'A Case Study Exploring Teachers' Experiences of

Peer Observation of Teaching in a Post-Primary Context'

Deirdre Walker

July 2018

Dissertation in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MA in Learning and Teaching

Presented to:

Dr. Tena Patten

School of Business

Letterkenny Institute of Technology

Disclaimer 1

"I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit in Partial Fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree MA in Learning and Teaching is entirely my own work and has not been obtained from the work of any other, except any work that has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work."

Signed: …………………………….

Disclaimer 2

"I agree to assign the rights of any intellectual property arising from this study or other activity to LYIT. This dissertation may be used by LYIT for teaching purposes on future Masters Programmes and may be published online by the Institute."

I agree [ ]

Abstract

A transition towards teacher autonomy, teacher collaboration and context specific learning as foci of teacher professional development coupled with exposed weaknesses in traditional externally controlled professional learning led to the development of this case study research. The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' experiences of peer observation of teaching in a single Post-Primary school in Ireland as a method of developing teacher pedagogical capacity.

The literature critiqued encompasses peer observation of teaching, teacher professional development, professional learning communities, reflective practice and teacher leadership. A qualitative, inductive, cross-sectional, multi-method case study has been designed in response to the study's research questions. Four participant pairs volunteered to engage in one peer observation of teaching session. A background-data gathering questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and reflection logs were implemented in the approach to data collection and data was subsequently analysed thematically.

Emergent themes from the data suggests that peer observation leads to reflective practice which consequently results in personalised learning for both visiting and observed teachers. Peer observation appears to enhance staff collegiality, a professional learning community and individual teacher self-efficacy. The study also reveals openness as an attribute of teacher leaders. The research highlights that teachers require additional supports in developing their reflection skills and further research is required into the relationship between teacher reflection and CPD. The study further suggests that a longitudinal study into the impact of peer observation of teaching may be beneficial.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Section One: Rationale and Introduction

1.1 Introduction and Background to Research

The purpose of this study is to research teachers' experiences of peer observation of teaching in the context of one Post-Primary School in Ireland. It aims to explore the role of peer observation in teacher continuing professional development (CPD), professional learning communities (PLCs) and reflective practice. It also seeks to consider the role of the teacher leader within the peer observation process.

Throughout my ten years of teaching, I as a practitioner have attended various traditional forms of professional development including whole school in-service, subject specific conventions, national conferences and supplementary qualification courses. These courses have indisputably provided comprehensive information, resources and approaches to teaching. However, the delivery of the numerous courses has reflected the predominance of an external, expert-led focus on the provision and delivery of CPD for teachers. I have also experienced that whilst invigorated and revitalised in the initial days subsequent to the training, it infrequently results in a concrete, tangible change in practice when teaching in the classroom (Fullan *et al.* 1991)**.** If teachers' professional learning does not result in improving students learning, it cannot be deemed valuable (Guskey 2017)**.** Enriching the students' learning experience should be the principal force driving teacher learning (Inspectorate 2016)**.**

Educators are frequently reticent in appraising professional learning opportunities as they are of the belief that they lack the skills required to do so (Guskey 2017; King 2016)**.** Teaching is an isolated, lonely profession and individual practice predominantly prevails (O'Sullivan 2010; Fullan and Hargreaves 1992). Teachers work in seclusion and hence, they encounter challenges in discussing practice and professional development (Ainscow 2015)**.** Aspects of professional development are therefore, typically imparted to external agencies and bodies. The Looking at Our Schools Framework (Inspectorate 2016) empowers schools to command ownership of CPD and learn within the individual school context. It encourages teacher collaboration in building professional pedagogical

capacity. Collaboration amongst teachers facilitates the development of a language of practice (Hargreaves and Fullan 1992) enabling teachers to evaluate their professional learning to the advantage of the learners in their classrooms.

Teacher collaboration in the form of peer observation of teaching has been recently introduced into Post-Primary teaching in Ireland as a component of the Droichead teacher induction programme for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTS). The Droichead programme entails teacher induction in situ reinforced by reflective practice and rich professional learning experiences in the form of peer observation of teaching (The Teaching Council 2017)**.** Peer observation of teaching in the Post-Primary context in Ireland has not been formally researched and evaluated despite its integral inclusion in the induction process for NQTs.

Furthermore, The Teaching Council, the Irish statutory body responsible for the promotion and regulation of teacher professional development have devised a framework for teacher professional development namely Cosán. The Cosán Framework has not yet been implemented on a national scale, it has undergone consultation and planning and is currently in the pilot stage of development. The Teaching Council are expectant that the framework will be introduced in 2020, therefore, this study researching peer observation as a branch of teacher professional learning is relevant and timely and would be welcomed by stakeholders in Post-Primary education in Ireland incorporating classroom teachers, leadership and management and policy makers.

The professional demand of the researcher for a more effective CPD model due to failings of externally led professional learning, the inclusion of peer observation in the Droichead programme, the development of the contemporary Cosán Framwork for teacher learning and the knowledge gap encasing peer observation in the Post-Primary in Ireland precede the research questions that have evolved throughout the proposed research design.

Creswell (2012) advocates the construction of an overarching central research question to position a research study followed by the development of sub-questions to narrow the

boundaries of the research. This research study poses the following questions outlined in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1 Central Research Question and Sub-Research Questions

A qualitative, inductive, cross-sectional, multi-method case study has been designed in response to the declared research questions. The objective of this study is to gauge teachers' experiences of a peer observation activity while embedding CPD internally within the school environment and stimulating peer collaboration. A qualitative

background data gathering questionnaire was first distributed to teaching staff followed by one peer observation session. Teachers participated in the peer observation in pairs, one teacher acting as a visiting teacher observing the lesson whilst the second teacher was observed by the visiting teacher. Teachers then partook in a brief, post-observation feedback meeting. Data was then collected when the visiting teacher was invited to partake in a semi-structured interview and the observed teacher was be requested to complete a reflective journal. Data was then analysed, collated and findings and conclusions presented and discussed thematically.

Notwithstanding the limitations of the study as a single-case study with a small sample size centred upon the peer observation of a single lesson, the research is of interest to the researcher, the teaching staff of the school in context, practitioners, individuals and policy-makers concerned with peer observation of teaching and collaborative practice in the Post-Primary educational setting.

1.2 Research Site

The primary research site is a rural Post-Primary School in North-West Donegal. It is a co-educational school with 790 students currently enrolled. There are 54 teachers working in the school at present, both male and female. The study is a context-based study and therefore, research occurred at this site solely.

The research study undertaken will be expounded, justified and considered in three further sections. The subsequent element of this paper, Section Two, the literature review and critique evaluates current literature identified by the researcher as relevant to the research questions. Section Three firstly clarifies the implementation of the study by outlining the methodology underpinning the design of the study and secondly, the findings evolving from the data collected are deliberated and evaluated. Section Four comprises overall conclusions, recommendations for further research and a researcher reflection.

Section Two: Literature Review and Critique

2.1 Introduction

This research study is an inductive case study exploring peer observation of teaching in a context-based study of one Post-Primary School. Theory is the final destination of research not the beginning (Cohen *et al.* 2007), however, qualitative, self-reflexive researchers must acknowledge their position in relation to the research study (Tracy 2010). The themes that have emerged in this literature review are those identified from the researcher's professional experience and judgement as relevant to the research questions. The literature review aims to examine and critically analyse existing, appropriate literature concerning peer observation of teaching, CPD and PLCs, teacher leadership and reflective practice.

2.2. Peer Observation of Teaching

Literature focusing on peer observation of teaching conceptualises a myriad of terms, definitions, models and approaches to peer observation. Peer observation traverses educational sectors, fields and is introduced for varying purposes for instance teacher CPD, teacher appraisal and education management (O'Leary 2014). Debate is evident throughout the literature regarding these functionalities of peer observation of teaching as a managerial, collegial, formal, voluntary or evaluative process (Carroll and O'Loughlin 2014). Gosling (2005) presents a well-respected classification of models of peer observation as evaluative, developmental or collaborative, touting collaborative as the most effective. The terms 'peer observation' and 'peer review' are used elusively throughout the literature. Hendry *et al.* (2014) emphasise their preference of the term 'peer observation' as it resonates a collegial attitude to peer observation, that of observing a colleague's lesson without essentially assessing the lesson or providing feedback. This is the definition of peer observation that will be adopted by this study.

