figures 2.2 and 2.3- continues to be the nucleus of most action research plans despite later modifications and adaptations (see for example: Burns, 1999:155; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988a; Kemmis et al., 2014; Richards & Farrell, 2005:183; Zuber-Skerritt, 1996:99). With action research, Lewin introduced a new conceptualisation of social research; one in which, unlike traditional academic research, the inquiry is recursive, developmental, ongoing and based on practice. The outcomes, understandings and actions of one cycle of inquiry feed into later cycles in a systematic attempt to improve practice rather than being aimed to be generalised to or replicated in other contexts or disseminated to other scholars in prestigious academic journals. Action research, in contrast, seeks to improve and learn from local practice.



Figure 2. 2: the action research spiral (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 19)

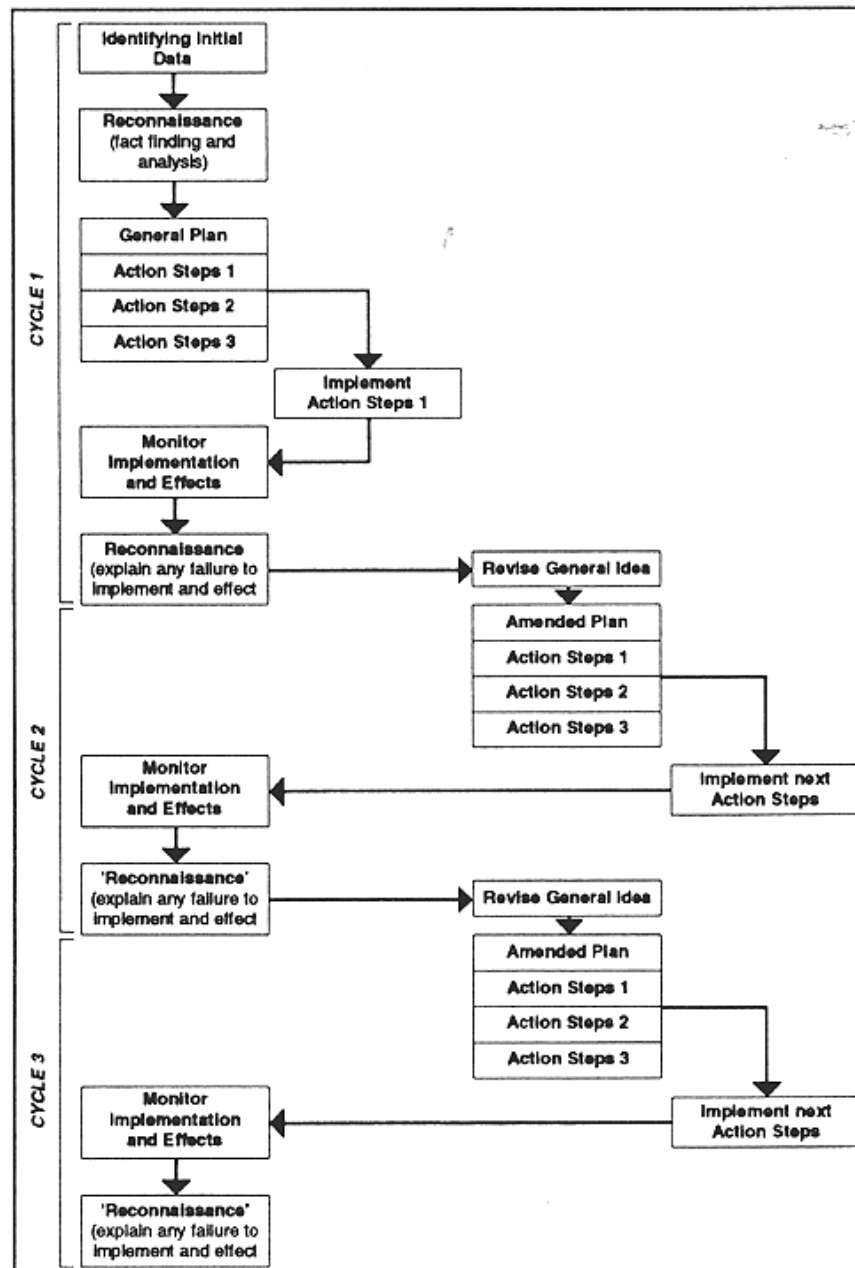


Figure 2. 3: Action research cycles (Elliott, 1991:71)

Lewin problematized the purpose of social research. He claimed that ‘research that produces nothing but books will not suffice’ (1946:35); what is needed, then, is research that leads to actual and tangible improvement and development in practice. At a time when scientific research was viewed to be the model for social research, Lewin asked the daring question of ‘[w]hen, where, and by whom should social research be done?’ (1946:37). He worked with organisations to improve the intergroup relations amongst staff and workers. His main concerns were ‘the systematic, preferably experimental, study of a social problem, and efforts at its solution’ (Bargal et al., 1992:8). A central tenet in Lewin’s approach is the call for *democratic* participation in the inquiry (John et al., 1989), though this call for democracy in organisations and workplaces did not involve critiquing the

wider undemocratic social patterns (Adelman, 1993), unlike latter forms of action research such as participatory, critical or emancipatory action research that took society at large as its target for change and improvement (Boog, 2003; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Fals-Borda, 1987; Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). According to (John et al., 1989:165), Lewin maintained that practitioners in a given context ‘should be taken into account as part of the investigation ... [not] as mere objects of research’. In a similar vein, Freire (1973), the influential Brazilian educator and activist, also maintained that ‘the person who has the problem has the solution’ which might indicate that Lewin's ideas influenced him. Although Lewin did not explicitly discuss his political ideas, it was speculated that his approach was humanistic (John et al., 1989:166). Action research, however, as it is emphasised in the literature represents a political stance and is usually power-laden (Noffke, 1994; 2009).

Lewin laid the foundation for this line of thinking and since then the popularity of action research has notably risen and gained more currency in various fields including education. However, and as is the case with most innovations, it came under fire mainly from the traditional academic front and consequently action research witnessed noticeable decline especially in the United States in the late 1950s (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988b, p. 9; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006, p. 37; Pine, 2009, p. 42). Some commentators attribute this decline to the focus on ‘technical excellence’ and the ‘emergence of new research and development models’ (McNiff & Whitehead, 2006, p. 37). I suggest that this early resistance to and decline of action research could be additionally understood in two further ways. First, Schön's concept of ‘dynamic conservatism’ which is a ‘tendency to fight to remain the same’ (1973, p. 30) provides a way to understanding reactions in academia towards a new approach to research that claims to produce knowledge and have significant impact on practice. Action research represented at that time a step out of the comfort zone for academics who were comfortable with their ‘established’ and taken-for-granted research methodology. For example, Hodgkinson (1957) criticised action research highlighting methodological and theoretical shortcomings in light of his own understanding of prevailing scientific, mainly quantitative, methods of that time. Not surprisingly, then, he compared action research with ‘*true*’ research (1957, p. 146) and asked whether action research could indeed be termed *research*. The second way that helps understand the decline in interest in action research is the power relationships inherent in this research approach. Briefly put, action research disrupts the various roles, ways and purposes of the academic inquiry (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). The traditionally taken-

for-granted *subjects* of educational research suddenly become active *researchers* or co-researchers in action research. A different type of knowledge, one that is grounded in the day-to-day reality of the local context and produced mostly by individuals native to the same context of the inquiry, rather than outside ‘experts’, started to emerge with action research. Academic researchers are no more the sole experts on educational matters and ‘brokers of knowledge’ (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992, p. 459; 1994, p. 43). Conceptualised in this way, the early grassroots action research represented a threat to academic research, to the knowledge status and hierarchies associated with academic research, and thus the tendency to resist action research and claim that it is not proper research.

Two points about the Lewinian approach merit explication before I proceed further with the discussion in this chapter. First, Lewin mainly used an approach similar in principle to that of Randomised Control Trials (RCT). He divided the workers into two groups, one received training, while the other did not. Productivity in the group which received training was remarkably higher than the controlled group and hence Lewin generalised about the method he used with the training group. This is not to imply that Lewin was a positivist. On the contrary, it is argued that ‘Lewin is not a scientific positivist’; his approach was rather ‘a dialectical process ... and an interpretative ... epistemology melded to a quasi-experimental orientation’ (Adelman, 1993:12). It can be speculated that his tendency to use an RCT type of action research was in line with and influenced by the general tendency at that time when scientific methods, popular and hegemonic in the natural sciences, were highly esteemed and cast their influences on the social sciences. Seen in the background of that time, Lewin’s contribution is still innovative and creative and is meant to overcome the shortcomings of the taken-for-granted methods in the social sciences. The second point about the Lewinian action research is that it was generally interventionist in nature. This is usually referred to as the ‘Lewin-Tavistock¹ model’ in which “‘outside’ researchers provid[e] technical assistance with traditional research methods’ (Noffke, 1994, p. 14). The underlying assumption here is that practitioners in a certain context are *empowered* and their work situations are improved through being involved in the research process with the help of the experts (academic researchers, for example) in a process that democratises the research process and advocates democracy and equity in general. The power relationships involved in such an approach in which insiders are supposedly empowered by outsiders

¹ The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations was influenced by Lewin’s ideas and action research approach.

should not be taken for granted. For the purpose of this study, I will limit the argument to academic researchers (outsiders) and teachers (insiders). In action research projects which involve collaboration with academic researchers, which is usually the case (see for example: Christenson et al., 2002; Martinovic et al., 2012), the role and agenda of the researchers as well as the purpose of the inquiry and the agendas of all parties need to be explored and questioned. What is also noticeable in such ‘collaborative’ projects is that it is always assumed that the practitioners are the ones in need of help and support from the ‘experts’ whose efficacy and development are almost always taken for granted (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Some of the questions I want to pose at this stage and try to engage in responding to throughout this thesis are related to whether inside practitioners (teachers) can, or need to, be empowered by outside professionals (researchers) (Hammersley, 1993). While acknowledging the value and importance of action research for teachers, which may be a democratising process, I will argue that a better understanding of the relationship between research and practice on the one hand and researchers and practitioners on the other is needed for impactful and sustainable action research.

Stephen Corey

Another key figure in the development of educational action research is Stephen Corey. He highlighted problematic issues associated with the conduct and dissemination of academic educational research and the lack of impact on practice and compared the procedures and assumption of the emerging action research with what he termed ‘fundamental’ research (Corey, 1949). He contends that academic research aims to establish new generalisations stated as observed uniformities, explanatory principles or scientific laws (1949). He also notes that academic researchers ‘test hypotheses’ and are interested in ‘discovering the truth’ and they consider that it is the responsibility of the practitioner to take the new findings into account (Corey, 1949). The linearity, cause-effect relationship between research and practice is inherent in most social research which adopts natural sciences methodology, i.e. positivist research. For Corey, action research represents a way of transcending the theory-practice divide, characteristic of educational academic research. Corey sums up much of the thoughts behind action research as a new form of inquiry:

We are convinced that the disposition to study ... the consequences of our own teaching is more likely to change and improve our practices than is reading about someone else has discovered of his [sic] teaching’. (Corey, 1953, p. 70)

This line of thinking proved to be influential and resonated with many practitioners and scholars to follow.

Lawrence Stenhouse

As Corey (1949) anticipated, interest in action research grew in other parts of the world. In the UK, action research became prominent particularly following the work of Stenhouse (1975) in the Humanities Curriculum Project and his advocacy of the teacher-as-a-researcher movement. Like Corey, Stenhouse voiced dissatisfaction with traditional academic research maintaining that academic researchers ‘have been more interested in building a theory of teaching [...] in a form addressed mainly to the research community, than in improving the classrooms they have studied’ (1975:156). He envisioned the solution to be that teachers themselves ‘possess this field of research’ (1975:142), to be knowledge-generating practitioners and researchers themselves. Despite his influential work, Stenhouse’s call for an enhanced professionalism for teachers was focused primarily on the teacher him/herself, without emphasising the need for a better reconceptualisation or reconfiguration of the role of the teacher and what this might entail to other individuals and groups closely or remotely affected by teachers’ work, such as learners, parents, administrators, academic researchers and policymakers. His view was that the professionalising of teachers through research, and ultimately curriculum development, is dependent on ‘full-time researchers to support teachers’ work’ (1975:162). In this way, the outside researcher is still seen as more powerful and knowledgeable than the practitioner (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002b:44).

John Elliott and others in the UK

Following in Stenhouse’s footsteps, Elliott and Adelman in the Ford Project (1975), and Elliott’s later work on action research (1991, 2009) better conceptualised and refined Stenhouse’s ‘the teacher-as- a-researcher’ movement into the action research movement in the UK. Both Stenhouse’s and Elliott’s works contributed to ‘reframe the nature of teaching as in itself a form of research, and to extend the concept of the professional to highlight careful deliberation over both the ends and means of educational work’ (Noffke, 2009, p. 9). Based on new conceptualisations and developments of the role of the teacher, Whitehead (1989, 1998) and Whitehead and McNiff (2002a) developed living theory approach to action research. This is prompted by the question of ‘how do I improve my practice?’ (Whitehead, 1989, 1998). Here, practitioners are encouraged to:

produce their own descriptions and explanations for their own learning. They do this by undertaking their action enquiries into their own practice, producing evidence to show that they have improved practice, and having that evidence validated by the critical scrutiny of others. (McNiff & Whitehead, 2002a:54)

Stephen Kemmis

In Australia-and beyond-, action research also gathered momentum with the influential work of Kemmis and collaborators (Carr & Kemmis, 1985, 2005, 2009; Kemmis, 2006, 2009; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988a, 2005). Kemmis' noticeable contribution is his advocacy of a 'critical' approach to action research which aims to investigate social and political pattern in educational life. He argues that action research, when conceptualised and conducted critically, will bring 'unwelcome or uncomfortable news' about schooling, and action research is conceptualised as the way to challenge and change such unwelcome news (Kemmis, 2006, p. 461). He expressed dissatisfaction with action research that has grown to be docile and technical, affirming that:

action research ... work that discovers no unwelcome truths, that avoids or shrinks from them or avoids telling these truths is not the kind of research needed to transform practices, our understandings of our practices or the institutional and historical circumstances in which we practise. (Kemmis, 2006, p. 474)

Cochran-Smith and Lytle

Finally, the work of Cochran-Smith and Lytle (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990, 1993, 1999b, 2009) is significant in understanding action research as we know it today. A unique contribution of the two scholars is their reflexive accounts on the relationships between the academic world and the world of practice; with practitioners and other stakeholders in the teacher research projects in which they were involved. They analyse and reflect on most of what is taken for granted in collaborative research projects between academics and practitioners. They also problematise taken for granted ways in knowledge production in teacher education (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999a) and question the accepted truths and logic when using terms such as 'action research, teacher research, the scholarship of teaching and self-study' (2009:45-6).

The theoretical framework in this study is informed by the work of the individual authors briefly outlined above and others whose work I will refer to in other parts of this thesis. My own understanding of action research has evolved through the unique position of belonging both to the world of practice as a teacher and the world of research as a doctoral candidate.

2.5.3 Characteristics of Action Research

Action research is ‘the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it’ (Elliott, 1991, p. 69). This study is ‘systematic’ and, unlike traditional academic research, focuses on ‘specific situations and localized solutions’ (Stringer, 2007, p. 1). Improvement in action research is usually associated with change, a key characteristic in action research. It is ‘concerned equally with changing *individuals*... and ... the *culture* of the groups, institutions and societies to which they belong’ (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988a, p. 16, original emphasis). This view of educational research stands at odds with other approaches especially the traditional academic approach to research which aims to ‘produce knowledge’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007:15) or probably generalisable wisdom that transcends the confines of the local context. The main features of action research which are pertinent to this study are:

- Small-scale
- Practical
- Reflective
- Change-oriented
- Collaborative
- Values and beliefs-based

These characteristics are discussed in turn below.

Small-scale

Teacher action research tends to be ‘small-scale’ in nature (Armstrong & Moore, 2004; Campbell et al., 2004; Gray, 2012; Kember & Gow, 1992; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988a; Koshy, 2005; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002a; Phaik-Lah, 1997; Sagor, 2000). The most successful action research projects reported in the literature are those which are ‘small-scale, contextualised, and local in character’ (Burns, 2010, p. 10). Taking into

consideration the busy professional lives of teachers, in general, expectations about involvement in action research need to be realistic. Starting small and probably involving those who are interested in the inquiry in the same organisation, if feasible, makes it more manageable to accomplish its intended outcomes. Although sustainable action research is better conducted through small-scale projects focused on local and specific issues or questions, more administrative top-down support is crucial to the sustainability and institutionalisation of those small-scale action research projects. In my earlier MRes study (2012), for example, I found that the majority of the teachers in the study had diverse understandings of research, mainly influenced by positivistic notions of research, and are generally disengaged from research with the lack of administrative support as a primary reason. Even in individual cases where enthusiastic teachers tried to initiate a small-scale inquiry, they found a lack of cooperation and sometimes resistance from the administration which resulted in the abandonment of the inquiry.

A major reconceptualisation of the role of the teacher in light of inquiry-stance of teaching is needed to sustain a critical, research-based education. This reconceptualisation must also take into account all the necessary support needed for those teachers –not necessarily all-who are willing to be engaged in small-scale action research so that research is built into their normal teaching practice without causing burnout or negatively affecting either of the activities: teaching or researching. In principle, research is conducted to improve practice and the experience of education; therefore, it should never be imposed or become a burden on teachers.

Practical

It is acknowledged that teachers are ‘practical people and tend to focus on what needs to be done in the classroom to help their students learn’ (Burns, 2010, p. 14). Educational action research usually starts with identifying an issue related to teaching and learning that needs to be improved, changed, or simply better understood. What this means is that the areas or problems to be investigated through action research stem from the day to day practices of teachers, not necessarily from gaps, inconsistencies or ambiguities in the available literature about the topic under examination. The existing literature is crucial as the action research project proceeds; however, it is not necessarily the starting point.

What initiates an action research project is a commitment to improving the quality of education in a specific educational context (school, college, university) and teachers’

ongoing ‘reflection-in-action’ and ‘reflection-on-action’ (Schön, 1983, p. 22). The first refers to thinking on the spot while the latter being the ‘the systematic thinking back on action that has been completed’ (Hooton, 2008, p. 30). It can be inferred, therefore, that whereas reflection-*in*-action is spontaneous and intuitive, reflection-*on*-action, which is our concern, is more deliberate and planned, as I will show below.

The outcomes of action research are also normally expected to be practical in nature: making a change or an improvement of some sort to the normal way teaching and learning processes are conducted (Creswell, 2012, p. 22). This is a main motive of carrying out action research.

Reflective

Reflection is a fundamental component of action research. In this study, and contrary to Leitch and Day (2000), I use ‘reflection’ and ‘reflective practice’ interchangeably. Reflection is used here to mean ‘systematic and deliberate thinking back over one’s actions’ (Russell & Munby, 1992:3). In addition, an essential ingredient of any action research project is a recursive critical reflection on the various stages of the process in order to monitor progress and continually refine understanding and modify the process of the inquiry in relation to observed practice and perhaps to the body of available literature on the issue under consideration. (McAteer, 2013, p. 25) maintains that ‘action research is predicated on the concept of a more critically reflective practice, which challenges the teacher to move beyond the ‘normal’ evaluation of practice to a more problematising approach; one which raises questions and seeks alternative perspectives’. In this way, *a priori* design of action research is uncommon. ‘Inquiry’ and ‘action research’ are also used synonymously in this thesis, unlike (Baumfield et al., 2012, p. 4), who argue that reflection leads to inquiry which leads to sustainable action research. I do not think the distinction they make between inquiry and action research as distinct processes or one leading to the other is a helpful one. However, I concur with those authors that reflection is ‘a crucial stage [in] the forming of questions arising directly from practice and it is the fostering of this intention’ (ibid) and that reflection on action is necessary throughout an action research project. A relevant linkage between action research and reflective practice is pointed out by Leitch and Day who emphasise that Schön’s work on reflective practice was ‘a reaction against an instrumental notion of teaching where the teacher is a technician implementing others’ knowledge in practice’ (2000, p. 181). Action research shares a similar concern of ‘implementing others’ knowledge’. It values local knowledge created in

a systematic and reflective manner in response to actual issues and problems practitioners face in their practice.

Change-oriented

Change is an essential characteristic of action research (Atkins & Wallace, 2012; Waters-Adams, 2006); it is a distinguishing feature from other approaches to research. Simply put, action research is conducted to improve practice and this entails initiating and studying the change required to achieve this improvement. The change is both behavioural and cognitive. In other words, the change can be observable and comes in the form of altering an aspect of practice. Alternatively, it can simply mean learning something new about practice, which leads to change in both cognition and practice. In education, change can be exemplified by teachers systematically experimenting and innovating in their classes. This requires a principled and informed change in some aspects of their teaching informed by the outcomes of the action research project they choose to conduct. Another cycle of inquiry can follow to investigate the validity and reliability of the changes introduced in the first cycle. The change can also be the outcome of the new understandings as a result of doing action research. In other words, teachers' involvement in action research ultimately results in changing some aspects of their practice while systematically studying the impact of these innovations and changes on teaching and learning in the specific context where they work.

Collaborative

As indicated above, a basic tenet of action research since its early days is the collaborative endeavour to improve intergroup relationships (Lewin, 1946). Critical action research, associated with Carr and Kemmis, also emphasise the collaborative aspect of critical research work in order to 'overcom[e] aspects of the social order which frustrates rational change' (1985, p. 200). Conceptualised in this way, action research 'organises practitioners into collaborative groups' for the purpose of learning and development as well as creating a 'model for a rational and democratic order' (Carr & Kemmis, 1985, p. 200). (Calhoun, 1993) discusses three types of action research: individual, collaborative and schoolwide action research. Two main issues can be identified with Calhoun's individual action research: (1) top-down support cannot be guaranteed to accommodate individual cases and/or interests, (2) the primary audience of the individual action research is the teacher conducting the research and findings are not necessarily shared (1993, p. 63). With

collaborative action research, on the other hand, the wider interests of the school is usually a priority and the knowledge generated in the process is tentative and subjected to scrutiny and debate (Hammersley, 1993, p. 213; Pring, 2004, p. 140) which creates a sound foundation for the insights and lessons learned from the study. Arguing from a critical perspective, (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988a, p. 5) go as far as claiming that it is only action research when it is done collaboratively, though acknowledging the '*critically examined action* of individual group members'.

Collaboration can be between individuals within the same institution (i.e. insiders such as teachers, students and administrators), or individuals within the same institution with other outsiders (i.e. insiders with outsiders such as academic researchers).

A misunderstanding of 'collaboration' in action research is that it simply happens when people –potentially outsiders and insiders, or just insiders- come together to work on a certain project (Pine, 2009; Reimer & Bruce, 1994). Numerous commentators (see for example: Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Elliott, 1991; Hargreaves, 1999b; Pine, 2009) have highlighted the significance of explicating the meaning of collaboration and what it involves from the very beginning of a research project, so that the agendas, roles and responsibilities of different individuals and stakeholders are examined and explored to achieve the goals and purposes of the inquiry (see (Sagor, 2005, p. 25) for an example of a focus worksheet for collaborative action research). Otherwise, action research can be 'hijacked' by those who have more power (Zeichner, 1993b, p. 212). All involved in collaborative action research need to be self-reflective and sensitive to their and others' roles and responsibilities as the project progresses. Primarily, university researchers need to be careful not to reproduce the 'researcher-subject' relationship characteristic of positivistic research' (Pine, 2009, p. 143). What is needed in collaborative action research is *genuine* collaboration where hierarchies are eliminated for the purpose of group learning and development. Professionals conducting action research are 'co-researchers' and their collaboration means that:

each person's ideas are equally significant as potential resources for creating interpretive categories of analysis, negotiated among participants. It strives to avoid skewing of credibility stemming from the prior status of an ideal holder. It especially makes possible the insights gleaned from noting the contradictions between many viewpoints and within a single viewpoint. ... Collaboration has always been a concept basic to the educational action research process (Pine, 2009, p. 74).

In collaborative action research projects between teachers and academic researchers, what needs to be challenged is the accepted wisdom that it is only practitioners who need to develop and grow professionally as a result of involvement in such projects. University researchers need to consider working ‘in the field’ with practitioners as an invaluable learning and developmental opportunity. The expertise and skills of university researchers should not be considered more valuable than those in the field and their needs to develop should be considered as well in collaborative projects (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). What needs to be reconsidered is the assumption that when researchers and practitioners collaborate, it is practitioners who know less, or in need of the ‘expert’ advice to improve their practice. Each party brings a unique perspective to the collaborative inquiry; neither should be taken for granted. The insider knowledge and expertise of practitioners is significant for successful and meaningful inquiry. Equally important is acknowledging the need for academic researchers to learn and develop by working with practitioner. In this way, teachers and researchers work on building and enhancing school-based learning communities with professionals who investigate matters of mutual interest (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Sagor, 1992, p. 10). I will return to a discussion of the power relationships in (collaborative) action research in later parts of the thesis.

Critical friendship (Baskerville & Goldblatt, 2009; Carr & Kemmis, 1985; Costa & Kallick, 1993; Kember et al., 1997; Stenhouse, 1975; Swaffield, 2005, 2008) is a particularly effective type of collaboration between academics and practitioners. In this relationship, outsiders help insiders to act ‘more wisely, prudently and critically’ (Carr & Kemmis, 1985, p. 161) in the process of action research. Other ways of conceptualising the relationship between academics and practitioners were not always successful mainly because ‘the power and authority’ associated with academics hindered the process of development and ‘learning capacity’ (Kember et al., 1997, p. 464). (Swaffield, 2005, pp. 44-45) puts forth a useful set of criteria and characteristics of a ‘critical friend’ as:

an outsider, who not only has a different perspective on the school from those within it, but also assists them to see the familiar in a new light. The primary aim of a critical friendship is seen as supporting improvement through empowerment, demonstrating a positive regard for people and providing an informed critique of processes and practices. The critical friend’s viewpoint gains credibility the more it is informed by an understanding both of the specific issues facing the school and of the wider context of its work, its community, and the priorities and pressures of local and national policy-making.

Trust is a significant characteristic of the relationship between outsiders and insiders in critical friendship as well as awareness, knowledge and sensitivity towards the local

context (Costa & Kallick, 1993, p. 50). As well as providing support, an outsider critical friend also provides challenge through facilitating reflection and ‘providing another viewpoint, prompting honest reflection and reappraisal, a seeing anew that may be challenging and uncomfortable, yet enhancing’ (Swaffield, 2008, p. 323).

Values and beliefs-based

Action research is strongly rooted in teachers’ own practice and through the process of action research, teacher critically examine their own teaching in order to enhance it. This makes the notion of ‘objectivity’, often aspired to in much social research, problematic. Teachers are immersed in their practice and action research allows them to question and examine their conceptions and beliefs in an attempt to better understand their practice and improve it. Indeed, in action research, value free or value neutral types of research are rejected; whereas, what is focussed upon is a critical examination of one’s own values and beliefs in relation to one’s own practice (McAteer, 2013, p. 33; McNiff, 2016, p. 22; Reason, 2006, p. 201). Kemmis et al. (2014) for example argue that:

action research...rejects the notion of the ‘objectivity’ of the researcher in favour of a very active and proactive notion of critical self- reflection—individual and collective self-reflection that actively interrogates the conduct and consequences of participants’ practices, their understandings of their practices, and the conditions under which they practice, in order to discover whether their practices are, in fact, irrational, unsustainable, or unjust. (2014, p. 6)

McAteer (2013) explains that action research is highly personal, focusing on and challenging the researcher’s values and beliefs. ‘It immediately provides a challenge to the often sought objectivity that seems to characterise ‘good’ research’ (McAteer, 2013, p. 33). Pine (2009) also rejects the notion of objectivity in action research and calls for reflexive subjectivity. He maintains that ‘in action research, there is a move away from an “objective” position on inquiry; instead, it tries to move researchers to an intersubjective perspective that includes their social location, personal experiences and self-awareness’ (Pine, 2009, p. 69). The changes in practice involved in action research are ones that are meaningful to the action researcher as such changes are normally expected to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. What is significant here, then, is the exploration of how such a values and beliefs-based approach fits within a context characterised by high levels of performativity and procedural ‘objectivity’. This will be further revisited and discussed in chapter six.

2.6 Teachers' Beliefs and Conceptions

In a small-scale MRes study (Ashour, 2012, p. 11), I defined teachers' beliefs as 'mental constructs with affective loading. They are the result of an individual's personal history, culture, education and experience; therefore, they are personally configured and of specific significance to the person who holds them. Beliefs are likely to guide and define practice'. Drawing on Lortie (1975) 'the apprenticeship of observation', I regarded beliefs and ensuing conceptions as constructs that require a long time to formulate; however, they become resistant to change over time. Since my early interest in the area of action research by teachers, I have considered beliefs and conceptions to be the starting point in understanding teachers' engagement/lack of engagement in any type of inquiry into their practice. Aiming to understand teachers' beliefs and conceptions about teacher research is likely to (1) facilitate reflecting on this activity and (2) provide a basis for introducing and integrating this activity to become sustainable professional development activity or the usual way teachers go about their teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). The discussion below focus on three areas related to teachers' beliefs and conceptions. Firstly, I consider the significance of teachers' beliefs as a useful construct in educational research. Secondly, I discuss the relationships between beliefs and practice and I conclude the section with a discussion of some practical issues related to investigating teachers' beliefs.

2.6.1 Significance of teachers' beliefs

In order to understand the significance of researching teachers' beliefs, we need to understand how this area of research in education started and developed.

A major factor that led to the emergence and then the popularity of teachers' beliefs as an area of investigation in educational research is the shift from a process-product approach in studying teachers and teaching to an approach that focused more on teachers' thinking processes (Richardson, 2003). The former approach is one that mainly views teaching as a set of observable skills that a teacher can master (Calderhead, 1996); therefore, the teaching effectiveness approach to understanding teaching and teachers was prevalent (Shulman, 1986) and issues related to the effective adoption of new teaching methods, classroom management and behavioural and observable skills (Richardson, 2003). Elbaz (1981, 1983) points out that curriculum research at that time focused mainly on 'intended outcomes' while ignoring teachers' 'complex type of action and decision making' (1981, p. 44). In this way, what mattered is what teachers did rather than what they thought or

believed. The 1970s witnessed a challenge to this view. Wary of the limitations of this approach, researchers shifted their focus from what teachers do to what goes on in their minds, their beliefs and thinking processes, that makes them do what they do (Richardson, 2003), i.e. the unobservable face of teaching. More studies based on classroom observation and semi-structured interviews with a focus on understanding not only teaching but also teachers' thinking about the teaching process started to emerge (Clark & Peterson, 1986). (Skott, 2015, p. 14) maintains that the shift 'was based ... on an acknowledged need to move beyond process-product studies that had linked teacher behaviour to student performance'. Jackson's (1968) was an avant-garde study in this sense as it focused on the thinking that underpinned teachers' behaviours. Lortie's (1975) is another influential example in this context as he brought to the fore intrinsic issues related to how teachers come to learn about teaching and their profession. The shift can be conceptualised as one from outward inwards: from what is observable and seen from the outside (what teachers do) towards the unobservable (what teachers think and believe) about various elements of their practice and professional development. A further factor in the interest in teachers' beliefs and cognition was the advancements made then in the field of cognitive psychology (Borg, 2006b). The understanding that started to crystallise then is that in order to better understand teaching, it is essential to understand teachers' thinking and beliefs.

2.6.2 The relationship between beliefs and practice

One of the main reasons behind the interest in studying beliefs is the potential for understanding practice. The hypothesis here is that understanding *what* lies behind what teachers do in terms of thinking and beliefs will facilitate understanding *why* teachers do what they do.

Teachers' beliefs play a significant role in how they teach, how they make sense of new information about teaching and learning, and how this is transferred into classroom practice. Beliefs guide teachers' understanding of the effectiveness of their instructions and inform their classroom decisions. Uncovering teachers' beliefs contributes to our understanding of teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning, their decision-making processes and their classroom practice. The close affinity between beliefs and practice is suggested by research which shows that the beliefs held by teachers about teaching, learning, subject matter, students and the classroom affect teachers' overall practice and classroom instructions. A few studies (Bailey et al., 1996; Calderhead & Robson, 1991; John, 1996; Johnson, 1994, pp., for example) outline the relationship between teachers'

beliefs and their conceptions about teaching and classroom practice. These studies suggest that what teachers bring to the classroom is the major factor that shapes their approaches and teaching philosophies and that teachers 'beliefs ... inform their knowledge about teaching and shape what they do in the classroom' (Freeman & Johnson, 1998, p. 401).

Studying teachers' beliefs is challenging. Part of the challenge stems from the nature of beliefs itself. This is so because trying to pinpoint beliefs is far from straightforward. Even when participants talk about their beliefs, they might not be accurate in describing their beliefs or they might decide to provide a different representation of themselves for various reasons. For example, a teacher who believes that the best type of professional development activities is through attending workshops run by experts might not voice their concerns about a participant-initiated form of professional development if he/she knows this is an unpopular view in their school.

2.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced and discussed the main central concepts in this study: school culture and CPD. In particular, it examined macro and micro political aspects of school culture with a focus on the micropolitics of the school. It then explored teachers' beliefs and conceptions and action research as a form of teacher inquiry. It outlined the significance of beliefs and conceptions in understanding how teachers react to new professional development experiences. In discussing action research, the chapter provided a historical and conceptual discussion of the action research tradition concluding with its key features and assumptions.

The methodology and methods employed in carrying out this study will be discussed and explained in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the methodology and the methods employed for data collection and analysis in this study. The chapter is divided into two main sections: the first discusses the rationale behind the main research decisions (3.2) while the second describes the operationalisation of the methodology and methods in the actual data collection and analysis (3.3). I address the need to employ a case study in order to fully understand the phenomenon under study and answer the research questions.

3.2 Research design: description and rationale

The design of this study is informed by the need to understand teachers' experiences of engagement in an inquiry-based professional development activity. Numerous studies in this tradition have employed diverse methodological tools; however, one contribution of this study is to attempt to obtain richer and more detailed understanding than is normally reported in the literature. In order to do so, I took the decision to follow a social constructionist (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) qualitative approach. Within this overarching approach, I decided to follow a case study approach in order to better understand the how and why (Yin, 2014) of teachers' understanding and engagement with inquiry as a professional development activity.

3.2.1 *Qualitative Research*

Conceptualising qualitative research

Qualitative research is a heterogeneous field and therefore the criteria that define it vary considerably (Hammersley, 2013). While it is true that qualitative researchers mainly deal with words more than numbers in their data collection and analysis, as (Bryman, 2012, p. 380) observes, this is a reductionist view of a rich and complex field. In order to better conceptualise qualitative research and examine its main tenets and how this study fits within a qualitative paradigm, I will use Hammersley's (2013) demarcation of qualitative research in which he outlines five key characteristics of this research tradition. He defines qualitative research as 'a form of social inquiry that tends to adopt a flexible and data-

driven research design, to use relatively unstructured data, to emphasize the essential role of subjectivity in the research process, to study a small number of naturally occurring cases in detail, and to use verbal rather than statistical forms of analysis' (Hammersley, 2013, p. 12). As (Hammersley, 2013) notes, this is not an exhaustive list of characteristics of qualitative research and it is not essential that a qualitative study should have all the characteristics outlined above. It is now worth outlining how these main characteristics are reflected in this study:

- *Flexible research design:* this was necessary to understand how the teachers in this study understood and conducted inquiry in their practice. A pre-defined research design, which is commonly associated with quantitative research, would have limited what I could ask and look for in the field as I will demonstrate in this chapter.
- *Unstructured data:* most of the data which were collected in this study can best be described as unstructured in the sense that the design of the study was flexible enough to allow for the capturing and collecting of data likely to help answer the research questions. This is a decision I made in response to the richness and complexity of the phenomenon. With this in mind, in the interviews, for example, the participants were usually encouraged to elaborate and explore issues around research engagement in their own terms. One feature of all the interviews is that there was a follow-up (interviews and documents) of relevant topics or ideas that the participants mentioned. In a sense, unstructured data is an advantage of qualitative research design in the way that it allows the researcher to capture the complexity and does not restrict what, where and how he or she will collect data.
- *Subjectivity:* one strength of qualitative research is the acknowledgment that 'data, and any inferences from them, are always shaped by the social and personal characteristics of the researcher' (Hammersley, 2013, p. 13). This is of great significance in this study where I participated in setting up the inquiry -based professional development initiative. What becomes critical in this type of research is the researcher's reflexivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002; Dowling, 2008; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; May & Perry, 2014; Williams, 2005) which is the ability of the researcher to reflect on his or her role in and influence upon the research process by being explicit in his or her practice.
- *Natural setting:* this is also an important feature of this study took place in the school where the inquiry-based professional development was based. The fact that

the study was conducted in the participants' own workplace facilitated more interactions and hence building trust and rapport with them. This was essential for them to open up and share more critical and meaningful accounts. A quantitative approach would possibly mean controlling the variables within the study environment which might ultimately create a different environment to the one in which teachers work. Given the complexity of human behaviour, a quantitative approach along these lines does not help to answer the research questions fully or get in-depth understanding of teachers' research engagement. What needs to be acknowledged, though, is that having an outside researcher in the teachers' own context is likely to have an influence on how teachers behave and how they respond to the researcher's questions. This is why reflexivity is of paramount significance in qualitative research.

- *A small number of cases:* This study investigated teachers' research engagement in one secondary school. The study is best described as a qualitative embedded case study, where each individual teacher who participated in this study is considered a case - embedded within the same context. Aiming for an in-depth understanding of my participants' research engagement, I took advantage of all possible sources of data including public documents and other institutional-only documents that were not all produced by the participating teachers. This, however, makes defining the borders between cases even more challenging and therefore a thematic rather than case analysis is used in this study (see 4.2.2). In a qualitative doctoral study, this amount of data is arguably sufficient to manage within the scope of the timeframe of the study and to answer the research questions.
- *Verbal analysis:* besides a few pictures taken mainly in the school (especially in the staffroom), the data in this study are, or were made, textual. What mattered in the analysis, as I will discuss below, is how participants verbally described and explored their research engagement or write about it from their own viewpoints. Therefore, language and words, rather than numbers, is what matters in this qualitative study.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the relationship between qualitative and quantitative research paradigms has typically been described using hostile metaphors and metaphors such as the 'paradigm war' (Gage, 1989). Underpinning this perceived conflict is a view of how we can study and interpret the social world. Constructive debate is necessary; however, what is not necessary is to 'marginalize or rubbish other research traditions

without even attempting to explore the complexity of their positions’ (Furlong, 2004, p. 351) based on methodological bias. The position taken in this thesis is that a qualitative approach and a quantitative approach are not mutually exclusive and indeed can be used in the same project, when appropriate, as part of a mixed methods approach, as (Creswell, 2012, 2014) proposes. He argues that ‘the basic assumption is that the uses of both quantitative and qualitative methods, in combination, provide a better understanding of the research problem and question than either method by itself’ (Creswell, 2012, p. 535). This depends on the nature of the study itself. Sometimes a qualitative approach offers more than a quantitative one, as in this study, and sometimes there is a need to use both orientations in order to better understand a certain phenomenon and answer the research questions. An argument of suitability rather than superiority is necessary.

A rationale for taking a qualitative approach

The decision to choose a particular research approach should be based on the nature of the study itself (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 226; Silverman, 2013, p. 10). In other words, each research approach has certain assumptions of the world and how it can be understood; what becomes essential is selecting and operationalising the approach that best suits the purpose of the study. In this section, I will discuss why a qualitative approach is appropriate in this study.

As discussed in previous chapters, this study aims to examine and understand teachers’ cognition and beliefs and their development about an inquiry -based professional development activity in their school. In other words, what matters in this study is trying to understand human behaviour and understanding of a certain activity in a natural setting. A qualitative approach is appropriate when the aim is to provide ‘holistic, in-depth accounts and attempt to reflect the complicated, contextual, interactive, and interpretive nature of our social world’ (Staller, 2010, p. 1159). On the other hand, a quantitative approach ‘cannot hope to catch the essence of social interactions. Only qualitative methods, with their detailed, flexible, sensitive and naturalistic characteristics, are suited to producing adequate ... accounts’ (Payne & Judy, 2004, p. 176). A predominantly qualitative approach, therefore, is adopted in this study in order to help obtain the appropriate data that will adequately answer the research questions and ultimately improve our understanding of the phenomenon under study. There are further reasons that make a qualitative approach more appropriate in this study. Before I discuss these reasons, I need to highlight that I will always refer to and juxtapose my choice of qualitative research paradigm with the

quantitative paradigm. This will make it clearer what qualitative research can and cannot do.

Firstly, a qualitative approach enables the researcher to go into the field with an open mind, aiming to understand the phenomenon in its entirety, rather than a slice of it. One major advantage of relying on a qualitative paradigm in this study is that it frees the researcher from the shackles of hypotheses that quantitative researchers typically aim to test and develop. So, whereas quantitative researchers look for very specific data, usually quantified, the qualitative researcher, especially in the ethnographic and case study traditions, aim to take advantage of all possible sources of evidence to inform their understanding of the phenomenon under study. With a qualitative study, the researcher has the flexibility needed to look at the phenomenon under study from different angles. In this study, adopting a qualitative study facilitated taking advantage of data other than the interview data such as documents produced in relation to the initiative, field notes, and images taken in the field.

Secondly, in a qualitative approach a researcher can prioritise the participants' own perspectives and seek to understand them (Creswell, 2012, p. 17) within the borders of the contexts where these perspectives operate. With prolonged encounters in the field in this study, this approach provided the ability to delve deeper in order to understand the participants' lived experiences. This does not mean that the researcher's own perspective is absent or irrelevant; it simply refers to a tradition of aiming to empower participants, and balance their worldviews with that of the outsider researcher, rather than positioning them as 'subjects' of the research. This orientation facilitated access and building rapport in the field with the teachers. In this way, I obtained deeper and more meaningful accounts of teachers' participation in the inquiry -based professional development initiative.

Finally, the focus of this study, being on participants' understanding, beliefs and the meanings participants assign to inquiry as part of their practice, lends itself readily to a qualitative rather than quantitative approach. The aim here is rather to understand teachers' beliefs and understandings about inquiry -based professional development in a certain context and thus it is best served by a qualitative approach. No matter how accurate, objective or rigorous a quantitative approach may be, it would not enable us to understand how participants understand or react to certain phenomena from their own perspectives. Focusing on participants' *'meaning and motivations ... personal experiences, and*

phenomena and on detailed understandings of processes in the social world' (Kalof et al., 2008, p. 79, original emphasis) is a distinguishing factor of qualitative research. There is no quantitative test or criteria that can logically claim to explain participants' research engagement or understandings of a new initiative in their workplace. On the other hand, a qualitative approach can provide more in-depth details and analysis that suit this particular type of study.

3.2.2 The case study approach

Case study as an appropriate approach in this study

At the outset, as the overall aims of the current study are to explore and understand why and how teachers in a certain context engage/do not engage in researching their practice, how they conceptualise and combine inquiry into their teaching practice; how they produce local knowledge and learn from practice; and the type of impact and learning this knowledge generates, it is hypothesised here, therefore, that this is best researched by employing a case study approach. A case study approach is effective in answering 'how' and 'why' research questions related to contemporary phenomena without the need to control the behaviour of participants in the study (Yin, 2014, p. 8). Like other concepts in the social sciences, the case study is often described using a variety of terms such as methodology, approach and genre (Elliott & Lukeš, 2008; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Scholz & Tietje, 2002, p. 5). In this study, I describe and operationalise case study as an approach: a set of assumptions and a way of seeing, thinking about and doing research. In this sense, case study 'includes an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence' (Robson, 2002, p. 178). The multiple sources of evidence –such as interviews, documents, field notes, observations- constitute a 'unique strength' of case study research (Yin, 2014, p. 17).

Qualitative case study as an inquiry approach 'fits the purpose' (Elliott & Lukeš, 2008, p. 88) of this study in many respects. Firstly, in this study where one organisation is the case, what becomes significant is the particular and the contextual rather than the representative and generalizable (Stake, 1995). Case study is also the recommended approach to studying the underlying dynamics between structure and agency within a single setting (Eisenhardt, 1989), to account for and understand 'complex social phenomenon' and 'retain a holistic and real-world perspective' of real-life events (Yin, 2014, p. 4). Moreover, a special use of case study has been to 'to examine how a particular programme or intervention will unfold

in use' (Kalof et al., 2008, p. 144). In a sense, this study is about the new programme of professional development and this makes a case study approach more appropriate than any other approach.

It is worth explicating the type of case study in this study. Commentators have used various typologies for case study research. (Stake, 1995) for example categorises case study into intrinsic, instrumental and collective. The former is mainly studied because the case is interesting in itself and, unlike the latter, the understanding gained from an intrinsic case does not necessarily help us understand other cases. An intrinsic case is studying a case for its own sake. The instrumental case, however, is studied with the aim of transferring the new models, theories or understanding to other similar cases. In other words, the tacit assumption here is that the understandings and discoveries gained from studying a certain case will be transferable or simply have 'resonance' (Mason, 1996, p. 195) to other cases. The final type, collective, is when the investigator studies several cases to investigate some general characteristics among the cases and therefore this last type is not relevant in this study. Using Stake's (1995) typology, this study is instrumental as it aims to understand the particular case it focuses on and then the understanding is going to be useful in other similar cases. In practical terms, it is not possible to study all cases to understand them. The understanding gained from a case can be illuminating and useful elsewhere as long as it is taken tentatively and no assumptions about the automatic and unproblematic 'application' of the understanding from one case in other cases.

Yin's (2009) categorisation depends on the number and context of the cases. Figure 3.1 shows the four types of case studies. In this study, there is one case: the inquiry-based professional development initiative. Within this case, there are multiple sub-units including the participating teachers and the administration facilitator. There are also data that were not produced by the participants whom I interviewed; hence, the most accurate description of this study using Yin's typologies is an embedded case study. A final relevant classification by Yin (2009) is related to the purpose of case study. Here, there are descriptive, exploratory and explanatory case studies. This is where the distinction becomes unnecessarily too fine grained. In fact, this case study aims to describe the case, explore what teachers understand about research engagement - having been asked to be engaged in a research activity -and how they engage/ not engage in it, and finally offer some explanations and models of teachers' research engagement.

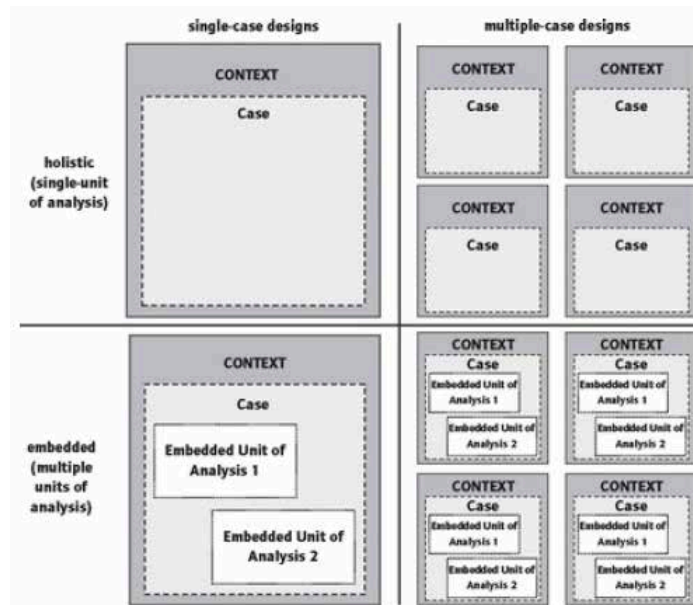


Figure 3. 1: Types of case studies. Source (Yin, 2014, p. 50)

The messiness of locating the case in case study research

As discussed above, the case, or unit of analysis, in the current case study project is the new inquiry initiative in the school. This is not the initial conceptualisation of the case in this study, though. At the design and early stages of the study, what was taken to be the case was the individual participant himself or herself. Soon, this had to be reconsidered. It is reassuring to know that it is not uncommon to revisit the case (or the unit of analysis) as the study progresses (Yin, 2009, p. 30). One reason behind the need for reconsideration was that I started to collect data that did not belong to a particular ‘case’. This data was mainly in the form of documents. I was given access to several types of documents such as planning, reports and some correspondence emails by teachers and administrators in the school. This was not restricted to the teachers who agreed to be interviewed in my study. My strategy while in the field was to seize every opportunity that would potentially lead to obtaining more relevant data and more understanding of the inquiry initiative. The documents, both from my participants and others, constitute a relatively large volume of data compared to the interview data. The other reason behind the need to reconsider the case in this case study is that it soon began to emerge that the data and accounts I was starting to receive from the senior school leader were not similar or comparable to that of the other teachers. In this way, cases cannot be considered of the same class. Data and accounts from the senior school leader cannot be compared and contrasted with that of the teachers because each had a different orientation. The teachers always focused on their experiences of being engaged in the initiative whereas the administrative facilitator

focused on facilitating and sustaining the initiative, the teachers' response to her initiative, its impact among other things. Therefore, a cross-case analysis would not have been possible. The most practical strategy to follow was to consider the initiative itself as a case where data are collected from multiple sources: teachers, administrators, documents, observation.

3.3 The Research Process

The research process started in April 2013 when negotiating access with the school began. Data collection continued throughout the 2013-2014 academic year, and I stayed in contact with the school and some participants after that time because they started a new cycle the next academic year. In the next section, I will present the major processes, aiming to be offer reflexive accounts (see 3.2.1 above) of how I conducted the research in this study. The first issue I will discuss is that of negotiating and securing access to the school. Afterwards, I will look at my initial interaction with the teachers and the sampling procedures. I will finish this section with a reflective account on how I positioned myself throughout the fieldwork.

3.3.1 Negotiating and gaining access to the school

As an outsider researcher in relation to the school, I was faced with several challenges in negotiating and securing access to the school. I had to prove my worth and suitability to the host school and quickly learn how things work in secondary schools in the UK. That was a steep learning curve in my research journey. I had to learn about the hierarchy of the school and understand the appropriate ways to approach a school and negotiate access; the role of the gatekeepers and how to address them; how to create and sustain interest in my study; and how to encourage busy teachers to take part in my study and the dress code in school, among other things. As a consequence of conducting the study in a school, I had to continually reflect on my identity and my positionality and how this played out during the gaining access stage. As a researcher who is a non-native speaker of English, with a difficult-to-pronounce name and a different school and undergraduate educational background, I was aware that I needed to convince the school and the potential participants that I had the necessary understanding of their context to enable me to research it and that my own different educational background could provide a fresh perspective on the phenomenon under study.

Access in this study was obtained in two stages (see Figure 3.2 below). A senior academic at the Open University (OU), who put me in contact with and introduced me to the gatekeeper, facilitated the first stage. The gatekeeper is the deputy headteacher in school and she has overall responsibilities for the provision of teacher professional development within the school. I will use the term ‘gatekeeper’ in this section to emphasise her role as deputy headteacher, but will refer to her using different terms (school facilitator and deputy head) in latter chapters. The fact that some senior leadership staff members in the school including the gatekeeper had previously known and worked with this OU academic facilitated the first stage of the access. Although the gatekeeper showed interest and agreed to give me access to the school, the access in this stage was provisional. What I mean by provisional here is that on the formal level I had to go through a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB)² check and then formally write to the headteacher outlining my research plan and activities and requesting access to the school (see a letter to the headteacher in appendix 1). On an informal level - and this is where the more important second stage starts - I had to negotiate my plan with the gatekeeper and ensure interest in hosting me for data collection. During this time, I had email, telephone and in-person contact with the gatekeeper. What became clearer to me is that what mattered to the gatekeeper was whether I could and was willing to contribute to setting up the action research programme she was planning. Although not stated explicitly, it was clear that I was expected to offer something in return for being allowed access to the school. Here, I was disillusioned about any altruistic motives to grant access. What was worrying at this stage was whether my own autonomy as a researcher (Hammersley & Traianou, 2014) was being compromised by being asked to offer something in return for access. Ultimately and upon reflection and consultation, I thought about this issue as an opportunity for more interactions with the teachers and, therefore, a better understanding of their experiences and perceptions of research engagement. I accepted the request to help in the form of running workshops with the teachers who were going to lead the initiative. I discuss these workshops in more details in 3.2.3 below. Additionally, I agreed to help the teachers find resources for their action research projects. For this purpose, I set up a wiki, which had information about the process of action research and links to readings and explanations of various aspects of the action research process.

² now called Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)



Figure 3. 2: Gaining Access process

By the end of September 2013, having completed all necessary checks and negotiations, I had full access to the school and was issued a green identification badge³ which meant I could be unaccompanied within the premises and I was ready to meet the teachers for the first time for the workshops.

3.3.2 Pre-entry and workshops

I aimed to understand my potential participants as much as possible before meeting them in the workshops. To this end, I sent the potential participants of the workshops a short preliminary survey comprised of 12 questions prior to the workshops (see Appendix 3). The purpose of the survey was to find out some basic information about the teachers such as their teaching subjects, years of teaching and any relevant research activities. I received nine responses out of the seventeen teachers who attended the workshops. From these responses, it was clear that the majority had no or very limited experience or knowledge about doing research about their own teaching. Inquiry engagement was mainly part of a degree programme, not on-going professional development programme based in the school. With this in mind, I structured the workshops in a way that introduced inquiry⁴, in a participatory and engaging way, to those who have not even heard about it before. Table

³ Green is for visitors with CRB check. Red is for visitors without CRB check and those must be accompanied by a member of staff at all times. Blue is for staff.

⁴ The term used in school to refer to this project was action research, but I use inquiry as a more encompassing term as discussed in the previous chapter.

3.1 shows the contents of the workshops and the full contents and the materials used are included in Appendix 3.

There were two half-day workshops; the first was on the 30th of September and the second on the 16th October 2013. The first workshop was pivotal and high stakes as any problem might have been detrimental to my study. Therefore, I planned the workshop carefully and sought feedback from both my supervisors and the insider facilitator (the gatekeeper in the previous section). From my own perspective, the type of discussions and interactions were indicative of interest and engagement. The teachers were given tasks, readings and ideas to think about before the second workshop. In the second workshop, the main aim was to prepare an action research work plan for them to start thinking about and incorporate into practice. Table 3.1 below shows the main components of the workshops. By the end of the second workshop, I outlined my study and research interests in the school to the teachers and provided them with informed consent forms to read and sign if they decided to participate in my study.

| Main Tasks | |
|------------|--|
| Day 1 | 1. Getting To Know You |
| | 2. How Does Action Research Relate to Other Types of Research? |
| | 3. Identifying a Focus and Topic for Your Action Research |
| | 4. Developing Research Questions |
| Day 2 | 5. Defining the Scope of Your Action Research Study |
| | 6. Approaching Research and Collecting Data in Action Research |
| | 7. Data Analysis |
| | 8. Developing an Action Plan to Take Away |
| | 9. Evaluating Action Research projects |

Table 3. 1: workshop contents

3.3.3 Selecting the participants

Selecting participants – sampling - in case study research differs from sampling in other types of research where a large number of participants is included. While the focus in the former is on deeper understanding and exploration of the phenomenon under study, representativeness and generalisation to populations is more important in the latter

(Gerring, 2007). Accordingly, and as (Gerring, 2007, pp. 87-88) argues, random sampling which is usually employed in other types of research is not effective in case study research because ‘there is no guarantee that a few cases, chosen randomly, will provide leverage into the research question that animates an investigation. The sample might be representative, but not informative’. (Yin, 2014, p. 40) makes a similar point in relation to generalisation and sampling in case study research:

A fatal flaw in doing case studies is to consider statistical generalization to be the way of generalizing the findings from your case study. This is because your case or cases are not “sampling units” and also will be too small in number to serve as an adequately sized sample to represent any larger population.

Purposive sampling is therefore used in this study. Indeed, it is the sampling strategy widely employed by case study researchers in order to identify ‘information-rich cases for in-depth study’ (Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki, 2010, p. 837).

As discussed above, the single case in this case study is the newly introduced inquiry programme in the school. The selection of this case was purposeful for several reasons. First, the programme provides a suitable context to study teachers’ inquiry engagement in a natural setting. The programme itself had been planned even before I approached the gatekeeper for access. This is a crucial difference between case study and non-case study research: studying the phenomenon in its natural context (Yin, 2009, p. 109), rather than creating a setting specifically for the study, while controlling the variables and studying them. The other reason I expected this professional development programme to be information-rich mainly is that it is a new initiative in school and teachers will probably not approach it with preconceived ideas about its effectiveness or suitability. In this way, I expected more honest, first-hand experience of research engagement. A final factor in choosing this case is the practicality of choosing this case. As mentioned in 3.3.1, it was a complementary relationship with the school where I offered some support and they offered access. This role facilitated introducing and positioning me in a non-passive or ‘fly on the wall’ manner.

Within the case, there are multiple sources of data in this study, the most important of which is the teachers themselves who agreed to participate in the study. Before I set forth how I sampled from the pool of the teachers, I need to provide a bigger picture of the structure of the action research programme.

3.3.4 The structure of the inquiry programme

The deputy head is the leader of the whole inquiry programme. During the fieldwork year, there were eight inquiry groups; each had a particular focus and lasted for a whole term. Each group was led by two or sometimes three teachers known as the action research leaders. The action research leaders were the teachers who attended my workshops and I sampled from this particular group to participate in the interviews. The group members, besides the action research leaders, were other teachers who had the freedom to choose any group to join based on their interests in the topics. They were also able to join a different group in the new term if they wished to. So, the structure of the programme is represented in figure 3.3. My own position was between the deputy head and the action research leaders. Because they were responsible for facilitating and leading action research within their groups, and because I had more interactions with them through the workshops, the action research leaders were the group from which I sample informants for this study.

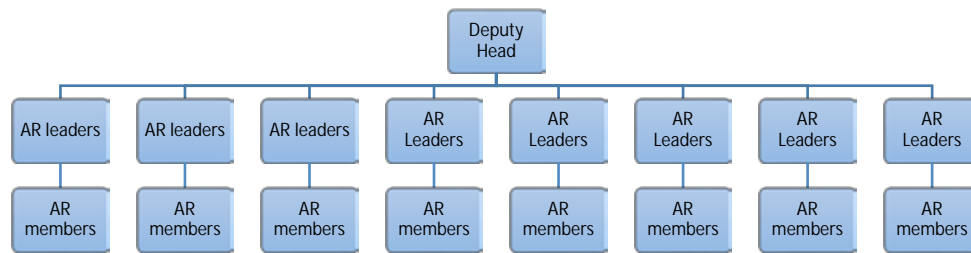


Figure 3. 3: The structure of the action research programme⁵

Of the seventeen teachers who participated in the workshops, twelve agreed to take part in this study. And of the twelve who agreed to participate, eight were selected for inclusion. In selecting the participants, I considered two main points: (1) the teacher’s subject area and (2) the need to not include more than one teacher from the same action research group. The number of participants selected for interviews, in addition to other sources of data, was deemed to be sufficient to produce enough data to explore issues of inquiry engagement and ultimately answer the research questions. In doing so, I aimed to obtain a broader view of what actually happens within the groups across the school and whether or not there are any noticeable variations amongst different subjects. Table 3.2 presents basic information related to the interview participants.

| <i>Name⁶</i> | <i>Subject</i> | <i>Experience in years</i> | <i>Focus of inquiry</i> | <i>Inquiry question</i> |
|-------------------------|----------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Teacher 1 (T1) | History | 3 | Assessment for learning | Does effective assessment for learning augment achievement and hence engagement? |
| Teacher 2 (T2) | English | 8 | Differentiation | Could effective differentiation help low ability students to experience success in completing classwork? |
| Teacher 3 (T3) | PE | 6 | Engagement | How can recognising student engagement in learning help to improve the delivery of outstanding lessons? |

⁵ This inquiry programme was led by the deputy head and hence the head is not listed in the figure.

⁶ The word Teacher and a number is used to refer to the participants. This is a conscious decision made to anonymise and simplify reference to participants.

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|----|-------------------------|--|
| Teacher 4 (T4) | Science | 17 | Engagement | How can recognising student engagement in learning help to improve the delivery of outstanding lessons? |
| Teacher 5 (T5) | Psychology and Religious studies | 14 | Challenge | Does participating in a VLE project improve engagement and progress of a small (10 – 15) sample of y11 higher prior attainers? |
| Teacher 6 (T6) | Music | 5 | Assessment for learning | Does effective assessment for learning augment achievement and hence engagement? |
| Teacher 7 (T7) | English | 8 | Independent learning | Does giving students a list of strategies for independent learning improve their resilience and work quality? |
| Deputy Head ⁷ (DH) | Geography | 21 | Planning | How can I plan for more independent learning in my KS3 lesson? |

Table 3. 2: Interview participants

3.3.5 Positioning

In my first visit to the school after a CRB check was issued, I asked the administrative team to use the word ‘researcher’ instead of ‘consultant’ on my school access card that they initially wanted to use. To me, this was not insignificant. In the school, teachers are used to outsiders running workshops and training and those are the consultants. As consultants are usually paid for the work they do, teachers only see them when there is a certain training event. I decided that I did not want to be viewed and treated as a consultant by the teachers despite the workshops I ran with them. Because I wanted my relationship with them to last for longer than the workshops and due to the fact that I wanted to build trust and rapport with the participants, I decided to adhere to the word ‘researcher’ since it genuinely reflects my role in the school and positions me in a way that justifies my frequent presence in the staffroom.

Another positioning technique is related to the location in the school I used to spend most of the time when not interviewing other teachers. After the workshops, I aimed to make

⁷ With overall responsibilities of facilitating the inquiry programme across the school.

myself familiar in the staffroom and therefore I visited the school at least once every fortnight over the academic year 2013-14. I wanted to see my participants outside the interviews and have casual conversations with them, listen to their conversations with others and, in the long run, get the participants to trust me more and share more meaningful accounts of their experiences. In order to do so, I decided that I should not be associated with the administration or be seen in the deputy head's office unless it was necessary. The reason behind this is that I did not want the teachers to view me as the agent of the administration, someone who asks them questions then maybe shares what they say with people who are more powerful within the school. In the casual conversations about a difficult class or using a certain strategy, I often participated in these conversations as a teacher myself, not as a researcher. This often sustained the conversation and helped in creating trust.

3.4 Data collection and analysis

In this study, qualitative data was collected using interviews, documents and surveys. This was also enhanced by detailed field notes. Of these data collection instruments, interviews are the most significant instruments through which accounts of research engagement were captured. The documents provide a wider context of the initiative, usually the formal side of it. The two surveys could be considered complementary in this study and therefore no statistical analysis is used in this study. Before discussing the individual instruments of data collection, I examine the term 'data collection'.

3.4.1 A note on 'data collection'

Up until this point in this chapter, I have used the term 'data collection' without much explication or reflection on it. Therefore, before I explore how data was processed and the process of data analysis, I need to problematise and then clarify how I conceptualise and use the term 'data collection' in this study. The clarification is relevant and necessary as it refers to an ontological and epistemological stance I take in this study. 'Data collection' is a familiar and accepted term in interpretative and qualitative studies, see for example the frequency of the term in these major works: (Babbie, 2008; Cohen et al., 2007; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Newby, 2014). This term is not unproblematic, though. To 'collect data' gives the impression that data are 'out there' ready for the researcher to collect. This is not the understanding adopted in this study. A major limitation of this understanding is that it ignores to a large extent the active role of the researcher and his or

her interactions with others in the field in order to obtain the necessary data. With the exception of naturally occurring data such as the data schools typically keep about their students for various purposes, most other data, especially interview data, are 'generated' in partnership between the researcher and the participants. This is of great significance in this study. In a sense, this is an acknowledgment that in this study the researcher becomes a research instrument (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 17).

In qualitative studies similar to the current study, the researcher actively decides what constitutes data (ontology) and then chooses the types of data to include in the study and how the data will be recorded and analysed. This means that data are not as pure or do not exist objectively and independently of the researcher as the term 'data collection' might suggest. Also, in a study based largely on interview data, to think of data as being 'collected' is to disregard the input of the researcher. No matter whether the interviews are structured, unstructured or in between, the researcher plays a major role in shaping the data and the interview data become co-constructed data that would not have existed without the researcher being there and asking the specific questions he/she had actually asked. The data, in this case, are not 'collected'; they are rather generated by both the researcher and the researched. For example, my role throughout the fieldwork was far from being passive, or a 'fly on the wall' type. I actively participated in setting up the action research programme in school and I aimed to study how the teachers reacted to and did this sort of activity. Most of the data in this study were thus jointly generated by the participants and myself. Therefore, even when 'data collection' is used in this study, it simply refers to the deliberate process of generating data with participants while acknowledging that data do not exist in the field ready to be collected. It also means that I, as the investigator in this study, had exerted an influence on the process itself. What matters to this discussion is that the researcher needs to maintain a level of reflexivity and always aim to minimise their impact and prejudices on the data (reactivity) (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

In this study, a considerably large amount of data was

generated: twenty-three interviews ranging between approximately fifteen and fifty minutes each depending on the availability of the participants, two surveys, local documents and a lot of field notes. As indicated above, interviews could be considered the primary source of data in this study. On a typical day in the school, I would generally have between two to four interviews. All interviews, except for one phone interview, took place

in the school, normally in the teacher's own classroom, but sometimes in the staffroom. There was only one interview in which the participant preferred not to be audio-recorded, so I had to take detailed notes, although he agreed to be recorded in subsequent interviews. I transcribed all the interviews entirely and verbatim as soon as was possible during the fieldwork period. For the purpose of this study, some features of interviews such as pauses and back channelling, noise, for example, were considered unnecessary to add any dimension or depth to understanding the interviews themselves; therefore, they were not captured in the transcripts. The additions to the transcripts that I made were when there was something relevant in the context of the interview such as an interruption from a student or a colleague, describing something in a sarcastic way or digressions the interviewee would make. Such extra information is written between square brackets [] to indicate that this is additional information, not necessarily words uttered at the time of the interview. The decision to fully transcribe, despite being a time-consuming task, is to guarantee that relevant information will not be overlooked and as (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp. 149-150) explain 'what will be judged relevant will change over time, and what is on the recordings that has not been transcribed will probably be forgotten'. In this type of qualitative study, it is more effective to have a full transcription as multiple readings and the search for emerging concepts are the norms. The strategy I followed was not to schedule a new interview with the same participant before transcribing his or her previous interview. This decision was made to allow me time to understand and reflect on emerging points and thus plan the next interview accordingly. Transcribing while still in the field proved to be an effective strategy in this study for two main reasons: one technical and the other conceptual. While transcribing the first set of interviews, I discovered that I had to improve my questioning skills as a researcher interviewer. Being excited about the fieldwork in general, I noticed that the first interviews included elements of interruption to the interviewee, completing a sentence for them or rushing through to the next question. Transcribing while in the field highlighted this issue to me and therefore I aimed to improve the quality of my interviews. I learnt the value of slowing down and the 'awkward silence': the few silent and uncomfortable seconds when an interviewee stops talking. Instead of rushing to the next question or follow-up one, the awkward silence gave the interviewees the impression that I was expecting them to say more and they were generally encouraged to add more and go deeper in their explanation of whatever the topic was. The other advantage of transcribing while in the field was that I was able to familiarise myself with my data and therefore the earlier interviews functioned as a guide for latter ones. No matter how much the researcher is immersed in their data while in the field, it is when

examining what happened, what was said and what was noticed after a long day at school that things start to become clearer. This gives a sense of direction as to what the next interview with the same teacher would be about. Transcribing in this way becomes part of the analysis and it guides and refines the study.

Interviews

In order to answer the research questions, twenty-three interviews in total were conducted with eight participants. It was recognised at the design stage that a one-off interview would not be appropriate for the purpose of this study. This is so because one of the aims is to understand how teachers' views and perceptions about inquiry engagement change or otherwise over an academic year. A single interview, at any given stage of the inquiry programme, would have only given a snapshot of a teacher's experience and views of the inquiry programme at that particular time with other significant insights and views about the development of such views potentially lost. Multiple interviews with the same participants were therefore chosen as a main approach to not only collecting data but also building rapport with the participants and ensuring good quality data are collected, as (Grinyer & Thomas, 2012) remind us. Other benefits of multiple interviews are:

- development of trust and rapport between the researcher and the participants,
- less exhausting for both parties,
- an opportunity to reflect between interviews,
- aspects discussed in one interview can be clarified and explored in greater depth in subsequent interviews. (Earthy & Cronin, 2008, p. 431)

All interviews were semi-structured in which I had prepared a few prompts and general topics I wanted to explore with the interviewee- appendix 4 includes the interview schedules of all interviews with the teachers. Often, these prompts were based on the previous interviews. This means although similar issues were explored with all participants, more bespoke questions were asked to the individual participant himself or herself in the interview- starting from the second interview. The goal behind this strategy is to try to understand each participant's own experience by asking questions relevant to him or her and following up on issues he or she previously mentioned. For example, Teacher 2 outlined in the first interview that one of her goals of doing this action research project is to help two students in particular who are weaker than the other students in literacy. In all of the subsequent interviews, there were questions about those two students and she often

showed me samples of their writings. In this way, I avoided the interviews being too abstract by grounding them with actual practices and examples relevant to the inquiry projects. Appendix 9 presents an excerpt from one of the interviews.

Most of the interviews took place in the participant's own classroom. This made it more comfortable to them and easier to access any files or documents on their computers if they needed to. Only three interviews were conducted in open spaces: two in the staffroom and one in the canteen because the interviewers' classrooms were being used by other teachers or students at the time of the interview. Compared to interviews in their own classrooms, interviews in open spaces were characterised by more interruptions, and more caution and less concentration on the part of the interviewee. Interviewees often talked about their interactions with others within the same set and that was not often without critique of certain aspects of other teachers' engagement or the administration facilitation of the process. With this in mind, I aimed to schedule the interviews in the participating teacher's own class whenever possible.

In terms of timing, interviews ranged between twenty and fifty-five minutes with the majority of the interviews being around or more than thirty minutes. What determined the length of each interview was the availability of the teacher himself or herself. Often, the interviews took place either when they do not have teaching in a specific period, or at the end of the school day. The latter tended to be more relaxed and often lasted more than the ones which were scheduled between classes. Of all the other interviews, Teacher 1's interviews were the most challenging. He was the participant with the most teaching hours, reaching more than twenty hours per week. That meant the only possible timeslot in which to interview him was Thursday from 8:30 to 9:15 am.

Documents

As figure 3.4 below shows, there are two types of documents used as data in this study: internals and public. Most of the documents are internal and produced by different people in the school. Some of these were produced by the participants whom I interviewed throughout the academic year. However, the others were produced by other teachers who did not take part in this study. I was granted access to all the documents related to the action research programme by the deputy head after she asked the other teachers' permission to share their reports with me. It is this particular aspect that caused the unit of

analysis to shift from the participating teacher into the professional development programme itself.

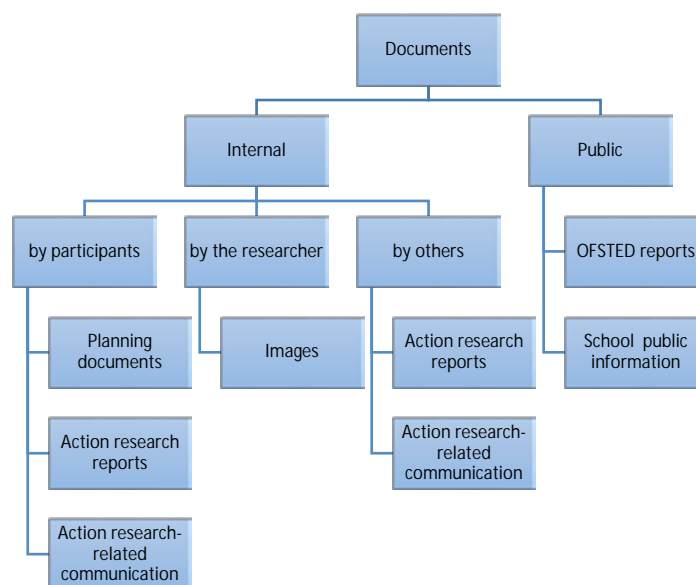


Figure 3. 4: Types of documents used in this study

The internal reports, both the participants’ and others’, can be further classified into three types: planning documents, reports and communication. The planning documents are mostly prepared by the vice-principal and shared with the staff to guide the process of action research. The reports are documents produced by the teachers in order to capture their action research work and any findings or implications of that work. The communication documents are mainly email communications either between the Deputy Head and me, the Deputy Head and the teachers, the teachers and me. In some cases, and upon my request, I was forwarded emails in which teachers and the Deputy Head negotiated certain aspects of the action research programme.

The documents I ‘produced’ are mainly in the form of images. Starting from the workshops, I aimed to document various aspects of the action research programme and the participants’ interactions. Figure 3.5, for example, is a picture of some group work during the first workshop in which the participants wrote some of their worries about starting an action research programme.

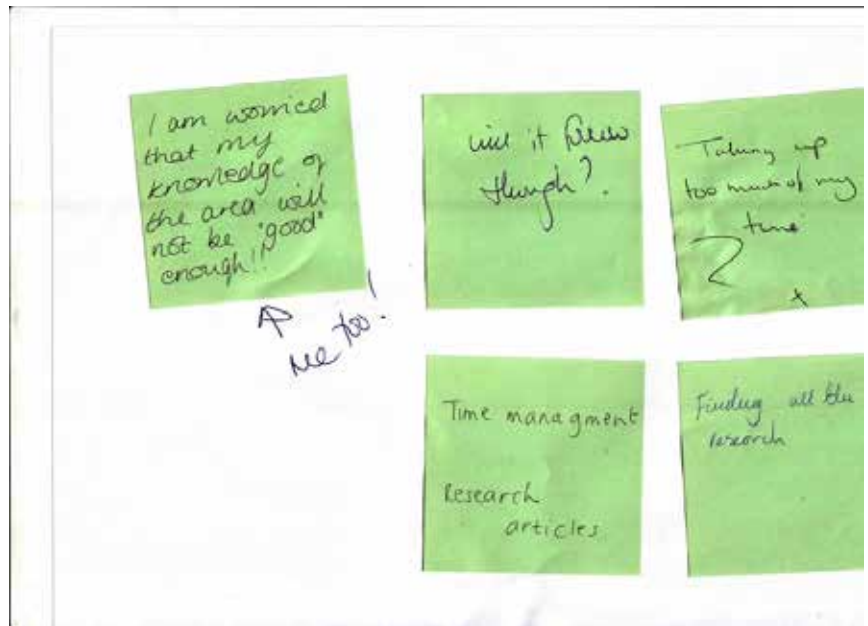


Figure 3. 5: Example of document produced by the researcher

Other documents I produced include the building work in the school especially after some participants started to talk about it in their interviews and some posters and announcements mainly in the staffroom. My view in collecting such images is to be able to describe the context with lots of details and representative features. It is worth highlighting here that no pictures of any persons within the school or outside were taken as part of this study.

The final type of documents used to provide more information about the context of this study is open documents. These are documents produced by the Department for Education (DfE) containing information about the school, its history, the intake, students' achievements tabulation among other facts and figures. There are also other documents produced by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) as part of their regular inspection of the school. This is particularly relevant as the planning of the action research programme took into account the feedback from the Ofsted inspection. In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality in this study, no direct quotes will be made from such documents. I will indicate the year and the body or organisation that produced the document, but not the document itself, particularly those comments that make direct reference to the school (see 3.4.3. for more on ethical considerations).

Surveys

There are two surveys in this study. As outlined above, the first was used to obtain some basic information about the participants and their research engagement, if any. This aided

the design of the workshops. The second was designed and run by the deputy head and then I was given access to the raw data after the survey was closed. In this one, the deputy head wanted to have feedback on the action research programme from all the teachers, not just the participants in this study. This survey was sent and completed electronically and in order to encourage the teachers to share honest and in-depth account, the submission was anonymous and untrackable. Both surveys are included in Appendix 3.

The data generated from both surveys are predominately qualitative. Participants commented on various aspects related to the action research programme. Therefore, the survey data are, along with the other data in this study, are treated as qualitative data and analysed accordingly.

A summary of the data collection process

Table 3.3 below illustrates the timeline of data collection in this study. Data collection started with collecting public documents about the school. Throughout the study, other relevant documents, particularly internal documents, were collected. As the figure shows, there were two surveys that were used in this study: one before the workshop for the purpose of finding out the participants' professional backgrounds and expectations about the new inquiry programme and the other conducted by the Deputy Head for the purpose of assessing the progress of the programme.

| Data | 2013 | | | | | | 2014 | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul |
| Documents* | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Interviews** | | | | | | 7 | 3 | 2 | 3 | | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Pre-workshop survey | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Deputy-head survey | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Table 3. 3: A timeline of data collection

*Document collection continued throughout the study and, as outlined in the section above, documents were of different types. Because of the volume of the documents collected and the nature of some documents, it was determined that no specific date would be used in this table.

** All interview schedules are included in the appendices.

As table 3.3 shows, interviews were carried out over the whole academic year with multiple interviews with the same participants in order to understand the development of their beliefs and engagement in the enquiry programme.

Data analysis

The analysis in qualitative studies is characterised by being an iterative process (Dey, 1993, p. 54; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp. 158-159) which does not necessarily start at the end of data collection. On the contrary, the analysis is an integral part of the process of research that does not commence only after the end of fieldwork. This study is no exception. Indeed, the ability to reflect on the data while still in the field is one of the greatest assets of carrying out qualitative research. This is so because, in this study, the continual reflection of the data helped me refine my subsequent questions.

The data collection methods outlined above resulted in large amounts of rich and detailed data. These included typed up field notes, interview transcripts, documents and visual data taken during the workshops and around the school. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), a flexible qualitative data analysis used ‘across methods and paradigms’ (Lapadat, 2010, p. 927), was used to organise and analyse the data in this study. Thematic analysis is effective in making sense of rich data, as is the case in this study, and it is described as a means: ‘(1) of seeing, (2) of finding relationships, (3) of analysing [and] (4) of systematically observing’ the data (Lapadat, 2010, p. 926). In thematic analysis, the researcher codes sections of the data according to whether they contribute to emerging themes and patterns (Gioia et al., 2012; Schwandt, 2007, p. 292). As (Braun & Clarke, 2006) explain, coding involves interrogating the texts to identify recurrent themes, topics, relationships in order to offer a rich and detailed analysis. (Saldaña, 2009, p. 3) describes this process as assigning an ‘essence-capturing’ word or phrase to portions of the data. One strength of thematic analysis is that although themes could be identified depending on the research questions, it still allows for a more inductive approach. (Lapadat, 2010, p. 926) vividly describes the process of inductive thematic analysis which is similar to the process of thematic analysis followed in this study:

Through a process of noticing patterns, attending to how participants label events, defining emergent themes, constantly comparing data against codes and categories, cycling back through documents to revise coding, recording interpretive insights in research memos, and developing data displays that reveal overarching patterns, the researcher builds a complex exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory ... analysis grounded in the particulars of the case or multiple cases.

Inductive thematic analysis avoids the rigidity and premature closure that are risks of a deductive approach.