Barth (2001) refers to craft knowledge, the accrued experience, perceptions and understandings possessed by teachers throughout the duration of their career. This

instrumental craft knowledge can be effectively distributed and made available when classroom practice is modelled by teachers for their colleagues (Hendry and Oliver 2012). Teaching in Ireland in current society is an isolated profession (King 2016). Sharing of instructional practice through peer observation also decreases teacher isolation and generates a professional work environment (Bell and Mladenovic 2008) whilst proving beneficial to both the observer and the observed (Gosling 2005; Peel 2005)

Hendry *et al* (2014) caution against the over-formalisation of peer observation as a developmental process. They articulate that much can be gained from simply watching a lesson without a burdensome focus on documentation and procedure. They declare that observation alone enables the individual practitioner to explore what is most important to them, expands their range of teaching strategies and view their peers teaching in situ with students present.

Professional learning through peer observation correlates with Bandura's theory of observational learning (1977) indicating that effective learning can occur through observation as it can through direct experience. Bandura's theory of positive self-efficacy (1977) is also supported by the concept of peer observation. Observers perceive the level of mastery accomplished by their peers during the classroom session and this in turn results in increased self-efficacy with the raised expectations that their own future performances will be successful (Donnelly 2007). Bell and Cooper (2013) comment on the confidence-building capacity of peer observation and peer feedback as they assert teaching approaches and confirm pragmatic understandings of teaching standards.

Peer observation of teaching prevails largely in the Third Level educational sector. Several universities in the United States and Australia implement the evaluative model while in contrast, collaborative and developmental slants predominate this sector in the United Kingdom (Chamberlain *et al.* 2011). Peer observation takes place in Third Level education in the Irish educational context, however, it is a modern phenomenon and is not extensive (King 2016; Carroll and O'Loughlin 2014). A search of the literature reveals a

distinct lack of research observable in the Post-Primary field in Ireland stressing a significant knowledge gap.

Carroll and O'Loughlin (2014) outline a qualitative study completed in an Irish University examining the experiences of lecturers as novice peer observers. A rigorous approach to data analysis was adopted. Both researchers examined and coded data at first induction which then led to a comparison and contrast of themes. Researchers then inferred and agreed upon the most appropriate emergent themes from the data. The study concludes that observational pairs should be voluntary and self-selecting improving levels of trust and staff collegiality. These findings reflect similar deductions of seminal peer observation researcher Bell (2001). The study, however, fails to address conflicting claims by Hammersley Fletcher and Orsmond (2004) that self-selection of observation partners leads to a 'cosiness' with participants relaying what they think the other partner might like to hear rather than the truth and where lecturer experience was highly valued with senior lecturers observing a junior lecturer's lesson.. A further perceived limitation of the study was the joint interviewing of both participants in the participant pair. A more influential study would have interviewed participants separately.

Kenny *et al* (2014) conducted an action research study investigating an alternative approach to peer observation. Four university lecturers attended four lessons simultaneously, adopting each of the varying roles as lecturer, peer observer, peer participant and external observer in an attempt to recognise the voice of the student in considering the impact of peer observation as perceived by students. Power control is often a concern in peer observation between pairs (O'Leary 2014) and this approach relieves any tensions this may create by participants assuming various roles. The combination of field notes from each observer in each role and lecturer reflections adds validity and reliability to the rich data gathered, however, these data collection methods are not mentioned clearly and explicitly in the methodology section of the paper.

Studies investigating peer observation draw overwhelmingly positive conclusions (Bell and Thompson 2016; Carroll and O'Loughlin 2014; Bell and Cooper 2013), yet conversely limitations of peer observation must be acknowledged. Participants partaking in a model of formalised peer observation felt under pressure and stress even when a

collegial or developmental approach to peer observation was taken (Adhsead *et al* 2006 cited in Chamberlain *et al.* 2011). Hammersley _ Fletcher and Orsmond (2004) distinguished that individual CPD was being met through peer observation, however, the practice was not perceived as impacting on wider school improvement strategies.

2.3 Continuing Professional Development and Professional Learning Communities

Effective professional development exists as significant element in modern strategies aiming to enhance and enrich education and student learning (Guskey 2002). King (2016) similarly highlights that a progressively globalised economy and participation in international measures of educational efficacy has led to both an increased interest and government expenditure in teachers' CPD in Ireland in an endeavour to improve educational standards. CPD can be defined as teachers learning, becoming aware of how they learn and how they employ theory and knowledge acquired in practice to foster students' learning (Avalos 2011 cited in Svendesen 2017).

A contemporary shift in professional development has occurred, from a traditional topdown approach from teachers as recipients of knowledge to educators becoming active participants in their own CPD (King 2016; Svendesen 2017). Collaborative CPD has emerged as an auxiliary aspect of modern teacher development encompassing casual, unplanned dialogue to dedicated, explicit communities of practice (Kennedy 2011). A large and growing body of literature has investigated cooperative CPD and places value on the scholarship inspired through working with colleagues (Kennedy 2011; Hargreaves and Fullan 2012; King 2016).

Svendesen (2017) asserts the potential of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in developing sustainable, context-based CPD and depicts a longitudinal qualitative case study investigating the impact of collaborative design on teacher professional learning in one secondary school in Norway. The study's findings, despite their somewhat confounding presentation within the research paper, draw attention to the pertinence of situatedness and meaningful contexts in effective professional development; participants extracted meaning and understanding from new, accessible knowledge as it was directly

situated in their everyday working contexts. Furthermore, the professional collaboration resulted in individual teacher change in practice. Teachers were more likely to implement knowledge and teaching methods sustainably when it originated in their own classrooms and in colleagues' classrooms within their own familiar setting. This correlates with Hendry *et al* (2014) and Lowrie (2014) signalling that teacher professional development must occur in environments that are genuine and realistic.

Bolam *et. al* (2005) following an expansive study of PLCs in the British Educational system, declare that a challenge arises when seeking a distinct definition of a PLC as the context and cultural background of each school and learning community varies, prompting each educational PLC to examine and define their own context to develop a tailored, working definition of their own situated PLC. The project does, however, identify common characteristics exhibited by effective learning communities:

> shared values and vision, collective responsibility for students' learning, reflective professional inquiry, collaboration focused on learning, inclusive membership; mutual trust, respect and support; openness, networks and partnerships.
>
> (Bolam *et al* 2005, p. 145)

The inclusion of the word 'community' has generated conflict throughout the literature regarding PLCs. The community as a positive element of collaborative practice is emphasised by numerous studies placing the concept of community at the heart of PLCs (Svendesen 2017; King 2016; Bolam *et al* 2005). Contrastingly, certain studies ascertain that communities by their very nature are a complex, intricate phenomenon (Stoll *et al.* 2006) implicated with issues such as trust, conflict and exclusion (Bolam *et al* 2005; Watson 2014). The term community is used too frequently and too loosely, not every group situated together may be defined as a community (O'Sullivan 2010). Watson (2014) argues that PLCs have been utilised as a 'goldilocks' approach to fill the gap generated by deficiencies in one-off, decontextualized professional development models. The term PLC has been overused and cannot be neatly placed into fissures to smooth over problems evolving from alternative approaches to CPD (Watson 2014).

2.3 Teacher Leadership

Carrol and O'Loughlin (2014) and Kennedy (2011) mutually comment on the lack of research into the role of leadership in leading teacher professional learning with much of the literature encasing teacher leadership being confined to contexts within the U.S.A. (Alexandrou and Swaffield 2012). A teacher leader is a teacher who leads inside and outside of their classroom, adds to professional learning communities and inspires others in improving their own practice (Katzenmeyer and Moller 2001). Teacher leaders can assume several roles; change agents, resource provider, mentor, learning facilitator, instructional specialist, curriculum specialist and learner (Harrison and Killion 2007). Bolam *et al* (2005) refer to learning enriched schools where robust collaborative learning communities reign with teachers taking on the role as change agents within the schools. This is contrasted with teacher impoverished schools where a lack of aspiration to change is evident.