This approach to analysis allowed for a more holistic identification and capturing of the themes across the data sets.

There are no hard and fast rules on how to do thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2009) however, the step-by-step guide offered by (Braun & Clarke, 2006) is arguably one of the most adopted by thematic analysts. In this guide, Braun and Clarke suggest a six-phase process as shown in figure 3.6 below.



Figure 3. 6: A 6-phase process for doing thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) was used in this research project. Upon completion of fieldwork, all data sets were entered into Nvivo 10 to prepare for coding and further analysis. The decision to use this software was to facilitate more systematic and accurate organisation, preparation and handling of the data. Figure 3.7 shows memos in Nvivo, which were used to organise thinking about analysis and capturing any emerging ideas. Figure 3.8 shows some of the codes identified in the data and Figure 3.9 shows an example of how Nvivo assists in recording details related to qualitative data analysis. It also made it simpler to look for patterns and frequency in the data, which was useful at the analysis stage. Another advantage of using Nvivo is that it allowed all the datasets –interviews, documents, surveys- to be pooled together in one place which facilitated looking for patterns and concepts across datasets. One useful feature Nvivo also offered was the ability to use ‘queries’: to search and interrogate the data using specific search terms. This was particularly useful at later stages of the analysis to test emerging ideas and concepts.

| Name | Nodes | Referen... | Created On | Created By | Modified On |
|-------------------------------|-------|------------|--------------------|------------|--------------------|
| Analysis | 0 | 0 | 22 Sep 2014, 14:34 | SA | 27 Nov 2014, 12:44 |
| Coding Log | 0 | 0 | 23 Aug 2014, 00:02 | SA | 23 Dec 2014, 01:00 |
| dissonance | 0 | 0 | 17 Oct 2015, 23:13 | SA | 17 Oct 2015, 23:15 |
| emergin ideas | 1 | 1 | 27 Nov 2014, 12:44 | SA | 20 Jan 2015, 14:09 |
| is it enquiry as a profess... | 0 | 0 | 22 Nov 2015, 17:06 | SA | 22 Nov 2015, 17:07 |
| Journal | 0 | 0 | 21 Aug 2014, 23:30 | SA | 28 Aug 2014, 11:13 |
| outcomes of doing the en... | 0 | 0 | 11 Oct 2015, 23:43 | SA | 16 Oct 2015, 10:17 |
| The ideal and real | 1 | 1 | 20 Jan 2015, 11:45 | SA | 23 Jan 2015, 10:40 |

Figure 3. 7: Memos in Nvivo

| Name | Sources | Referen... | Created On | Created By | Modified On |
|------------------------------|---------|------------|--------------------|------------|--------------------|
| Aspirations & Want to ach... | 0 | 0 | 27 Aug 2014, 22:39 | SA | 28 Aug 2014, 00:13 |
| Admin | 6 | 14 | 27 Aug 2014, 22:38 | SA | 25 Dec 2014, 13:05 |
| Teachers | 9 | 22 | 23 Aug 2014, 22:31 | SA | 25 Dec 2014, 13:51 |
| Attitudes towards AR | 0 | 0 | 22 Aug 2014, 08:24 | SA | 22 Aug 2014, 08:26 |
| Negative+criticism of t... | 14 | 37 | 22 Aug 2014, 08:25 | SA | 25 Dec 2014, 13:07 |
| not decided | 7 | 9 | 24 Aug 2014, 12:06 | SA | 13 Dec 2014, 09:24 |
| Positive | 13 | 22 | 22 Aug 2014, 08:25 | SA | 8 Dec 2014, 12:00 |
| Bio | 4 | 4 | 9 Sep 2014, 17:18 | SA | 4 Dec 2014, 13:00 |
| Challenges | 0 | 0 | 22 Aug 2014, 08:28 | SA | 24 Aug 2014, 13:30 |
| Communication | 9 | 20 | 22 Aug 2014, 08:29 | SA | 9 Dec 2014, 22:25 |
| Expertise and self-effic... | 12 | 24 | 24 Aug 2014, 13:45 | SA | Today, 02:33 |
| Overwhelming (Both S... | 9 | 9 | 24 Aug 2014, 13:46 | SA | 22 Dec 2014, 18:44 |
| Practicalities and buy in | 14 | 30 | 24 Aug 2014, 12:24 | SA | 23 Dec 2014, 00:01 |
| School's culture and c... | 10 | 17 | 28 Aug 2014, 14:48 | SA | 13 Dec 2014, 09:25 |
| Time | 15 | 29 | 22 Aug 2014, 08:28 | SA | 23 Dec 2014, 00:03 |
| Collaboration | 0 | 0 | 26 Aug 2014, 08:18 | SA | 26 Aug 2014, 08:19 |
| with others in school | 22 | 53 | 23 Aug 2014, 22:16 | SA | 23 Dec 2014, 23:23 |
| With researcher | 6 | 6 | 26 Aug 2014, 08:19 | SA | 25 Dec 2014, 13:04 |
| Comparison with other fo... | 9 | 11 | 24 Aug 2014, 12:53 | SA | 8 Dec 2014, 23:10 |
| Context | 17 | 32 | 24 Nov 2014, 18:13 | SA | 25 Dec 2014, 13:07 |
| Contradiction | 11 | 33 | 25 Nov 2014, 20:39 | SA | 25 Dec 2014, 13:04 |
| Development of understa... | 17 | 56 | 26 Aug 2014, 08:06 | SA | 22 Dec 2014, 18:36 |

Figure 3. 8: Codes in Nvivo

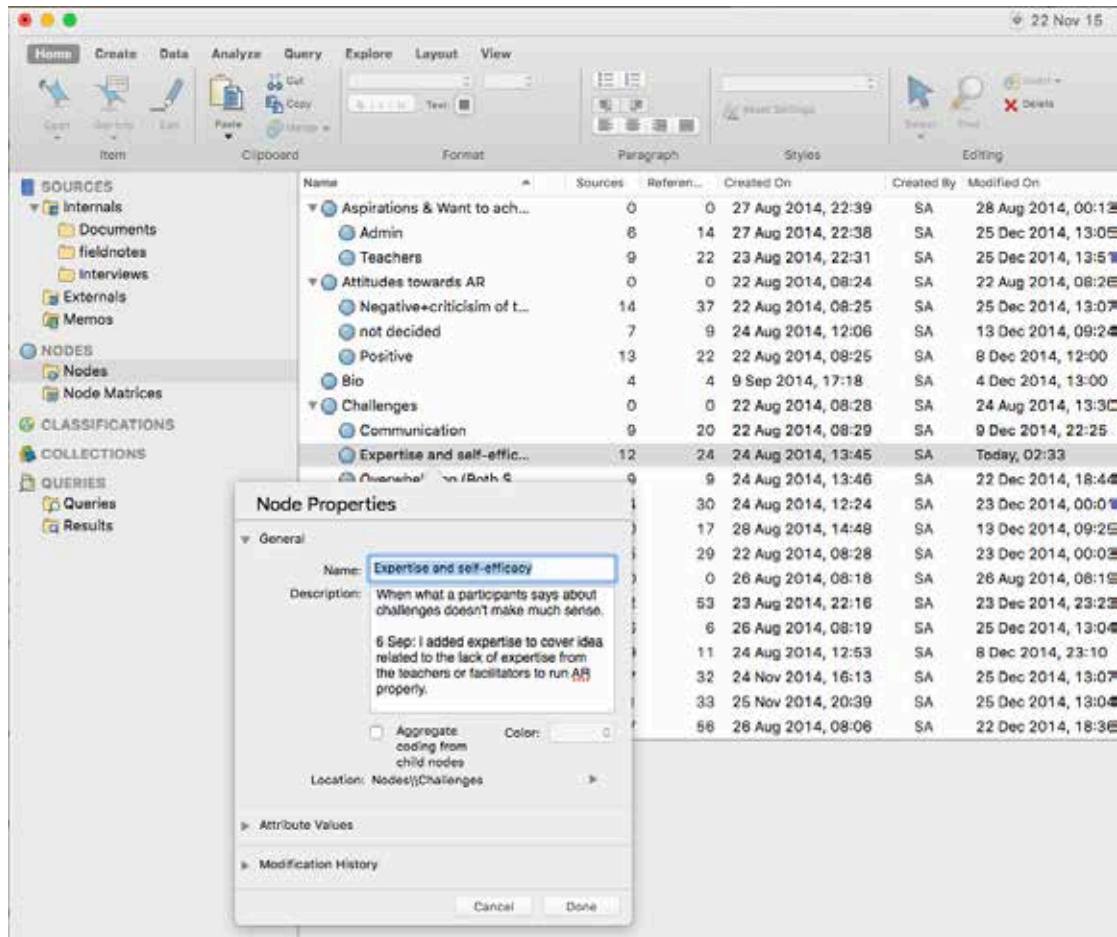


Figure 3. 9: Code properties in Nvivo

3.4.2 Ensuring research trustworthiness

In their seminal work, (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) propose the use of ‘trustworthiness’ as a way of conceptualising and evaluating the appropriateness, quality and accuracy of the research procedure, data and results. They define trustworthiness as the quality of a study and its findings that made it noteworthy to audiences. As outlined in Table 3.4, the trustworthiness of a qualitative study, according to (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 328), is made up of four criteria credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

| Criterion | Meaning |
|-----------------|--|
| Credibility | Establishing that the results of qualitative research are credible or believable. |
| Transferability | The degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalised or transferred to other contexts or settings. |
| Dependability | Whether we would obtain the same results if we could observe the same thing twice. |
| Confirmability | The degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others. |

Table 3. 4: Criteria for judging qualitative research (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007, p. 149)

These criteria represent a useful alternative to the traditional criteria (internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity) employed in quantitative research (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007) as the basic assumption in the criteria is the acknowledgment that the quality of qualitative research cannot be evaluated by employing quantitative research criteria (Lincoln & Guba). Accordingly, Lincoln & Guba's suggestions were taken into account in the present study. Before outlining how these criteria are operationalised in this study, it is useful to remember that qualitative research procedures are often flexible and evolving and that qualitative research itself advocates freedom and flexibility which makes standardisation of such procedures challenging for qualitative researchers (Kumar, 2014, p. 218). Moreover, the criteria offered by (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) provide useful strategies for thinking about and ensuring good quality qualitative research.

To maximise the credibility in the current study, the following procedures were followed. First, an in-depth embedded case study approach was followed which is an established approach in educational research (Cohen et al., 2011; Gomm et al., 2011; Hamilton et al., 2013; Merriam, 2001; Thomas, 2013). Second, a prolonged engagement in the field was deliberately aimed to maximise trustworthiness. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301) maintain that prolonged engagement is 'the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the 'culture,' testing for misinformation introduced by distortions whether of the self or the respondents, and building trust'. In this study, achieving prolonged engagement was a decision taken to improve understanding of the phenomena within its natural context (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Third, triangulation was used (interviews, documents and surveys) to further ensure credibility. This facilitated the process of comparing and contrasting data and perspective from multiple sources and multiple methods. Finally, throughout the process of carrying out this study, continuous feedback was received (from academic supervisors, peers and in conferences) on the design and conduct of the research which ultimately contributed to the trustworthiness of the current study.

Transferability is defined as the extent to which the findings of a study can be generalised and applied to other populations or other contexts. However, qualitative research is not meant to be generalisable (Creswell, 2014; Gibbs, 2007; Hammersley, 2013); it is rather intended to provide in-depth insights into the phenomena under study. Still, one way employed in this study to enhance the transferability of the findings is to provide 'thick description' (Geertz, 1994). By doing so, readers of this research can judge and infer the

similarity and applicability or otherwise of the findings and can decide the transferability or 'resonance' (Tracy, 2010) in the context of this study in relation to other contexts and context. It is expected that other similar schools where there is a desire to start an inquiry-based professional development will find the findings of this study relevant.

Dependability is concerned with the process by which results and conclusions are reached (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is achieved in this study by providing sufficient transparent information about the processes of data collection and analysis. By doing this, others can judge the adequacy and rigour of the findings arrived at in the current study. Critical reflection on my role and interaction with the participants is also provided as well as excerpts from the data to ensure that the procedures followed to reach the conclusions are clear and principled.

Finally, confirmability accounts for the researcher's interpretations during the research process, reflecting the extent to which the findings are shaped by the data. Reflexive and critical memos were kept during the data collection, analysis and writing up stages to capture emergent ideas, concepts, concerns, questions to follow up, interesting insights and so on. Additionally, reflexive accounts on how my own initial thoughts and assumptions were challenged and altered as a result of the research process are provided in this thesis (see Chapter 8).

3.4.3 Ethical considerations

Schools are formal contexts which are characterised by being charged with politics and contested power relationships (Flessner & Stuckey, 2014) to the extent that a researcher cannot just ignore them. Qualitative researchers doing fieldwork in schools will inevitably face ethical issues to consider and deal with, despite this being dependent on the nature of the study itself and the research questions to be explored. If they do not, they are not probably looking much beyond the surface. In this study, the ethical issues provided insight into how the school functions. In this section, the focus will be on two main points that illustrate the main ethical issues faced in this study and the ways in which I dealt with them.

Informed consent

All the teachers who attended the workshops were handed informed consent forms (see Appendix 5) to read and sign if they decide to participate in this study. In this informed consent form, I outlined the general research interests in this study, what participation involves, confirmation of anonymity and confidentiality, and the ability to withdraw without the need to give any reason. Because the deputy head attended both workshops, there was an element of fear of coercion. I was concerned that her presence might intimidate other teachers to 'agree' to participate. However, this was not the case. As indicated above, twelve teachers decided to participate while the others decided not to. Two of them explained to me privately after the workshop why they decided not to participate; their reasons were generally related to other commitments in the school.

Power relationships

As indicated in 3.3.1, my first point of contact in the school was the deputy head who was also a senior administrator in the leadership and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) team. Her main responsibilities in the school are related to organising and facilitating CPD programmes and it was solely her initiative to introduce action research as an inquiry approach to the school's CPD programme. It is worth noting that she started working at this school only six months before she introduced the inquiry programme. This has implications. It was vital that she won the trust of the teachers. Introducing a new approach as demanding as action research to the teachers by someone who is relatively new in the school could best be described as a risk. In the following quote, she reflects on the potential risk associated with introducing action research:

"I do lots of things to build trust because that's the most important thing with the staff. In that context, it's [the action research initiative] a bit of a risk because people could think it's a waste of time if they don't actually learn much. It just becomes a talking shop. They do stuff, they find stuff, but it doesn't impact on practice. It could go horribly wrong." (Int, DH, November 2013)

The discussion of my role and my research interests (see 4.3.2) in the proposed action research programme in the school started with the deputy head in April 2013. A few months later, I was formally introduced to the teachers by the deputy head (see positioning 4.3.4). She introduced me in an email in this way:

"Dear all,

I am sending this email to link you up with Subhi, from the OU.

Subhi is going to guide us all through setting up small research communities through our action research this year. [...] (email communication: 9 September 2013)

Being introduced to potential participants by a senior person in the same organisation has both positive and negative sides. On the one hand, there is the reassurance that the person being introduced is approved and trusted by the school's senior leadership. In this study, this contributed to 1) better attendance and participation in the workshops (see 3.3.2) and 2) more straightforward participant recruitment. The attendance rate was high with only two absentees in the second workshop because of a family commitment and a health issue. As discussed above in this chapter, the level of engagement in the workshops and the quality of the discussions was also high. At the end of the second workshop, all attending teachers were formally invited to participate in the study and it was explained to them what participation would entail. The number of those who agreed to participate and signed the informed consent (see 3.3.3) was big enough to enable me to sample from this pool. On reflection, I believe that the fact that I was introduced by the deputy head and the quality of the workshops encouraged more teachers to agree to participate. Although it was emphasised that participation was voluntary and withdrawal is possible at any stage of the study without the need to provide any reason for it, and as indicated earlier, two of the teachers who decided not to participate talked to me after the workshop explaining why they decided not to take part.

On the other hand, being introduced by the deputy head has its downside. In the beginning, teachers were naturally reserved and cautious about whatever they talked to me -an outsider- in the interviews regarding the school culture in general and the new inquiry programme in particular, avoiding being critical of any aspect of these. To them, I was the person introduced by the deputy head and sometimes seen in her office. Soon, I realised that in order to get the type of in-depth data and accounts from my participants, they needed to trust me more and stop viewing me as someone working for the school leadership team. This was no easy task. I aimed to make myself known to the teachers in the first few months of my work in the school. Also, on the days I spent in school and whenever I had a gap between scheduled interviews or meetings, I started spending most of this time in the staffroom, having conversations with both my participants and other teachers about the new action research work and various other topics. Another factor that helped in this regard is that I maintained that I was not there to evaluate or judge the work

they were involved in doing. I noticed a sense of comfort when the teachers knew I was not a 'consultant' - for some reasons they thought I was. After persisting in this endeavour for about two months, I became a familiar face in the staffroom and it was noticeable that I started to have deeper and more critical accounts.

One final factor in encouraging the participating teachers to trust me more and start engaging in deeper and critical type of interviews is that they were promised anonymity and confidentiality (Wiles et al., 2006) both within the school and outside. Yet, this is not without problems as I will demonstrate in the next section.

Problematising anonymity and confidentiality

Despite building rapport with the participants, I was wary of the issue of anonymity and confidentiality. Each interview started with a confirmation that no personal or identifying information (such as school, borough, city) would be shared with any person or organisation within the school or outside. Because of the nature of this study (i.e., not being a practitioner research about my own practice, for example), maintaining anonymity and confidentiality outside the school is less challenging. In this study, it is mainly achieved by anonymising all personal or potentially identifying information related to the participants, their school and the wider city where the school is located. However, the real challenge was within the school. Naturally, the deputy head expressed interest in knowing whether and how teachers were engaged in the action research programme and what they thought about it. I anticipated this issue and therefore I made it clear from the beginning that no identifying personal opinions or views would be shared with any person within the school. At worst, this could have meant creating problems and confrontations between those teachers who might not have been convinced by the value of the action research programme and the administration. Alternatively, and because the interest was in the success of the process itself, it was agreed that I provide a periodical advice on what needed to be done to continuously improve the initiative and maintain momentum. This made it easier for me in the sense that my advice was general in nature and no reference to individual teachers; their disciplines or any other identifying information was made. This was not the end of the ethical concerns, though.

Two participants wanted the deputy head to know through me that they were regularly and actively participating in my study and in the inquiry programme work. Of all the ethical issues I anticipated and faced, this was the least expected and the most surprising. In an

attempt to understand their reasons behind asking for this, it emerged that participating in my study meant interest in action research in general. What these two teachers wanted to achieve by making this request is to become more high-profile with the deputy head-a powerful person in the school- by showing her that they were interested in her initiative. It appeared later that they were aiming for leadership positions within the school. This was worrying for me especially that I promised anonymity and confidentiality. I was aware also that not responding to their requests would negatively affect their participation in my study. Upon reflection on this issue, the way I dealt with this is by including the deputy head in the email I sent to the participant after the interview, as I normally do, thanking him/her for their time and participation and reminding them of the main themes of the interview. I made sure not to include any of the participant's responses or opinions in this email. In this way, no identifying information or personal views were shared with a third party and I maintained interest in the study.

Overall, and as I started this section, schools are power-laden contexts and qualitative researchers must be aware of this and conduct their research accordingly. There is not much they can generally do about the power structure and it is not their role to do so in the first place as it is characteristic of most human interaction in formal contexts such as schools. Yet, they need to acknowledge the power relationships and then 'keep faith with those who have helped them' (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 65). Working ethically here becomes a matter of integrity besides prioritising an overall ethics of care and respect.

3.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter started with making the case for a qualitative case study approach. It described and justified the use of case study. It then went on to provide a detailed critical description of the research process and the hurdles faced at different stages. Data collection and analysis methods and techniques are then outlined and discussed. The chapter concluded with a critical and reflective discussion of the ethical issues faced in this study. Based on findings and empirical observations, the next chapter describes the inquiry programme.

CHAPTER 4 THE INQUIRY PROGRAMME

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a thick description of the inquiry programme based on findings and observations in the field. This description is essential to understanding the specific CPD activity the participants in this study were expected to engage in and then to theorise from this activity. The chapter will describe the programme and critically discuss its rationale and structure.

4.2 Description of the inquiry programme

Before introducing this school programme to the teachers at Greenleys Park, the deputy head had worked with other teachers on a very similar programme in her previous school for over a few years. She claimed that the outcomes were positive overall: ‘having done ALS [Action Learning Sets] for the last five years, over that time and seeing the long-term gain, I kind of realised that it’s got a really interesting value. So, as I’ve done it over time, I’ve seen these benefits grow.’ (PM, Int, 14/11/2013). This is relevant because this suggests that she has the necessary background knowledge and expertise in facilitating this type of activity. I will refer to this point later in the chapter.

In this section, I will provide a descriptive overview of the programme by discussing three main points: the rationale and aims, the ways of working, and fundamental assumptions. This description is based internal documents, interviews with the deputy head, and my observations and field notes during fieldwork. The section concludes with a critical and analytical commentary on the inquiry programme.

4.2.1 *Rationale*

The grounds for this programme is best understood within the framework of the relevant contextual background. The school, as discussed in Chapter 1, came out of special measures by converting to an Academy status and working hard to raise standards. Since then, the school has been inspected by Ofsted once in October 2012, and the outcomes of this inspection indicated that the school was ‘good’. In describing the effectiveness of the provision, the 2012 report states that ‘teaching is improving, with an increasing proportion

that is good or outstanding.’ Having this in mind, the Deputy Head wanted to achieve three main points by introducing the inquiry programme:

The first is from experience. And having done ALS for the last five years, over that time and seeing the long gain, I kind of realised that it’s got a really interesting value. And that value includes people engage in the literature more; they can see practice outside their own school. It includes people looking more actively for case studies and materials to help inform their practice. And also, it broadens their horizons of what they do in the classroom, so people don’t get stuck with what they do in their classrooms. So as I’ve done it over time, I’ve seen these benefits grow. The second reason is that I quite like the idea of me (because I’m new here) using the staff we have as a kind of a confidence-building activity to show that they’ve all got something valuable to contribute, and so by setting people up as engaged group leaders (except in one of these groups), they’ll all participate in something together. And so I think that’s quite interesting. And the third is that I’m always interested in that gap between the research out there about teaching and learning and what we do in the classroom. And I don’t think there’s enough cross over. I’ve always been interested in that. So setting up the ALSs here, small scale, starting really small, it’s just a tiny stepping stone into a kind of three-year plan and having a really rich research-engaged school. (DH, Int, 14/11/2013)

Points one and three-previous experience of facilitating inquiry and the gap between research and practice- are related. She is convinced that there is value in this type of work from previous experience and it stems from the disjuncture between research and practice. What is interesting, though, is that on another level, she wants to build confidence with the teachers through involving them in a compulsory inquiry programme. I will return to this point in the next chapters.

Other reasons to introduce this initiative include:

- [The programme] offers a CPD opportunity where staff work collaboratively around whole school issues and current areas of educational interest.
 - Focused professional dialogue can be supported.
 - New knowledge can be constructed.
 - Autonomy for staff to guide their own professional learning and development.
- (Internal document, September 2014)

In order to encourage the teachers to engage in this programme and to make it more relevant, the deputy head designed the inquiry themes to respond to the Ofsted inspection feedback.

4.2.2 Structure

There are three distinct groups of people who had different tasks and expectations regarding the inquiry programme in the school. Figure 4.1 illustrates these groups. In this section, I will briefly look at what each group's role was.

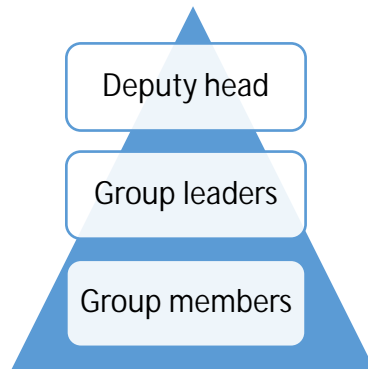


Figure 4. 1: The Structure of the inquiry programme

The Deputy Head

The Deputy Head (DH) is single-handedly responsible for introducing the inquiry programme to the school. She launched this programme soon after she joined the school and this means there is a lot at stake. Understandably, it matters to the DH whether the programme is successful or not more because, besides achieving the results hoped for in this programme, it was necessary for her to win the trust of the teachers (DH, Int, 14/11/2013). Her primary role was facilitating this programme in school. This was easier said than done, especially for someone new in the school. Part of the facilitation was to explain and convince: explain what the teachers, both group leaders and group members, were expected to do and then convince them that it is worth doing and worth their time. The explanation was given in the form of internal documents and presentations while keeping the momentum and the convincing was done through sending reminders about the meetings, checking progress and troubleshooting any issues. What this means is her main tasks were to communicate with the teachers. She mostly communicated with the group leaders and the latter cascaded information with their respective set members and reported to the DH. There were instances where communication fell apart and caused more harm than good (see Chapter 7). Finally, it is worth mentioning that the DH also joined one of the groups as a group leader to model what was expected – by her.

The group leaders

These were selected from a pool of ‘outstanding teachers’ (Internal document, August 2014). And they worked closely with the DH to run the programme. Their role was set out in a specific internal document entitled ‘The Role of the Learning Leader’. In this document, the DH outlined that the group leaders are expected to:

- Establish learning goals and action research focus.
- Design and agree on research questions – or plan on how to enable the ALS group to design one.
- Provide and share some relevant literature to members to support the learning of the group.
- Agree on methodology and data collection.
- Run the set twice a term, three times a year.
- Produce, with all members, a short summary of the ALS findings. (Proforma to use)
- Refine the approach to how the logistics of running the sessions after each cycle (one term). (internal document)

So this means that the group leaders had a key role in this programme. Each group had one or a maximum of two group leaders who liaised with the Deputy Head and worked closely with the set members. These teachers attended my workshops as the DH deemed it unfeasible to have both group leaders and group members in these workshops; that is, more than fifty teachers. In the workshops, they were introduced to the basic assumptions of action research and they were left with some tools to get them started with their respective inquiries. The group leaders had the chance to choose a topic to research with their set members from a predefined list of topics prepared by the DH and based on the Ofsted inspection feedback.

The group members

The group members are the majority in number; hence, they are represented in the base of the pyramid in figure 4.1. The majority are teachers but there were also a few support staff. The expectations of the set members were to:

- Attend each session as signed up for (6 in the year).
- Read literature presented and add [relevant literature] if possible.

- Contribute to the research design.
- Engage in and conduct the action research collaboratively with other members.
- Summarise findings to bring back to each second session. (internal document)

The set members had the choice of which group to join. They could also join other groups if they wanted to after each term (see 4.2.3 below). This meant different subject teachers worked together in all cases. Both the group leaders and the deputy head had mixed views about this, claiming that there were both advantages and disadvantages for different discipline teachers in working together. However, it was decided to have teachers within the same departments to work together in the next academic year (2014-20015).

4.2.3 Phases

In theory, the type of inquiry the teachers were supposed to conduct as part of the inquiry programme was action research. The framework of this programme is based on the core action research framework (Carr & Kemmis, 1986): plan, act, observe, reflect (see Chapter 3 for more about action research frameworks). However, within the busy context of the school, and because the Deputy Head had some experience in facilitating this type of activity in a similarly busy environment, there were some adaptations especially regarding the nature of the inquiry cycle. For practical and administrative reasons, there were three cycles; each lasted for a school term. During each cycle, teachers met twice after choosing a inquiry group that they find interesting. In the first meeting, nearer the beginning of the term, the group leaders discuss the research topic with their group members and how they all understand and/or currently deal with the topic, distribute any relevant materials such as background reading, and agree on the work to be completed. The work to be completed is normally in the form of introducing change to their practice related to the area of inquiry and keeping a record of the impact of this change. In the second meeting, the teachers come together again to reflect on and discuss the work since the first meeting and plan what need to be done and focused on for the next cycle. In particular, the discussion focusses on whether the introduced change was found to be useful and effective by the teachers and whether there is a need to continue and implement the change. These meetings were set in the school calendar in an attempt to embed and formalise the programme. Once a cycle is completed at the end of a term, the group members can choose to join a different set. The topics which were investigated include challenge,

differentiation, engagement and assessment for learning. Some of the questions the teachers wanted to investigate include:

- Does participating in a virtual learning environment project improve engagement and progress of a small (10 – 15) sample of Year 11 higher prior attainers?
- Could effective differentiation help low ability students to experience success in completing classwork?
- How can recognising student engagement in learning help to improve the delivery of outstanding lessons?
- Does effective assessment for learning augment achievement and hence engagement? (internal documents)

Regardless of the topic investigated, each group had to complete a cycle by the end of each term.

This model of action research implemented in the school is consistent with the characterises of action discussed in chapter 2 (2.5.3). in particular, the school action research projects were small-scale in their nature focusing on specific and practical areas of practice. Built within this model was the chance for teachers to reflect on their practice and introduce change based on systematic and critical reflection. The school model was also collaborative in nature in which teachers formed inquiry groups and supported each other in their action research work. Finally, and of paramount significance in the school model was the centrality of teachers' values and beliefs about the area of their action research projects. These projects started with what the teachers recognised as areas of interest requiring development and improvement and through these projects teachers attempted to enhance and improve their practice.

4.2.4 Commentary

As my purpose in this section is to *describe* the programme only, I provide here a critical highlight of few characteristics of the programme that are relevant to the discussion later on. One of these characteristics is that this programme was compulsory; all teachers regardless of subjects, seniority, the number of teaching hours, had to be involved. Notwithstanding that, one of the purposes of this programme from the Deputy Head's point of view is to empower teachers and involve them in the school policy and decision-making processes through putting forward suggestions and alternatives related to teaching and learning based on their inquiry outcomes. Another relevant characteristic is that the

plan, act, observe, reflect process of action research was not clearly demarcated in the process. And although all the group leaders were aware of the process, this was mainly communicated to the group members in the form of discrete tasks such as reading some literature about the topic, identifying target students and trying to implement some changes in the instructions. The reflective side of action research, for example, was not necessarily prominent in all groups, especially that teachers were under pressure to finish a cycle every term and start a new one with the new term. Finally, my own role in this programme was limited. This is so because the plan to introduce inquiry as a form of professional development to the teachers and the structure of the inquiry programme were in place before I contacted the school and my role was limited to introducing action research to the group leaders. That was in exchange for access; I ran the workshops and, in return, I was granted access to the school. This is not an attempt to distance myself from the initiative; it is simply to clarify and provide an accurate account. The work carried out by the teachers was considered by them to be action research for several reasons. First, they aimed to change an aspect or aspects of their teaching through researching it. They did this in the first phase in which they identified areas within their teaching worthy of collaborative investigation. Second, they consulted the literature on their topic through the group leaders

4.3 Chapter summary

This first findings chapter provided necessary essential insights about the inquiry programme. In particular, it discussed the rationale, structure and phases of the programme. The insights and discussion in this chapter are essential for addressing the research questions. The discussion in the next findings chapter will turn to answering the research questions.

CHAPTER 5 DEVELOPMENT OF BELIEFS AND UNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT RESEARCH & RESEARCH ENGAGEMENT

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings in this study and answer the research questions (see 1.5). The presentation of the findings is organised around the research questions: each section in this chapter corresponds to at least one research question or sub-question and offers an informed answer to it. In presenting the findings, I follow Bazeley's (2013, p. 223) advice in using a 'describe, compare, relate' strategy in presenting and discussing the themes.

5.2 Teachers' beliefs about research engagement

Whether and how teachers' beliefs and understanding of the role of inquiry in their practice and professional development undergo any changes as a result of engagement in an inquiry -based professional development programme is of prime significance in this study. As outlined in chapter 3, this is achieved by taking a case study approach to field work and trying to understand the experience of being involved in such programme from the teachers' own viewpoints. A relatively prolonged fieldwork engagement-one academic year- with the participants is necessary for a deeper and more in-depth understanding of the teachers' experiences. In this section, I present the findings related to the development of teachers' beliefs about inquiry and inquiry engagement. This is going to be achieved by focusing on three main strands:

1. Inquiry as a professional development activity: here, I will provide my claims, which are based on and grounded in the data, about teachers' beliefs and understanding about research as a professional development activity.
2. How teachers respond to the role of becoming researchers of their practice: I will focus on how teachers deal with the task of being researchers of their own practice.
3. The critical events that affected the development of their beliefs and understanding.

By discussing these three main strands, I aim to answer Research Question 1: To what extent and how do teacher's beliefs and perceptions about inquiry change after engaging in a school-supported inquiry project? The section concludes with an overall reflection on the three strands.

5.2.1 Beliefs and understandings of inquiry

As established in Chapter two, teachers have beliefs and understandings about various aspects of their professional work. These beliefs and understandings are shaped by and at the same time shape their practice. Therefore, one way to understand teachers' engagement or lack of it in a professional development activity –inquiry in this study- is to understand their beliefs and understandings about this activity. Gaining this understanding will not only facilitate our growing understanding of teachers' cognitions and beliefs about certain aspects of their professional work, but it will also facilitate a more effective provision and facilitation of these activities. Of the diverse approaches to teacher professional development, this study focuses on inquiry carried out by teachers themselves.

A central concern of this study is what teachers think about inquiry; how they engage in it; and what they think about it after they have been exposed to and engaged in it. There were multiple opportunities and sources of data to understand teachers' beliefs and understandings about inquiry in this study. Despite the richness of the picture this has created, it also resulted in some contradictions which I aim to unravel throughout this chapter. The first of these contradictions is related to teachers' stated beliefs and understandings of research.

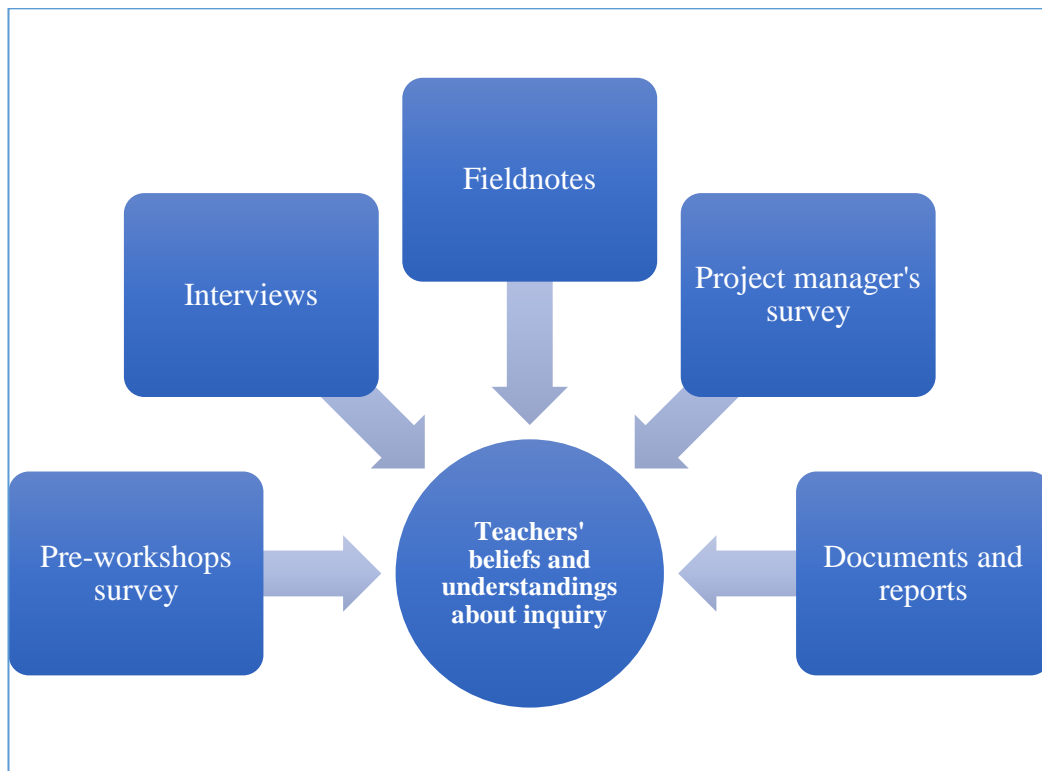


Figure 5. 1: Sources of data about teachers' beliefs and understandings about inquiry

Figure 5.1 shows the sources of data related to teachers' beliefs and understandings of inquiry. Overall, the way teachers talked about and explained their beliefs and understandings about inquiry as a professional development activity was positive except in the deputy head's survey. In this survey, three out of twenty respondents were critical, and at some points sceptical, of the idea of teachers doing research based on their practice. In fact, it is the only time in this study when teachers doubt the value of researching their own practice. In order to understand this potential contradiction, the survey should be seen in its own context and specificity. Two factors differentiate this survey from the other sources of information outlined in Figure 5.1. First, the deputy head's survey, though completed online using Google Docs, was anonymous to the survey owner. What this meant was that the respondents knew they could voice their concerns about the programme without being identified. They might have felt safe to express their views to the person responsible for facilitating this new activity in school without the pressure of being identified. Second, the survey was conducted after teachers had completed two cycles of action research. This means, in comparison to the pre-workshops survey, the latter survey is based on teachers' actual engagement in inquiry. For these two reasons, it can be argued that what might appear as a contradiction in teachers' beliefs and understandings about research is, in fact, a valuable way of understanding the dynamic and complex nature of teachers' work. This is not to say that the other accounts from other sources of data are invalid or mere

fabrications. Indeed, lots of the accounts from other sources were critical of various aspects of the inquiry programme. However, in these critical accounts obtained from other sources, the participants simply chose not to critique the inquiry programme itself as, for example, an ineffective or inappropriate form of professional development.

In order to achieve clarity in my presentation of the findings in this section, I will further divide it into two sub-sections: 1) findings related to teachers' beliefs and understanding about inquiry as a professional development activity and 2) findings related to teachers' beliefs and understandings about how research is facilitated and conducted in their school. The distinction I am trying to make here is one between the *ideal* and the *real* teacher; between what their educational principles about inquiry engagement are on the one hand and the realities of research engagement on the other. I turn now to discuss the concept of ideal and real teachers.

The 'ideal' teacher

The 'ideal teacher' is used to emphasise teachers' stated beliefs about inquiry and its value as opposed to the way they actually do it or the way they talk about and comment on the specific inquiry programme in their school. Overall, for the participants in this study, inquiry as an approach to professional development and improving practice is considered a significant and worthwhile form of professional development. Teachers at various stages in this study expressed interest in inquiry as a useful approach to professional development. They gave several reasons for their belief in the worthwhileness of inquiry. It is worth exploring here these reasons and then making sense of them within the whole framework of the school inquiry programme:

- *Reflect on their practice:* The majority of the teachers who were interviewed in this study (T1, T2, T3, T5, T6, and T7) believe that inquiry helped them to reflect on their practice. For these teachers, reflection was useful in focusing on significant issues in their practice and therefore find an answer(s) to these issues and by doing so improve their practice. For example, T6 claims that 'I think it [the inquiry programme] is a really good idea. I think it is great because it's obviously given people the opportunity to reflect on their practice [...] and that's something really positive' (T6, Int, 12/11/2013). T1 also believes that 'It [the inquiry programme] is a nice way to keep refreshing the profession and keep it exciting and to keep teachers thinking about and reflecting on ways to improve what they

do.’ (T1, Int, 14/11/2013).

Teachers’ eagerness and desire to reflect on their practice should be conceptualised in their own context, though. What was noticeable throughout the fieldwork is that teachers were overloaded with all the responsibilities, initiatives and extra activities in school. In order for the school to be transformed from a failing into a ‘good’ school (see Chapter 1); teachers had to exert more effort and work to the script. Once in the staffroom, I observed a very revealing incident. A senior teacher stormed into the staffroom, started photocopying some papers and then burst out with ‘It feels like a rat in a maze in this place’ (FN, 28/02/2014). To me and after few months in the staffroom, this eloquently and vividly illustrated the feelings the teachers were going through in the school. They were expected to do a lot and there was simply very little room for discretion, autonomy or reflection built into their work. As explained above, some anonymous respondents to the deputy head’s survey were critical of the whole inquiry programme because to them it is more work and less time to reflect: ‘All seems like additional work. Where did this work till you drop 24/7 culture come from and why? We seem obsessed with creating more and more work rather than reflecting, analysing and consolidating what we do well’ (deputy head’s survey). I will revisit this point in the next chapter.

- *Recognise local expertise:* the ideal teacher in this study also believes that inquiry engagement is valuable as it allows teachers within the school to utilise and maximise their expertise to improve their own and their colleagues’ practice. What is meant by local expertise here is the experience and knowledge the teachers within the school themselves have as opposed to knowledge and experience from the ‘specialists’ or consultants. Normally teachers will have external speakers and consultants for their in-service training (INSET) days and for other school initiatives and programmes related to their professional development. What was clear in this study is that teachers generally do not have much faith in the training provided by those external experts. For example, T6 argues that ‘it’s [the inquiry programme] obviously given people the opportunity [...] to use experts within the school rather than having people who are very removed from our situation and our context actually leading to improve each other’s practice’ (T6, Int, 12/11/2013). She also emphasises in the same interview that ‘I think it is good to have people who are already working in the school and know the way the school works and are

people who are confident in the particular area they want to focus on'. Teacher 7 uses an example to explain why local expertise matters:

Last year we had a CPD program and in the sessions, we were presented with somebody's specific paradigm of how the teachers can become better. One problem with us being given something and told do it is that it was filled with lots of jargon and it was difficult. We had to sort of guess where the writing was coming from. It was a bit the other way round, giving all the diagrams and buzz words and (A): it was decontextualised and (B): it seemed we were creating a lot more work for ourselves and ourselves learning how to do this specific thing without understanding why that would be of benefit in terms of putting the teachers and talking about as researchers achieve something. That (A): is driven by the teachers and B: is up to us to make it meaningful and decide what sort of terminology in using in terms of what sort of references we have. (T6, Int, 1/12/2013)

As this teacher explains, it is the teachers who make sense of new initiatives or knowledge and it is the teachers who, at the end of the day, incorporate these initiatives and new knowledge into their practice. In this way, inquiry helps them recognise what they are already good at and then improve it and share it within the school. Teacher 2 also argues that when the school supports inquiry, it will create more opportunities for teachers to build more on their expertise and become more research-literate. I think the teachers are usually overloaded with lots of work, planning and delivering lessons, tracking students' progress, doing data, and there is not actually enough time for their professional growth. I think if we link research and practice, it may give them some opportunities. (T2, Int, 28/02/2014)

- *Inquiry gives a sense of satisfaction and achievement:* another reason for the ideal teachers to believe that inquiry is valuable is that it gives them a sense of satisfaction and achievement. Teacher 1, for example, argues that inquiry engagement gives a sense of satisfaction to see that 'you have contributed something to the wider educational theory and practice' (Int, 14,11,2013) through research. He also thinks that it is a positive thing that the school is trying to involve teachers in research: 'for the school to be talking about this [inquiry -based professional development], I suppose it's a good thing, and trying to do it is a good thing.' He thinks that engagement in inquiry helps the teacher crystallise his or her ideas and present them to the school. He explicates his position further:

It is always nice and rewarding to have the school acknowledge your work and your ideas which is something this school is very good at. I have quite a lot of input and quite a lot of say in our marking policy which has changed because of certain things I have done. And

obviously the things that go well in your classroom give you a sense of satisfaction but it is the feeling that you are contributing to something a little bit more lasting a little bit more long term. I think there's something incredibly rewarding about that and I think every teacher wants something like that. And again if the school gets into this habit of rewarding and acknowledging teachers, and if you're making teachers' lives easier and the kids' learning better, I think there is not much more you can ask for. (Int, 14/11/2013)

Summary of the 'ideal' teacher

The ideal teacher in this study is keen on participating and engaging in inquiry as a useful form of professional development. What makes him or her believe that it is a useful thing to do is that they think it helps make their work better. It helps them focus on a certain area of their practice and improve it; it helps the school acknowledge and improve the local expertise and it gives them a sense of achievement. It is unclear what the source of teachers' theoretical beliefs¹ about inquiry engagement are at this stage or, in other words, what lead them to value inquiry. However, few explanations can be put forward here in the form of tentative claims based on the observations and interactions with the teachers in the field. First, the teachers in this study view the University-with capital U referring to it as an institution rather than a specific university- as a respectable institution. It is the same institution where they all received their qualifications and training and where most of the consultants come from. In fact, a few of the teachers in this study expressed interest in starting a higher degree. They discussed this with me and sometimes asked for help and advice. Two of them started part-time EdD (Doctorate in Education) and a third was planning to start an M.Ed (Masters in Education) in special education towards the end of my fieldwork. For this group of teachers who aspire to be affiliated with the University, the inquiry programme constituted an opportunity for them to start thinking about and doing research- albeit the differences between the types of research in each context. This, they believed, would make their entry to the University smoother. Indeed, one of the teachers who started an EdD is working on a similar topic to the one she started in the school inquiry programme. They viewed inquiry as something scholarly and academic and associated with the University, so for them to be involved in something associated with the University, which they aspire to and respect is very positive.

¹ I use 'theoretical beliefs' here to distinguish between teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards inquiry and their actual engagement.

The second point regarding how teachers formulate those positive beliefs about inquiry is related to the school's own leadership team. The school facilitator of this inquiry programme proposed it as a way of raising standards and responding to the Ofsted feedback. Another significant point about the way it was proposed is that teachers were encouraged to engage in this activity in order to have a say in the school's policy (cf. Teacher 1 above). They were encouraged to develop strategies or other ways of working with learners that can be rolled out across the school, which means they will have their own mark on the school's policy. This, with the emphasis that it is a mandated programme, created some pressure on the teachers to be involved in this activity and to accept it. The logical thing for the teachers to do in this case is to accept and value this opportunity. Not accepting it may be interpreted by the school's leadership team as being 'inquiry - philistine', or someone who does not want positive things to happen in the school.

Finally, there is an element of positionality that might have also contributed to the ideal teacher's stated beliefs about inquiry and inquiry engagement. In this study, and as discussed in Chapter 3, I positioned myself as a researcher. With the introductory workshops (see 3.3.2 in Chapter 3), my interest in action research conducted by teachers became apparent. For the teachers I interviewed and followed closely throughout the academic year, they knew that I was a doctoral researcher rather than 'consultant'. In either case, I was viewed by many teachers as the person who was interested in and knew about action research, or in some cases 'the action-research guy'. They knew that my primary interest was how they engaged in the new inquiry programme. This, and despite my continual effort to establish rapport and obtain as honest and accurate accounts as possible, might have exerted some more pressure on the teachers to communicate favourable accounts with me. After all, I was the outsider talking to them about something their school wants them to do. As will be outlined in the section below about the real teacher, despite the fact that teachers stated beliefs about inquiry and inquiry engagement seem to suggest positive attitude towards this activity, the way they enacted these beliefs and the way they actually engaged in inquiry was not always positive.

The 'real' teacher

One of the most intriguing aspects of this study is the contrast between how teachers talk about inquiry: 'the ideal teacher', and how they engage in it: 'the real teacher'. There is clear incongruence between what the teachers say about inquiry (stated beliefs) and what they actually do (practice). In this section, I will start to delve into this matter, as it is key

to understanding the development of teachers' beliefs about inquiry and inquiry engagement.

In the design stage, it was not expected that there would be disparities between how teachers talk about inquiry and how they engage in it. This is one of the areas that emerged and started to become prominent during fieldwork and early stages of analysis. In a sense, this represents an example of the advantages of an exploratory study in which the researcher goes to the field with an open mind trying to understand the phenomenon under study. This 'going to the field with an open mind' facilitated attention to details and possibility to look for explanations. Ultimately, it became apparent that in most cases what teachers say about inquiry is different from what they do.

In order to avoid repetition, the real teachers' beliefs and understandings of inquiry and inquiry engagement will be expounded in the next section. The discussion will be organised as follows. I will start with teachers' response to being researchers. Here I will present and discuss findings related to teachers' beliefs and understandings of the particular inquiry programme offered in their school. This will be followed by teachers' disenchantment with inquiry. This is another main theme in this study. Here I will present and discuss the factors that lead to teachers' mostly negative experience with *doing* inquiry. I will then conclude this section with critical events that have impacted on the real teachers' beliefs about inquiry engagement, whether positive or negative.

How teachers respond to being researchers

The inquiry programme represented a new way of doing professional development in the school as the majority of the teachers did not have research experience based on their practice prior to this programme, though some had some exposure to research as part of a programme of study requirement such as a Master's or Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). The latter is normally assessed and of a one-off nature. Therefore, I do not discuss this type of inquiry here. Being expected to be involved in researching their own practice for the first time, and in a way that is supported and mandated by the school, exposed lots of what the participants think and believe about this type of professional development programme as well as other ways of working within the school. In this regard, I will discuss three points that, in my view, clearly illustrate teachers' response to actual inquiry engagement (the real teacher). These are: 1) expertise and confidence in inquiry, 2) practicality and buy-in and 3) school culture. I will explore these in turn.

Expertise in inquiry

The findings of this study suggest a general and apparent lack of expertise in inquiry. This became prominent as the programme progressed and it can be noticed at different stages of the life of the programme. Table 5.1 shows examples of teachers' lack of expertise or confidence in carrying out research. The examples are organised according to the sources of the data and the stages of the programme: beginning, middle and end of the academic year. For example, prior to the workshops (see 3.3.2), one of the teachers said that he was 'worried about being able to do it properly with all the other commitments' (pre-workshops survey). Unsurprisingly, there are more examples related to the 'end' than the other two stages as participants at that stage were then able to reflect on the year's work.

| # | <i>Examples of teachers' lack of expertise in their own words</i> | <i>Inquiry Stage</i> | <i>Source</i> |
|---|--|----------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | 'I am worried about being able to do it properly with all the other commitments.' | Beginning | Pre-workshops survey |
| 2 | 'I have no idea what this is.' (in response to a question about any previous research experience as a teacher) | Beginning | Pre-workshop survey |
| 3 | 'I am worried that my knowledge ... will not be good enough.' | Beginning | Workshop |
| 4 | '[teachers] need more training and awareness raising about the value of research in education.' | Middle | Interview (T4, 27/3/2014) |
| 5 | 'It took a little bit of time to understand what we are doing.' | Middle | Interview (T4, 27/3/2014) |
| 6 | 'what surprised me was the fact that people or colleagues were expecting us to feed them with all the information.' | End | Interview (T2, 26/6/2014) |
| 7 | 'I said to my colleagues that I actually put some of the materials on the drive where they could access it and I also made hard copies and handed them out. Despite all of that, <i>they were not very willing to read</i> . When I said to them 'we've got few reading materials if you want to take with you to read for your own interest, and bring some ideas and thoughts into our second meeting so we can talk about it', <i>it was almost like a dead end</i> , I have to say. (emphasis added) | End | Interview (T2, 26/6/2014) |
| 8 | 'My feeling after all three first meetings was that quite a large number of my colleagues are perhaps not as confident [doing this work]. ... maybe it is the work load of teachers and they just find it difficult to cope with something else.' | End | Interview (T2, 26/6/2014) |

| | | | |
|----|---|-----|---------------------------|
| 9 | 'I saw with some teachers who came to my sessions they said 'we did it differently'. So I think people who are leading the action research groups, they themselves perhaps <i>are not fully informed</i> about it' (<i>emphasis added</i>). | End | Interview (T4, 26/6/2014) |
| 10 | 'Some don't want to do it; some don't see any value in meeting for the sake of meeting because they haven't been convinced by its worth. And I think those people think the same of much of school activity.' | End | Interview (A, 26/6/2014) |

Table 5. 1: Examples of teachers' lack of expertise in doing research

What is crucial here is the tension and ambivalence at different levels throughout the first academic year in the life of the programme. On the one hand, the group leaders reported more than once that there was not enough guidance and support from the deputy head. On the other, they generally complained about the group members' lack of engagement in this activity. Teacher 1 explains this:

But we have ... been left to our own devices about whether we even do it. When they [group members] come to my group, because this is not my role- I'm not head of CPD- so when they come to my group and they haven't done anything, there's no reason for me to say 'why haven't you done it?' Because we have been massively left to our own devices, some people are doing things in lots of different ways [...]. Some staff are buying into it some aren't, some staff have got different ways of doing things; some staff are looking for something completely different. I think it's been difficult to enforce. That's why I think it has to be something completely voluntary with a smaller group really interested people. (T1, Int, 30/1/2014)

The lack of engagement was often ascribed to the fact that most of the groups' members were not aware of the rationale behind this type of work and to the lack of time as outlined above. In some cases, and as Teacher 5 explains, the group members' engagement tantamount to a tick box activity; another thing to do in school:

I'm thinking of somebody [from the set members] who was quite reticent, but actually completed it [the action research work] very well in terms of she constructed a task, put it online, the kids did it, she got the data and she's recorded it. But I think that's because she didn't-and this is really judgmental thing to say actually-but almost because she is the kind of member of staff who is *very good at completing tasks without necessarily investing anything in the rationale behind or valuing the purpose*. So for her, it was 'right I've got to do this, I've got to give it to the kids, and I've got to monitor the results' and she did that within a term. But I don't think anybody could actually say anything drastic has been learned from that. (*emphasis added*.T5, Int, 14/7/2014)

This points in the direction that there is a culture of performativity and compliance: doing what is required to do with no or very little questioning or professional dialogue and judgment involved.

Practicality and buy-in¹

Teachers' buy-in to the inquiry programme was significant to the deputy head from the beginning of the academic year. When asked about the challenges that she was expecting as part of introducing the inquiry programme, she explained:

¹ I use this term 'buy-in' because it was widely used by the participants.

Another challenge is maybe people turning up because they have to as opposed to they want to. And so that kind of buy-in that the teachers will have. I think some of the people leading the sessions might not be as confident as others, and I think that might filter down into those turning up in their sets. People might think this is a bit woolly, not quite sure why I'm here. So that's a potential worry. And I think what they find is not robust enough because their questions haven't been small enough. I might be guilty of that myself. So the findings might not go anywhere because they're not that meaningful. And maybe at the end of the process, people will be reluctant to help write those projects up because of issues like time and the usual sort of things. And then we won't as a school see a rich enough bunch of activity evidence at the end to show that it's worth it. (DH, 14/11/02013)

The interviews and the documents show that the practical aspect of the inquiry programme and teachers' buy-in thereof fluctuated with more teachers in the 'negative and not convinced' camp towards the end of the academic year. This is not to suggest sharp contrast among teachers; what was noticeable in several cases, though, is that some teachers underwent some transitions in their views and beliefs about the practicality and therefore their buy-in changed over time (see below). Fewer teachers found the initiative practical and thus the buy-in declined markedly. To illustrate the decline in teachers' beliefs about the practicality of the inquiry programme and the decline in their buy-in, I present some related extracts in Table 5.2. What is noticeable here is that the interviewees in the extracts express concerns about the practicality of the inquiry programme in different ways. The extracts are again organised according to the stage and some basic information is provided about each:

| <i>Practicality and buy-in</i> | <i>Stage</i> | <i>Source</i> |
|---|--------------|----------------------------|
| <p>1. So they [the other learning leader] ... turned to me to give them ideas about what they should do. And then when they came back, it was pretty negative about what they had actually done. Struggling to bring anything in; struggling to see the point of what we were doing; struggling to come to terms with the project itself and what it was trying to achieve. And then I had only one member of staff in the second meeting, and I don't think they have really understood what action research is all about. They want a quick fix, a strategy they can try in their lessons, and then if it works, they keep using it, but not in terms of why it worked.</p> | Beginning | Interview (T1, 30/1/2014) |
| <p>2. If it's [action research meetings] 45 minutes after school, there's really no way people are buying into it, if you see what I mean. It becomes very much like a tick box activity; and that's what it feels like at the moment in school. There are so many things which are just tick boxes. We have been made to do them, but there is no real follow-up. You get the feeling that someone somewhere has got a lot of good ideas but it's like: do this, do this, do this, and there's so many of them that you can never do anything in enough detail. You're trying to juggle too many balls and at the end of the day you can't keep that going for long. With this action research, I feel the engagement is not genuine because people are doing it because they have been told to. If people are not buying into this initiative, there is going to be no real progress, there is going to be no real evidence that you can use at the end of the day.</p> | Beginning | Interview (T3, 27/1/2014) |
| <p>3. 'So I could go away and read an article for two hours and then get nothing from it. It could be not useful at all. And for a lot of teachers that is not even an option, like even though I like it or see the value of it, as you could say that it's a 50-50 chance they could find it useful after spending two hours reading it, I would say I haven't got the time. So unless you give me the extra hours that day it isn't going to happen. So I think yes the time issue is a big thing and there is quite a big risk and potentially not much reward, that's what people were concerned about.</p> | Middle | Interview (T1. 27/2/2014) |

| | | |
|---|--------|---------------------------|
| <p>4. It will take some time for it to be taken by the mass. The understanding of the principles behind it will contribute to the effective sustainability of this activity. Secondly a good planned program, i.e. it starts with people who are delivering it, the group leaders. The dynamics of the groups that you are going to be within. I think the groups need to be scrutinised, who is in the group and who is not, move away from the obstacles and making the time needed for this activity available, i.e. to be covered if you're teaching. So it's all the logistic stuff that needs to be done, but my main concern is that the principle behind what we're doing is not yet fully understood by all. People need to buy into it.</p> | Middle | Interview (T4. 27/3/2014) |
| <p>5. In the second cycle, and due to some logistical issues, even when we had the first meeting, few of them [set members] turned up. When we had the second meeting, only two came to the meeting. Some of them were involved in either extracurricular activity outside the school, or someone had a doctor's appointment, etc. But the first time we met with the second group, they weren't really keen because of the experience they had with previous group leaders. The person who led it didn't explain what it is all about.</p> | Middle | Interview (T4. 27/3/2014) |
| <p>6. I think some of them see it as an extra initiative, you know, in which we have to do lots of tick boxes. We are very very busy. I'm in a faculty in which we have lots of extra-curricular activities, for example we have clubs every day after school. So it's really difficult to free up any time. We're never free until 4 o'clock and sometimes until 5 or 5:30. So for certain faculties, it's a lot of time to give up and when you have free lessons during the day, which is used for planning, it always feels you can't justify a free lesson for planning to do an extra initiative.</p> | End | Interview (T3,11/7/2014) |
| <p>7. I think some people view it as another burden especially that the idea of the school day, what time they finish what time they start, and all of these good ideas but not incorporated really well, or explained really well to the teachers. In terms of time, I think a few weeks ago there was some talk about a new school hour next year and teachers were presented with a countdown of how many hours they should be doing whatever. I think some people were saying if this is the approach (you start at A and you finish at Y) so why do I go a little bit beyond the alphabet and do this action research.</p> | End | Interview (T4. 26/6/2014) |

| | | |
|--|------------|----------------------------------|
| <p>8. Interviewer: do you think the buy-in, and getting staff on board has changed at all? T5: no, I think once the initial buy-in happened... @ Interviewer: Did it actually happen? @ T5: for quite some people, yes. Let me qualify what I mean by buy-in. I don't mean unbridled enthusiasm; I mean acceptance of this is what's happening. For most people it wasn't the case 'did they buy-in or reject it?'; I think it was much more a case of did they understand it and because there was a confusion at the start, the focus on most staff became not on 'do we think this is a good idea?', but on 'do we understand what's happening?'. And I think they felt a sense of relief once they had understood it.</p> | <p>End</p> | <p>Interview (T5. 14/7/2014)</p> |
|--|------------|----------------------------------|

Table 5. 2: Teachers' extracts about practicality and buy-i

Teachers' beliefs and understanding about the practicality of the initiative and their buy-in were not static, though. Some gradual and subtle transformation took place over the academic year. Two factors can help us understand the change in beliefs and perceptions about the practicality and buy-in: *quick fix and tick-box*. Teacher 1 in extract 1 explains that the teachers he was working with were expecting a 'quick fix', which action research does not necessarily provide. As discussed in Chapter 2, action research requires time and reflection in order for new ideas and teaching strategies to be reached at and then implemented. It does not offer quick fixes. For some of the teachers, and due to the demands of a busy profession, this did not have sufficient practical consequences for them. After the experience of going to the action research meetings and doing some of the associated work, they began to realise that it was not offering them quick practical ideas and solutions to take to their classes. Their ideas of the practicality of the initiative began to take shape based on this experience and therefore they came to believe that the initiative was not as practical as they wanted it to be. The other factor is the 'tick-box' culture that Teacher 3 explains in extract 2. This culture is the result of the perceived numerous activities and initiatives the teachers have to participate in with the limited time they have at their disposal. The majority of the teachers saw this inquiry programme as another school initiative, which ultimately meant extra work on top of what they were already doing. This led the participating teachers to engage with a mandated school initiative in survival mode: they do it because they *have to* as opposed to something they *want to* do (see types of engagement in chapter 6). As extract eight from Teacher 5 indicates, there were cases when the type of engagement in the inquiry programme was shallow as the teachers merely accepted that it was something happening in their school rather than wanted to be involved and engaged in the inquiry programme. As Teacher 3 explains in extract 2, there are so many good ideas and initiatives, but little time to do any of them properly.

These findings are in line with Ball's (2003) arguments regarding the new power regimes that resulted in an obsession with performativity. He argues that performativity is:

a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgments, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic). The performances (of individual subjects or organizations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality', or 'moments' of promotions or inspections. (Ball, 2003, p. 216)

As discussed in Chapter two, performativity is one of the main threats facing teachers' engagement in professional development activities. This is significant in this study as what we see happening in the school in terms of pushing an inquiry agenda can be viewed as a result of a performativity culture.

School culture

Another significant factor in understanding how teachers respond to becoming researchers is through examining their school culture. What I take here to be the school culture are all contextual factors and how such factors contribute to facilitating or impeding inquiry engagement. I divide the school culture into two elements: physical and symbolic. The physical includes all aspects of the physical environment of the school that are relevant to the inquiry programme. The more significant symbolic element encompasses any relevant school policy, work pattern, and expectations from the teachers.

In examining the physical culture of the school and how it influenced the inquiry programme, the main impacting factor was the building work, which commenced in 2012 and was still in progress by the end of the academic year 2014. As part of the modernisation and investing in the Academies Programme discussed in Chapter 1, the school was undergoing building work over the whole academic year as the pictures in Figure 5.2 show. As the left picture shows, temporary walls had often to be erected and that meant different buildings within the school were separated. This had an impact on the way teachers worked and communicated with each other in general and for the purpose of the inquiry programme in particular. In some cases, teachers could not meet other set members unless there was a scheduled meeting. Ultimately, there was less communication between the teachers because of the building work. Teacher 7 notes the following about the effects of the construction work on teachers' communication:

It's been difficult with the building work, I think. And I think it's a bit more difficult in a split site as well because in some schools the staffroom is a central hall where everyone goes all the time during all the breaks. They will have a central meeting hall where they come together and discuss stuff. I used to be in the other side last year, and I used to go to the staffroom a lot more. I never go the staffroom anymore because it's like there's nothing over there for me and it takes me away from what I'm supposed to be doing. So I think that's damaged it a little bit in terms of how much staff are communicating, what they're doing and what they're producing. I think the actual layout and the physical geography of the school have big impact on the type of conversations that people might have. (T7, Int, 30/1/2014)



Figure 5. 2: Building work

Another impact of the building work was the instability and disruption it caused to teachers' work. Some teachers reported that even when they had a free period that they had planned to use for the inquiry programme work, what often happened is that his or her class had often to be used by another teacher because of either the noise from the building work or refurbishment of other classes, or any other building-work related reasons. Most teachers had to give up their free time to move classes and one of the participating teachers had to move classes four times over the academic year. As Teacher 1 explains in the extract below, everything in the school is connected and therefore there is a knock-on effect:

Everything has a 'knock-on effect' and because of all the moving, it then means that sometimes when English is moving and I'm not teaching and their classroom is down, then in my free period, people come and use my class and I have to go somewhere else. That means I can no longer concentrate properly on things that take a little bit longer. So this disrupts people's free time, the time when I can use to think about things like this [action research]. It also causes massive disruption in the kids' behaviour because as soon as they get a supply teacher, as soon as their normal routine is broken, they mess about and find it hard to control themselves as well. It's amazing what throws them when there is a change to their routine. Then all of that will have a knock-on effect so there'll be more time dealing with the behaviour and the issues and less time for your research and then less time to communicate. So, it is not necessarily in terms of the enthusiasm to the project itself, but maybe because it has been quite a disjointed year for us and it'll be really nice when it's all done and sorted. But I think in general terms as well, although we are not a split site (I've seen the traditional split site before where it takes about 5-minute walk to get to the site) it still does feel that we are a split site. Like that building is their building and this is definitely our building and I think how people mix is limited because of that. (T1, Int, 26/6/2014)

Another indication of the scale of disruption caused by the building work can be identified in a one of the school's letters to parents and carers. In this message the school management describes some disruption and give parents and carers an advanced notice that the summer term will be four days shorter:

The amount of movement that staff will have to do, in terms of classroom relocation, is enormous and the builders have advised us that we need to extend the time where students are not in school by 4 days to allow them and us to move equipment and resources. We sincerely hope that this does not cause inconvenience to parents and carers. The builders, the contractors, [school] staff and the project managers have been working very hard to minimise disruption and to ensure that student learning is never compromised. (Internal document)

Overall, the physical culture of the school in this study represents an added challenge to teachers' inquiry engagement. Teachers found it more challenging to communicate with each other because of the building work at the school. They also had to deal with considerable amount of disruptions and ad hoc work and decisions including multiple class moves and relocations and allowing other teachers to use their own classes when not teaching themselves. Although the building work is temporary, its impact on teachers' engagement in the inquiry culture, especially in its infancy year, was substantial.

The second aspect of the school culture is how it functions and what is expected of the teachers. In this regard, the findings in this study reveal significant patterns of the school culture that are relevant to the inquiry programme. The first of these patterns is that the school was moving towards a culture of sharing; one in which teachers share ideas related to their practice. Figure 5.3 below shows an example from the staffroom about a weekly event in the school in which teachers are encouraged to share ideas. The deputy head explains this point in the following extract:

I think there is a move to a large number of teachers knowing that there's stuff outside the school and it's a joy and a duty for us to get engage with that and actually sharing information is a good thing and the positive thing. One of the things we do on a Thursday morning is we have staff briefing where people do this open mic. So this morning, somebody talked about memory. Now it wasn't to do that with her action learning set, but it was a course that she was on and she found some really good research and the examples and stuff to do with students. Whether there is a link between that individual feeling more that research is a valuable thing to share because of the action learning sets or whether because she is doing this great course, I don't quite know. But you would hope the culture of those things happen in symbolically. And some people have come and shared their ideas on the action learning sets. (DH, Int, 27/3/2014)



Figure 5. 3: Example of the sharing culture

Another and more prominent example of the culture of sharing is the inquiry programme itself as it first and foremost aimed at sharing and improving practice.

Underneath the surface of the sharing culture is a different reality of the school culture. The findings of this study reveal some other latent aspects of the school culture. First, and very associated with the inquiry programme itself, the initiative was mandated and all the teachers were expected to participate in the inquiry programme activities irrespective of the teachers' own personal views on this type of this professional development activity and whether or not they wanted to engage in such a professional development activity. This is one of the most problematic issues of the inquiry programme and it caused a dilemma both to the management and the teachers throughout the academic year. On the one hand, for the deputy head, the way to ensure engagement and participation in the inquiry programme is to require all teachers to participate in the inquiry programme activities, regardless of teachers' own preferences or actual professional development needs. On the other hand, and as (Flessner & Stuckey, 2014) identify, forcing this activity, which is supposed to be democratic and empowering to teachers, is counterproductive in the sense that teachers' participation becomes superficial. I will explore this issue more in more depth below, but what matters for the discussion here is that by forcing the inquiry programme, it becomes

just another school activity, which teachers *must* do, but not necessarily *want* to do. As reported by all group leaders, some of their set members resort to ‘survival mode’ (Breaux & Wong, 2003; Crawley, 2012, 2016; Wong & Wong, 2002, 2008) where the teacher sees such activities as the inquiry programme as an extra and unnecessary burden and their participation and engagement become superficial because they are overwhelmed with the amount of work delegated to them. Some teachers start to question their priorities and main duties. Teacher 2 explains some of what she encounters with her set members:

Now unfortunately because some people are seeing this as demanding the time, a lot of the time the mindset becomes I’m only going to do it if I’m getting paid for it as well. If you keep saying ‘yes’ to everything, you’ll find out you’re not doing your original job properly any more. So maybe a little bit of funding would help and make the group really passionate about it. I think that will make it stand a much better chance. (T2, Int, 27/2/2014)

The inquiry programme also revealed some ways in which power is used within the school. This is illustrated by the power relationship between the deputy head and other teachers, although there is also an element of power exercised by the group leaders with their group members. The former, however, is what matters for the discussion here as it exemplifies some aspects of the school culture. Overall, the findings of this study suggest that the way power within the school was exercised was not conducive to inquiry engagement. To illustrate, the deputy head explains in the following extract how she deals with some resistance:

The person running it [the literacy group], ... didn’t want to do that, even *though that was one of the remit of their job description, to specifically run an action learning set*. I think at one of the training sessions we did, we could see that resistance straight away. So that just disbanded. It wasn’t really with my knowledge or agreement that the literacy one disbanded. And I think the group work one hasn’t met this term. So with that individual, it’s very clear that it is part of their job description to do that. So, you can talk and we have talked about the roles and responsibilities on the job description, but the resistance manifests itself with a whole bunch of different excuses: it wasn’t felt it was necessary; staff were getting literacy through different avenues; nobody wanted to join up. There was a whole range of things that weren’t there. (*emphasis added*. DH, Int, 27/3/2014)

Although the academic year 2013-2014 was the first year to introduce the inquiry programme, the school leadership team included it in the teachers’ job description in an attempt to have more buy-in from the teachers. In this way, it becomes binding to engage in the inquiry programme whether or not the individual teachers perceive the programme to be valuable. Another reason for the deputy head to force the programme in this way was to avoid turning the inquiry programme into what she calls an ‘in-house gimmick’: a

situation where school training and development opportunities are not taken seriously by teachers. As the extract above indicates, this plan was not always effective as some teachers showed more resistance to the programme and others simply ‘ushered into it’ (DH, Int, 27/3/2014). I will discuss the issue of power relationship in more detail below.

In summary, in trying to understand the symbolic culture of the school two patterns emerge. On the surface, the school seems to be encouraging a culture of openness and sharing through encouraging teachers to share ideas and practice. However, beneath that shiny surface, a different pattern manifests itself, a pattern that is not conducive to inquiry engagement. Teachers are forced to participate in a school activity that is supposed to empower them and different tactics are used to ensure their participation. Overall, teachers did not have much say in this inquiry programme despite the claim that it is intended to give teachers a say in the school policy and decision-making. Teacher 4 describes some of the outcomes of this culture:

The school is not really empowering people to the level where you could be acknowledged in an area of interest or an area of excellence. I was talking to some colleagues and that was their views as well. “I just want to do the work and go home”. “I just want to teach my classes and that is it”. That’s the attitude of teachers who don’t have much say in the school’s policy and decision-making processes.’ (T4, Int, 27/1/2014).

This culture is one of the main challenges to inquiry engagement in this school. The issue of inquiry engagement will be further explored later in this chapter.

5.2.2 Critical factors in the development of beliefs about inquiry

This final section of this chapter focuses on the critical factors that were instrumental in shaping teachers’ beliefs and understandings about inquiry and their subsequent inquiry engagement. It is noteworthy at the outset of this section that the focus here is on the critical events that shaped teachers’ research engagement *during* the inquiry programme, *not prior* to it. I acknowledge that every teacher has his or her own unique experience and beliefs about various aspects of education, which eventually contribute to how they engage or not engage in various professional development activities such as inquiry. In order to determine how these experiences and beliefs influence teachers’ engagement in a school activity, a longitudinal study is needed. This is beyond the scope and resources of this study and therefore the focus will be on critical factors during the first academic year of the inquiry programme. What matters here is understanding how a group of professional

teachers in the same context and under similar circumstances respond to an inquiry initiative and what conditions help them engage in this type of professional development or otherwise. Such understanding based on the work during the time of facilitating inquiry is expected to be extrapolated to other contexts.

The critical factors that shaped teachers' research engagement in this study are the workshops, time, communication, collaboration, power relationships and understanding of research. I will discuss each in turn and I will revisit them in chapter 8 in the discussion of proposed framework for effective inquiry engagement.

Workshops

In Chapter 4, I described the workshops and their contents. Here, I will focus on how the workshops, in particular, influenced teachers' inquiry engagement. During the interviews and the fieldwork overall, the participating teachers were not asked directly or indirectly to assess or evaluate the workshops or discuss them. However, the workshops became prominent when the participants started to discuss factors that contributed to their inquiry engagement.

The workshops were my gateway to the field and therefore their success was crucial to the field entry and to the whole research project. Therefore, considerable care and effort were invested in the workshops and the materials were piloted prior to meeting the participants and were also discussed with the Deputy Head. Some minor amendments and changes were made thereafter. The overall aim of these workshops was to introduce a specific form of inquiry, action research, to the group leaders, enable them to find other materials to improve their understanding of action research and ultimately help them run the inquiry groups effectively. All the workshops tasks and activities were connected by an Action Plan to Take Away hand-out (see Appendix 2). After each task in the workshops, there was a section in the action plan where teachers reflected on how that task or aspect of action research relates to their own action research. All the group leaders used the action plan in their own groups. Teacher 2, for example, mentioned that 'we used the action plan, the sample that you gave us in our first meeting, if you remember that booklet, the action research booklet, and there was a page about a sample of an action research plan. So, we filled it in with information about our target students and what we want to do about them.' (T2, Int, 26/6/2014). The workshops with the materials used in them provided a reference point to the group leaders for their work. Besides the workshops, an internal wiki was

created in which teachers (both group leaders and members) could access and use for their inquiries. It has action research resources and links to other related resources. The wiki is still active and is being used by the school at the time of writing (2016). The decision behind using an editable wiki was to encourage discussions and dialogues amongst teachers about the inquiry programme. It is worth noting here that although I continued to be in the school after the workshops, my role was limited to being a researcher interested in how the teachers understood and engaged in the inquiry programme.

Throughout the course of the first academic year of the inquiry programme initiative, the workshops proved significant in shaping teachers' understanding about what inquiry is and how to engage in it. Teacher 6, for example, claims that the workshops 'improved the way I personally will approach research'. She goes on to explain:

I think this partnership works really well because of all the skills within the school, this particular skill needs an expert like what you did in the workshops with focusing the research area and thinking about methods, etc. I think a lot of us did not have a clue before the workshops about these issues.' (T6, Int,12/11/2013).

When the participants reported any frustration about any aspect of their inquiry work, they always referred to the workshops in an attempt to identify issues and problems in their work. For example, Teacher 1 thinks that:

When you were delivering the sessions, it was great because there were loads of materials and resources you can take and use straight away. But then after you've gone away, it was like "where do we get the materials from now?". I know I could have sourced some out, but with the amount of work that was not very practical. (T1, Int, 27/2/2014)

Another example is when Teacher 5 was trying to explain why some of her set members did not engage in the activity as expected: 'we were really lucky because we had the workshops with you in the beginning, which was really good. I don't think there has been enough preparation for all staff for them to appreciate this activity.' (T5, Int, 14/7/2014).

On the leadership side, the deputy head also asserts that the workshops were effective and she ascribes the success of some of the sets to the workshops:

I think organisationally wise, because we had you to begin with, it gave kudos to the activity that we actually had a researcher from the Open University setting up to do this. [...] So on from that, that people who are doing it well are running through the way that you trained them. So working out a research question, thinking about design, thinking about how to drill down evidence, thinking about how to setup action research with the other teachers, having sort of interim checks on whether it's working and having an

impact discussion at the end. So, where it's working well, it's working well in line with the way you suggested the process should work. (DH, Int, 27/3/2014)

Overall, there is ample evidence in the study and mainly throughout the interviews with the participants to suggest that the participants benefited from the introductory workshops. The workshops assisted the teachers and especially the group leaders in understanding inquiry and how to do it. Evidently, the group leaders incorporated the points presented to them in the workshops into their work and thinking about inquiry throughout the academic year. The workshops also provided a reference point for them to support other set members. The teachers turned to the workshops whenever there were issues in how the inquiry was being conducted. The Deputy Head ascribed some of what she perceived as successful inquiry work to workshops. I want to conclude this section, though, by emphasising that although the workshops were influential in how teachers understood and did inquiry, more support and impact could have been achieved if the workshops had been followed up throughout the academic year. I will return to this point in chapter 8.

Time

In this study, the availability of time was crucial in determining whether and how teachers engaged in this activity. All the participants in this study including the Deputy Head identified 'time' as a main challenge to the inquiry programme. It is difficult to understand the role of time in teachers' work in general and in the new inquiry initiative in particular unless a researcher is immersed in the teaching context for a considerably long enough period and tries to understand the phenomena from the participants' own viewpoints. Towards the beginning of the study, it appeared as if time was used as an excuse for some of the more reluctant teachers in order to justify their lack of enthusiasm or active engagement in the inquiry programme. However, after a few months in the school, I started to realize that the data I was collecting demonstrated that time was a critical factor in this programme.

The inquiry programme was impacted by the time available for teachers to participate in this programme. Besides the other contextual challenges discussed above in this chapter, all of the teachers agreed that there was not enough time for the inquiry programme. As Teacher 2 reminds us, there is considerable amount of work that goes into teaching both before and after the actual classroom teaching:

Teaching is not only teaching 5 or 6 lessons a day. There is lots of work before and after the actual teaching in the classroom, planning, marking, and if you want to do it thoroughly, then my only worry remains is the lack of time. (T2, Int, 14/11/2013)

In order to probe into why time was a critical factor in this programme, we need to look at the structure of the programme and the time commitment expected from the teachers. As outlined in 4.2.3, teachers had to meet twice every term for the inquiry programme work. Between the two meetings, teachers had an 'action research activity period' (Internal document. November 2013) in which they carry out a small-scale action research activity. In practical terms, this action research period is six weeks long. To many group leaders, this was not enough. This meant that in most cases the first meeting is for planning and the second for evaluation and reflection with the actual action research work in between. Teacher 1 explains his views about the time available between the two meetings to carry out action research:

You have actually got six weeks to bring it to your practice and then bring all the data together to see whether it's been good. It's not going to work, which is why I am very glad I am leading because at least I can stay with my question, not being bound by the same time constraints like everyone else. So yes, I think the time is important as well. (T1, Int, 20/1/2014)

Reflecting on the time available for the teachers to carry out some action research activities between the two meetings, Teacher 2 thinks the time is not enough:

In our first meeting, we decided what type of differentiation techniques we want to use and whether with lower or higher ability students. And then we've got a certain period of time. I think now it's quite short time between our first and second meeting. We won't have that much time to apply the technique maybe that often. (T2, Int, 26/6/2014)

Teacher 1 also has similar concerns about the time available. The two meetings were always scheduled after school. Teacher 3 explains her views and experience about meetings after school:

At the moment it's being run after school where everyone has taught five lessons, and by the time you leave that room you probably have forgotten what half of it was about. And they probably have questions they don't probably understand, but they just want to go home. [...] We [met] at 4 o'clock after school. ... Everyone's brain is absolutely frazzled. You just can't concentrate; I can't concentrate and I am supposed to be leading this! And I was always just thinking about the other people coming to attend our session. If I can't concentrate, how are they going to be able to concentrate? (T4, Int, 27/1/2014)

Even when some teachers have a teaching-free hour to use for the inquiry programme work, teachers within this context sometimes find themselves unable to utilise this hour as might be expected. For example, Teacher 1 explains his concerns about the free hour:

For it [the inquiry programme] to be sustainable, there would have to be more revisions to a teacher's timetable because having one period free in the middle of the day, if you looked at it from an outsider's point of view, they might say yes you have a whole hour. But any teacher knows that it's not an hour because five minutes would have gone from last lesson, five minutes before the next lesson, so left with 50 minutes. And in this 50 minutes time, a lot of things might come up and you as a teacher have to deal with them. So there has to be a proper and solid amount of time that is set aside to doing this. (T1, Int, 14/11/2013)

Other teachers reported similar concerns and experiences. As Teacher 1 maintains, teachers have good ideas; however, what is crucial is having the time to put these ideas into practice: “when we meet, everyone is passionate like I got this idea, I got this idea. But then it is the kind of going away and having the time to put this into practice” (T1, Int, 14/11/2013). Teacher 5 also believes that ‘people do not have time to implement and review and collect data; it's never going to happen in a term with everything going on’(MJ, int, 14/07/2014). A common outcome of the lack of time is highlighted by Teacher 3 who argues, “we don't have time to do anything to a good enough standard. We don't have time to do enough. Everything is very shallow and I think for something like this you need to dig deeper” (T3, Int, 27/01/2014).