Contemporary literature conceptualises effective educational leadership as an increasing myriad of abstract and multifaceted qualities (West-Burnham 2009). The demands on school leadership is becoming increasingly intensified demanding distributed school leadership amongst staff in driving change and improvement within the school. Fullan and Hargreaves (2012) likewise agree that a distributed model of collaboration is more effective in promoting educational advancements as formalisation and a top-down approach can lead to a sense of contrived collegiality. Teacher knowledge and proficiency are the basis for cultivating school progression in teaching and learning. Practitioners sharing practice by collaborating with peers proliferates teacher expertise throughout the school environment lessening the seclusion of each individual classroom (Barth 2001). A new wave of teacher leaders have transpired in the Irish educational context due to the suspension in promotions within schools which occurred as a result of the economic turn. This has led to the emergence of teachers acting in positions or undertaking activities without a formal role or title (King 2016).

Bell and Cooper (2013) recognise the cultural shift barrier that must be conquered in attempting to engage all staff in peer observation. They claim it is the role of the

educational leader to facilitate that change by crafting a sense of community, demonstrating the principles they value whilst additionally adopting the role of the learner. Taylor *et al* (2011) concur that if teachers are to lead that they must initially position themselves in the context of their own learning and reflect critically on their own learning.

Leading inside and outside of the classroom in cultivating improved educational practice and complementing the collection of teacher leaders is tenable for every individual teacher (Donnelly 2007). Donnelly (2007) cites an interesting study by Muijs *et al* (2013) claiming that second-year trainee teaches displayed the ability to become teacher leaders within their schools indicating that teacher leadership qualities are not restricted to teachers of extensive teacher experience. Wenner and Campbell (2011) reinforce the concept that all teachers have the ability to become leaders yet indicate that not all teachers do or should become leaders. This perhaps signifies that variances occur between teachers that evolve as teacher leaders and those who do not. Teacher leaders fulfil their classroom responsibilities whilst also volunteering to participate in projects and events and help out serving beyond the classroom (Wenner and Campbell 2017, Hunzicker 2012). Various studies and papers draw attention to the traits and characteristics associated with those described as teacher leaders and a number of these are summarised in *Table 2.1*

Table 2.1 Attributes of Teacher Leaders

Attributes of Teacher Leaders	Relevant Literature
Motivation, self-efficacy, resilience, passion.	Hargreaves and Fink 2006
Student-focused cognisance, pursuit of professional evolvement, positive professional relationships.	Hunzicker 2011
Motivation, proactivity, amenability, industrious, openness.	Leithwood *et al* 2007

2.4 Reflective Practice

The Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers asserts that teachers should reflect upon and critically appraise their professional practice and participate in continuous professional development spanning their duration of their career (The Teaching Council 2016a). Reflective practice is not a contemporary theory with Dewey (1993 cited in Finlay 2008) first recognising reflection as a distinct form of cognition. Dewey reasoned that reflection enables the practitioner to move from habitual thinking to reflective action. Reflective practice can be defined as a procedure involving "reviewing an experience of practice in order to describe, analyse, evaluate and so inform learning about practice" (Reid 1993, p. 305). Bell (2001) expresses that reflective practice is a proficiency displayed by successful teachers and is an integral element of professional development.

Peer observation of teaching is regarded as a branch of reflection in a tactic to generate teacher dialogue with self and others and to ultimately enhance teaching and learning (Carroll and O'Loughlin 2014) yet it is not prevalent in practice in Second Level Education in Ireland. In the aforementioned study by Kenny *et al* (2014) the time and significance afforded to reflection during and following a peer observation process led to resolutions by participants to expand and enrich their own practice. Additionally, it reported that collective reflection amongst colleagues permits an appreciation of collegial professional development.

Donnelly (2007) illustrates a study where peer observation is implemented not as an evaluative device but purely as a critically reflective tool for the participants in a Higher Education context in Ireland resembling the attitude of Hicks (2002) that the purpose of the journey is not simply to arrive at the destination but to benefit from the avenue travelled.

Finlay (2008) draws that reflective practice is not without flaw and can trigger ethical professional, pedagogic and conceptual concerns. Mitchell (2017) highlights that reflective practice has become commonplace in Third Level and Higher Education and it

is often seen as a chore or a box-ticking exercise where an absence of real learning occurs. Moon (2001) observes that writers frequently reflect beyond a level of description. Teachers, researchers and mentors must be aware of the concerns with reflective practice and engage with the reflection proves with sensitivity and sincerity. The depth of reflection and in turn professional learning can be enhanced by the implementation of rubrics (Campoy 2010) and reflective frameworks and models (Gibbs 1988) as modelled in *Figure 2.1*.
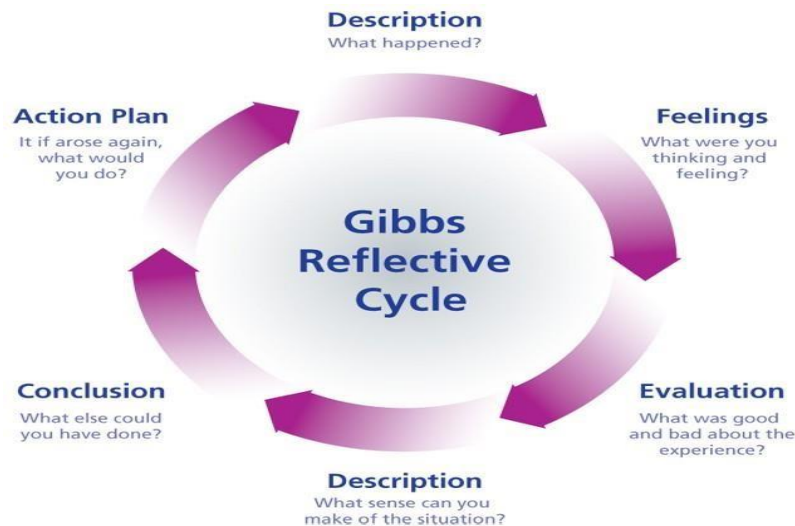
Figure 2.1 Gibbs Reflective Cycle (Gibbs 1988)

2.5 Conclusion

The literature reviewed for this study concludes that peer observation of teaching and the development of PLCs from a teacher led approach with an emphasis on reflective practice are worth the significant effort. Difficulties arise in the literature in that many of the studies and researchers are located outside of Ireland and secondly, much of the literature offers studies conducted within the Third Level and Higher Education sector and not in the Post Primary Sector in which this study is situated. Wilkinson *et al* (2013) dispute, however, that leading practices transect varying educational contexts and this research study designed is founded on influential paradigms from existing literature. The next section describes the procedures and methods employed in this enquiry in addressing the research questions and existing gaps within the literature regarding peer observation in a Post-Primary context in Ireland.

Section Three: Implementation and Evaluation

3.1 Introduction

This section firstly outlines the central research question guiding the research study, the sub-questions focusing the boundaries of the study and the research aims and objectives steering each research question. The enhancement of student learning and the relevance of the study to institutional need are then discussed. The research cycle and procedure undertaken are then demarcated. Methodology and research design are then described, outlined and justified. An evaluation then ensures with the elucidation and discussion of results evolving from the study.

Table 3.1 Research Aims and Objectives

Central Research Question	*Primary Research Aim and Objective*
What are teachers' experiences of peer classroom observation of teaching in a Post-Primary context?	The purpose of this qualitative study will be explore peer classroom observation of teaching a Post-Primary School
Sub-Research Questions	*Research Aims and Objectives*
How can in situ peer observation act as an alternative to externally facilitated professional development?	To explore the gap in teacher professional development from idealism to practice by implementing peer observation of teaching
What is the role of teacher leaders in facilitating peer observation of teaching and continuing professional development?	To understand teacher leadership within the school context particularly in relation to continuing professional development.
How do teachers reflect on their practice following peer observation of teaching?	To explore teacher engagement in reflective practice subsequent to a peer observation of teaching session
How do teachers view staff collegiality and collaboration and to what extent does peer observation enhance the professional learning community within the school?	To generate an understanding of staff collegiality following a peer observation session.