To conclude, time in this inquiry programme was not only a critical factor in determining how teachers engage in the inquiry programme, it was also one of the main challenges. As one of the respondents to the Deputy Head's survey put it:

Time is a valuable commodity and indeed is often described as being of the essence. One is left wondering how many layers, how many initiatives, how many projects, how many activities can be programmed in to the world of work and the world of education before we learn to pause, reflect and to consolidate. (Survey response)

The Deputy Head also acknowledges that the availability of time is crucial in this programme. Halfway through the academic year, she reflects on the role of time in the success of the programme:

As a school leader, you're always pushed for time and it's really difficult sometimes to prioritise where that goes. I think things would have moved more quickly if I had thrown more time at it. (DH, int, 27/03/2014)

The lack of time and the fast-paced nature of the project made it particularly challenging for some teachers to engage in the inquiry programme. As argued before, such contextual factors force teachers to be on survival mode where their engagement in a professional development activity becomes superficial and contrived due to difficulties and challenges associated with the activity. What they tend to do then is try and manoeuvre the stress and challenges by doing what they can do within the resources (such as time) available to them. Although time as a critical factor in this study did not have a positive impact on teachers' research engagement, it did reveal ways teachers make sense of and do their work, which is valuable for the purpose of this study. I will return to this point in Chapter eight. Following time, communication is the next critical factor.

Communication

Although effective communication may be thought of as an essential prerequisite for effective planning and execution of a new school professional development programme, it played out to be of central significance in teachers' inquiry engagement. What I mean by communication here is the ability to explain ideas, processes and rationales related to the inquiry programme to ensure maximum understanding and minimum to no confusion or misunderstanding by others involved in the programme. The major weight of communication naturally fell on the deputy head, who is the person who introduced the inquiry programme to the school in the first place. Therefore, since the beginning of the inquiry programme, she anticipated that effective communication would be one of the main challenges in this initiative. When asked about the anticipated challenges, she predicted that the main challenges would be:

communicating with the staff effectively to ensure they've understood the logistics, not just the purpose, because I think maybe the purpose is easier to get across. But the logistics have proved more difficult. (DH, int, 14/11/2013)

The findings of this study not only confirm her concerns but also reveal that communicating the purpose of the inquiry programme, in particular, is not a simple matter. There were instances where communication was a primary factor in the quality of teachers' inquiry engagement. I do not consider here communication issues that were addressed instantaneously such as in the workshops. Rather, I use examples of communication issues that lasted for a considerably long enough period of time to influence to a certain extent teachers' work and engagement. First, I will examine few of these instances and then attempt to relate them to the overall research engagement. Table 5.3 shows four examples

of communication issues. I start each with a brief description of the issue followed by an explanation of the reasons behind the communication issue. In some cases, this was simple as the interviewee directly indicated what had caused the issue; however, in other cases, where the causes were not explicitly stated, I rely on my observations, field notes and my own interpretation of the case. The final column provides an indication as to what the communication issue led in each case. Again, this ranges from a participant stating what the issue led them to do to me interpreting and trying to make sense of the issue.

These examples do not mean that communication completely broke down. And they also do not mean that I only focus on the ineffective side of communication. Rather, and as the purpose of this study is to explore ways and conditions for teachers to engage in inquiry, I use these examples to build up my claims about what could have helped teachers engage more meaningfully in the inquiry programme.

| Example | Why did it happen? | What did it lead to? |
|---|---|--|
| 1. Contrary to what the Deputy Head expected, the group leaders reported that the majority of their set members did not know why they were supposed to engage in the inquiry programme. | The Deputy Head had most of her contact with the group leaders. There was an assumption that the rationale and expectations would be filtered down to the set members through the group leaders. | Not unexpectedly, most group leaders reported lack of engagement or enthusiasm from their set members. To those members, it was another task the school required them to do. The engagement was not genuine or meaningful in most cases. |
| 2. Some group leaders initially thought their role was to share ‘good practice’ with their set members and do peer observation and maybe other collaborative professional development activities, rather than lead a research group. Then, other learning leader assumed that they had to supervise and manage the group without them conducting action research (T6, int, 12/11/2013). | Lack of clarity in explaining the roles, expectations and tasks. Most of the communication with the group leaders was mainly by email and sometimes by word of mouth. The Project Manager did not produce planning or process documentations to be shared across the school with details of the work, responsibilities, aims and expected outcomes. | In the first cycle, the work was generally erratic with the learning leader concerned not certain whether to supervise and manage the research group only or be part of the process by actively taking part in action research themselves as well. |
| 3. Different groups were doing different things as reported by Teacher 1, Teacher 4 and Teacher 5. | There were not clear or explicit instructions about the process of inquiry. The group leaders made some assumptions based on their contact with the Project Manager and acted accordingly. | Once the first cycle was over and set members joined new groups, they began to be confused as they were asked to do different things by the new group leaders. This led to more uncertainty and ambivalence towards the programme. |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p>4. Another CPD programme was running the previous year in which teachers had to meet, share practice discuss ideas and suggest improvements, but it did not include inquiry elements, such as collecting and analysing data. To many group leaders and set members, it was not very clear why they had to abandon the earlier CPD programme and then start the new inquiry programme and in some cases it was not clear what the differences between the two programmes are.</p> | <p>The common denominator between the two programmes is that they both involved teachers within the school coming together and discussing issues related to their professional practice. Some teachers who were not fully informed about the new inquiry programme might have thought that it was an extension or continuation of the previous one. There was generally a dearth of information about the inquiry programme.</p> | <p>Confusion and lack of enthusiasm from the part of the set members. Buy-in was slow.</p> |
|---|--|--|

Table 5. 3: Instances of communication issues

The examples above illustrate poor communication across different teams within the school. It is not exaggerated to claim that there were group members who did not know enough about the rationale behind the inquiry programme throughout the academic year. Rather, and as Teacher 3 put it, ‘someone somewhere has got a lot of good ideas but it's like: ‘do this’, ‘do this’, ‘do this’, and there's so many of them that you can never do anything in enough detail’ (Teacher 3, int, 27/01/2014). This highly directive style of professional development is not unique to this school, though. Indeed, this is one sign of a wider educational culture in the UK. As (Gray, 2005, p. 27) points out, consecutive UK governments since 1988 Education Act:

have developed policies that result in greater control of teachers’ time and limits to their professional autonomy. Limited time for [...] professional development means that many *teachers are increasingly directed towards fairly instrumental, information-led training, such as briefings on examination syllabi. (emphasis added)*

This culture is at odds with professional development that encourages teachers to become reflective practitioners who are able to make professional judgment about their practice and take ownership of what they do.

The final point relates to the quality of communication between the deputy head and the group leaders. This is also exemplified in example 3 in the table above where different groups were doing different things, which is an outcome of the different understandings teachers had about the inquiry programme. Teacher 1 points out what may have caused this situation. He maintains that ‘because we have been massively left to our own devices, some people are doing things in lots of different ways’ (T1, int, 30/01/2014). This indicates that the group leaders did not have enough support or follow-up from the Deputy Head to the extent that they thought they had to improvise when it came to organising and dividing the work. A further indication of this claim is illustrated in the following situation. In one of the interviews the deputy head mentions that, in an attempt to encourage more engagement, she was planning to give teachers a certificate for participating in the inquiry programme at the end of the year and include it in their CPD portfolios. The certificates depend on the role each teacher played and the level of engagement. For example, a group leader receives a different certificate than a set member. As I doubted whether the teachers knew about this plan, I asked whether this has been communicated to the teachers. The response was:

No. And that's my fault. That's one of the things I have been slacking on lately mainly because there isn't enough space at the moment to be able to talk to the people who are leading the sessions, meaning not being able to look at their work and giving them some feedback. That actually sharing the 'so what' aspect of the inquiry. (PM, int, 27/03/2014)

Communication was not effective overall in this inquiry programme. Different participants had different understandings of the process whereas some participants did not have a clear idea about the rationale behind the inquiry programme. As an outcome, teachers' inquiry engagement was negatively affected.

More importantly, and unlike other factors such as time, communication is one of the factors that could have been improved and used more effectively to encourage more meaningful participation and engagement, as I will argue in chapter 8.

Collaboration

In this section, I present and discuss the findings related to collaboration among teachers as part of their inquiry programme work and how this collaboration was a significant factor in shaping their beliefs and understanding of inquiry. To achieve this, I first start with the role of collaboration in this programme. Afterwards, I will examine few patterns and examples of collaborative work in the school as part of this programme. I then conclude with how collaboration was another key factor in shaping teachers' beliefs and understandings about inquiry.

The inquiry programme was built on the premise of collaboration among teachers. In a presentation about the programme, the deputy head makes the point that the inquiry programme 'offer[s] a CPD opportunity where staff work collaboratively around whole school issues and current areas of educational interest' (DH, internal document, November 2013). Of all the aspects of the programme, collaboration was the one that was met with no resistance. For example, the young Teacher 7 stresses the value of collaborative work in his practice:

I know the best work I've ever done was when I was talking and working with other teachers. Like when we had Ofsted in my last school. Me and the other history teachers co-planned all the stuff and we got outstanding in everything because we came together we talked about it and we were passionate. And it gets you really enthusiastic about what you're doing. And I don't think enough of that happens. (T7, Int, 30/01/2014)

Another indication of the value of collaborative work is the point Teacher 5 makes. She maintains that:

I think this [teacher collaboration] is one of the most underestimated things in teaching. It's amazing how passionate staff get together. And if I'm thinking about a lesson myself, I'll probably be thinking about, oh God, how can I make this more fun more exciting, my brain's gone blank and you under the pressure of lots of tasks and teaching to do. But if you are with other members of staff, there'll always be lots of ideas to think about and take to class. So, it's so much better when you're working together in groups. The best work I've ever done is the work I was doing with other teachers. So I think that would make a massive difference with some changes to the timetables. (T5, int, 27/2/2014)

That means providing more time for teachers to work together as part of the inquiry programme. Teacher 4 makes another point about collaboration among teachers especially collaboration across departments and highlight the significance of challenging ideas and seeing things from another perspective. He argues that:

I think working together probably would help and at least it'll give you a forum, a venue to discuss the problems and try and get on with them before someone turns and says I can't use this. And it is always good to work with different departments because if a science teacher has got lots of good ideas, these ideas may stay within the science department. But working with other departments will mean challenging your ideas and seeing things from a different perspective and it could be things you haven't thought about before. Again time wise, teachers should work with each other much more than they do. That is one of the things we always sacrifice when we don't have the time. I think something like this forces people from different departments to come and work together. (T4, int, 14/11/14)

The actual collaboration was primarily among teachers working in the same group where they were expected to work together to identify a specific inquiry focus then aim to implement new strategies, techniques or any other changes in their teaching. Notionally, they were also expected to support each other in implementing the changes in their practice by, for example, observing each other. However, due to time constraints, the members of the same group primarily worked together during the inquiry programme meetings with not much collaboration outside those meetings. For example, it was not possible to do peer observation mostly due to conflicts in teachers' timetables and, to many teachers, this particular activity was associated with the school administration for the purpose of assessment and appraisal- the inquiry programme did not break this culture. This means that the collaboration was a feature of the inquiry programme only when teachers came to the meetings to discuss and report on the inquiry work they have (or were expected to have) individually carried out in their classes.

Another level of collaboration that was supposed to take place is with the group leaders, the teachers running and facilitating the research groups, across all the nine inquiry groups. However, over the span of the academic year, this group of teachers did not meet or do any collaborative work on how they were running the groups. Teacher 6 highlights this issue and relates it to the communication and the multiple understandings of the inquiry process discussed above:

We haven't met as a whole group again since we came to your workshops. We've all splintered off into our little groups and the danger of that is that it means some people can interpret what they have to do in very different ways. (T6, int, 27/2/14)

Teacher 2 also points out this same issue and makes a similar point to the one above by Teacher 6:

It would be quite good to meet with other people who are delivering the other sessions. I only meet with my little group of four people and I'm actually delivering my own interest in the area we're working on. I don't know, for example, what's happening outside. It would be useful to share a little bit with others. (T2, int 28/2/2014)

To conclude, collaboration was a central aspect of the inquiry programme. The main type of collaboration was amongst teachers working in the same inquiry group and limited to the inquiry meetings and discussions and decisions within these meetings. Unlike other aspects of this inquiry programme, collaboration was the one aspect of the programme about which all participants had positive views and expectations. There was a unanimous agreement that collaboration is a good thing. Thus, to the participants, the idea of teachers having space and an opportunity to come together to discuss issues related to their practice with the aim of improving aspects of it was a chief motivating factor behind their inquiry engagement.

Power relationships

Schools are complex contexts that are laden with power relationships. Through the inquiry programme, it became possible to reveal and examine some of these power relationships in the school. It is worth noting here that power relationships exist independent of and prior to the inquiry programme and one can confidently claim that they are a feature of educational organisations in particular and human organisations at large. What matters in relation to the power relationships in this section is the impact these relationships had on the inquiry programme in terms of whether and how they contributed to teachers' beliefs, understanding and engagement in inquiry. I will examine the role of power relationships

by looking at some of the aspects where power relationships were clearly manifested. In each example, I will provide sufficient contextual information in order to clarify how each element represents a case of the role of power relationships. As a conclusion, I will draw together a few points that inform our understanding of the relationship between power and engagement in the new inquiry programme.

The first aspect I want to discuss concerns the nature of participation in this inquiry programme. As the deputy head emphasised, ‘all teachers are *required* to attend these [inquiry programme] sessions as part of our CPD provision’ (*Emphasis added*. Internal document, October 2013). This means that the inquiry programme was an obligatory, school-mandated programme that teachers had to accept regardless of their own views, experience, beliefs and understandings about this programme. This is so because teachers were not consulted about the nature of the CPD activities they wanted to do carry out that year. Rather, they were informed about what they were *required* to do in the form of a final plan. There is a dilemma here. On the one hand, and from the deputy head’s viewpoint, the teachers may not take the initiative seriously unless participation is enforced and mandated; it becomes an ‘in-house gimmick’ as she called it (DH, Int, 27/3/2014). Agreeing with the deputy head, Teacher 4 makes the point that ‘if they [teachers] are forced to do it [inquiry programme] and if it is staying around, they are more likely to do it and commit to it’ (T4, int, 26/06/2015). On the other, an initiative that proclaims to empower and give teachers a voice contradicts itself when it becomes a mandated task that teachers have to do as opposed to something they want to do. As we saw with Teacher 3 above, the inquiry programme idea is good; however, the general feeling was that teachers were too much directed to do their own professional development: ‘do this, do this, do this, and there’s so many of them that you can never do anything in enough details’ (T3, Int, 27/01/2014). Reflecting on the enforcement aspect of the inquiry programme, Teacher 1 also maintains that ‘if you try to get everyone to do it, it loses its purpose’ (Teacher1, int, 26/06/2014). It did so because teachers felt they were forced to do it and they were not consulted on whether, how, or why they were doing this type of professional development work. Overall, enforcing the initiative was a problematic aspect of the initiative. All the teachers interviewed in this study expressed resentment to the idea of requiring all the teachers in the school to participate in the inquiry programme. They thought not all the teachers should have been required to be involved in the inquiry programme. This led to the creation of what I will call here the ‘imaginary core inquiry group’: a suggested group comprised of teachers passionate about inquiry and want to have the opportunity to

research their practice and hence should be the only teachers participating in the inquiry programme initiative. For example, Teacher 1 suggests that ‘I think it would probably have to be done on a smaller scale, but with a really core group of dedicated people that definitely want to do it’ (T1, int, 27/02/2014). Another, Teacher 3, thinks that ‘it has to be something completely voluntary with a smaller group really interested people’ (T3, 30/01/2014). Interestingly, none of the teachers who suggested the core group put themselves forward as a potential member of the imaginary core group.

Another aspect of the power relationships concerns the relationship between the deputy head and some of the teachers leading the inquiry group. Naturally, the deputy head expressed interest in knowing whether and how teachers were engaged in the inquiry initiative and what they thought about it. I anticipated this ethical issue as discussed in Chapter four and therefore I made it clear from the beginning that no identifying personal opinions or views would be shared with any person within the school. At worst, this could have meant creating problems and confrontations between those teachers who did not see much value in doing the new initiative and the administration. Alternatively, and because the interest was in the success of the process itself, it was agreed that I provide regular review on the progress of the inquiry programme and how teachers were –or were not–engaging with the programme in order to help her improve the initiative and maintain momentum. This made it easier for me in the sense that my review was general in nature and no reference to individual teachers, their disciplines or any other identifying information was made. Despite the precautions, and as explained in 3.4.3, two participants wanted the deputy head to know through me that they were regularly and actively participating in my study and in the action research work in general. In an attempt to understand their reasons behind asking for this, it emerged that participating in my study meant interest in the inquiry programme in general. What these two teachers wanted to achieve by making this request is become more popular with the deputy head, a powerful person in the school, by showing her that they were interested in her initiative. I explained in Chapter three how I dealt with this ethical issue. What matters here, though, is to highlight this issue as a second aspect of power relationships within the school. It simply illustrated that those participants understood the power structure within the school and tried to take advantage of the inquiry programme to become more popular and possible achieve certain aims- for example one of these teachers became head of Sixth Form later in the year. Although I discuss types of participation and engagement in the inquiry programme in Chapter five, it is worth highlighting here that in the case of the two teachers

here, theirs was ‘strategic participation’: a type of participation where the teacher does not wish to participate or be involved in the CPD activities and therefore his or her participation is triggered by another aim or fear of consequences of not participating (see Chapter five for more on types of types of participation).

The final example that illustrates the role of power relationships within the school is also related to the enforcement of the inquiry programme and it shows how power is used in the school as part of the inquiry programme. After the workshops, the teacher who was supposed to run the literacy inquiry group decided not to do that and as she was not convinced by the worthwhileness of such activity. Here is how the deputy head describes this incident:

And I think the person running it, I don’t know how to say this professionally, didn’t want to do that, even though that was one of the remit of their job description, to specifically run an action learning set. I think at one of the training sessions we did, we could see that resistance straight away. So that just disbanded. It wasn’t really with my knowledge or agreement that the literacy one disbanded. And I think the group work one hasn’t met this term. (DH, int, 27/03/2014)

This incident is very revealing. It shows that some new professional development activities can quickly become part of the teachers’ job description. This is another strategy the deputy head followed to enforce the inquiry programme. The teacher who did not want to run the inquiry programme did not have another option. And this is how the deputy head further dealt with this issue:

With that individual, it’s very clear that it is part of their job description to do that. So, we have talked about the roles and responsibilities on the job description, but the resistance manifests itself with a whole bunch of different excuses: it wasn’t felt it was necessary; staff were getting literacy through different avenues; nobody wanted to join up. There was a whole range of things that weren’t there. [...] But at the end of the day, everybody was supposed to go, so everybody knows they needed to sign up and attend one. Once I get my hands on this one, I need to sit with any individuals that haven’t quite made it to any set. (DH, int, 27/03/2014)

This example shows a teacher coerced to be engaged in a professional development activity. There is a problem with how power is used here. In an activity that is assumed to empower a teacher, a teacher loses control over her own choice of professional development and becomes forced to comply with the more powerful voice in the school.

Overall, and as I started this section, schools are power-laden contexts and qualitative researchers must be aware of this and conduct their research accordingly. There is not much that can generally do about the power structure and it is not the role of the researcher

to do so in the first place as it is characteristic of most human interaction in formal contexts such as schools. Yet, what is needed is to acknowledge the power relationships and then ‘keep faith with those who have helped them’ (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 65). In a study such as the current one, besides acknowledging the power relationships, it becomes essential to bring to the fore their impact on the inquiry programme as I did in this section.

Understanding of research

The final critical factor that had an impact on teachers’ inquiry engagement is linked to how teachers in this study conceptualised and thereafter operationalised their understandings of inquiry by putting them into practice. I already outlined in this chapter that different processes and different understandings of the inquiry programme was reported by a few group leaders. They saw this as a challenge especially with new teachers joining their respective groups every cycle. In this section, I examine some of these understandings in order to explore the role of understanding of inquiry in shaping and influencing beliefs and understandings about research and research engagement. In the final interview, each participant was given a ‘think-aloud’ task as part of the interview. The data generated from the ‘think aloud’ activity are particularly relevant here due to two reasons. First, in the ‘think aloud’ activity the participants were asked to explain the inquiry programme to an imaginary new colleague joining the school. This new colleague did not know how to conduct inquiry in their teaching and did not conduct it before. This means that the participants in this activity vocalised in a brief manner the gist of their understanding of inquiry drawing on their experience and involvement in the programme throughout the academic year. The second reason relates to the timing of the think-aloud activity. It was conducted in the final meeting with the participants towards the end of the academic year. This means what participants had to say about their understandings is more likely to be a result of their experience and engagement in inquiry over an academic year, rather than being what they think it might be, what they started off with, or what they might have read or heard about it.

Table 5.4 shows examples of a variety of inquiry understandings captured in the think-aloud activity. In the Understanding of inquiry column, I tried to use as much as possible the participant’s own language in describing their understanding of inquiry in order to avoid misrepresentation and to continue to focus on participants’ own view of the world. In the Comment column, a few points about some participant’s understanding of inquiry are highlighted to be unpicked later. My comments also include points and ideas about each

participant's understanding that are not stated in the think-aloud activity but were gleaned from other sources such as interviews, documents or field notes.

| Participant | Inquiry focus | Understanding of inquiry | Comment |
|--------------------|----------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| Deputy Head | NA | A group of teachers interested in a specific topic work together and meet twice each cycle. In the first meeting, the team devise an inquiry questions and then develop research activities around the questions. They read relevant literature, research think pieces relevant to their inquiry and try new activities in their classrooms. They discuss their findings, share their practice and examples from their classrooms and by doing so try to answer the inquiry questions. They finally discuss implications and what to do next. | |
| Teacher 5 | Challenge | Working teachers think about an area of their practice they want to change or improve. Action research follows the principles of research but in a condensed way. Teachers choose a target group of students and then choose a control group. Keep a baseline data before the experiment. Then introduce the change to one group (the intervention group) and compare the difference or impact of the changes with the group that continued to be instructed in the same way with no changes (the control group). In this way, teachers can improve their practice and know for sure whether new changes are going to lead to the intended results. | Randomised controlled trails |
| Teacher 4 | Engagement | Teacher 4 explained his understanding of inquiry by talking giving an example from his own inquiry work. The focus of his inquiry was engagement and he chose one student in his science class. He looked at her entry grades, SEN status and then interviewed her. He incorporated new strategies that were suggested in the inquiry programme meetings and he noticed a huge positive difference. She entered as a 3A student and left as 5B, a massive and remarkable achievement. The student began to take pride in her work and participation. According to Teacher 4, this is a good example of how action research can improve teaching and learning. | Concrete example. Positive outcomes. |
| Teacher 3 | Engagement | Teachers work together. You come up with an inquiry question that is narrowed down enough. You then work with your group to come up with how you might answer that question. You then create evidence you create as a group related to your inquiry. The focus then is how to integrate the inquiry question and focus into your teaching. In their work, they kept a diary pf how each lesson and strategy was used and of any impact on students. In the next meeting, we reported our findings and narrowed | |

| | | | |
|-----------|-------------------------|---|--|
| | | down our inquiry focus, which has shifted by this time. You work with a small to investigate small pieces of action research that have been previously done and share it with your colleagues. You use these pieces of action research to guide your own action research till you are able to gather information needed to be able to answer your original research questions. You break down your teaching and examine your practice and share ideas with other people, get to know their best practice and develop your skills and your knowledge as a teacher. | |
| Teacher 2 | Differentiation | Action research is based on applying research into teaching practice. Some teachers deliver the sessions and others are participants. As a school, we then decide what topics to focus on in order to gain more knowledge and skills and use this in our teaching. There are three cycles every year with two sessions for each. In the first, participating teachers are informed about the content and the expectations. The leaders talk about the topic of the inquiry and agree on a plan with the other teachers. In the second, it is more practical and focused on the findings from applying some of the knowledge from the first session into classroom teaching. As a result, the teacher will have more and better knowledge. | |
| Teacher 1 | Assessment for learning | Action research is one way for teachers to participate in research in education. The areas are defined by the OFSTED framework. There are teachers who lead the research groups and other who teachers who help the leaders. They all identify an area in their practice to improve and contribute to educational research. You think of a strategy and you do lots of reading and lots of research. The reading and research inform what you want to do in the classroom. The existing research will help the teachers focus on what they want to do. Then teachers manufacture and create these | |

Table 5. 4: Various understandings of inquiry

5.3 Inquiry engagement

Before discussing the types of inquiry engagement that emerged in this study, it is worth clarifying what it is meant by ‘engagement’ here. For the purpose of RQ2, any type of work related to the inquiry programme is going to be considered as ‘inquiry engagement’. In a sense, and as established in the previous chapters, all teachers in this project were required to engage in the newly proposed professional development initiative in school. So even in the case where, for example, a teacher was reluctant to participate in the inquiry initiative, this teacher’s work and participation in the inquiry initiative is going to be considered and classified under types of engagement. A word of caution is also necessary here. The classifications I use are not to be understood as discrete and clear-cut territories as I will outline 5.2.1. Indeed, teachers’ engagement varied as will be explicated below. In terms of significance, the variety of types of engagement illustrates multiple ways teachers adapt to a professional development activity. In order to illustrate the types of inquiry engagement, in each case, a teacher will be used as an example of a specific type of engagement. Where relevant, other examples from other participants will also be used.

5.3.1 *Types of inquiry engagement*

The findings in this study suggest five types of inquiry engagement. These types are not ones that are, for example, found in the literature and then confirmed in this study. Instead, these are types of inquiry engagement that emerged from analysis and reflection on the data and the research process. This is why I put forward these types of inquiry engagement tentatively acknowledging that, like most findings in qualitative work, these are based on this particular study but have the potential to have resonance or similarity with other contexts. The types of inquiry engagement discussed below constitute one of the contributions of this study (see Chapter 7). These types of engagement are, I will argue, a starting point for conceptualising the way teachers try to make sense of inquiry as a professional development and navigate their way around it. The types of engagement that were identified in this study are:

- Purposeful engagement
- Sceptical engagement
- Strategic engagement
- ‘Sailing with the tide’ engagement

- Coasting engagement

As I will demonstrate below, there is ample empirical evidence in the data to suggest this categorisation and there is also benefit in starting to consider types of engagement rather than a binary 'engage/not engage'. This is so because teachers' work is complex and their response to a certain professional development activity is not necessarily static and different factors are likely to contribute to their individual type of engagement. Once we start to think about engagement in this way, then we are ready to consider these factors and understand them and the role they play in helping teachers engage/not engage in research. It is worth pointing out at this stage that, besides inquiry, these types of engagement are also likely to be relevant when considering other types of professional development activities.

Purposeful engagement

In this type of engagement, a teacher exhibits an understanding of the process of inquiry and decides to become involved in this activity to achieve a clear and defined goal in his/her teaching. Inquiry here is taken to be a vehicle for achieving a goal. In this sense, the work carried out by Teacher 2 represents an example of purposeful engagement. She started the inquiry work by identifying two of her students who have reading difficulties and as her inquiry focus was on differentiation. She wanted to help the two students with their reading. In her meetings with the groups she had throughout the year, there was a distinct focus on being practical through identifying strategies for differentiating instruction to include students she identified as being 'weaker'. She used the same strategies in her class with the two students. When I observed her teach in class, it was evident that her inquiry work was being translated into practicable action. The observation was for a library reading session and the two pupils were allocated a lower level story to read. The teacher made sure to visit them more often than the rest of the students in the class either to read with them or check they were able to cope with the story themselves.

Another example is Teacher 1 who focused on peer assessment with a 'group of students that have a track record of behaviour issues, lack of engagement and suffer from poor self-esteem and social issues' (T1, 18/12/2013). His focus on trying to help this group of students was unabated throughout the academic year. He tried different strategies to improve their experiences and raise their self-esteem. In this sense, Teacher 1's work is an example of a genuine desire to achieve real and noticeable positive change in his teaching.

Sceptical engagement

In this type of engagement, a teacher exhibits a behaviour that can best be described as sceptical of the whole inquiry initiative. What is notable about this type of engagement is that the teachers here were mainly fixated on challenging aspects of the initiative such as lack of time, lack of cooperation from other teachers or simply difficulty in translating the initiative into tangible and practical outcomes in their teaching. In this sense, the teachers in this category were not willing to engage in the inquiry work; however, they had to at the end because they had no other option. This aspect of enforcement made it more challenging for them in the sense that they tended to focus on what did not work or what was challenging about the inquiry programme. Table 5.5 shows a few examples of sceptical engagement.

| Example | Participant |
|--|--------------------|
| There are many other things we could be doing in school that would have a bigger impact and will be easier to control and easier to manage and get more input. | Teacher 7 |
| Not a lot of people from what I can gather are willing to or want to go away and do some research, read about a certain topic, which may or may not improve their practice. I think that's the big problem and that's what people have been feeding back. | Teacher 7 |
| Struggling to bring anything in; struggling to see the point of what we were doing; struggling to come to terms with the project itself and what it was trying to achieve. And then I had only one member of staff in the second meeting, and I don't think they have really understood what action research is all about. They want a quick fix, a strategy they can try in their lessons, and then if it works, they keep using it, but not in terms of why it worked. | Teacher 1 |
| We changed our groups every time and we haven't been able to get that continuity with taking a group and working with that group throughout the year. It just feels like we've been doing the same thing over and over again with new people. | Teacher 3 |
| It's just been a case of 'oh, yes next week is action learning set meeting, make sure you let your groups know what's going on'. And it usually has been annexed to meetings, so teachers see it as an extra meeting they have to go to. So, yeah, I don't think it's being held in the place it should be. | Teacher 3 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| At the moment there just seems to be so many things going on in school and so many people are doing so many things. There is no real identity; it's just another thing people are doing and it doesn't seem that it is recognised. It's good that we are doing it, but it's not recognised. Basically, just do it on your own time on top of everything else that is being done and happening. | Teacher 6 |
| I was talking to some colleagues and that was their views as well. "I just want to do the work and go home". "I Just want to deliver my classes and that is it". That's the attitude of teachers who don't have much say in the school's policy and decision-making processes. | Teacher 4 |
| It's still an issue for some people as some view it as a burden, some view it as an irrelevant initiative, some don't have the time: they have the good will to participate, but they don't have the time to do it. | Teacher 4 |

Table 5. 5: Examples of sceptical inquiry engagement

As can be inferred from the quotes in Table 5.5, the teachers directly point out issues that limit their or other teachers' inquiry engagement. What is interesting is the impact of a performativity (Ball, 2003) culture (see Chapter 5) in which teachers feel that their own professional autonomy is fading away and that they are subjected to regimes of measuring their performance. As Ball (2003) argues, performativity has serious negative consequences on teachers and this is particularly evident in the way Teacher 4 explains the lack of engagement by some teacher: 'I just want to do the work and go home. I just want to deliver my classes and that is it'. It is clear that the morale is low here and this leads to a sceptical attitude towards whatever school activity that might require extra work and extra time. In this way, performativity offers a way to understanding teachers' sceptical inquiry engagement.

Strategic engagement

The third type of engagement that emerged in this study is strategic engagement in which a participant tended to give both the researcher and the administrative staff the impression that he or she was interested in the initiative and that he or she was actively participating in it. However, their engagement was superficial as I will demonstrate in the example below. In such cases, and as I discussed in the Ethical considerations section, two of the participating teachers asked me to make the deputy head aware that they were actively participating in the inquiry programme despite the fact that this was not the case. In particular, Teacher 5 was the one whose inquiry engagement falls in this category. Her inquiry focus throughout the academic year was challenge; however, her work did not

translate into actual classroom practice or classroom inquiry. At the same time, this participant was adamant that she was keen on participating and that she thought it was a good idea that the school was promoting this type of professional development activity. It emerged later that she was intending to be considered for the post of head of the newly established Sixth Form and that explained her strategic engagement. Towards the end of the year, the group leaders were asked by the deputy head to produce a report each on their inquiry work throughout the year. The one produced by Teacher 5 testifies to the argument that her engagement was faux and strategic. The full report is included in Appendix 5 for reference.

Being strategic is key here. What this means is that the teachers who are in this category had ambitions and plans to achieve certain goals in the school. Indeed, Teacher 5 was appointed head of Sixth Form towards the end of the academic year. Seen in this way and evidenced by the inquiry report in Appendix 5, it becomes clear what it means to have a faux and strategic participation. It is one in which micropolitics (Ball, 1987) provides a way of understanding how teachers react towards a school activity and emphasises other aspects of school life such as interests and conflicts in the way teachers respond to change and to other school-mandated activities such as the inquiry programme. A micropolitical perspective, therefore, shows us that Teacher 5 was driven to achieve a particular goal in the school: becoming head of Sixth Form. The way she responded to, and indeed used, the inquiry programme was to achieve her goal. She was not genuinely interested in engaging in the activities of the inquiry programme as her report proves. However, she managed to employ the inquiry programme to serve her interests.

To conclude, a micropolitical perspective to examine teachers' inquiry engagement revealed in this study what I termed a strategic type of engagement in which a participant's own interests are served by giving the appearance of active participation in a school-mandated activity.

'Sailing with the tide' engagement

This is a type of engagement that characterises the work of group members, the teachers who joined different inquiry group throughout the academic year. The amount of information this group of teachers received about the inquiry programmes was considerably less than the group leaders. Again, and like the group leaders, they were not consulted on the nature of the programme or the type of work to be carried out. Instead,

they were informed about a new type of professional development and were expected to join in. The rationale and purpose of the work remained enigmatic to many. This particular aspect significantly contributed to this type of engagement where teachers mainly did what they were asked to do without necessarily engaging in a professional discussion of the rationale or outcomes of the activities the teacher did.

A main indication of this type of the engagement is the noticeably significant theme in the data pointing towards a culture of ‘wanting to be told what to do’ amongst the teachers in this study. In this culture, teachers were expected to follow instructions and do what they were told to do. This was first discussed by the Deputy Head who, in reflecting on the development of the school, pointed to an apparent culture of following instruction. According to the Deputy Head, and as outlined earlier in this thesis, by ‘following what [they] have been told to do, things got better’ (Int, DH, 26/6/2014). This is particularly interesting as she had only been in the school for a few months when she started the inquiry programme and made this observation about how teachers work in her new school. For another person who had been in the school, this culture of being told what to do might have been internalised and not picked up as the Deputy Head did.

Not only the Deputy Head identified this culture, but the group leaders also did. For example, Teacher 1, 2, 3 and 5 complained that their respective group members were not sure how to incorporate the new professional development activities into their practice and they expected to be told what to do, rather than take control of the process and the activity. In this way, those teachers’ engagement can be termed as ‘sailing with the tide’ to emphasise that when an inquiry programme is introduced there is the danger of having some teachers not fully aware of the complexities and the rationale behind such programme. When this happens, a trend of doing inquiry activities without necessarily seeing the full picture might appear: the teachers do it because they are asked to do so. This type of engagement is also a reminder of the significance of ensuring and nurturing a professional culture at the school that features teacher professional ownership of their own professional development and their professional autonomy. A lack of such culture, as evidenced in this study, leads to a ‘sailing with the tide’ type of professional development engagement.

Coasting engagement

The term coasting engagement was inspired by some recent official discussions (DfE, 2015a, 2016a) of coasting schools; ones that ‘have, year after year, failed to push every pupil to reach their potential’ (DfE, 2015a, p. 1). Coasting schools are not failing schools per se, but at the same time they are not performing well enough or at a satisfactory level: they are just coasting. Here is the analogy with inquiry engagement: a coasting engagement is neither purposeful nor sceptical. It merely is one where there is a shallow type of engagement. What I mean by shallow engagement here is one that lacks passion or a genuine desire to be involved and engaged in it. Rather, the way teachers in this category engaged in the inquiry programme activities amounted to an act of ticking off points on a list. Inquiry as a form of professional development was not seen so by the teachers in this category; rather, it was an extra school activity that whether or not they liked it, they had to do it. Therefore, their engagement in this activity lacked passion or enthusiasm and a genuine desire to learn and develop.

To help us understand why such a situation arose, different contextual factors need to be considered. With thirty-three references across the datasets, the lack of time is one of the most prominent of these factors. There was a consensus amongst the participants that they felt overwhelmed by all the initiatives and tasks they had to do and that they felt they did not have enough time at their disposal to fit the various school activities they have to do besides teaching. Engaging in the inquiry becomes shallow and amounts to a mere box-ticking activity. One of the respondents to the deputy head’s survey made the following point:

| Data | Source |
|---|-------------|
| ‘Due to other school commitments after school on Monday it is impossible to keep up with the Action Learning Sets. I wish they started at 4pm instead. Sorry to be so unhelpful. Next academic year I will need to consider priorities on a Monday... | DH’s survey |
| Concept is great - but, as with all things, not enough time, meetings too close, IT not ready, etc. | DH’s survey |

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| All seems like additional work. Where did this work till you drop 24/7 culture come from and why? We seem obsessed at creating more and more work rather than reflecting, analyzing and consolidating what we do well. | DH's survey |
| It was very shallow; there was not much meat to it. It was good in terms of the fact that you are exposed to different ideas, strategies, games, some of them work for starters, plenary is some for engagement and motivation. But there was never really anytime to properly research. | Int, T3, January 2014 |
| Time is a valuable commodity and indeed is often described as being of the essence. One is left wondering how many layers, how many initiatives, how many projects, how many activities can be programmed in to the world of work and the world of education before we learn to pause, reflect and to consolidate. | DH's survey |
| I was talking to some colleagues and that was their views as well. "I just want to do the work and go home". "I Just want to deliver my classes and that is it". That's the attitude of teachers who don't have much say in the school's policy and decision-making processes. | Int, T4, January 2014 |

Table 5. 6: Empirical evidence of coasting engagement

5.3.2 Summary of types of inquiry engagement

To summarise, five types of inquiry engagement were identified in this study. These include purposeful, sceptical, strategic, sailing with the tide and coasting engagement. I have argued that thinking about teacher research engagement in this way is helpful in understanding how teachers engage in inquiry and starting to identify the levers and barriers of inquiry engagement are.

Having discussed types of inquiry engagement, I turn now to consider research outcomes.

5.4 Research outcomes

This section aims to answer research question two: what do teachers perceive to be the outcomes of carrying out their own inquiry projects? There were multiple opportunities in the fieldwork and data collection stages to collect data related to participants' understandings and perceptions of the outcomes of the inquiry programme from their own

individual perspectives. The most relevant dataset that informs this area are the pre-workshop surveys, the protocols, the deputy head's own survey and the interviews. One way to understand teachers' perceptions of the outcomes is to present and discuss what they aimed to achieve at the outset of the inquiry programme and then see how these expected outcomes developed towards the end of the academic year and whether or not these aims/hopes/objectives were achieved. It is important to differentiate here between what they actually achieved and what they said they did. The difference here is between my world as a researcher and theirs as teachers involved in a specific type of professional development; between what I viewed in the field as noticeably significant and worthy of including in this study and what mattered to them. In the fieldwork, I was focused on understanding how they engaged in inquiry and what they achieved as a result. However, when they *talked* about the outcomes of their inquiry work, especially in the interviews, other areas started to emerge as outcomes. There is another benefit of discussing the initially expected outcomes and then their development. In doing so, I will be able to discuss teachers' perceptions of inquiry and how they go about achieving their expected inquiry outcomes.

In categorising teachers' inquiry outcomes, three types of outcomes were identified:

- 1) Outcomes related to the students
- 2) Outcomes related to school
- 3) Outcomes related to individual goals

I will consider each in turn.

5.4.1 *Outcomes related to students*

In this type of outcome, the teachers started the inquiry programme aiming to have an impact or change of some sort on their students' learning experiences as the main target of their inquiry work. For example, Teacher1 explains here what he aims to achieve as part of his inquiry work:

The changes I'd like to see in the target students are:
Raise self-esteem
Raise achievement
Empower students with knowledge of levels and assessment criteria
Raise independence and resilience
Raise engagement (T1, int, 14/11/2013)

Teacher 1's students were a challenging group. Using the school's terminology, they were a 'bottom set' which means they had the lowest achievement amongst the other students in that specific year, year 9 in this example. Teacher 1 sympathetically describes this group:

their whole time in education has been reinforcing that the fact that they are not bright, not very clever. So hopefully, the way we are going to use AFL [assessment for learning] is to try and rebuild that confidence and help them make more progress and hopefully this will be quite empowering for them to change that negative mindset. So hopefully, if it works well, the kids learning experience will be improved. (T1, int, 14/11/2013)

One way of conceptualising this outcome is through seeing the inquiry work as a vehicle for trying to alter some of the classroom realities. The issues with this particular group are not new. Teacher 1 mentioned that these issues were known in the school from the previous year and they became a school reality. What can be inferred from Teacher 1's plan and expected outcome is that this activity can be seen as a practical activity that ties in well with what a teacher normally does in their classrooms.

It is intriguing to see Teacher 1's thinking and conceptualisation of the inquiry work at this early stage of the inquiry. For him, the inquiry is a vehicle for changing a difficult situation in his teaching and at the same time an opportunity to provide the students with not only a potentially better learning experience (contents of subjects taught in school) but also a better social and interpersonal experience through, in Teacher 1's words, 'rebuilding his students' confidence'. Teacher 1 explained how before the inquiry programme, the students in this group became aggressive to each other as a defence mechanism. In principle, to think about inquiry as a way of changing this challenging classroom reality shows a powerful side of teacher inquiry. It is an attempt to change and improve teaching and learning by those immediately affected by the teaching and learning processes.

Teacher 1 was not the only participant to start with such aims and expected outcomes related to the students. Teacher 3, a PE teacher, focused in her inquiry work on engagement. She began her inquiry work with the following observation:

I teach girls PE, all the girls. I teach some of the boys as well, but for me, although it's true you have kids from both sexes who aren't motivated, but generally there does seem to be more girls who are kind of switched off. So for me, that's why I'm focusing on girls. (T3, int, 14/11/2013)

Like Teacher 1, Teacher 3 also aimed to do something about her students' learning experience. For this purpose, she identified two girls who were disengaged, and based her inquiry work on helping them become more motivated and engaged in these classes. Again, what is emerging here is a desire by the teachers to act and help their students have a better learning experience. Inquiry is a way of doing this. The attempt to help, whether or not it was successful, emphasises a significant aspect of inquiry relates to being a vehicle for improving the quality of classroom life.

Teacher 2 teaches English and throughout the academic year, she focused her inquiry work on two specific students. Both are Year 8 and had reading difficulties. What she aimed to do is to encourage them to read and comprehend what they read more. Her inquiry focus was differentiation in the sense that she sought to differentiate her literacy instructions to suit struggling readers like these two students and more able students. I was invited to observe one of Teacher 2's reading class in the library and I sat with the two students. Afterwards, I was given access to samples of their writing in latter interviews and communication with Teacher 2.

A significant point that this type of work by the teachers mentioned above brings to the fore are the moral and social justice aspects of this type of the professional development activity represented by seeking to enhance and improve students' learning experiences. Similarly, Teacher 2, Teacher 3 and Teacher 4 have similar expected outcomes and aims to achieve in relation to their inquiry work.

5.4.2 Outcomes related to the school

In this type of outcome, there was a tendency and desire to influence some school policy or practice. Not all the teachers who expressed an interest in influencing school policy, however, explicate the reasons behind their wish to influence how things are done in the school. Yet, it emerged during fieldwork that having a specific policy or strategy associated with a particular teacher is a significant achievement in the school, especially for those teachers with aspirations to be promoted as a middle leader or director of Sixth Form, for example. Even prior to the inquiry initiative one teacher had a considerable input in the new literacy programme in the school and therefore she was appointed as the literacy coordinator. This helped her to go on training and influence this important area within the school. Another indication that influencing school policy and having an impact on how the school functions is significant to the teachers is captured in the following quote by Teacher

1: 'I had quite a lot of input and quite a lot of say in our marking policy which has changed because of certain things I have done' (T1, int, 14/11/2013). This happened a year before the inquiry programme and Teacher1 mentioned this in the context of his expected outcomes of his inquiry work. There seems to be a sense of achievement associated with influencing school policy and having one's own stamp on certain school-wide strategies. As Teacher 7 argues, 'it is always nice and rewarding to have the school acknowledge your work and your ideas which is something this school is very good at, (T7, int, 1/12/2013). Another aspect of this is related to the micropolitics of the schools: some of those teachers who set out to influence how the school does things ended that same academic year taking some leadership roles such as head of year (Teacher 1 and Teacher 3) or director of Sixth Form (Teacher 5). Seen in this way, it becomes easier to understand why some of the participants in the inquiry programme aimed to achieve school-wide impact as an outcome of their inquiry work.

In this study, influencing school policy was a significant aim. A few teachers found in the inquiry programme a way to influence and change certain aspects of school life, practice and strategies through their inquiry engagement. Teacher 1, for example, explains in the following quote what he aims to achieve and how this might have a school-wide impact:

I think one of the interesting things about education is that all the short term things you do in a lesson with students can contribute to the long term. And as my career progresses, I'd like to think about contributing to the profession. If we can prove that it [peer assessment] is actually very important, maybe we could say that the school might decide to say OK, they [Teacher 1's inquiry group] have actually found out that it is very useful, we as a school are going to guarantee that each subject has at least one piece of proper peer assessment work say every 4 weeks or something like that. So we might be able to impact the school in this way I suppose depending on what we find. (T1, int, 14/11/2015)

What is noticeable here also is the tentativeness nature of Teacher 1's claims; he knows what he is trying to find out might not work. So it is only if he finds out that the strategies and interventions he wants to propose do actually work and improve the quality of learning for his students that he will aim to introduce them to the whole school. Overall, this quote also indicates that T1 has a considerable level of understanding of how inquiry can influence a teacher's teaching and then a school's way of work. Yet, embedded in this understanding is the tentativeness of the possible impact on one's teaching and the school's policy. Inquiry can only achieve this if the outcomes are practical and do make a tangible difference. This is significant in conceptualising teacher inquiry and I will refer to this point in the next chapter (6.4).

Similarly, Teacher 3 set out to improve engagement and motivation by introducing new strategies. Her aim was also to encourage the students who are the target of her inquiry to participate more in her classes. In the quote below, she sets out what she wants to achieve through her inquiry work:

I'd like to be able to have a couple of strategies of engaging these girls and have the data to back it up and make people see well actually if you do it this way, it does have a positive impact. And for the school, if that happens, then it could be rolled out across the school. It may not apply to all the groups, but hopefully with those couple of pupils, it may be something that can be used in other lessons to increase the motivation and therefore make them achieve better. (T3, int, 14/11/2013)

It is also evident here that there is an aim to influence a school-wide policy or activity; in this particular case, it is student engagement and motivation. Like Teacher 1, Teacher 3 exhibits another side of understanding teacher inquiry that is worthy of noting at this stage. She acknowledges that even if the strategies she introduces do work with her own students, they might not work with other students in other classes. This is another indication of the level of understanding of inquiry by the group leaders in this study.

A final example is Teacher 6 whose inquiry focus was project learning. He gives an overview of his inquiry work:

I'm trying to raise the profile of project-based learning not only in this project specifically but also broadly. And I've also talked about how important it is to allow students to do independent projects. It's just now been taken out of curriculum so [the DfE] doesn't want students to be working on things independently and doing redrafts, etc. So what we will do [in the inquiry project] is to try and convince the school that even though it's not being examined in Year 10, with these crucial skills, they'll still do better in standardised exams. (T6, int, 1/12/2013)

Again, what Teacher 6 outlines here is another example of a teacher wanting to influence and shape school policy. In this particular example, it is about project-based learning and the possibility of proving that it works and it improves students' overall skills and might have a positive impact on students' performance in exams.

To conclude, influencing school policy and strategies is professionally satisfying and there is a sense of achievement and professionalism attached to that. Therefore, participants in this study aimed to influence some strategies and school policies through their inquiry work. Inquiry as a form of professional development can thus be viewed as a lever for influencing some school-wide policies and practice.

5.4.3 Outcomes related to individual goals

In this type of outcome, a few participants considered the inquiry work as an opportunity to enhance or improve the prospects of their career. Three participants, in particular, had had their individual plans these were tested through the inquiry programme.

Teacher 4 was planning to do a doctorate in education (Ed.D) prior to the commencement of the inquiry programme in the school. For this purpose, he used the inquiry programme to experiment and then decide whether or not to apply for the doctorate. In an earlier interview, he makes the following point about his interest in the inquiry programme: 'I am interested in it [the inquiry programme] because I am personally interested and would like to take it further and use it as the basis for my doctorate hopefully (27/1/2014). He was admitted in the same academic year to an Ed.D programme and his Ed.D research is closely related to what he started in the school inquiry programme. He concedes that the inquiry programme was a major determining factor in his decision to pursue an Ed.D. This shows one aspect of the inquiry programme in which the initiative could be considered as the seed to much larger work in the school.

Teacher 2 is another example in this category. As outlined earlier, she normally works with 'bottom sets' where it is common to have students who struggle to read and/or write. Therefore, a big part of what she normally does is differentiation. Like Teacher 4 above, she also finds in the inquiry programme a way to test ideas and plan a postgraduate degree. She maintains that:

I'd like to do a Master's in inclusive and special education. And I think this [the inquiry programme] is a quite brilliant opportunity for me to soak into the research area, and on the other hand, I think once you become a practitioner, it is very difficult to go back and do any research or study any methodology. I think it is a good way to keep up to date with what is going on in the field of pedagogy or education in general really. I think action research also helps in long-term learning, same as doctors do. They have to be equipped not only with skills, but also the current knowledge in the field. So I think it should be the same for teachers in order also to be able to contribute to the field and develop the specific areas they are interested in. (T2, int, 14/11/2013).

The analogy with the doctors is interesting and she expands on it in later interviews and brings to mind the influential analogy put forward by (Hargreaves 1999). She views inquiry as a way of professionalising teaching; a way of keeping up to date with the current knowledge and developments in the field and also contribute to the development of various areas of interest within education. One way she conceptualises this is through pursuing a

research degree based on her practice and again the inquiry programme is useful here to her as it provides a platform through which she is introduced to some research activities.

A final example of a participant who exhibited outcomes related to individual goals is the Deputy Head herself. Although not discussed in interviews, she had started an Ed.D before she joined the school and her area of research interest was the university-school collaboration. In this regards, the inquiry programme can be seen as another way to have and strengthen links with universities. In particular, she aimed to create and enhance the relationships with the local university ¹² by encouraging. In the following longer quote, she clarifies her individual agenda behind introducing the inquiry programme:

So I would like to see us linked to other HEIs; I'd like to see university researchers coming in a regular basis to this school; I'd like to see our staff meeting with researchers regularly producing papers, sharing papers, publishing papers from very small-scale, so the action learning sets maybe quick think piece of two sides: I tried this and this is what happened to some of the bigger works that [Teacher 4] and I are doing about teacher leadership and mine is about school-university partnership and then anybody in between. So people who might be doing masters to actually bring that more into the school environment and share it as opposed to being something they do at home or they just do the evenings, but actually sharing that. If I could develop the links with [X] University, they've got a centre for research, things might evolve and then we could do be involved in bigger projects. We're also involved in "Closing that Gap" research project where at the moment, we are a control group. That will change next year. So I see it with having research at a whole different scale, but that being one of the things *the school becomes known for*, and having that at different levels, having teachers buy-in whenever and how do they want to.

There are some [teachers] who really like it and who potentially would've wanted to do it before we brought it in anyway. And there are certain people who want to get in Master's programmes, we have few staff who've done that recently, so they can be the kind of people who enjoy research because I know there are a couple of teachers who were really enthusiastic and excited from the start because they naturally wanted to do things like this anyway. (DH, int, 26/6/2014. *Emphasis added*)

Seen from this angle, it can be argued that the deputy head also had her own personal goals in promoting the inquiry programme. Although I discuss micropolitics in several places in this thesis, it is almost always present when the point is related to the deputy head. In the above extract, there is a linkage between her own personal interests –creating links with universities- and how she is leading the school and in particular the professional development in this school. It is interesting to see that she wants the school to be known for inquiry as a way of doing professional development. Returning to micropolitics, it is also more interesting to see in retrospect how this interest of the deputy head was

¹² The name of the university will remain anonymous to protect the identity of the participants.

actualised and the role the teachers themselves played in all of this. What I am referring to here is the fact that teachers had little to no say in the type or shape of this professional development programme. They were expected to do it whether or not they wanted to and whether or not they had the professional capacity to do such work. Ultimately, micropolitics as evidenced in this instance and other instances in this study, provide a powerful tool to examine the personal interest and then relate this wider context of the school to consider how personal interests affect engagement or lack of it in school activities.

5.5 Conditions for inquiry engagement

In this section, I aim to answer RQ2: ‘what aspects of context affect teachers’ active engagement in inquiry?’ through presenting the relevant findings to this research question. The section is organised into a few distinct context-related areas that were demonstrably significant in teachers’ inquiry engagement. These are: (1) the physical layout of the school, (2) understanding of inquiry, (3) communication, and (4) the micropolitics of the school. In thinking about the conditions that are put forward in this study as ones necessary for inquiry engagement, care was taken to ensure that these conditions are not exclusive or and unique for the context of this study. These conditions will be discussed in turn.

5.5.1 Physical environment of the school

As established in the previous earlier in this chapter (5.2.1), the physical layout of the school proved to be a significant factor in teachers’ inquiry engagement. In the previous chapter, the discussion focused on describing the physical context of the school and how that played out throughout the first year of the lifespan of the inquiry programme. Building on from that discussion, I argue here that the physical environment of the school is going to be employed to argue that, although basic and sometimes taken for granted, can become a crucial factor in determining teachers’ inquiry engagement.

The physical environment of the school is a significant factor to consider in teacher inquiry engagement. In their discussion of teaching in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects and the challenges faced by teachers in these subjects, (Banks & Barlex, 2014) dedicate a chapter to the physical environment in the school. They maintain that ‘if the physical environment of the classroom is set up so that pupils can take responsibility for their work and make informed choices of tools and

components as they progress through a task, they are better able to take control of their own learning' (Banks & Barlex, 2014, p. 220). They also discuss further aspects of the physical environment of the school such as the staffroom and the noticeboard. Although they have STEM teachers in mind, their discussion is also relevant school-wide. The physical environment can function as either a lever to effective CPD provision and engagement, inquiry in this case or as a hindrance to teachers taking control and engaging in CPD. In this particular study, the findings suggest that the physical environment of the school contributed to the lack of inquiry engagement.

Initiating an inquiry programme as a form of professional development in a year through which building work was underway in the school brought to the fore the significance of the physical environment in facilitating and embedding an inquiry culture within the school. These points might not have arisen in other contexts if there had been no building work; however, such points emphasised basic points that are so crucial and relevant to an inquiry programme. The main point here relates to collaboration and sharing. In a context where the school is, or feels like, a split site, teachers are less likely to come together to share ideas or collaborate with each other as we saw with Teacher 1. Such split site enhances a more rigid structure and relationship amongst teachers and decreases spontaneity and opportunities to collaborate or create an inquiry community. As (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 5) indicate, inquiry 'creates the conditions for practitioners to participate in and develop the communities of practice through which the practice is conducted, both in the relationships between different participants in a particular site or setting of practice, and in the relationships between people who are collectively responsible for the practice.' What contributed to hindering such community in this study is the stress of the building work and the instability felt by most participants regarding moving classes. This created a sense of exhaustion and sometimes anxiety on the part of the teachers; therefore, opportunities to collaborate and improve practice were severely limited. Overall, the physical environment of the school in this study contributed to teachers' negative engagement in inquiry.

5.5.2 Conceptualisation of inquiry

Various understandings of inquiry emerged in this study and this is primarily linked to the way inquiry was promoted in the school. Lots of how teachers' inquiry work was influenced by how they personally understood and interpreted this activity rather than through how it was facilitated and explained to them in the school as part of the inquiry programme. There was also an unstated assumption by the deputy head that teachers in this

school knew how to inquisitively incorporate aspects of inquiry into their practice. This, as I showed earlier in the chapter, is not true as the majority of the teachers in this study had no exposure to or training in carrying out research into their practice. This ultimately led to diverse understandings of the same activity and this situation of diverse understandings led to diverse approaches to doing inquiry. The issue of diverse ways of doing inquiry within the school was intensified by the fact that the teachers felt they were 'left to their own devices' (T1, Int, 30/1/2014) with little to no support and guidance from the school facilitator.

Understanding inquiry –what it means, how it is done and for what reasons- is a significant condition and indeed a prerequisite for its success, as the findings of this study suggest. The absence of this requirement made it clear that multiple understandings and interpretations lead to confusion. One implication of this is that a newly introduced inquiry programme is better served by the facilitators and teachers spending time with unpacking what inquiry means and how best to do it in their school. In this way, teachers are more likely to have a better understanding of the role of inquiry in their teaching and professional development and less confusion about how it should be done in their context.

5.5.3 *Communication*

In the context of the newly introduced inquiry programme, effective communication emerged as a significant condition in determining the ways in which teachers engage in this type of professional development activity. It also relates to the previous point about multiple understandings of inquiry. Indeed, a significant part of the diverse understandings of inquiry is attributable to poor communication in the process of inquiry facilitation. Different groups were doing inquiry in a variety of ways and teachers realised this as soon as they started their respective second cycle with their own respective new groups. This led to confusion. For example, after starting the second cycle, Teacher 1, reflecting on whether what he was involved in with his groups was action research, makes the following point:

I think from what some of the teachers have been feeding back to me after the sessions about what they have done and from what they've come from other groups having done in the past, it is not what's happening, unfortunately [i.e. it is not action research]. (T1, int, 30/1/2014)

What this extract shows is that as early as the second cycle, teachers started to have doubts about the nature of what other groups were doing as part of the inquiry programme.

Another teacher makes a similar point but then refers to the main issue of having multiple interpretations of the same activity:

I heard from a colleague who is in another group, with the people who are delivering and facilitating that group, they are not doing it *the way it should be done*. They are asking individuals to go and keep researching the topic of that particular set rather than ‘this is what it is all about, this is how we identify the individual pupils we want to target in this action research, etc’. That’s why when you asked me what would help improve this activity I said people’s understanding of the principles and the ideas step by step and understand the different types of research and what action research is all about. And also teachers need to be given examples of action research, rather than leaving it to be interpreted differently by the facilitators of the groups. (*emphasis added*. T4, int, 27/3/2014)

This sense of confusion was accentuated by a lack of support and follow-up by the Deputy Head and the intermittent nature of the communication regarding the inquiry programme: ‘we’ve been left to our own devices’ (T1, int, 30/01/2014). Instead, what the teachers mostly had in terms of communication was were brief announcements, mainly emails, packed with unexplored assumptions about what is good for the school and what is good for the teachers. An obvious example of this is how all the teachers within the school were introduced to the new inquiry programme:

We are planning to run mini Action Learning Sets (ALS) which reflect the key criteria from the Ofsted inspection framework around Teaching and Learning. The 9 ALS groups will run three times in the year over the three terms, with two workshops each term. Staff will need to *sign up to one for each term*. (*original emphasis*. DH, internal document)

This announcement was not preceded by a consultation with the teachers on the shape and content of their own preferred professional development activities, or their professional development needs. Like other major decisions in this inquiry programme, it was a unilateral decision based on ideological conviction on the role of inquiry in teaching and learning rather than an effective communication in the school that might have warranted better understanding of teachers’ experiences and needs in relation to their professional development and professional practice. Conceptually, and in effect, this unilateral decision stripped the inquiry programme and the teachers of some of inquiry fundamental principle: ‘a way of thinking about and developing [...] practice’ (Shosh & McAteer, 2016, p. 12).

At points when it was evident that teachers’ inquiry engagement was declining, communication took a more directive and reasserting turn. This is exemplified in the extract below which is part of an email sent out to the inquiry group leaders after the

Deputy Head noticed that the way teachers were engaging in and doing inquiry was not as she expected:

I will pop into each session for a few minutes. Can you let me have the inquiry question titles by the 10th please. Please ensure you send out invites with room numbers etc to your participants for this term and copy me in so I know where to go also. [...] This initiative isn't going anywhere as *I plan to continue it year on year* and hope that as it develops it really will become an embedded part of our best practice. (*emphasis added*. DH, internal document, 26/6/2014)

There are a few points to be unpacked here in terms of the role of communication. A threat strategy 'I will pop into each session' is being used here to force teachers to engage in inquiry. Teachers know it is not normally good news when a senior school administrator wants to visit their class as this is generally linked to observation and appraisal. This is what the Deputy Head called in one interview as 'gentle cajoling': 'at the end of the day, everybody was supposed to go, so everybody knows they needed to sign up and attend one' (DH, int, 27/3/2014). Another point is the use of 'I plan to continue it year on year' which, besides sounding a bit threatening, proves again the lack of ownership by teachers themselves of the inquiry programme; it is merely another school activity they are forced to do. It is a non-inclusive style of communication that emphasises the power relationships within the school, despite the appearance of inclusivity in decision making in the school policy at the surface.

5.5.4 The micropolitics of the school

Thus far in this thesis, I presented micropolitics as a lens of examining and investigating school life. It also is significant factor in inquiry engagement. It is true that micropolitics is inescapable facts of school life; however, the findings of this study suggest that there is more to micropolitics than just being an approach to investigating what happens when teachers are tasked with engaging in inquiry. Findings suggest that reflecting on essential micropolitical aspects of the school such as the interests of individuals within the school and the power relationships is necessary to foster a culture that is conducive to meaningful teacher engagement in inquiry. This is easier said than implemented, though. For an inquiry culture to be promoted and sustained in school, aspects of micropolitical life in the school need to be transparently discussed and a culture of good practice, sharing and trust needs to be fostered if an inquiry programme is to be meaningful for teachers and their school. Such culture requires that individuals within the school reflect on their own interests and reasons behind engaging or not engaging in the inquiry programme. This type

of reflection is regarded as the foundation on which healthy and productive micropolitical relationships and activities within the school are established to ensure that an inquiry programme achieves what it is meant to achieve.

What transpired in this study is something that is entirely different to such culture. Specifically, it was a culture of ‘cajoling’, one in which teachers’ contracts are amended to make it obligatory for them to engage in certain activities in the school. The micropolitical culture reported in this study, in this way, can be considered the antithesis of what is required to promote and engage teachers in research.

5.6 Chapter summary

This chapter started the presentation and discussion of the findings. It addressed RQ1: To what extent and how do teacher’s beliefs and perceptions about inquiry change after engaging in a school-supported inquiry project? Two types of teachers were identified when examining findings related to the development of beliefs about inquiry engagement: the ‘ideal’ and the ‘real’ teacher. This was followed by a discussion of the various ways in which teachers responded to the role of being researchers of their own practice. The chapter then presented findings related to critical factors in the developments of beliefs about inquiry. These are workshops, time, communication, collaboration, power relationships and understanding of research. The chapter then explored the main contributions in this study: types of teachers’ inquiry engagement. Five distinct types of inquiry engagement were identified and discussed. These are: purposeful, sceptical, strategic, ‘sailing with the tide’ and coasting engagements. It was suggested that conceptualising teacher inquiry engagement in this way is likely to help us understand why and how teachers engage in inquiry and possibly other types of professional development. Outcomes of research engagement were then presented and discussed. The chapter afterwards concluded with conditions that were found to be essential to ensure teachers’ purposeful engagement in inquiry. The next chapter provides a discussion of the findings presented and offers a framework for understanding teacher inquiry engagement.

CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters, the focus was on presenting the findings in this study with the initial interpretation. In this chapter, the focus turns to a deeper interpretation, abstracting from the findings of this study and offering some conceptual frameworks based on the findings of this study. I aim to bring together multiple threads to the tapestry of this study and reflect on what they mean both for schools interested in offering inquiry-based professional development and for individual teachers in such schools. In terms of the structure of this chapter, it will (1) critically assess the work that was carried out in the first year of the inquiry programme, (2) provide a detailed discussion of threats to inquiry engagement and finally (3) offer a new framework to enable the necessary considerations in engaging teachers in school-wide inquiry-based professional development. The evaluation is organised into two parts: from the perspective of the teachers themselves and then from a school-wide perspective. The threats to inquiry engagement will be discussed in relation to the findings discussed in the previous chapter. Finally, the framework will attempt to bring together various threads of the findings and outcomes of this study in order to offer a fresh way of looking at inquiry-based professional development, highlighting the factors that interplay when a school decides to engage its teachers in inquiry-based professional development. From a practical perspective, the framework will also offer a practicable checklist for schools, facilitators and teachers wishing to engage in this type of professional development.

6.2 A Critical Assessment of the First Year of the Inquiry Programme

There is no shortage of advice and praise in the literature for teachers wishing to be involved in research activities to support their professional development and their student learning (for example: Altrichter et al., 2013; Bartlett & Burton, 2003; Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Burns, 2010; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 2009; Helskog, 2013; Hopkins, 2014; Martinovic et al., 2012; McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Stenhouse, 1975; Stringer, 2013). The interest in teacher research is not limited to the literature; in fact, accompanying the growing teacher research literature are various attempts to translate the idea of the teacher-researcher into reality. Two ways of doing so stand out as the most

prominent: (1) promoting teacher research in teacher education programmes, most notably through university courses and (2) funding teacher research programmes. (Foster, 1999), for example, evaluates the quality of some research projects funded by the then Teacher Training Agency (TTA) under the ‘Teacher Research Grant Scheme’ scheme which was an ‘attempt to develop teaching as a research-based profession’ (1999, p. 380). More recently, teacher research has received further support. The Department for Education (DfE) for example in one of its Research Priorities and Questions policy papers, and despite the patronising tone, acknowledges that ‘teachers themselves will play a central role in identifying and addressing research priorities’ (DfE, 2013, p. 6). Another example is the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) which funds small scale teacher research projects. In one of its recently-funded projects, the EEF claims that

This project is one of several EEF-funded projects that are seeking to improve teachers’ awareness, understanding and use of research. Many schools are still not using evidence to improve teaching or support decision-making. The EEF’s previous research in this area [...] has highlighted the challenges of applying research evidence to the classroom. (EEF, 2015)

A final example of supporting teacher research is the research conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). One of their major projects is called the ‘Enquiring Schools: Evidence-Based Teacher Development and School Improvement’. They describe the project as ‘a fresh approach to teacher development and school improvement built around inquiry -based projects carried out by teachers in your school, with support from NFER’ (NFER, 2015).

Despite the growing teacher research literature, the increasing funding and the recent overall popularity of this area, teacher research is still not a feature of teacher’s regular work or the most popular professional development approach. What we have instead is a rather sporadic hit and miss attempts where in most cases there is an enthusiastic individual or team within the school wanting to drive a research agenda. Indeed, (Foster, 1999) and (Hammersley, 2004) warn against conceptualising teaching and research as isomorphic activities and emphasise that both activities are distinct and require different sets of skills to achieve different aims. The marriage between teaching and research has hardly been outlasting without the extra support and continuous ‘push’ of certain stakeholders interested in this activity. Also, we still do not know under what circumstances teacher inquiry in all of its varieties and other associated names such as action research, self-study, practitioner research, to mention but a few, could become a

worthwhile and sustainable form of professional development for teachers and whether teachers themselves value such professional development opportunities. Teachers' own voices, though, have been 'curiously absent' (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 4) in these debates and developments. What needs to be examined here is the value of teacher research itself and whether it does what it promises teachers: empower those who do it. What can be noticed is that there is plenty of advice and encouragement to engage in teacher research, notably from the academic side represented by university-based academic researchers and other governmental and non-governmental organisations. However, what is usually overlooked is what teachers themselves think and believe about this process and how practical, worthwhile and enriching to their practice it really is. The area that is not normally highlighted in the literature is the process which teachers undergo in order to become researchers of their practice with a view to improve it.

To ascertain whether the inquiry programme that is the focus of this study was an effective form of professional development, I will consider *teachers' experiences* as an area that will inform our understanding of the worthwhileness of the inquiry programme:

6.2.1 Teachers' experiences

In order to assist me in considering teachers' experiences in the first year of the inquiry programme, I will consider (1) *teachers' attitudes* and (2) *teachers' learning* that together are expected to provide a rich view of teachers' experiences in relation to the inquiry programme:

Teachers' attitudes

As it has repeatedly been emphasised in this thesis so far, one major drive in this study is to focus on teachers' own perspectives and experiences of being involved in researching their own practice as this is a focus that is either lacking in the literature or at best requires critical edge as argued in previous chapters. Getting to grips with teachers' attitudes towards a school-supported and at the same time mandated teacher research programme is likely to facilitate our understanding of the value and relevance of research as a professional development activity in which teachers are expected to engage. This understanding might be crucial in critiquing and improving this type of professional development activity. A non-patronising debate centred on teachers' own perspective is

essential to understanding and thus improving teachers' learning and development opportunities in such professional development programmes.

There was a range of attitudes towards the inquiry programme with a noticeable prominence of negative attitudes towards the programme. What needs to be remembered here is that attitudes do change over time and this is exactly what was observed over the period of the first year in the life of the inquiry programme. In order to explore these attitudes further, I use Figure 6.1 to illustrate key aspects of the teachers' attitudes and how these can help us assess the inquiry programme. The figure aims to represent an overall view of the participants' attitudes so this needs to be approached with caution.

Understandably, no two participants' attitudes were identical at all the stages of the inquiry programme. However, towards the end of the academic year, a clear picture started to emerge about how teachers responded to the inquiry programme and how their attitudes shifted throughout the year due to certain factors. So the timeline does not relate to any particular participant(s); however, it does offer a school-wide sense of what the overall teachers' attitudes were at different stages.

To explicate the figure further, the general attitude prior to the start of the inquiry programme (in green) was positive with the participants' attitudes characterised by enthusiasm and excitement. The main indications about these attitudes came from the pre-programme survey and the work during the workshops. What is noticeable here is that despite the positive initial attitude, the survey and workshop field notes demonstrated that more direct guidelines and support were required for the teachers in order to grasp the rationale behind this type of work.

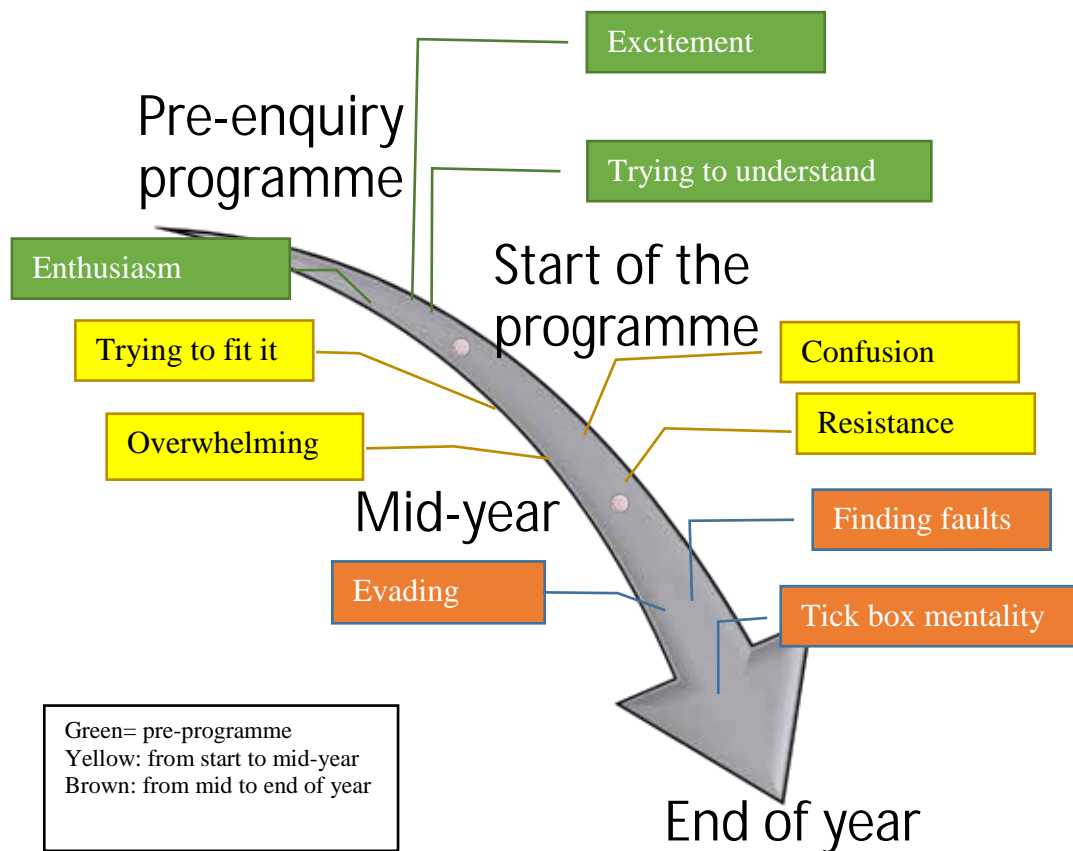


Figure 6. 1: A Timeline of Teachers' Attitudes towards the Inquiry Programme

As soon as the programme commenced, different attitudes started to become more apparent. Here attitudes started to shift and become more realistic and based on experience of being involved in the programme. Teachers in this study were expected to engage in inquiry on top of their other responsibilities with no considerations for giving them dedicated time to do this activity. Therefore, they started this phase (in yellow) with trying to find the relevance for this type of professional development and then fit it into their already busy timetable. This ultimately made it overwhelming for the majority of the participants. Added to that, they reported that they had little support from the school facilitator as Teacher 1 maintains: we were left to our own devices (T1, 30/1/2014). Therefore, what started to emerge was different interpretations of the tasks and doing things differently across the groups which led to more confusion. Because of this, towards the end of the first phase, resistance to the programme started to surface and this featured until the end of the year. The teachers started to see the inquiry work as a burden, extra

work and extra commitment with little to no immediate outcomes or rewards. A natural reaction to this was that the teachers began to become more evasive of the activities involved in the inquiry programme, hence the school facilitator's email discussed in the previous chapter warning teachers that she wanted to visit them during their inquiry meeting to make sure these meetings were happening in the first place. The sessions were organised after school so some sessions were attended by only one or two teachers out of six or more in total. Even in the case of those who did attend, it was a matter of tick box activity, as outlined in the previous chapter. They did show up in the meetings but their engagement was superficial in the sense that they tried to do what was expected of them, not more not less, just to avoid any conflicts or issues with other members in the school leadership team. A common feature of teachers' attitudes at this stage (in brown) was also trying to find problems and challenges with the programme so that they could justify their lack of engagement with the problems and challenges. As anticipated, time was the main mitigating factor despite some compelling evidence in the literature that disassociates time and success of teacher professional development activities (see for example Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Yoon et al., 2007).

Teachers' attitudes towards the inquiry programme are one useful indicator in assessing the effectiveness of the programme and then start to conceptualise teachers' experiences of being involved in this type of professional development. This conceptualisation is one way to theorise from this study. As outlined above, teachers' attitudes towards the inquiry programme shifted throughout the academic year and went from positive to negative. There were a few key turning points behind this shift among them were the lack of ownership support or follow-up (see Appendix 8). Although the teachers voiced their concerns, the school facilitator did not respond to these concerns directly. Instead, the programme was enforced in a stricter way, see Appendix 8, and the teachers felt they were forced to engage in the programme irrespective of what they thought about it.

What this means for other inquiry programmes is that it is crucial to consider what teachers' attitudes are if such programme of professional development is to meet the expectations of the teachers and the school facilitators. Although the teachers in this study set out with positive attitudes towards the opportunity of investigating their own practice, the reality of such work was far from expected and therefore their attitudes negatively changed. There were opportunities for the school facilitator and administrators at key stages in the programme to repair widening divisions amongst teachers regarding what the

inquiry programme was all about and how to do it. Missing these opportunities to enhance teachers' attitudes towards the programme and to empower teachers adequately by giving them real ownership of their professional development was one of the main lessons in this inquiry programme.

Teachers' learning

Teacher learning is a major objective of teacher professional development efforts and it is considered a prerequisite for any changes or improvements in teaching and learning (Borko, 2004; Desimone, 2009; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010). Therefore, when assessing the inquiry programme, it is worth considering what teachers in this study learnt as part of their professional development. Teachers' learning is conceptualised here as 'changes in participation in socially organized activities, and individuals' use of knowledge as an aspect of their participation in social practices' (Borko, 2004, p. 4). In this study, there were no defined teacher learning objectives *per se*, so the discussion below is based on some learning that was observed and some aspects of which were discussed with the participants during the interviews or were captured in some internal documents. Based on this, the two areas I want to focus on here as exemplary of teacher learning are collaboration and focusing on 'at risk' (Kamler & Comber, 2005) students.

Collaboration

A major characteristic of the inquiry programme in this study is that it was designed as a 'CPD opportunity where staff work *collaboratively* around whole school issues and current areas of educational interest' (emphasis added. Deputy Head, internal document, September 2014). Each inquiry group had two leaders and at least four group members. The group members rotated throughout the year meaning that most of them worked on more than one inquiry topic with different teachers each term they rotated their group. The structured opportunity to meet with other teachers and discuss the topic of the inquiry was one of the main highlights of the first year's work. This is so because the inquiry programme was the first and only opportunity through which the teachers in this school did this type of professional development based on local expertise in which they work with each other in order to discuss common issues of interest in their teaching, and to improve it. Working collaboratively, especially in professional development activities, was not the norm until the inquiry programme commenced. Still, there were issues in collaboration such as those related to collaboration amongst teachers from different disciplines. Of all

the participants in this study, only one complained about the ineffectiveness of working with teachers from different subjects. In his view, what works in his subject (history) does not necessarily work in a maths or science class; therefore, he used this reason occasionally to justify his lack of engagement. Notwithstanding that, the same participant and all other participants considered the opportunity of collaboration with others in the school as one of the best aspects of the inquiry programme. There was agreement among participants that what this meant to them is using local and more relevant experiences, which is something they valued in this type of professional development. The classic example that was juxtaposed with their collaborative work was the external speakers and consultants who used to come in in CPD days and talk to them about how to improve certain aspects of their work. All the participants agreed that this latter type of work was not effective and therefore more often than not they found it did not translate into tangible changes in their practice. In this regards, working collaboratively on issues of common interest within the school can be considered as initiating a new culture in this school and therefore it can be considered as a major learning opportunity.