3.2 Enhancement of Student Learning

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' experiences of peer observation of teaching in a Post-Primary context. While the study endeavours to gauge teacher experiences, it must be acknowledged that peer observation is predominantly implemented to improve teaching which consequently enriches student learning (Donnelly 2007).

Furthermore, peer observation of teaching fosters teacher collaboration and social capital cultivating student development. Collaboration is a vital component in developing a collective, collegial responsibility towards student learning (King 2017). Contemporary society regards collaboration as a required competency for fast-pace economies moving student collaboration to the forefront of classroom activities. Teacher collaboration is a prerequisite to student collaboration (Hargreaves and O'Connor 2018).

3.3 Institutional Need

The Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers (The Teaching Council 2016) asserts that teachers must work with colleagues to share, nurture and support effective practice. Peer observation is currently implemented within the school context as a component of the induction procedure for Newly Qualified Teachers, Droichead, however, a comprehensive search of the literature suggests that peer observation in a Post-Primary context within Ireland has not been formally researched. The Cosán Framework for teacher professional learning (The Teaching Council 2016b) will be fully implemented in 2020 requiring teachers to embark on a continuous, accountable, reflective learning journey. Peer observation offers a sustainable approach to personal and collaborative continuous professional development (Chester 2012) and therefore, a study investigating peer observation within this school context is required.

3.4 Implementation

This research adopted a case study approach with the implementation phase spanning eight weeks in the second term of the school calendar. A background-data gathering questionnaire was first administered to all teaching staff within the school in context via the school's internal email system to garner a broad perception from descriptive statistics of the previous experiences of staff regarding peer observation of teaching and to invite expressions of interest from staff to participate in the successive stage of the study. A reminder email was distributed to staff one week later to encourage a solid staff response.

The second stage of the interview invited staff to volunteer to participate in one session of peer observation of teaching. The second stage of the research was modelled on recommendations by Gosling (2005) regarding the introduction of an effective peer observation framework. Participants were included on a voluntary basis. It was envisioned prior to the study that a minimum of four participant pairs would be required to achieve adequate data from the research. Eight participants volunteered to partake in the peer observation lesson. Two of the participant pairs were self-selected peers (Gosling 2002) and the final two participant pairs indicated a willingness to collaborate with any of their fellow participants and hence, were partnered by the researcher. This was followed by a pre-observation meeting between the researcher and the eight participants. Information and consent forms were administered to participants and aims and queries regarding the study were discussed.

Participants then mutually agreed a suitable period for the lesson to occur and supervision of the visiting teachers' classes during the peer observation session was organised by the researcher. Following each of the peer observation sessions, participants were asked to engage in an immediate, brief, informal, verbal feedback session. A number of the participants highlighted that while the feedback did occur in each instance, it did not occur directly after the observation due to timetabling constraints and many of the teachers were teaching in the immediate aftermath of the observation lesson.

The observed teachers were invited to complete a reflective log based on their experience of the observation session and three out of four participants returned the reflective log to the researcher. Visiting teachers individually met with the researcher and four semistructured interviews were conducted. This completed the implementation phase of the research.
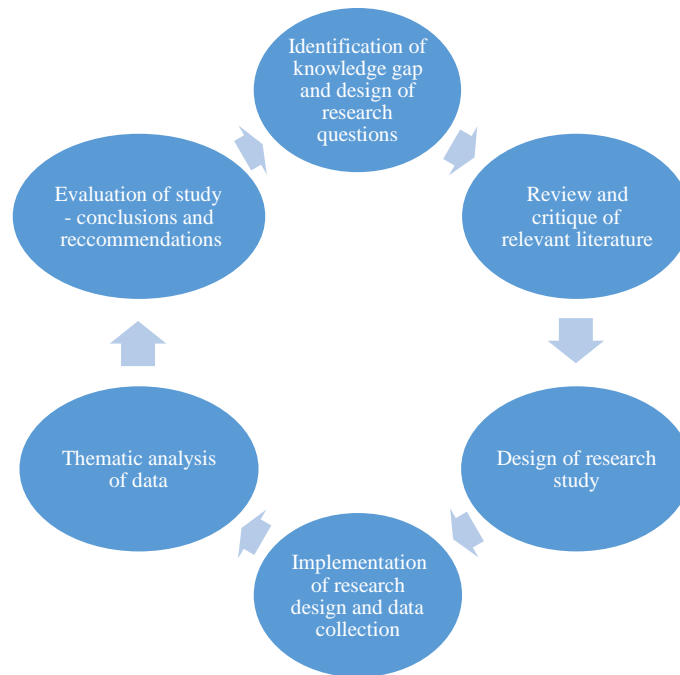
Figure 3.1. Summary of Research Cycle

3.5 Research Methodology

Academic research is a sequence of stages implemented to amass and evaluate knowledge in order to enhance our understanding of a topic or concern (Creswell 2012). The metaphorical 'Research Onion' as designed by Saunders *et al.* (2009) (See Figure 3.2) provides a blueprint on which this particular research study has been situated. The research onion enables the researcher to consider each layer of the research design in context and in relation to the other components in the research design (Saunders and Lewis 2012). The methodology is a qualitative multi-method, inductive, cross-sectional case study located in the field of pragmatism. Each layer of the research design will be dissected, explained and justified below.
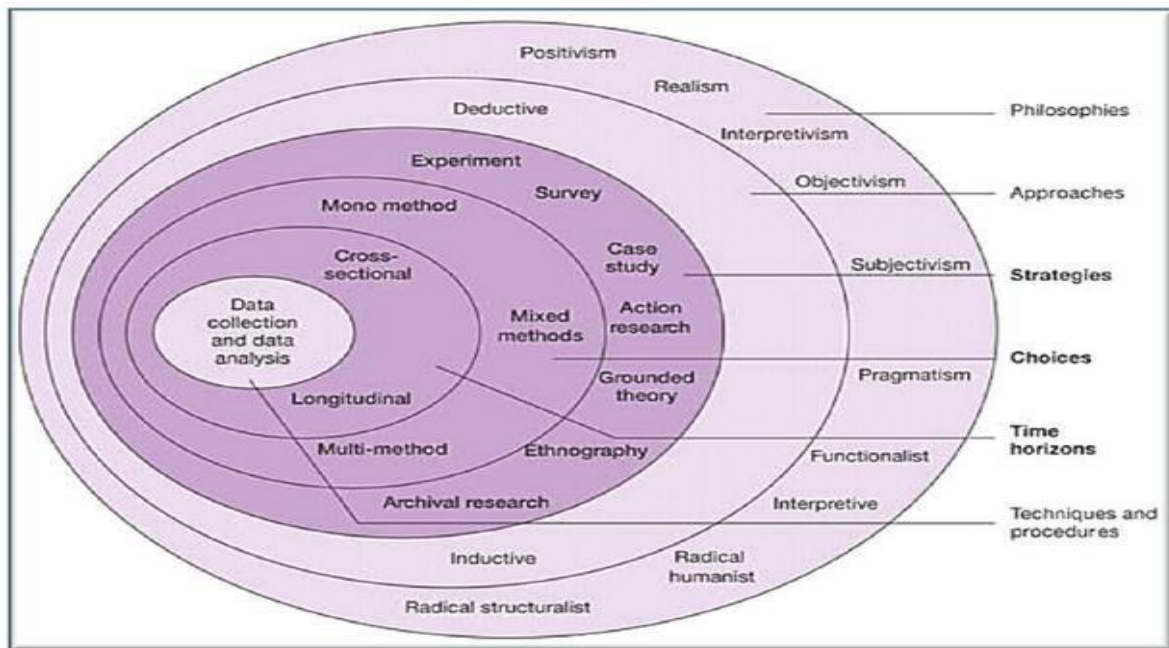
Figure 3.2 The Research Onion (Saunders *et al.* 2009)

3.5.1 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy can be defined as a researcher's interpretation of the world, their deductions about knowledge conventions and their appreciation of the construction of said knowledge (Saunders and Lewis 2012). The researcher's philosophy undeniably influences the initial generation of a research questions and subsequently moulds an appropriate research design in reaction to the research question. The research philosophy, therefore, is regarded as the paradigm overarching the entire research study, justifying the location of the philosophy layer as the outermost sphere of the research onion encasing the research in its entirety.

Pragmatism is the selected philosophy underpinning the proposed research. This research aims to explore the implementation of peer observation of teaching. Pragmatist efforts acknowledge the prominence of collaboration between humans and positions people at the crux of research in order to render meaning from our world (Korte and Mercurio 2017). The study focuses on an inquiry into teacher experience of peer observation. Pragmatism is founded on Dewey's concept of inquiry, a practice of asking and answering questions and directing current values and attitudes into future practice (Morgan 2014). Pragmatism evades the rivalry between positivism and constructivism, diverts the

researchers attention from debates regarding truth and reality and provides and alternative paradigm focusing specifically on the research question and the outcomes of the exploration undertaken (Feilzer 2010).

3.5.2 Research Strategy and Approach: Case Study

The research designed is a context-based qualitative case-study situated in one PostPrimary school in Donegal. This calls for an in-depth, multi-layered exploration of the central phenomenon (Creswell 2012) of peer observation within the school context. The strategy of action research was first considered as a possible research strategy in an attempt to respond to the research questions, however, the cyclical, iterative nature of action research demands a substantial timeframe (Saunders *et al* 2009). This research study was bounded by time constraints as it occurred over one term in the academic school calendar and did not lend an appropriate timeframe to execute action research.

Robson (2002, p. 178) defines a case study as "a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence". Yin (2009) a seminal writer in case study design, similarly underlines the pertinence of context in case study research. Case study mirrors the objective of the proposed research to explore peer observation and professional development (contemporary phenomenon) in situ, in the everyday, natural context of the case which can be identified as the Post-Primary school, thus, case study presents as an appropriate design for the purpose of this particular study.

Case studies are differentiated as single cases or multiple cases and further distinguished as either holistic or embedded cases. The proposed study is a single holistic case study (Yin 2009). Single case studies offer thorough, intensive exploration of a single bounded unit of analysis, the unit composed of the school's teaching staff in light of this study (Stake 1995). Single case studies are often criticised and may be observed as a limited study due to a perceived lack of rigour and a deficiency in methodological guidelines (Yin 2009). Buchanan (2012), alternatively, contends that single cases certainly add value and

merit to research, although admittedly the value of the research is frequently emergent and not always palpable from the outset.

Yin (2009) stipulates that a case study must be a highly structured research design and the researcher must plan their design according to five principal elements: questions, propositions, unit(s) of analysis, logic linking data to propositions and criteria for interpreting findings. While Yin (2009) advocates this pre-defined, deductive approach to the research design and data analysis, contrastingly, Buchanan (2012) suggests that case studies are emergent and can be reflected upon retrospectively. As aforementioned, there are limited studies regarding peer observation of teaching in second level in the Irish educational context, therefore, the pragmatic, qualitative disposition of the study aims not to directly align data gathered with pre-existing theories but to pursue evolving and emergent theories from the data in line with Buchanan (2012). The theories built have then be applied to the context in which they originated. In similar vein, Saunders *et al.* (2009) theorises that an inductive approach is predominantly preoccupied with the specific context in which the phenomenon transpires.

3.5.3 Methodological Choice

Saunders *et al* (2009) define the methodological choice as the employment of either quantitative or qualitative or a combination of both quantitative and qualitative techniques in the research design and implementation. Quantitative research is described as data and procedures that are essentially numerical while qualitative research deals with data and techniques that are classed as non-numerical (Saunders *et al* 2009). The explorative objective of the research seeking participants' experiences and perspectives of peer observation would not be effectively achieved through the collection of numerical, quantitative data and consequently, qualitative data collection methods were utilised applied. Multi-method, holistic approaches to data collection are valued in case study research (Yin 2009). Easterby-Smith *et al* (2008) further validate that a number of qualitative methods and data are more appropriate when studying a small sample of

participants in an attempt to unearth diverse aspects and perceptions (cited in Saunders 2009).

A cross-sectional, multi-method, triangulation approach was employed in the study in an attempt to ensure the worthiness of the research (Cohen *et al* 2007, Yin 2009). A crosssectional method is a snapshot of a phenomenon over a short period of time (Saunders 2009). Triangular approaches in the social sciences such as education attempt to understand the intricacy and wealth of human conduct by studying it from various viewpoints encompassing multiple sources of data (Cohen *et al* 2007). Stake (1995) explains that four types of triangulation may be employed to fortify a case study design: observer triangulation, source triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation. The triangulation technique implemented in this study is methodological triangulation where various data collection methods are merged and combined to create a vivid, extensive picture of the phenomenon i.e. peer observation of teaching (Stake 1995).

The supremacy of the research question in pragmatist studies is also reflected by Buchanan (2012) in reference to case study design where it is advocated that the data collection methods should emerge from the research question. The research question aims to explore peer observation amongst teaching staff. The data collection occurred in two sequential stages. During stage one, in order to get an overview of teachers' experiences and perceptions of peer observation a background data gathering, descriptive, qualitative was administered to all teaching staff. Following this a period of classroom teaching observation occurred involving a teaching pair. Peel (2005) implies that peer observation of teaching proves valuable to both the observed teacher and the visiting teacher observing the lesson. This demands that data should be gathered from both the observed teacher and the visiting teacher to achieve an in-depth analysis of the peer observation process, therefore, stage two involved data collection from each teaching dyad. The teachers observed were requested to fill in a single, once-off reflective journal. The teachers who visited and observed the other teacher's lesson were invited to partake in a semi-structured interview. The data gathering methods are discussed in greater detail in the next section.

3.5.4 Data Collection Methods

3.5.4.1 Questionnaire

A cross-sectional, anonymous, online questionnaire was administered to the entire teaching staff of the school accompanied by a cover letter explaining the purpose of the proposed research (n=54). The context-based study indicates purposeful sampling was implemented (Creswell 2012). Informed consent was indicated with the completion of the survey (Cohen *et al* 2007). The objective of the qualitative questionnaire was to gather background data regarding the staff and their current experiences of peer observation of email system was utilised with a follow-up reminder email one week after the initial teaching. Web-based questionnaires gather broad data in a short space of time, however, response rates are frequently low (Creswell 2012). An internal school-based distribution of the survey in an effort to counterbalance the limitations of the questionnaire. A combination of close-ended, open-ended and Likert Scale questions on the questionnaire provided both staff context information and comprehensive data befitting a case study project (*Appendix 1*). Thirty out of fifty-four teaching staff members of the school in question completed the online questionnaire representing a response rate of 55.5 per cent. Questionnaire responses can be viewed in *Appendix 6*.

3.5.4.2 Piloting of Questionnaire

The questionnaire was piloted prior to circulation in order to gauge the accessibility of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to two Second Level teachers working in a co-educational school within a similar context to the school involved in the research study. There was ambiguity surrounding one Likert Scale question "You have been appropriately trained to conduct peer observation" and subsequently this was altered to "You have participated in training in order for you to feel confident in observing a fellow colleague". The questionnaire was then distributed to all teaching staff within the research site as a Google form via the internal institution email address.