A final concluding point about collaboration is that although some of the literature on teacher collaboration (for example: Darling-Hammond, 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Goddard et al., 2007; Vangrieken et al., 2015) discuss teacher collaboration and its potentials normally in a positive light, my take on collaboration here is different. Collaboration is considered here mainly because it is a novel way of working in the school; a way that was brought about because of the inquiry programme. I turn now to discuss the final point related to teachers' experiences: working with at-risk students.

Working with 'at risk' students

This is one aspect that I introduced at the workshop stage and tracked throughout the year. The idea of targeting at-risk students was inspired by the stories reported in (Comber & Kamler, 2005) by teacher researchers in Australia who:

examined the effects of their own practices on different students; and they re-designed aspects of their literacy pedagogy to re-connect their most alienated students (2005, p. 122).

The participants in this study found it more practical to target specific students in their inquiry work whenever possible so that the work was more manageable and the results are more apparent and extrapolated to other students or classes if the intervention(s) do turn

around the target students' engagement and achievement. As indicated earlier, Teacher 1 focused on a group of students who were seen as difficult and disengaged and he tried to boost their motivation by using peer assessment. Another, Teacher 3, targeted a small number of female students who were withdrawn in her PE classes and she tried to understand the factors behind their disengagement and then introduce strategies to encourage them to participate more in these classes. As an English teacher, Teacher 2 had three students who were struggling in their literacy and she focused her inquiry work throughout the inquiry programme on differentiating her instructions in order for the students she identified as being weaker to be able to catch up with their peers in the same class.

The teachers found in the inquiry programme a vehicle through which they could target some of the weakest or most alienated amongst their students and focus their efforts to understand these students' learning experiences. This understanding was significant in trying out interventions with the at-risk students as Teacher 4 explains:

I chose only one student to follow in my ALS work after I looked at her entry grades, looked at her SEN status and assessed her in a face to face mini-interview after class. The area I worked on was engagement. So I incorporated different techniques and ideas that we discussed as a group and gleaned from our reading of the relevant literature. I then have seen massive difference. Her grades at the end of the year: she was a 3A student and she left with a 5B, which is a massive and remarkable improvement. And her work ethics and engagement has changed completely. She began to take pride in her work, she takes pride in her participation. She's allowed more time in the exam and now she started to ask for it, that's a big change in her attitude. I think that was a very good example of how action research can help and improve teaching and learning. (T4, int, 26/6/2014)

This example represents new learning: learning to respond to particular students' needs and work on improving these students learning experiences. In this regard, the inquiry programme, and despite the challenges and trial and error nature of the first year, can be considered effective in bringing about new learning for teachers that made a difference to some of the students who most needed it.

6.3 Threats to inquiry engagement

Up to this point in this chapter, I have focused on critically examining some aspects of the inquiry programme through considering what was effective and what was not. Informed by insights and findings in this study, the discussion now turns to focus on threats to teacher

inquiry engagement. This section brings together the factors that made it difficult for some participants to engage in inquiry as a professional development activity.

Figure 6.2 captures the main threats to inquiry engagement as these were manifested in this study and played out at different stages of the programme. Crucial to understanding the threats in Figure 6.2 is that these are interrelated factors and it is the combination of multiple threats that are likely to lead teachers to form their negative attitudes towards inquiry. More particularly, in this study when teachers were faced with multiple threats, they started to become disengaged with the whole inquiry initiative in some cases. The factors outlined in Figure 6.2 constitute the ‘lessons’ learnt in this study and indicate what one should avoid when starting an inquiry programme in a school. I discuss these threat factors below.

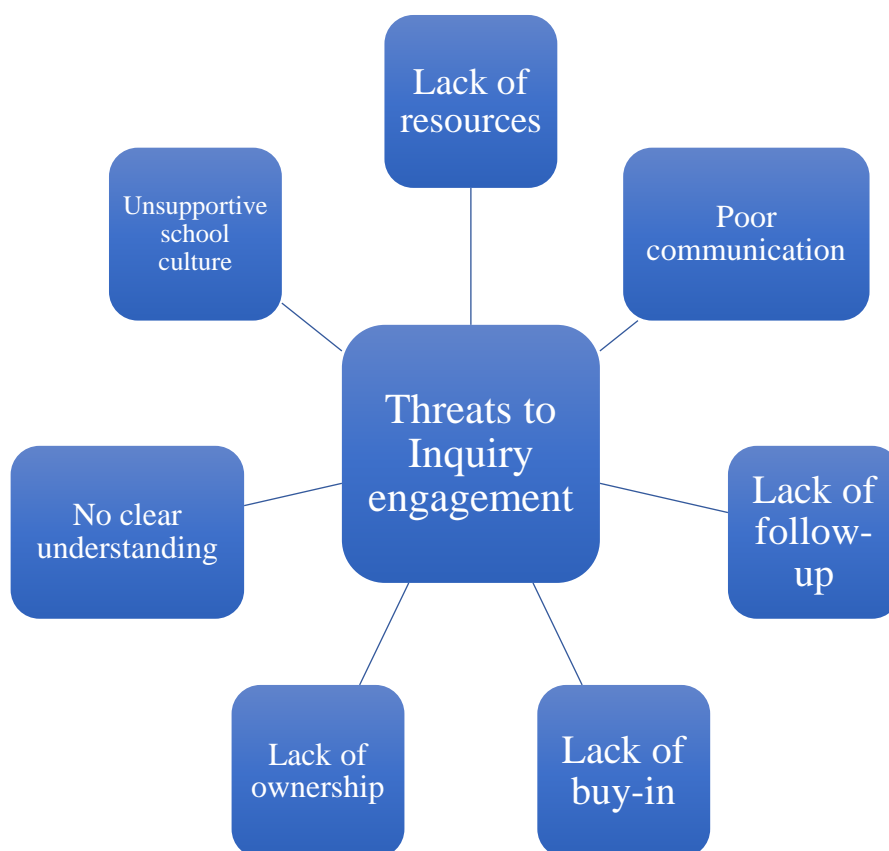


Figure 6. 2: Sources of threats to inquiry engagement

6.3.1 *Communication and understanding*

The role of communication was discussed in Chapter 5 (5.2.2) so here I recap that discussion illustrating how poor communication could lead to detrimental effects regarding teacher inquiry engagement. Figure 6.3 below shows the patterns of communication which were observed amongst the participants throughout the first year of the inquiry programme. The Deputy Head mainly communicated with the group leaders for all matters closely or remotely related to the inquiry programme through emails and occasional staffroom meetings. Despite these communications, the group leaders thought they were ‘left to their own devices’ and that resulted in different people understanding and interpreting the inquiry programme in different ways as I will highlight below. As for the group members, they mainly had the group leaders as a source of information and guidance about their work.

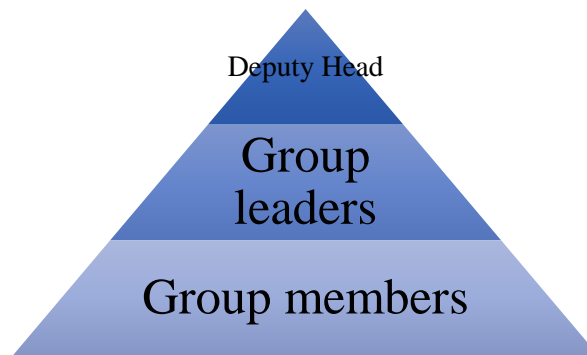


Figure 6. 3: Patterns of communication in the inquiry programme

Prior to the inquiry programme, there was an absence of communication regarding the nature and conduct of this new type of professional development. Having done this type of professional development in her previous school, the deputy head simply announced the new inquiry programme to the teachers with no communication or input from the latter. Instead, and as identified in Chapter 4 (4.2.1), she tied it to the areas defined by the Ofsted inspection that required improvement and enhancement. In doing so, the school facilitator aimed to give the programme more currency and legitimacy.

It is estimated that merely establishing an inquiry programme requires about six months (Simonsen, 2009, p. 118) while it takes between two to four years in order for changes, such as an inquiry programme, to be institutionalised and embedded in the school culture (Fullan, 2007, p. 68). This makes the first year in the life of a new programme crucial to its

success and continuity. In this way, I want to argue here that much of the success of the first year is dependent on effective communication. What I mean by effective communication is when all those involved in a similar inquiry programme discuss and negotiate their priorities in regards to the programme at the outset. It also involves transparent and multi-directional communications: between those involved in the programme within the school and outside if relevant. For teachers working within the same school having multiple channels for communication is also a sign of effective communication where teachers seize possible opportunities to have ongoing communication with colleagues for the success of the inquiry programme. This type of communication is vital to establishing trust and maintaining a balance between respecting others involved in the programme and critically investigating their practice (Borko, 2004, pp. 6-7).

The findings and observations in the current study point towards the significance of communication. What was noted in the inquiry programme in this study, however, is that there were a few assumptions made by the school facilitator. One of these is that if the teachers did not ask for help or clarification, then that meant they did not have issues in their inquiry work. This was not always true as some teachers were reluctant to ask questions most probably because they did not want to be seen as the ones who do not understand what was happening in the school or they were probably navigating their way around dealing with the deputy head: a new powerful person in the school. Therefore, the communication was limited to email reminders sent by the school facilitator to the group leaders about meetings and attendance. In practical terms, the communication was one way: top down, from the school facilitator to the group coordinators and then from the group coordinators to the group members. In effect, there was no space created for effective communication where teachers could feel confident to ask questions, demand changes, voice their concerns or at least reflect on progress. With a new deputy head in school running this type of professional development, the teachers needed such space in order to build trust in the new person and then engage in this type of professional development in a meaningful way.

One of the outcomes of poor communication was the mushrooming of various misunderstandings and interpretations of this new type of professional development and consequently the various ways it was conducted. This issue came to the fore as soon as the different group members moved to the various groups in the second and third terms. They

found different ways of doing the same activity and this led to confusion. Teacher 4 outlines the issue of multiple understandings of inquiry:

Something really important I saw with some teachers who came to my sessions was they said ‘we did it differently’ in the previous term. So I think people who are leading the action research groups, they themselves perhaps are not fully informed about it. Or they were informed as much as myself, but they decided to do it differently. In practical terms, the work we did across the groups did not carry the same cohesion, i.e. we do the same thing but investigating different areas. Yes, I agree that one has to have their own mark or input, but we all should be singing from the same hymn sheet. (T4, int, 26/6/2014).

As I demonstrated above, teachers’ engagement started to decline as soon as they switched to another group in the second term. They found the new group coordinators not only communicating different purposes of the inquiry but also doing it differently. In some groups such as the differentiation group, the group members were asked to read on the topic and find ideas to try out in their classes and then report back. In other groups such as the engagement and the challenge groups, the group members only attended sessions on the topic and were given ideas to try in the classes by the group coordinators while the latter did the ‘research’ part of the job: reading literature, designing an intervention, collecting and analysing data. Teacher 1, a history teacher, speaks about this situation:

So they [group members] kind of turned to me and [the other coordinator] to give them ideas about what they should do. And then when they came back, it was pretty negative about what they had actually done. Struggling to bring anything in; struggling to see the point of what we were doing; struggling to come to terms with the project itself and what it was trying to achieve. (T1, int, 30/1/2014)

This can be ascribed to confusion and lack of unity in the purpose and conduct of the inquiry programme. So, both poor communication and lack of clarity in understanding inquiry and how to do it

6.3.2 *Support and Resources*

Teachers starting a new inquiry programme require bespoke support as those teachers are doing a challenging activity (researching) beside their already highly demanding job (teaching). The ability to systematically and meaningfully investigate one’s own practice requires expertise and skills and that is why support is essential to the success and sustainability of an inquiry programme. The type of support referred to here includes giving continuous advice and guidance, providing feedback, critiquing and improving the design, conduct and dissemination of inquiry and offering any other necessary assistance to

the teachers while they embark on researching their practice, especially for the first time. Another indirect aspect of support is by creating an atmosphere where teachers- and particularly in the context of the inquiry programme- trust each other, receive encouragement and support and feel that what they do is valued and significant. An antithesis to this is when teachers view such activities as those involved in the inquiry programme as a test to their performance and abilities as teachers.

Lack of support emerged as a threat to inquiry in this study, and as outlined in the point above about communication, the support the teachers had was not enough to rekindle their interest and enthusiasm in the new inquiry programme. As Teacher 1 put it, they felt they were 'left to their own devices' (T1, Int, 30/1/2014) with little input from the school facilitator. In fact, the school facilitator admitted towards the end of the academic year that the support was not adequate. In an email to the teachers towards the end of the academic year, the school facilitator wanted to renew her own interest in the inquiry programme by stressing that it will run the next year and then she admits:

This initiative isn't going anywhere as *I* plan to continue it year on year and hope that as it develops it really will become an embedded part of our best practice. The first year with any initiative is always difficult and *I should have done more myself to support it.* (*Emphasis added, internal document, 5/6/2014*).

There is a lot to be unpacked here, but I will leave the first part of this quote to the discussion about ownership below. In the latter part, she acknowledges that the first year is difficult; however, despite that the support she dedicated to the initiative was not sufficient. This was no secret as the teachers complained about the amount of support, in the form of guidance and follow-up, they received throughout the year. However, this acknowledgment highlights the significance of support to achieve purposeful research engagement. In another place, the school facilitator promised more support for the next year.

Another relevant threat is the lack of resources. For teachers, time generally tops the list of resources. Other resources might include access to materials and readings and training in specific areas of inquiry such as data collection and data analysis for classroom research purposes. There is compelling evidence in this study that lack of resources can lead to poor or shallow engagement in the new inquiry programme. The most prominent and recurrent example in this study was clearly the lack of time. One of the respondents to the school facilitator survey makes the following point:

Time is a valuable commodity and indeed is often described as being of the essence. One is left wondering how many layers, how many initiatives, how many projects, how many activities can be programmed into the world of work and the world of education before we learn to pause, reflect and to consolidate. (Anonymous, SF survey)

The way the inquiry programme was designed is that the meetings and other inquiry-related activities were on top of everything else the teachers did, rather than embedded in their routines. The meetings, for example, were held after school, the thing that discouraged many teachers. And despite the repeated arguments in the literature that teacher research activities can be interwoven into the typical working pattern of the teacher with not much extra work involved (see 2.7.3), this might not always be accurate. What is puzzling about such arguments is that the majority of are proposed by university-based academic researchers who might not necessarily be well informed about the realities and demands of accountability and performativity regimes (Ball, 2003) of modern days schooling. In order for it to be done appropriately and meaningfully, teacher inquiry requires time and effort. It is naïve and patronising to assume that the job of teaching can be turned into teaching and researching with few changes to what the teacher normally does in his or her classroom. One of the participants talked about spending her weekends reading on the topic of her inquiry and others expressed their frustration that no time is built in in the school timetable to do the inquiry activities.

Support and resources are essential factors in teacher research engagement and when they are lacking, teachers' likelihood to be able to engage in inquiry becomes thin as demonstrated in this study.

6.3.3 Practicality and follow-up

As discussed in Chapter three, one of the main appeals to teacher inquiry is that, unlike other types of educational research, it is directly grounded in the realities of practice and aims to make direct changes and improvements to this practice. Therefore, it is essential for those planning teacher inquiry programme that they consider embedding this type of professional development activity in teachers' work and ensure that there is a direct relevance of what inquiry tries to achieve to what teachers already do in their teaching. The findings of this study suggest that teachers' inquiry engagement significantly declined when they did not see the relevance and practicality of the inquiry work. As established throughout this study, teachers' professional lives are characterised by being busy and the tasks they engage in are complex. This allows for almost no space for any other

distractions; almost everything teachers do revolve around their classroom teaching so when a demanding task is seen as irrelevant or does not enhance and improve their teaching they naturally start to avoid it or become disaffected with it. Teacher 1, for example, maintains that ‘there are many other things they could be doing in school that would have a bigger impact and will be easier to control and easier to manage and get more input’ (T1, int, 26/6/2014). It is worth pointing out here that Teacher 1 comes to this conclusion towards the end of the academic year after he experimented with inquiry for almost a whole academic year. For him, and indeed others in the school, inquiry was not practical enough. What this means is that inquiry did not have much direct impact on how teachers taught and therefore interest in it declined sharply as teachers experimented with it more and more. Rather, and in retrospect, it was mainly viewed as a separate activity teachers were required to do. This is not to suggest there was no impact on practice whatsoever; in fact, I discussed in the previous chapter some examples of the impact on practice. However, the issue here is that teachers did not necessarily view inquiry as a vehicle to influence and change what they do in the classroom; it was a separate activity they had to do. To summarise, despite the claims in the literature about the integration and close impact of inquiry on practice discussed in Chapter 2, teachers are still likely to view inquiry in isolation, not as part of or closely linked to their practice (Hammersley, 2004).

Another threat to inquiry engagement is the lack of follow-up. This was something related to the design of the inquiry programme in this study. As explained in 4.2.3, each action research cycle lasted for one academic term. This proved to be challenging especially for the teachers running the inquiry groups as for them it was restarting what they already did each new term. Teacher 3 makes the following point about the follow-up aspect of the inquiry programme:

Each meeting that we’ve had, we’ve had a different group of staff, which is good in a way because we’ve been able to share what we’ve done and share the aims of what we’re doing with different groups of staff. But it just means that we haven’t really been able to actually follow anything up with each group. We haven’t been able to evaluate anything each group has done. I think that’s one of the drawbacks this year. (T3, int, 11/7/2014).

Teacher 7 makes a similar point as well:

So you don't ever have the chance to get your teeth into anything. So they will come back and say we tried this and then they will go to another and then we have a brand-new group to work with. So you don't have any time to gather any evidence really. (T3, int, 27/1/2014)

Another factor that caused the lack of follow-up was the fact that the group leaders across the school did not have the chance to meet, share what they did or build on what was done.

To summarise, both the lack of practicality and lack of follow-up can be regarded as serious threats to inquiry engagement. Evidence in this study suggests that teachers' interest in inquiry significantly decreased as a result of perceived lack of practicality and lack of follow-up.

6.3.4 Buy-in and ownership

Both buy-in and ownership are closely related and they proved to be of central importance in this study. What this study demonstrated is that when teachers are not given the opportunities to take ownership of their own inquiries, they are less likely to buy into this type of professional development. Throughout the academic year, teachers merely received information and instruction about what to do regarding inquiry. They were not, however, consulted about the shape or process of the programme. Neither were they in charge of identifying topics to investigate. This contributed to creating barriers to inquiry engagement. As Teacher 5 points out, 'we have been made to do this [action research]' (T5, int, 27/1/2014).

Performativity (see 2.2) has its impact on the teachers' ownership of their professional development activities and their buy-in to such activities. As discussed in types of engagement, (see 5.3), there was a culture of 'wanting to be told what to do'. This culture can be attributed to performativity. The deputy head explained that teachers had to be told what to do in order to 'raise standards' and improve the school performance. Despite the democratic and empowering nature of inquiry, teachers still wanted to be told what to do and that limited their ownership and buy-in to inquiry. It can be argued that performativity contributed to creating 'docile' teachers: those who want to play it safe, fear innovation, and as Teacher 4 put it, 'want to deliver my classes and go home'.

6.4 A framework for engaging teachers in inquiry

The following section proposes a framework for conceptualisation teacher inquiry, drawing on the findings of this study and the above discussion. This framework features considerations in teacher inquiry that are found to be essential when promoting teacher inquiry. The conceptualisation here is thought to be relevant to other contexts where there

is a desire to embark on inquiry as a form of professional development. In order to unpick the framework, I first discuss the main components of teacher inquiry in turn leading to an overall framework for conceptualising the primary considerations that are pertinent in the process of promoting an inquiry culture in schools. The final framework is going to incorporate the main components and considerations in a dynamic and holistic way.

There are four main considerations necessary in the proposed framework for understanding what matters in promoting and involving teachers in teacher inquiry as an approach for achieving professional development. These are micropolitics, resources, ownership and conceptualisation of inquiry. They are considered to be interconnected and do influence each other as I will discuss in this section. They are all components of a whole system that interplay and have an impact on each other. For example, the way the micropolitics of the school plays out in a teacher inquiry programme is likely to have an impact on teachers' ownership of the programme. Likewise, when the teachers have access to an outsider consultant to support the inquiry programme, this is likely to affect their conceptualisation of inquiry and its role in their practice.

6.4.1 *Micropolitics*

As demonstrated in earlier chapters, the study of how one school and its teachers respond to inquiry activities as part of a professional development programme needs to acknowledge that the wider national and international educational arenas influence directly or indirectly what happens in individual schools and what the individual teacher does. Teachers work within schools where wider national and international policies and changes do exert an influence on what the individual teacher himself or herself does in their schools. An example of this relates to the creation of academies in the UK and the rationales behind them, discussed in Chapter 1, where the idea was imported from the United States charter schools. Also, the currently popular Teach First Programme (DfE, 2015b) training around five thousand teachers in the United Kingdom is another import from abroad (Hill, 2012). This indicates that wider international educational policies and trends are relevant in understanding the local context where teachers work. Within the United Kingdom, teacher education policies have recently been described as varied and diverse with the three other United Kingdom nations, unlike England, heading towards a more research-based and research-engaged teaching profession (Beauchamp et al., 2015). What this suggests is that no school is an island in itself and when a school sets out to engage its teachers in an inquiry programme, there are a host of backstage factors that are

likely to influence directly or indirectly teachers' perceptions and engagement in this type of professional development. Figure 6.4 below shows the interlinked relationships from micro (the individual and the school) to the macro (the national and international). Although the macro level is likely to provide insights into the culture of the school or education system under study, this study focused on a different level for various reasons.

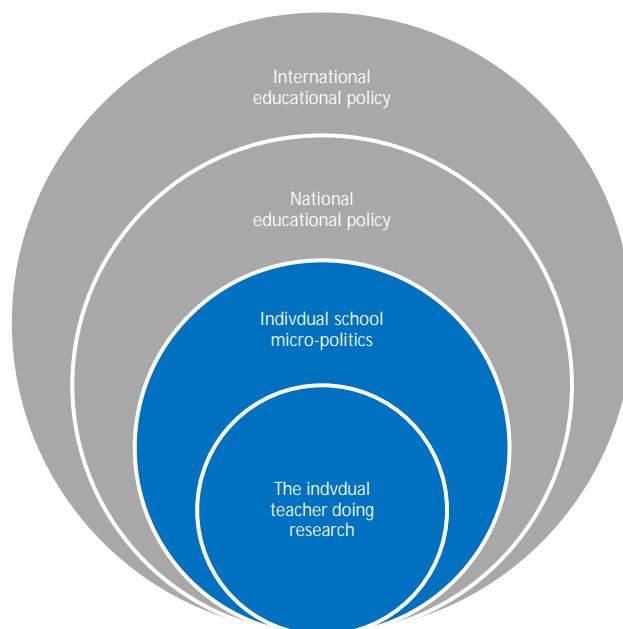


Figure 6. 4:Micro and macro levels of educational policy

Significant as it is, the macro level on its own is not enough to understand how teachers at the grassroots level deal with inquiry in their specific contexts. This is what the micro level (blue coloured in Figure 6.4) can better achieve. This study focuses on the micro level of facilitating and doing inquiry in school. This grassroots level is also significant in understanding how and why a school and its teachers do inquiry and what goes on in the process and what can be learnt from this experience and extrapolated to other contexts.

A very powerful dimension in this micro level is the focus on the intricate and nuanced of teachers' experience of research engagement, that is the *micropolitics of the school*. The findings of this study demonstrate the significance of school micropolitics in understanding the ways in which teachers decide to- or not to- engage in an inquiry proposed in their school and how they conceptualise and carry out such activity. The study of micropolitics is likely to reveal webs of interactions and relationships that are essential to understanding teacher inquiry engagement. In this study, various interests and power relationships were manifested and the interplay of which provided an opportunity to understand how the

participants in this study understood and engaged in the inquiry programme while juggling interests and power relationships in their school.

In examining the micropolitics of the school, other factors warrant further attention as outlined in Figure 6.5. To start with, interaction is of critical significance here. The way the school facilitator interacted with the teachers and the way the group coordinators also interacted with the group members shaped, unveiled and reinforced the existing power relationship in the school. The teachers dealt with the inquiry programme as another top-down task their school leadership team assigned to them: a task they *had to* do with no or little say from the part of the teachers on whether or not they themselves want to do this type of professional development or how best to do it. Rather they were expected to do it. Once engagement and enthusiasm about the inquiry started to wane, interaction with the teachers took another more authoritarian and assertive turn which laid bare the claim that the leadership team wanted to give teacher a voice and empower them.

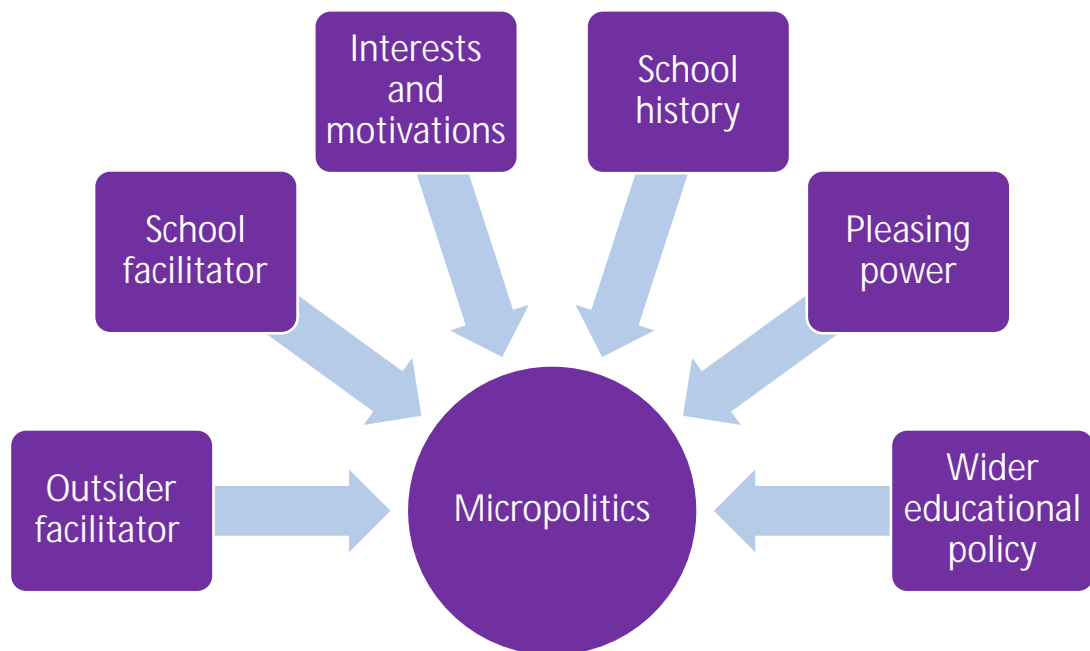


Figure 6. 5: Micropolitics as a main consideration in teacher inquiry

As well as interaction amongst the different participants in the school, there was the interaction with the outside facilitator, myself in this case, but in a very limited sense. This is because my role was limited to delivering two workshops at the beginning of the programme and afterwards I had my ‘researcher’s hat’ on until the end of the year, though that was not as simple to maintain as it might sound. This was meant to maximise the criticality and objectivity throughout fieldwork. For the participants at the beginning of

fieldwork, however, I was someone associated with their school's leadership team. Therefore, caution was exercised early in the study by the participants and it was only after building rapport and establishing trust and ensuring anonymity that I started to obtain more critical accounts from the teachers. Still, participants also, as outlined in 3.4.3 above, wanted to advance their own individual interests through their interaction with the outside facilitator as more interaction with the latter was seen by the school facilitator as interested and engaged in the inquiry programme. It is through such critical incidents that understanding of teachers' attitudes and inquiry engagement becomes illuminated and things are put into perspective.

Interests and motivations are also significant in examining the school micropolitics. The teachers in the current study had diverse interests in the engaging in the inquiry programme and hence their engagement varied. Some had a genuine desire to help their students, others were planning to take on more responsibilities and be promoted in the school and found this inquiry programme as a way of proving their worth to the leadership team. Some participants wanted to pursue a higher degree and saw the inquiry programme as an opportunity to start to explore the topic their enquiries in more depth, while others seemed to want to please power as such and avoid any ramifications as a result of opposing what the school is trying to achieve. The study of micropolitics in this sense facilitates exploring such intricate issues and therefore provide richer and more authentic accounts of teachers' experiences. My recurrent argument is that such understanding is invaluable in designing, facilitating and sustaining a school inquiry-based professional development programme.

The final point related to the study of school micropolitics concerns the history and culture of the school itself. For example, the school where this study is based had undergone considerable changes in order to reach where it was at the time of this study. At some point in its history, the school lost the trust of the community it served¹³. In order to turn around that situation, a pattern of work developed in which the schools developed a culture where teachers 'were told what to do'. In doing so, the school performance was thought to improve; however, for the many teachers who witnessed the transformation, the new culture of being told what to do was there to stay. As discussed earlier in this chapter and in previous chapters, this impacted in how teacher approached inquiry in this study: they wanted to be told what to do. They were not yet ready to innovate, or take risks in

¹³ This is evidenced by online forums

engaging this type of professional development due to the legacy of the school history. When they were not told what to do, confusion was apparent and in some cases resulted in a lack of engagement. In a nutshell, when studying teacher inquiry engagement in a newly proposed inquiry programme, it pays to explore the relevant history and development of the school whenever possible. This might reveal relevant facets and details that could be seen useful in understanding inquiry based professional development.

The points discussed above and represented in Figure 6.5, which are relevant to micropolitics, are by no means intended to be an exhaustive list of sub-themes in the study of a school micropolitics. These are simply points that were found to be significant in this study and other studies might find other points depending on the nature of the context itself.

6.4.2 Resources

In the area of teacher inquiry and as discussed in Chapter 2, one perplexing facet is the argument that teaching and researching can be combined into one activity and that the diligent teacher can do both with few changes to what they formerly did prior to inquiry engagement. The findings of this study suggest that such arguments are far-fetched and removed from the reality of school and classroom life. One of the main arguments I advance in this study is that researching one's teaching is not the same as teaching as the former requires a different set of skills and is conducted for various reasons and the aims of each activity are not and cannot be identical. However, the two activities converge as a primary target of teacher inquiry is the enhancement of the quality of teaching. Teacher inquiry as a distinct activity in which teachers engage, requires a considerable amount of resources in order to be meaningful and sustainable. There is evidence in this study to support the idea that in order to be useful to teachers and the school, teacher inquiry requires a set of resources that are necessary to maintain teachers' interest and engagement in this type of professional development. Figure 6.6 identifies the basic points related to resources in the context of teacher inquiry.

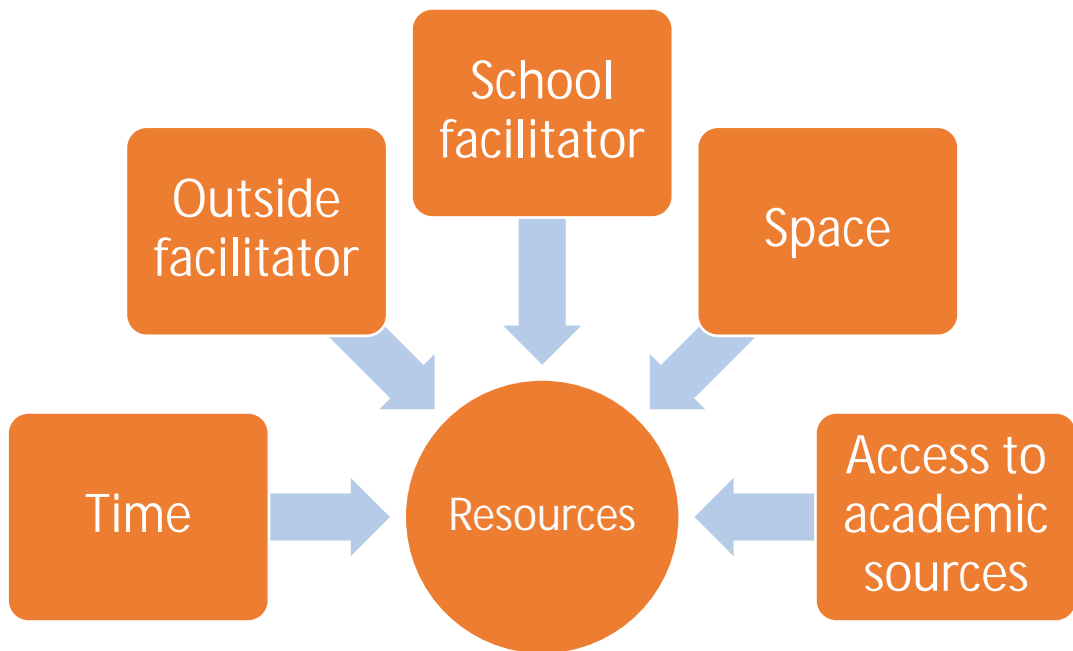


Figure 6. 6: Resources as a main consideration in teacher inquiry

Time can be considered as a top resource in such type of professional development programmes. To return to the point I made above, it is naïve to assume that investigating one’s teaching is not going to take much of teachers’ time. In fact, the one challenging factor that all the participants in this study, including the school facilitator, unanimously agreed upon was the lack of time. They did not have dedicated time to conduct the inquiry activities or to hold the meetings. Instead, they held the meetings after school. And as for the other inquiry activities such as reading about the topic, observing specific students and making notes, collecting information and trying to make sense of what the information means, all of that was expected to be conducted within the time the teachers already had for their normal teaching activities and the other school activities. This study confirmed that lack of specifically dedicated time for inquiry is one of the main reasons behind teachers’ lack of engagement. Once teachers are overwhelmed by the amount of work they have beside their main teaching activities, they tend to switch to what I termed in Chapter five as a ‘survival mode’ (Breux & Wong, 2003; Crawley, 2012, 2016; Wong & Wong, 2002, 2008) where engagement in activities such as inquiry becomes cursory and far from meaningful. One way around this could be building in time in the teachers’ timetable to accommodate some inquiry activities such as meetings. Another –costly- way is to release some of the teaching time to use that for the inquiry such as observing other group members and/or analysing collected information. This can be achieved by employing substitute teachers to help cover few lessons while teachers carry out essential inquiry activities as (Flessner & Stuckey, 2014) suggest. If a school is serious about introducing

inquiry, then time needs to be on the top of the resources list. The amount of time required might vary depending on the availability and affordance of time in the school and then on how the time is going to be used. Starting small with two to three hours every fortnight might give practitioners within the school a good idea about what is needed. Finally, it needs to be remembered that time alone cannot guarantee successful inquiry engagement; it is rather how the time is allocated and used what matters as indicated by (Flessner & Stuckey, 2014).

Space also proved to be a significant resource in inquiry-based professional development. The first aspect of space is the physical environment of the school and how much it is conducive to teacher collaboration and opening up of their work to others. In this study, the environment in the school was characterised as limiting and teachers' contact and interactions with each other were limited by this environment. For a period of time during the fieldwork, the teachers did not have a central staffroom or a central area where they could meet and discuss their inquiry work in a relaxed, non-threatening context such as that associated with the staffroom conversations. Some teachers, such as Teacher 1, tended to stay in their classes and had little to no contact with other teachers throughout the whole school day because of the lack of space and the ongoing building work as explained in Chapter five. This meant that some of the necessary informal conversations about the inquiry work were lacking- if not non-existent. Others had to move classes every few weeks and they did not feel settled. Although the physical space is usually difficult to alter to make it more conducive to teacher collaboration and inquiry engagement, there are small things that a school can do to make the space more conducive to teacher research engagement. One way is through creating a 'teacher inquiry corner' in the school library or the staffroom (something that was planned in the school while the building work was still ongoing). Such a corner could be provided with relevant print resources and any other resources that are deemed useful for the teachers' inquiry work. Space can also be symbolic, meaning that teachers have discretion and professional judgment in matters related to their practice. Having this is necessary to ensure teacher ownership of their professional development (see below).

Teachers also need access to academic and professional resources to read about their topics and get more ideas and guidance on how to conduct their inquiry and what interventions to try in their classes. There is typically a cost associated with such access and therefore schools wishing to engage their teachers in such type of professional development need to

consider the provision of such materials. In this study, the teachers had access to academic resources and databases and this was a positive factor in their inquiry engagement as outlined in the previous chapter.

Finally, this study found that an outside facilitator, or a critical friend, is one valuable investment that the school can make in facilitating inquiry-based professional development. The participants in this study agreed that they wished to have more structured support and advice from a professional educational researcher. Throughout the data collection period, they kept referring to the introductory workshops as these gave them a reference point on how to go about investigating their practice. As discussed in the point above about micropolitics, there are considerations to be made here too. The teachers might view the outside facilitator as another way of enforcing hierarchy and an extension to the leadership team's own agenda rather than the teachers'. This is particularly significant where there are tensions and competing interests within the schools. Interaction with the outside facilitator needs to be facilitating and engaging in the teachers' work while at the same time maintain criticality and rigour in the project. Clear agendas –the teachers', the school's, the outside facilitator's- need to be established, discussed and agreed early in the programme.

6.4.3 Ownership

Ownership is widely regarded as a significant aspect of any teacher professional development activity (Castle et al., 2006; Eilertsen et al., 2008; Flessner & Stuckey, 2014; Loucks-Horsley, 2010; Zeichner, 2003). In particular, and as (Zeichner, 2003, p. 318) puts it, 'the ownership of the research by teachers seems to be essential to teacher research which makes a difference for teachers and their students'. This study provided an in-depth understanding of how a lack of ownership affects teacher inquiry engagement. Figure 6.7 below outlines the main issues associated with teacher ownership of the inquiry initiative as a main consideration in teacher inquiry projects.