3.5.4.3 Semi-Structured Interview

Teaching staff members were invited to form a volunteer sample (Cohen *et al* 2007) to partake in the second stage of the research process by participating in four pairs in one peer observation of teaching session. Four staff members who acted as vising teachers in the observed lesson were then asked to engage in one post-observation interview. A qualitative interview occurs when researchers pose questions to participants, record the answers and later transcribes the data digitally for analysis (Creswell 2012). Interviews capture participant voice providing personal, in depth information proving as a robust data collection method in qualitative research (Creswell 2012). The questionnaire previously administered enabled the interviewer to design the semi-structured interview questions in allowing for emergent data (*Appendix 3*). Semi-structured interviews cover a list of themes and questions, however, the questions and order of questions varied in certain cases (Saunders 2009) enabling the researcher to explore and probe if appropriate or required. Open-ended questions enabled the researcher to probe and delve deeper into the participants' experiences of the peer observation of teaching session also resulting in unforeseen answers reflective of the emergent, inductive nature of the research design (Cohen *et al* 2007). A focus group might have been fitting also in gathering participants' experiences of peer observation, however, it was decided that the sensitive nature of information discussed regarding peers' teaching methods and student behaviour in the various classes observed may breach confidentiality issues and this method was therefore dismissed (Robson 2011).

3.5.4.4 Reflective Log

Four volunteering participating teachers taught a lesson while being observed by a colleague and were then requested to reflect upon their experience using a two page maximum reflective log. The reflective log featured as the third step in the multi-layered, triangulated approach to data collection. Reflective logs gain insight into participants understandings, experiences and practices that might not otherwise transpire through

interview or direct observation in line with the explorative nature of the study (Symon 2004). Limitations may occur if participants are unfamiliar with participation in reflexive thinking (Symon 2004). A pre-observation briefing offered participants and opportunity to seek guidance on completing the reflective log in an endeavour to limit challenges presented to participants. The participants were supplied with a reflective log to complete following the peer observation session. The reflective log utilised Gibbs Reflective Model (1988) to assist participants in engaging with reflection and limit difficulties associated with reflective thinking (*Appendix 4*). The reflective log was returned to the researcher by three out of the four observed teachers.

3.5.4.5 Participant Information

Table 3.2 Peer Observation of Teaching - Participant Information

Participant Name (*Pseudonym)	Teaching Experience	Participant Information	Participant involvement in the study
Anna*	> 5 years	Anna is a teacher of English and Irish.	Anna acted as a visiting teacher and observed a First Year History lesson.
Beth*	5 – 10 Years	Beth is a Modern foreign languages teacher	Beth acted as a visiting teacher and observed a First Year Irish Lesson.
Cora*	5 – 10 Years	Cora is a Mathematics teacher.	Cora acted as visiting teacher and observed a Third Year Home Economics Lesson.
Dylan*	10 – 15 Years	Dylan is an English teacher.	Dylan acted as a visiting teacher and observed a Second Year Music Lesson.
Úna*	5 – 10 Years	Úna is a teacher of English and History.	Úna acted as an observed teacher.
Vivian*	15 – 20 Years	Violet is an Irish and Geography teacher.	Violet acted as an observed teacher.
Wendy*	< 5 years	Wendy is a Home Economics Teacher.	Wendy acted as an observed teacher.
Yvonne	< 5 Years	Yvonne is a teacher of Music.	Yvonne acted as an observed teacher.

3.6 Researcher Positionality

Traditional quantitative research methods value tested hypotheses in research where bias can be reduced and measured (Tracy 2010). Cohen *et al* (2007) emphasise that the researcher enters the research process with pre-existing knowledge and attempting to eradicate researcher influence would be impractical, hence, highlighting the researcher as a significant, integral tool in qualitative research design. Saunders (2009) specifies that inductive approaches to research particularly actualise the researcher as a cog in the research wheel. Researchers, however, must exert self-reflexivity at each phase in the process in openly recognising their influence on the project particularly those working in an insider position (Cohen *et al* 2007). The researcher conducting this study is also a practitioner and currently works within the research site and hence, must introspectively express and evaluate their role, bias, relationships and decisions during the research procedure in an attempt to curtail potential disadvantages associated with an insider researcher. Herod (1999) disparages the insider/outsider debate attesting that the researcher and the participants are co-producers of knowledge in a social context. The researcher recognises their role and influence on this study throughout.

3.7 Criteria for Qualitative Research Quality

A unanimity prevails concerning the criteria that qualify quantitative data as good data. Quantitative researchers rely on validity and reliability as markers of effective research (Cohen *et al* 2007). These indicators do not merge effectually with the qualitative data collected within this study and therefore, a more appropriate criteria for assessing the worthiness of this study was sought. This case study has adopted Tracy's (2010) criteria for excellent qualitative research.

Table 3.3 Qualitative Quality: Eight "Big Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative

Research

Worthy Topic	The topic is relevant and timely due to the recent inclusion of peer observation of teaching as an integral element of the Droichead teacher induction programme and the development of Cosán, the Framework for Professsional Teacher Development as visibly outlined in *Section 1.1.*
Rich Rigour	This case study ensures rich rigour as the study is founded upon strong theoretical concepts. The data collection methods employed generated a wealth of data and the thematic analysis process employed ensued a comprehensive approach was taken in generating a data audit trail as identified in *Section 3.9*. The richness of data is also perceptible in the data extracts evidenced findings in *Section 3.12.*
Sincerity	The researcher exerts self-reflexivity throughout the study and is transparent regarding approaches to the research design, data collection and data analysis.
Credibility	Credibility is achieved in this study with the triangulation of data collection methods and the density of description throughout. Respondent validation of interview transcripts was also sought to increase credibility.
Resonance	Whilst this case study is contextualised within one school and involves a small sample the rationale underpinning the study and the expressions of participants in the data extracts should be familiar to fellow practitioners in the Post-Primary education field.

Significant Contribution	An exploration of current literature exposes a considerable knowledge gap surrounding peer observation of teaching in Ireland. This study whilst small-scale and context-based shares insight teacher experiences of peer observation and suggests innovative findings and confirms pre-existing findings consistent with the literature (*Section 3.12*).
Ethical	An ethically robust study has been designed following ethical procedures of the researcher's educational institution and ethical permission was granted prior to implementation as outlined in *Section 3.10.* The researcher endeavours to similarly ensure exiting ethics in the sharing of the findings and in the analysis of the findings
Meaningful Coherence	The study purposed to explore teachers' experiences of peer observation of teaching. The data collection methods and data analysis procedures facilitated this exploration in replying to the research questions underpinning the study. The evaluation of the study and data (*Section 3.12*) merges the findings and interpretations with previous studies in a meaningful and intelligible manner.

(adapted from Tracy 2010)

3.8 Limitations and Challenges

The case study approach may be limited as it presents as a single case study (Yin 2009). The data collected may also be subject to volunteer bias. The researcher conducted research whilst also working as a practitioner in the school and the relationships between the researcher may influence the participants responses in the questionnaire, interview and reflective logs (Cohen *et al* 2007). As previously outlined a multi-method, triangulated approach was implemented in an endeavour to improve the worthiness of the study (Yin 2009).

A challenge within the research design was encountered during data analysis. The reflective logs completed by the observed teachers displayed data that was highly descriptive in nature (Moon 2001) and less analytic than anticipated by the researcher and

therefore, less data than expected regarding richer teacher experience was accessible from the reflective logs. A reflective model was provided to the staff members to support their reflection, yet this highlights the necessity for further teacher development in the art of reflection. However, the remaining data set from the interviews conducted with visiting teachers coupled with the limited data from the reflective logs provided the study with rich, detailed data from which many of the findings have evolved.

3.9 Data Analysis

3.9.1 Thematic Analysis

Strategies for establishing research congruity must be incorporated into the qualitative research process (Carcary 2009). The data analysis strategy implemented throughout this research enhances the conformability of the study and provides a clear audit trail of data and the processes undertaken to enhance the reliability, findings and rigour of the study (Tracy 2010; Lincoln and Guba 1985). This section justifies the selection of Thematic Analysis as the nominated data analysis method and explains the steps taken in analysing the qualitative data gathered.

Data collected via questionnaire, semi-structured interview and reflective log were analysed sequentially with the questionnaire first being analysed. The interview data and reflective logs were analysed subsequently. Data analysis was conducted thematically according to Braun and Clark (2006). "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data in (rich) detail" (Braun and Clark 2006, p.6) Thematic analysis aligned suitably to this study as it is a flexible tactic and it is not explicitly linked to any theoretical or epistemological standpoint thus suited to this study rooted in pragmatism (Maguire and Delahunt 2017). Furthermore, other qualitative data approaches often require a degree of familiarity of the theoretical and technological underpinnings of each approach. Thematic analysis is an accessible analysis method for novice researchers as is the case regarding the researcher in this study (Braun and Clarke 2006). The study was also bounded by time constraints limiting the researcher's ability to examine and become

knowledgeable of more theoretically complex methods of data analysis. The flexibility of thematic analysis encompasses various research questions such as the overarching research question and sub-questions within this study. Thematic analysis can be used to examine various sources of data including questionnaires, interviews and reflective journals as carried out in this multi-method case study. Furthermore, thematic analysis complements small sets of data as gathered in this context-based study and thematic analysis is appropriate in inductive, data-driven analyses therefore favouring the emergence of themes from the data as anticipated in this study (Clarke and Braun 2013).

Data was analysed by following a six-step procedure designed by Braun and Clarke (2006) (*Figure 3.3*). Although displayed as a linear process, the exploration of data was an iterative and reflexive progression.

Figure 3.3 Six Stages of Thematic Data Analysis (adapted from Braun and Clarke 2006).

3.9.1.1 Become Familiar with Data

The first step in the thematic analysis method involves becoming familiar with the data gathered. It is crucial that the researcher submerges themselves in the data prior to moving to the second stage of the analysis process (Braun and Clarke 2006). This involved the reading and re-reading of open ended answers in the completed questionnaires and also of the reflective logs provided by the observed teachers. Familiarisation of data also occurred during the transcription of the recorded interview audios. The data was transcribed from a handheld device using the word processing software Microsoft Word. Transcripts are visual depictions of voiced exchanges where the oral language is written in the form of dialogue (Lankshear and Nobel 2004). A careful account from each of the four recorded interviews were transcribed. Following transcription, the audio was

replayed and the transcripts were checked for accuracy (Braun and Clarke 2006). It was established in seeking ethical approval to carry out this initial study that interview participants would be given the transcription of their audio interview prior to the continuation of the study as a method of respondent validation (Gibbs 2007). It was on this basis that it was decided to omit non-verbal elements and utterances (Braun and Clarke 2006) during the written transcription. It was believed that this could impact upon teacher self-efficacy. Braun and Clarke (2006) recognise that transcription is frequently the primary step in data analysis whilst also displays the interpretative skills required to analyse and code data. The researcher engaged in 'intensive reading' of the transcripts (Charmaz 2003 cited in Gibbs 2007) before progressing onto the second step in the analysis process, the generation of initial codes.

3.9.1.2 Generate Initial Codes

The second phase of data analysis comprises the coding the data corpus by identifying features within the data that appeared interesting to the researcher (Boyatzis 1998 cited in Braun and Clarke 2006). This embraces the arranging of data into meaningful segments (Braun and Clarke 2006). The inductive, data-driven nature of the study resulted in an inductive approach to the coding process. A word processing tool Microsoft Word was implemented throughout the coding process. The codes assigned to the data were not predefined but rather open coding was implemented (Gibbs 2007). Each data set from each interview transcript and reflective log was afforded the same cognisance and attention during the coding process. The researcher attempted to extract from the data whilst setting aside pre-existing theories and biases in a concept termed 'bracketing' (Gibbs 2007, Cohen *et al* 2007). However, the role of the researcher as the analyst cannot be ignored and it must be stated that data are not coded in vacuum. "The researcher is both an observer of the social world and part of the same world" (Gibbs 2007 p.45).

Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to the layers of coding involved in thematic analysis namely latent and semantic. Following the initial coding of the data set, the researcher felt that the data was coded on a shallow, descriptive or semantic level and that the data

set required a further analytical level of latent coding. The data was then coded again and an extract from the initial coding process can be viewed in *Table 3.4*. A limited extract from the original transcript data has been selected in order to protect participant anonymity.

Table 3.4 Extract from Initial Generation of Codes

Original Transcript	Semantic Codes	Latent Codes
DW: How did you find the experience of the peer observation that you took part in for the purpose of this research? Anna: I found it really beneficial as I actually teach the same class that I viewed with the other teacher. I visited them in history class and I actually teach them English myself. I liked the group work that the teacher did with them and how enthusiastic they were with the group work and I suppose it made me realise I should do more group work with them. I suppose I do it every now and then but that class are so good at it, I could probably get more benefit from it than with the paired work that I would usually do with them, that I would base a lot of my class work on them.	PO beneficial Teach same class Liked group work activity Enthusiastic students Should do more group work Group work more beneficial than pair work Classwork usually based on pair work	Value of peer observation Teacher reflection on student engagement Teacher reflection on current practices Desire to improve practice Learning from PO

3.9.1.3 Search for Themes

The ensuing stage in the data analysis procedure involved the organisation and grouping of data in a primary exploration of themes. An inductive analysis of data ensures that emerging themes are closely linked to the data (Patton 1990 cited in Maguire and Delahunt 2017). The long list of codes from stage two, the initial generation of codes was first analysed and similar codes grouped together in a broader concept of potential themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). The relevant data associated with each code was also collated. Codes not relevant to the existing themes were placed together and not yet discarded from the analysis and remained accessible for further stages of analysis and refining of themes (Maguire and Delahunt 2017). An overlap of codes between themes

became apparent in some instances. The decision to position a code within one theme or another reflects the role of the researcher within the data analysis process in crafting the research.

Braun and Clarke (2006) identify that the keyness of a theme is not inherently connected to quantity but involves the capturing of significant concepts. Thus, due to the primary research question seeking teachers' experiences of peer observation it was decided that the quantifying or counting of codes would not be appropriate within this study as each experience would be varied. The interview and reflective logs gave voice to the research participants and each individual was valued as they offered a depth of expression pertinent in case study research. The themes originally identified through active crafting of data were 'Personalised Learning', 'Reflective Practice', 'Attributes of Teacher Leaders', 'Teacher Self-Efficacy' and 'Peer Observation in a Professional Learning Community'. A table displaying the primary themes and a selection of codes generated can be viewed in Appendix 7 (adapted from Maguire and Delahunt 2017).

3.9.1.4 Reviewing Themes

Phase four of the analysis of data involves refining the themes identified in the initial search for themes. It involves re-reading and evaluating codes applied to each theme and the related data extracts. The inclusion of each theme across the entire data set of interview transcripts and reflective logs was considered (Maguire and Delahunt 2017).

It was decided at this point to collapse the themes 'Personalised Learning' and 'Reflective Practice' into one theme termed 'Personalised Learning through Reflective Practice'. It appeared on further analysis of the data that the learning experienced by each individual participant and their reflections are entwined. The learning evidently occurred in each instance due to the reflection of that participant on their own teaching practice or in light of practice observed in the peer observation session. It could also be argued that reflection itself is a form of individual learning on a teacher's professional development journey.

It was identified that there was a lack significant data to support the theme 'Attributes of Teacher Leaders'. This theme would imply that the data supports several differing

characteristics of teacher leaders. The codes assembled under the remit of this theme and the associated data extracts, however, on further analysis indicated an over-arching essence of 'Openness as an Attribute of Teacher Leaders' and this theme was renamed appropriately.

Finally the theme 'Teacher Self-Efficacy' was fragmented into two sub-themes 'Teacher Affirmation' and 'The Value of Feedback in Enhancing Teacher Self-Efficacy' as it was felt that these were distinct branches of teacher self-efficacy that emerged from the data.

Four distinct but interconnected themes were acknowledged at the completion of stage four: 'Personalised Learning through Reflective Practice', 'Peer Observation in a Professional Learning Community', 'Openness as an Attribute of Teacher Leaders' and 'Teacher Self-Efficacy' embracing two sub-themes 'Teacher Reassurance' and 'The Value of Feedback in Enhancing Teacher Self-Efficacy'.