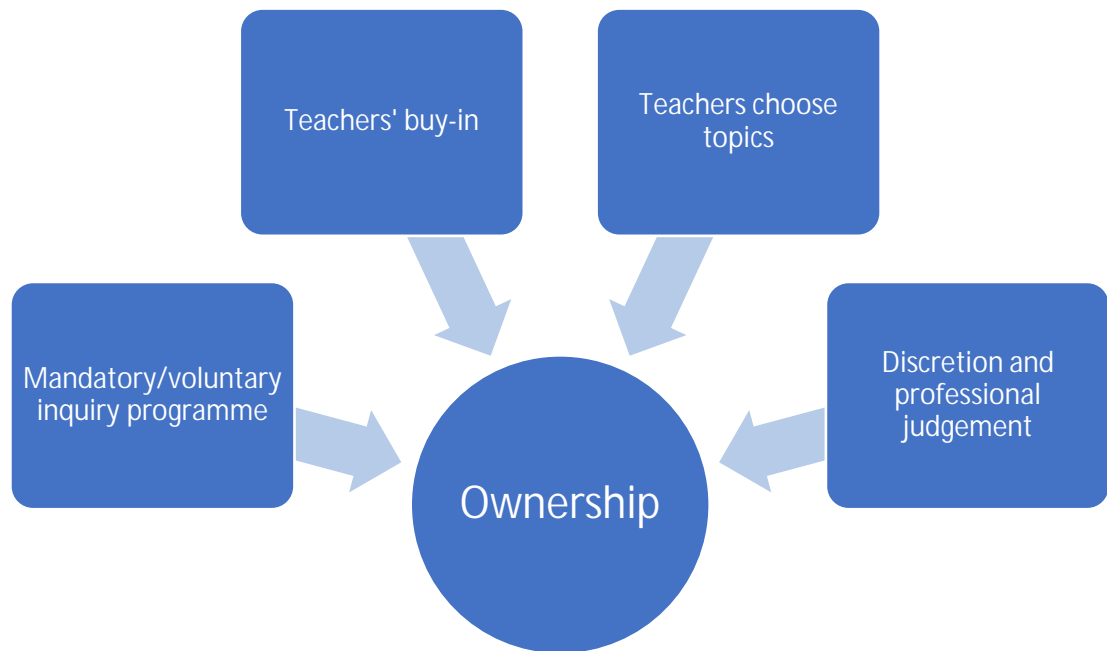


Figure 6. 7: Ownership as a main consideration in teacher inquiry

As noted in 4.2 above, the inquiry programme in this study was a school-wide activity mandated on all teachers irrespective of their interest or expertise in this type of professional development. This was one of the most challenging decisions in the programme. From the perspective of the school facilitator, she was unwilling to introduce a CPD activity only for some or on an opt-in basis. The risk with this was that teachers might not take the programme seriously if it were offered as an optional activity. However, the findings of this study indicate that the dangers of enforcing inquiry on teachers are greater than not enforcing it. When mandated, teachers are likely to start viewing inquiry as any other school task, one they are required to do, irrespective if they genuinely want to engage in this type of professional development or not, rather than they want to do. Another issue relates to the inherent contradiction of enforcing an activity which is supposed to be democratic and empowering. Once enforced, it loses these core characteristics and runs the risk of being superficial or done just because teachers have no other option- see the types of engagement identified in this study in 5.3.1 above. One phenomenon that emerged as the participants in this study talked - and complained - about the mandatory nature of the programme is that they argued that the programme should be carried out by a 'core group' comprised of teachers who are supposedly dedicated and passionate about doing research about their teaching. The concept of the core group remained mysterious throughout the fieldwork as none of the teachers expected himself or herself to be in that group. Teacher 1, for example, argued that

it [the inquiry initiative] would probably have to be done on a smaller scale, but with a really core group of dedicated people that definitely want to do it. Now unfortunately because some people are seeing this as demanding the time, a lot of the time the mindset becomes I'm only going to do it if I'm getting paid for it as well. If you keep saying 'yes' to everything, you'll find out that you're not doing your original job [teaching] properly anymore. So maybe a little bit of funding would help' (T1, int, 27/02/2014)

As the inquiry programme progressed, it became apparent that the notion of the core group was an attempt to escape a mandated task. The level of lack of ownership exhibited in this extract is also astonishing: being paid to do a CPD activity. Teacher 4 also reiterates the same idea in a different way: 'I just want to do the work and go home' (Teacher 4, int, 27/02/2014). What these two extracts suggest is a high level of being disenfranchised with a supposedly developing and enriching professional activity. This can be largely attributed to lack of ownership of the inquiry programme by teachers themselves.

Related to the mandatory nature of the programme is teachers' buy-in to the programme. Since an early stage of the inquiry programme, teachers felt a lack of control or ownership of the programme so buy-in was hard to achieve. In the school facilitator's words, she aimed to use 'gentle cajoling' to get teachers to buy-in to the programme. This included promising to embed successful strategies across the school and to change certain aspects of teaching and learning according to their inquiry outcomes. Another factor was that the majority of each group members changed their group every term. What this meant for those teachers moving groups is that they did not feel that they belonged to a specific group and this resulted in a lack of buy-in and their engagement was 'very shallow; there was not much meat to it' as one participant put it. One implication of this discussion is that schools planning to introduce inquiry to their teachers need to consider appropriate ways in their contexts to maximise genuine buy-in by teachers. Such ways vary from context to context but some general ideas might include appropriate professional rewards and acknowledgment from the school that teachers' work is valued and supported by the school. Involving teachers in planning and shaping their inquiry work is also equally significant to achieve ownership and buy-in.

Other aspects of ownership relate to how much teachers can exercise discretion and professional judgment and to what extent they have a say in the design and conduct of the inquiry programme. In this study, participants had little to no input in the design or the way the inquiry programme to be conducted and this impacted on their engagement in the programme. One participant strongly expresses her frustration with this aspect saying that:

Someone somewhere has got a lot of ideas but it's like: do this, do this, do this, and there's so many of them that you can never do anything in enough details. You're trying to juggle too many balls and at the end of the day, you can't keep that going for long. With this action research, I feel the engagement is not genuine because teachers are doing it because they have been told to. If people are not buying into this initiative, there is going to be no real progress, there is going to be no real evidence that you can use at the end of the day. (T5, int, 17/1/2014)

The topics of inquiry were also decided without any input from the teachers. Although the topics were chosen in line with the Ofsted recommendations in an attempt to make the inquiry programme more relevant, not consulting them in this area or on how the programme to be structured did fire back in terms of engagement and level of interest. One way that could have improved ownership and buy-in was to include teachers in deciding what topics to investigate and in what ways.

6.4.4 Conceptualising inquiry

The final consideration in introducing and facilitating inquiry-based professional development for teachers can be considered one of the most contentious areas not only in teacher research but also in educational research as a whole. Figure 6.8 outlines some points related to conceptualisation of inquiry which will be discussed here. The debate about what educational research really is and what purpose it should serve is still, and will continue to be, debated and contested (Berliner, 2002; Biesta, 2007; Furlong, 2004; Hammersley, 2006; Hargreaves, 1999b; McIntyre, 2005). Similarly, and as outlined in Chapter 3, there is no universal agreement on what constitutes teacher research as some consider it as a type of or extension to reflective practice (Leitch & Day, 2000; McIntosh, 2010), others emphasise the deliberate change in practice (Elliott, 1991; McNiff & Whitehead, 2002b), while another group insist that in order to be considered research *per se*, it must follow a similar pattern as *academic* research such as the need to be made public (Borg, 2010a; Stenhouse, 1975). However, and despite the divergence in opinions regarding what teacher research is, it is worthwhile, as the findings of this study suggest, to start a teacher inquiry programme with exploring teachers' understanding of teacher research is.

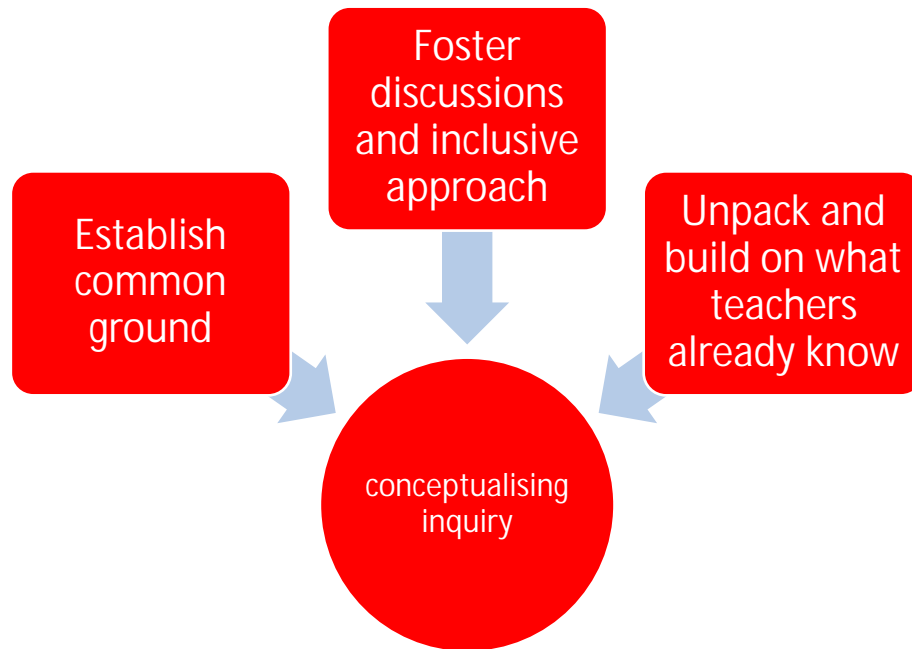


Figure 6. 8: Conceptualisation of inquiry as a main consideration in teacher inquiry

As outlined in Chapter 2, teachers are likely to have diverse understandings of teacher research. Positivists notions of research, for example, are common among teachers in some circles. Even if understandings and conceptions of research are explored, this does not mean that differences amongst teachers are ironed out and that only one version of research is right. The next step is to try and establish a common ground, despite the potential plurality of views and understandings, for what teacher research is and what teachers aim to achieve through engagement in this activity in their own context. Without this, an inquiry programme runs the risk of being confusing, inconsistent and incoherent. In this study, and as demonstrated above, group members started to notice differences in approaching inquiry when they moved to new groups. For some teacher and especially novice teachers with little to not much exposure to educational research, and with no opportunity to explore what research is, this was one factor behind their lack of engagement in this type of professional development.

6.4.5 Summary of the framework of engaging teachers in inquiry

Figure 6.9 is used to bring together all the elements of the inquiry engagement framework. I explain this figure here as a way of summarising the inquiry engagement framework.

In this framework, I use the elements I discussed above in 6.4.1 through 6.4.4. The framework is designed with the different elements being interacting and part of a whole

system. This is indicated by the use of the green thick arrows. The rationale behind these arrows is that the main considerations do influence each other and they, therefore, should not be viewed as individual entities.

Each element in the framework is represented in a different colour to correspond with the one used above to discuss these elements. The grey ovals represent the main considerations in the framework. The coloured ovals are the points and considerations related to the main concepts in the grey ovals. Therefore, the coloured ovals are linked to the main grey ovals with one-sided dotted arrow. The interconnectedness of these sub-points is significant. For example, in micropolitics, the interactions between the teachers and the school facilitator (headteacher, deputy head, or the senior leadership team) on the one hand and their interactions with the outside facilitator can be linked together within the framework of the whole inquiry programme in terms of power relationships, interests and agendas. The main elements of the framework are linked with arrows to indicate that they are interconnected as well.

Overall, the figure is intended to make the following points. First, it shows that engaging teachers in inquiry as a form of professional development is anything but a simple matter. Indeed, those planning to initiate and foster an inquiry culture in their school need to bear in mind that there is a considerable amount of effort, thought and preparation required to be invested in this. This is comparable to a seasoned farmer who ensures that the soil is ready prior to planting the crops. The seeds are unlikely to germinate and grow if certain conditions such as temperature and humidity are not met. In a similar vein, the seeds of inquiry are unlikely to grow or flourish if the culture of the school is hostile to this type of professional development. As the findings of this study testify, it is counterproductive to suddenly start an inquiry programme in school without guaranteeing that the general culture within the school is likely to be receptive to inquiry as a form of professional development. This can be achieved by genuinely and actively involving the teachers in particular in the decision-making process from the beginning. After all, inquiry is an activity that is aimed to improve the quality of teacher's work so it is illogical not to involve them. In doing so, teachers are more likely to take ownership of the inquiry. As Figure 6.9 shows, taking ownership is a main consideration in understanding and engaging teachers in inquiry. It is achieved when teachers know the type of professional development they are to be involved in and the rationale behind it. This maximises the chances of their buy-in and their purposeful engagement thereafter (see 5.3.1.).

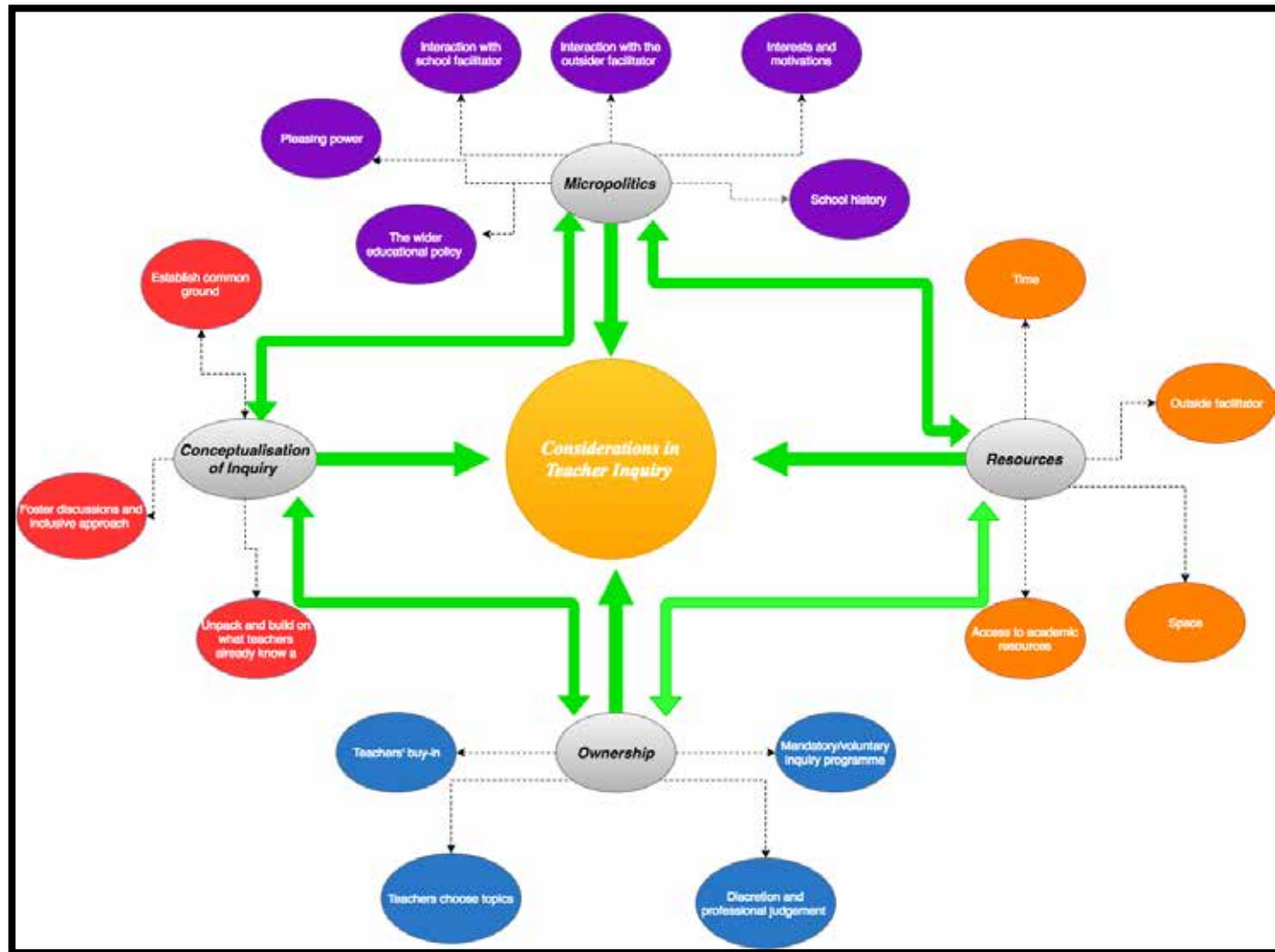


Figure 6. 9: A Framework for Conceptualising Teacher Inquiry Engagement

Another significant point in Figure 6.9 is related to the role of the school facilitator. A considerable amount of significance is placed on the school facilitator (the deputy head in this study) and therefore the way he or she promotes inquiry in the school and the way he or she interacts with the teachers matters for inquiry engagement in the school and eventually effective inquiry work. As the findings of this study reveal, micropolitical aspects in the school, such as interests and conflicts need to be considered. Left unaddressed and unacknowledged, such aspects might compile to result in a situation where teachers perceive this supposedly effective professional development activities as a burden, another soulless initiative or a tick-box activity. As the findings in this study suggest, inquiry requires transparency and genuine collegial collaboration led and facilitated by an enthusiastic school facilitator. The school facilitator also needs to consider the availability of resources to start an inquiry culture in the school. Evidence in this study reaffirms that the lack of resources is likely to lead to a lack of engagement. Therefore, it is essential that school facilitators consider the affordability and availability of the resources available for inquiry initiatives.

The final point about Figure 6.9 that I want to discuss here- and the one that was strikingly significant in this study- is the role of understanding inquiry and its role in teaching. A lot of the lack of engagement in this particular study could be attributed to diverse notions of inquiry which, when left unexplored, led to confusion and weakened the prospect of purposeful inquiry engagement. Teachers from different subjects and with different teaching experiences are better off if they are given the opportunity to unpack their understandings of inquiry which might be acquired from previous inquiry work, study programmes or even folktales related to what constitutes inquiry. The natural next step is to engage in a school-wide discussion that focuses on exploring the diversity of understanding and establishing common ground that covers the basics. Such basics might include what is to be achieved as a result of the inquiry and how the inquiry work should be carried out in school. This establishing of common ground is best served by a combination of what teachers already know and what is established in the teacher inquiry literature.

6.5 Implications for school culture research

Two aspects of culture were relevant in this study: macro and micro politics of the school. The macropolitical aspects of school relate in particular to performativity which has been

conceptualised as the systems and regimes designed and put in place to measure performance and productivity (Ball, 2000, 2003, 2012a; Lofthouse & Thomas, 2017). In practical terms, performativity is maintained through the use 'databases, appraisal meetings, annual reviews, report writing, quality assurance visits, the regular publication of results, inspections and peer reviews' (Ball, 2017, p. 58). Performativity is considered to have a negative impact on teachers' autonomy and what it means to be a professional teacher. Indeed Ball (2003, 2017) goes as far as to suggest that it creates a culture of terror. This study was conducted in a context in which performativity was embedded in the culture of the school. The study in this sense revealed some negative effects of performativity on teachers' engagement in action research as model of CPD. A main empirical theme was that there was an ongoing expectation of being told what to do with diminished sense of professional autonomy and ownership of one's own professional development. Another negative side of performativity on teachers' engagement in action research was the reluctance of some participants to take part in the action research activities as long as these were not directly related to their school performance management system. What this indicated was a sense of meeting the demands and ticking the boxes set by those higher up in the hierarchy. One main implication here is that more evidence is required to investigate and establish the impact of performativity on teachers' engagement in CPD and on their identity as professional teachers.

The other aspect of culture of central significance in the current study was the micropolitics of the school: the ways in which teachers navigated power and interests as part of their action research work. Jostling power and pursuing own interests are some of the aspects of micropolitics investigated in this study. Ball (1987); Blase (1991a); Hoyle (1982) highlight the significance of micropolitics in understanding life in school. What this study showed was that micropolitics has a significant impact on the way teachers engage in action research as an inquiry-based CPD. The current study, therefore, belongs to a small minority of studies investigating action research and micropolitics (Academic Search Complete only returned: Eilertsen et al., 2008; Lam & Kwong, 2012 using "action research" and "micropolitics" in abstract). In this sense, more research into the impact of micropolitics in teachers' CPD engagement is needed. Though a less trodden path in the CPD literature, such research is likely to pave the way into understanding how contextual factors and various ways of communication and hierarchies interplay and shape the diverse ways in which teachers approach their CPD.

6.6 Implications for CPD

Inquiry-based professional development represented by action research in this study has both potential strengths and weaknesses. As outlined in Chapter 2 (2.4.1, 2.4.2), Bolam (2000); Day (1999a) argue that, through CPD, teachers attempt to improve the learning experience of some of their students. This was the case in the study in the sense that participants aimed to solve problems related to their students' learning such as engagement in learning in general, literacy and poor performance. The inquiry-based CPD experimented with in this study provided the participants with a framework to understand their inquiry focus and therefore attempt to improve their practice accordingly. This is also consistent with the principles of action research as an approach to inquiry-based professional development. For example, through the action research programme, one of the participants helped her students who were having reading difficulties. Another introduced peer assessment in order to address some behavioural issues in his class. A third helped a weaker student to improve her achievements to double the predicted outcome. This indicates that action research as a form of CPD can potentially enhance the learning experience of students, as claimed in the literature (Burns, 2010; Elliott, 1991; Stringer, 2007, 2013).

Most of the participants also reported engagement with the published literature as part of their action research projects in order to begin to investigate answers to puzzling questions in their teaching. This, for them, was another positive aspect of action research. Action research also facilitated new ways of working together within the school that would not have been possible otherwise. As outlined in Chapter four, teachers in this study worked within action research groups and in each group, teachers worked collaboratively on a specific action research project to try to change an aspect of their practice related to the project focus. This supports the view put forward by numerous commentators in the literature discussed in Chapter two (see for example: Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Pine, 2009; Sagor, 2005; Zeichner, 2003) that action research can initiate and promote a collaborative approach to CPD in school.

On the other hand, some aspects of action research had a less favourable impact on some of the participants. As indicated in 5.3.1, there were variations in the participants' engagement in this type of CPD, with some who were less convinced of the value of action research as a model of CPD and who felt overwhelmed by the demands on them to carry

out action research. Recent reports on teachers' burnout and the anticipation of a sizable percentage of working teachers leaving the profession (see for example: Lightfoot, 2016; Wiggins, 2016) bring a significant perspective to teachers' engagement in a demanding type of CPD such as action research. Seen in the context of performativity and the rhetoric of raising standards (see Chapter 2), it becomes obvious why some participants felt unable to cope with the demands of such types of action research. This implies that in contexts where action research is seen as an appropriate form of professional development, issues relating to teachers' workload, their interests and autonomy, their skills and expertise should be carefully considered. Action research can potentially be a rewarding model of CPD for both the individual teacher and the school, if and when the right conditions are created for it. Some of these conditions were identified in this study (see 5.5) and other conditions might be identified elsewhere.

To conclude, school culture factors such as those identified in Chapter 2 (macro and micropolitics) are likely to play a key role in teachers' active engagement in action research as a type of CPD. If action research is intended to be a sustainable model of school collaborative CPD, then school leaders and those involved in promoting action research must consider the aspects of the internal and external school culture and ascertain the likely impact of those of teachers' action research engagement.

6.7 A School Checklist

The practical and takeaway message from the framework outlined in Figure 6.9 and discussed above is presented here in the form of a checklist that is relevant to school facilitators, practitioners and others wishing to engage in or start inquiry activities in schools. In constructing the checklist, the central considerations presented above and their constituent elements are transformed here into simple questions that are thought to be necessary to ensure the school builds to build a culture and environment conducive to purposeful inquiry engagement. Table 6.1 presents the checklist in the form of questions about the four main considerations of inquiry engagement: micropolitics, resources, ownership and understanding inquiry. It is expected that the checklist is likely to foster a strong inquiry foundation where roles are defined and the mode of work is discussed and agreed. Teachers in this sense are more apt to understand and value the role of inquiry in their professional practice.

| <i>Main consideration</i> | <i>Questions</i> | <i>Yes /No/Ongoing</i> | <i>Issues</i> |
|---|--|----------------------------|---------------|
| <i>Interpersonal Issues (micropolitics)</i> | 1. Have roles and expectations been discussed and agreed? | | |
| | 2. Have expected outcomes been explored? | | |
| | 3. Are the motivations and interests of those involved clear? | | |
| | 4. Are teachers likely to be on board? | | |
| | 5. Can potential conflicts because of the inquiry work be avoided? | | |
| <i>Resources</i> | 6. Is there available time to conduct the inquiry-related activities? | | |
| | 7. Can time needed for inquiry be built into the school timetable? | | |
| | 8. Can an outside facilitator be recruited? | | |
| | 9. Is there space for the school such as a library or staffroom corner that can be utilised for inquiry? | | |
| | 10. Are teachers going to be provided with space and support to engage in inquiry? | | |
| | 11. Has access to published and online materials been provided? | | |
| <i>Ownership</i> | 12. Is the inquiry programme going to be on a voluntary or mandatory basis? | | |
| | 13. Have teachers negotiated and agreed on the voluntary/mandatory basis? | | |
| | 14. Are teachers given the chance to exercise discretion and professional judgement in their inquiry work? | | |

| | | | |
|------------------------------|---|--|--|
| | 15. Are teachers involved in selecting the inquiry topics? | | |
| | 16. Are there strategies in place to maximise buy-in and project sustainability? | | |
| <i>Understanding inquiry</i> | 17. Have teachers' understandings of inquiry been unpacked and explored? | | |
| | 18. Is common understanding of the basics of inquiry and how to conduct it possible to reach? | | |
| | 19. Are discussions and inclusive approaches fostered in the inquiry programme? | | |
| | 20. Have effective and clear ways of communication been discussed and agreed? | | |

Table 6. 1: checklist of main considerations in engaging teachers in inquiry

6.8 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I provided a critical assessment of the inquiry programme. This was achieved through focusing on teachers' experiences and learning in the inquiry programme. Two key aspects were discussed in this regards: collaboration and working with at-risk students. Afterwards, and based on the findings in chapters five and six, I explored the threats to inquiry engagement and focused on how these threats played out in the context of this study. Following that, I introduced and explained a theoretical framework for understanding teacher inquiry engagement. The framework is comprised of various considerations: micropolitics, resources ownership and conceptualising inquiry. Each of these considerations was explored and discussed separately and then an overall framework combining these considerations was offered and justified. The final part of the chapter was dedicated to providing a practical 'checklist' for practitioners, researchers and those involved in facilitating inquiry in schools. The checklist is derived from the framework and contains questions about each aspect of the framework. The purpose of the checklist is to offer a way to consider major issues related to inquiry engagement and, by doing so, maximise more purposeful engagement by teachers.

The next chapter briefly summarises the main contributions of this study and offers some indications of future research.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I start with a reminder of the research questions and a summary of how they were answered. Afterwards, I highlight and outline the contributions of this study. This is going to be achieved through discussing (1) types of inquiry engagement, (2) a framework for understanding factors and considerations in implementing a teacher inquiry programme, (3) employing a micropolitical perspective to investigate inquiry engagement and (4) a school-friendly checklist for starting an inquiry culture. I then consider the limitations of this study, the direction of future studies and final reflections on this research journey.

7.2 Reviewing the Research Questions

Conceptual and theoretical threads were discussed in the literature review part of this study. These threads are focused on school culture (macro and micropolitics of the school) and CPD (teachers' beliefs and action research). In the literature review, two aspects of school culture were outlined: macro and micropolitical of the school. The former relates to system-wide issues such as performativity. The latter is concerned with issues such as power, change, conflict and interests within the school. Of particular interest in this study was the theoretical and empirical insights offered through focusing on the micropolitics of the school. The micropolitical perspective facilitated looking at participants' interactions and communications and other aspects of their work to uncover latent factors that contributed to their engagement or lack of it in the newly introduced inquiry programme.

With the CPD theme, the definition of this theoretical strand was explored and two main approaches were outlined. These were deficit and growth CPD. The purpose of this conceptualisation was to locate the specific CPD activity that is the focus of the current study and present it within the relevant conceptual background. It was established then that inquiry-based professional development belongs to growth CPD as it aims to develop and enhance teachers' knowledge and skills rather than rectify weaknesses in their practice. Action research was then discussed as one of the main approaches within the inquiry-based professional development tradition and it was distinguished from other types of

practitioner and teacher research. The relevant history of action research, along with the main contributions of the founding fathers and main theorists and the main characteristics of action research, was discussed. Following that, 'teachers' beliefs' as a main concept and a significant unit of analysis to be employed in investigating how teachers make sense of their various activities was explored. It was established that focusing on beliefs would help us understand how teachers respond to the role of being researchers of their own practice and would explain what would assist them engage in inquiry and what would not. The final main concept within CPD that I discussed in the literature was inquiry. Here, I highlighted its central tenets and influential scholars who helped shape the teacher inquiry we have today.

A particular focus of the study was exploring the various ways through which teachers engage in inquiry through examining their inquiry work in the context of a newly introduced school-mandated action research programme. To achieve this, rich data was collected throughout one academic year to understand how teachers conceptualised inquiry, how they conducted it and what critical factors shaped their experience of understanding and doing this type of professional development. Accordingly, the study set out to answer three main research questions related to teachers' beliefs about inquiry, outcomes of carrying out inquiry projects and contextual factors that impact on teacher inquiry engagement. The findings for the research questions based on these areas are summarised below.

7.2.1 RQ 1: To what extent and how do teacher's beliefs and perceptions about inquiry change after engaging in a school-supported inquiry project?

Through categorising teachers' beliefs about inquiry into two categories of 'ideal' and 'real' teacher, it was possible to understand some contradictions identified in the data related to teachers' beliefs about inquiry. The 'ideal' teacher believes that inquiry is an effective type of professional development and he/she aspires to engage in this type of professional development. He/she believes that integrating an inquiry aspect into their teaching will ultimately improve it. Overall, the 'ideal' teacher exhibits a positive attitude towards inquiry. However, the 'real' teacher is more practical and his/her beliefs and cognition towards inquiry differ markedly from that of the ideal teacher's. The 'real' teacher tried to fit inquiry within a busy schedule; therefore, it sometimes was overwhelming. Examining the real teachers' engagement and beliefs about inquiry also revealed a general lack of expertise in doing inquiry about various areas of teaching and

learning overall. Another significant finding here is that teachers' beliefs underwent some change in the course of the first year of the inquiry programme. This was captured in Figure 6.1 which showed that at different stages of the inquiry programme, teachers had different reactions, attitudes and beliefs about the inquiry programme. Knowing what these beliefs and attitudes were facilitated thinking about the factors that led to these beliefs. Here, it was found out that the main factors that impacted on teachers' beliefs were the participatory workshops, time, communication, power relationships and understanding of inquiry. One practical implication of identifying the critical factors behind teachers' beliefs about inquiry engagement is for those facilitating inquiry to consider such factors in their own contexts and how these factors might affect teacher in other contexts.

7.2.2 RQ 2: What do teachers perceive to be the outcomes of carrying out their own inquiry projects?

In examining the outcomes of research engagement, three categories were identified: outcomes related to students, school and the individual teacher. In the first category about students, there were some outcomes related to the quality of learning of students. Some students had various types of challenges such as literacy problems, lack of confidence, lack of engagement among others. The teachers participating in inquiry tried to help their students overcome such challenges. One of the immediate outcomes of inquiry engagement was to improve the learning opportunities for students who were considered 'at risk'. Through the framework of the inquiry project, participating teachers were able to dedicate time and effort to understand and help some of their 'at risk' students. It was suggested that inquiry had a moral and social aspect in the way that is focused its outcomes on improving students' learning experiences.

The second type of outcomes related to the school itself. It was found out that despite the varying levels of inquiry engagement, teachers wanted to influence school policy related to their own inquiry focus. This appeared to be significant to them. It can also be seen from a micropolitical perspective with the individual teachers seeing the inquiry as an opportunity to advance their career and achieve their interest in the school. The final outcome related to the individual teacher himself/herself. Here some of the participants wanted to engage in inquiry as a way to pilot their ideas and projects for higher degrees of study. Inquiry engagement here was more purposeful and meaningful as the teachers actually wanted to test ideas and build a foundation for further study.

7.2.3 RQ 3: What aspects of context affect teachers' active engagement in inquiry? How?

The contextual conditions were found to be significant in determining teachers' active engagement in inquiry. The first aspect was the physical environment of the school itself. Teachers in this study faced challenges with the physical environment and layout of the school as I showed in 5.5.1. What this meant for the inquiry programme was that there were fewer opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and less time to carry out the inquiry activities. One implication of this finding is for school administrators to consider the potential impact of the school environment on teachers' inquiry engagement, especially in the crucial first year of an inquiry programme. Secondly, having a conceptual understanding of inquiry was another contextual factor that determined the levels and types of inquiry engagement. Various understandings and interpretations of inquiry arose in this study and this negatively impacted on teachers' inquiry engagement. Due to the structure of the inquiry programme, teachers had to move to other inquiry groups and, once this happened, the multiple understandings of inquiry caused confusion and in some cases withdrawal and lack of inquiry engagement. The third key contextual factor was communication. Ineffective communication that was documented in this study led to a further lack of inquiry engagement. Facilitators and administrators need to consider how to effectively maintain ways of communication within and across the inquiry teams in order to ensure that members are aware of the developments and are able to act accordingly. Limited and normally one-directional communication in this study proved detrimental to purposeful and genuine engagement in inquiry. The final contextual aspect is associated with the role of micropolitics of the school. Micropolitics, by its omnipresence in school life, had a significant role in shaping teachers' inquiry engagement. Among others, interests and power, determine a great deal of the ways in which people work and interact within a professional context. The agendas and interests of different participants, when it came to the inquiry programme, were significant in understanding how they engaged in inquiry. For example, the deputy head saw in the inquiry initiative a way to raise the profile of the school. She claimed that one of the purposes of introducing inquiry was to empower teachers and involve them in shaping the school policy. However, by employing a micropolitical lens it was possible to ascertain that behind that façade, hierarchal power relationships permeated and exercised in the inquiry programme. Teachers were forced to do the inquiry activities and various managerial approaches were followed to make teachers do inquiry. An implication of the findings related to micropolitics is that aspects

of micropolitical life in the school need to be acknowledged and reflected upon and a genuine sharing and collaborative culture need to be fostered if inquiry facilitators wish to encourage more purposeful inquiry engagement.

7.3 The Contributions of this study

As a result of carrying out this study, four contributions are put forward. These are summarised in turn below.

7.3.1 Types of teacher research engagement

In Chapter 5 (5.3.1), five types of inquiry engagement were identified: purposeful, sceptical, strategic, 'sailing with the tide' and coasting engagements. Empirical evidence was provided to support and explain this typology. These types of inquiry engagement constitute a way of thinking about the diverse approaches and orientations teachers are likely to have when tasked with researching their practice or indeed when presented with new types of professional development activities. This way of thinking about inquiry engagement is likely to help us understand the various ways in which teachers conceptualise and engage in inquiry. It also acknowledges that it is impractical to think about teacher engagement in research in a simplistic dualistic way: whether or not teachers engage in inquiry. Working within complex environments, teachers' inquiry engagement is subject to and influenced by a multitude of factors. Some of the factors discussed in this study are the micropolitics of the school, the communications amongst and across different inquiry groups and the ways in which teachers and those involved understand inquiry. Using the various types of the proposed inquiry engagement is also likely to be the first step towards identifying and understanding these factors and orientations that teachers might have when they integrate an inquiry perspective into their teaching. To summarise, the types of inquiry engagement outlined in this study represent a rejection of shallow understanding of how teachers deal with and respond to the role of being researchers of their own practice and an embracement of plurality and complexity of teachers' work.

7.3.2 A framework for conceptualising teacher inquiry engagement

Based on findings and results in this study, a framework for engaging teachers in inquiry was outlined and discussed in Chapter 6. The framework features the main considerations that are key to starting, promoting and sustaining a healthy inquiry culture within schools.

These considerations are micropolitics, resources, ownership and conceptualisation of inquiry. I argued that these considerations are interrelated and are likely to influence each other. At the heart of this framework is an effort to bring together, based on empirical evidence, critical factors that need to be considered when starting an inquiry culture in a school. Despite the fact that these considerations emerged empirically from within one school, they are likely to be relevant or have resonance with other schools with similar backgrounds.

7.3.3 School-friendly checklist

The framework discussed above was also offered in a different format aimed at schools, facilitators and practitioners. The four primary considerations and their sub-categories were transformed into a practical checklist format featuring questions about each consideration. These questions are expected to aid school, facilitators and practitioners in considering and salient issues related to teacher inquiry and making informed decisions about such matters. In the micropolitics category, for example, some of the questions ask about negotiating roles and expectations, teachers' buy-in and avoiding conflict. If such issues are considered and reflected upon throughout the inquiry process, it is expected that a healthy and sustainable inquiry culture will be fostered.

7.3.4 Employing a micropolitical perspective to investigate teacher inquiry engagement

The final contribution is both methodological and theoretical in nature. In particular, I referred to the argument put forward by (Eilertsen et al., 2008, p. 306) that micropolitics is a 'theory-for-understanding' and that it is a means for understanding the 'complexity and often contradictory power relations and webs of influence affecting and guiding unconsciously professional practices [...] in schools'. Yet, it was established in Chapter 2 (2.3) that there is a noticeable lack of micropolitical focus in literature related to various types of teacher inquiry. What I endeavoured to demonstrate in this study through empirical and conceptual evidence is that micropolitics offers deep understanding of school life and that by employing a micropolitical perspective, we are more likely to better identify and understand the root causes of teachers' various types of inquiry engagement. A micropolitical perspective made it possible in this study to delve deeper into teachers' experiences of inquiry engagement and unravel the complexities associated with the how

teachers make sense of inquiry. Indeed, the micropolitical perspective can be extended to other areas of professional development and school life.

7.4 Limitations of the study

In principle, I reject the apologetic tone of educational researchers often found at the end of their research reports lamenting the limitations and weaknesses associated with the choice of case study due to the inability to generalise to other populations or cases from their case study research. Instead, the reader is reminded that the point of employing a case study approach in the current research, as detailed in Chapter 3, was not to generalise to all schools in all places. Rather, it was a decision made in order to explore the phenomenon under study and aim to understand it in its complexity. Although this study was not originally designed to generalise to other schools or teachers, there are theoretical and conceptual elements of the findings and insights, however, that are likely to have resonance and relevance in other contexts. For example, the framework for engaging teacher in inquiry and the school-friendly checklist are likely to be relevant to other schools as the insights and questions asked there are not limited to the one school where this research was based. Still, and despite the effort made to ensure that appropriate methodological approaches were employed, the inclusion of more cases (schools) could have strengthened the findings of this study. Using multiple cases could have provided the opportunity to perform cross-case analysis through which contextual and other significant factors might have been examined and compared in diverse settings. Because of the limitation of resources in this study, it was not possible to include more schools. However, and as I will point out below, this is a project for future research.

Another potential limitation of this study is my role in setting up the inquiry programme. In the design of the school inquiry programme, I was asked to run workshops with the teachers. The workshops were my passport to the school; however, I was concerned about the objectivity of my study. As outlined in Chapter 3 (3.3.5), after the workshops, I focused my efforts on gathering data related to teachers' own experiences of inquiry engagement while trying to maintain objectivity. The reflexive and critical accounts presented in this thesis also aided in maintaining objectivity and rigour. In an ideal world, I would have carried out my research without necessarily taking part in the activities being researched. However, this is not always possible and I believe that through being reflective, analytical and unbiased, I managed to overcome and deal with this limitation.

7.5 Future research and final thoughts

While this research has made contributions to knowledge regarding certain aspects of teacher inquiry, there is substantial scope for further work in this area.

This study focused on the first year in the life of an inquiry programme, it would be interesting and insightful to explore how such inquiry projects develop in the following years through using a longitudinal approach. It would also be relevant to examine factors that help make an inquiry culture sustainable. In these two areas of research, more correlations with contextual and policy factors are likely to enrich our understanding of how and why teachers engage in inquiry as a model of CPD.

Another potential direction of research is exploring how teachers come to formulate their understandings and beliefs about research. This would entail working with student teachers and tracking the development of their understandings of research until they settle in their profession. Such direction of research would provide more insights into the role of research in teacher professional development.

Finally and as suggested in 6.5 and 6.6, more research is needed to establish the impact of school culture both at its macro and micro levels on teachers' engagement in various types of CPD and especially action research.

7.6 Final Reflections

The thesis began with a belief that teacher inquiry is the answer to teacher's professional growth and development. Through undertaking this research, I became aware of the complexity and contentious nature of teacher inquiry as a model of teacher CPD. Having challenged my own assumptions and pre-conceived thoughts, I now see the problems I set out to investigate in more clarity. It was only through undertaking this research that I discovered areas and factors in teacher inquiry that I had not thought about before conducting this research. I claim now that I have a better understanding of my area of research and I have gained a more critical and balanced stance in my research as a result of doing this research.

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