3.9.1.5 Defining Themes

The penultimate stage of thematic data analysis incorporates the designation and further refinement of themes. As the researcher was satisfied with the nominated titles of each theme and with the correlated codes and collated data extracts the first step in this stage involved composing a definition of each theme to capture the crux of the theme as outlined in *Table 3.5*.

Table 3.5 Definition of Themes and Corresponding Data Extracts

Theme	Definition of Theme	Data Extracts Supporting Theme
Personalised Learning through Reflective Practice	This theme encapsulates the rich, varied extent of individual learning experienced by each of the research participants who participated in one peer observation session. Each individual participant devised their own constructs from the lesson taught or observed and this resulted in learning or in a change in practice. The connection between teacher reflection and teacher learning became apparent. Personalised learning occurred as a consequence of teacher reflection on their own practice.	*"So those are the two things, giving them more group work and more specific tasks. Very, very specific roles to keep them on task"* (Anna) *"It was fantastic to get an insight into grammar awareness, language awareness for the students and to see how they participate, how they use their oral skills, written skills, all the four skills really and how they are applied in one lesson"* (Beth)

Peer Observation in a Professional Learning Community	Peer observation of teaching enriches a community of practice as emerged from the data. Peer observation promotes the sharing of practice, collaboration, professional dialogue, situated learning and reduces the isolation of individual teacher practice.	*"Giving your own knowledge and I think getting other people's input on it also. I think that's the best aspect of it, being able to touch base with people from the same subject background" (*Dylan) *"I think it's better to see something in a more realistic context, you actually see it happening in front of you rather than learning it from a slideshow from any training company or whatever they are doing with us" (*Anna)
Teacher SelfEfficacy Sub-Theme: Teacher Affirmation	Peer observation of teaching boosts teacher self-efficacy by simply reaffirming teachers of their practice. This is evident for both observed and visiting teachers.	*"It was a very positive experience and felt that the feedback I got from my colleague was very helpful and gave me confidence in myself and my lessons"* (Wendy)
Sub-Theme: The Value of Feedback in Enhancing Teacher Self-Efficacy	The data exposed the self-criticism expressed by observed teachers following the observation of their lesson. The feedback session postobservation gave the visiting teacher the opportunity to dispel unnecessary selfcriticism aiding the observed teacher's selfefficacy.	*"She started to bring up all of these negative things I hadn't even thought of...tiny little things" (*Anna)
Openness as an Attribute of Teacher Leaders	The data highlights that the lesson observation participants display a degree of openness in their professional practice. Teachers by their voluntary participation may be identified as teacher leaders and display traits of being open to collaboration with colleagues, open to risk taking, open to feedback, open to continuous learning and professional development.	*"You'll never be a fully established teacher if you don't continually learn and be open to change and different methods"* (Cora) *"As a result of this experience, I would be more open to the prospect of more peer observation"* (Vivian)

The second stage in the definition of themes involved the design of a concept map (*Figure 3.4*) to appreciate the idiosyncratic nature of each theme whilst also charting the networks that exist between the themes and sub-themes (Maguire and Delahunt 2017).

Figure 3.4 Concept Map of Themes

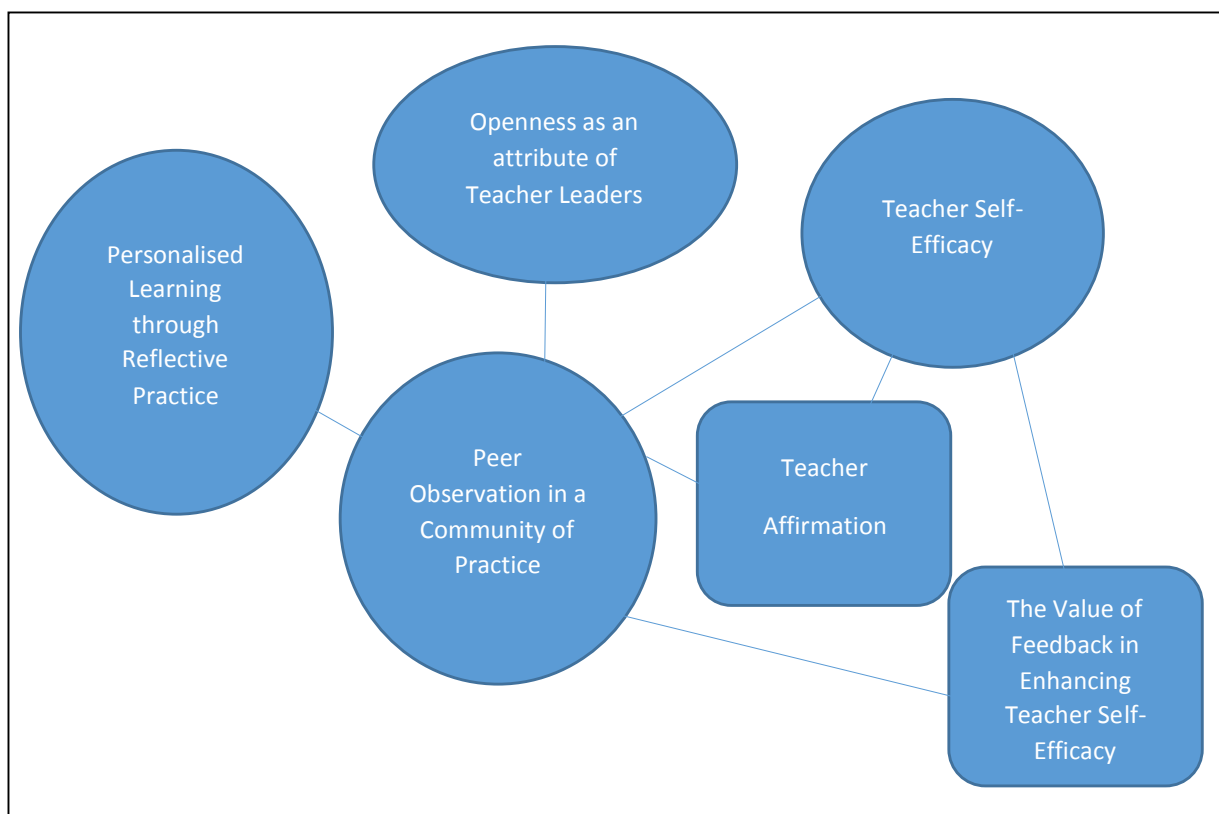### 3.9.1.6 Writing up

The final stage of data analysis involves the presentation of the data within this paper (*Section 3.12*). The presentation of data must be logical, articulate, and succinct whilst also informing the reader of the narrative of the data. The data reporting should be analytic in nature, presenting an argument reinforced by fitting data extracts (Braun and Clarke 2006).

3.9.2 Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis

Computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS) specialist packages have been specifically developed to aid in the analysis of large amounts of qualitative data (Robson 2011). It is claimed that CAQDAS can enhance the speed and efficiency of the coding process and occasionally improve the transparency of the data analysis procedure (Bryman 2012). However, the effectiveness of CAQDAS in a small-scale study such as that carried out has been widely debated (Bryman 2012; Creswell 1998). Computer programmes demand that the researcher should spend a considerable amount of time becoming familiar with the programme being utilised (Creswell 1998) and a researcher may expel more time and focus in grasping the mechanics of the software than on data interpretation (Robson 2011). Computer assisted coding of data and the retrieval of data also risks decontextualizing data (Bryman 2012). The research carried out was a contextbased study and hence, it was crucial that the context would not be demoted within the study and the use of a specialist CAQDAS programme was not employed on these bases. Stanley and Temple (1995) cited in Bryman (2012) propose that many of the coding features required to manage the analysis of qualitative are attainable using a word processing software. The data was analysed with the assistance of Microsoft Word, a powerful word processing software.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues must be held in fervent esteem within qualitative research practice and identified as the primary aspiration of a study rather than simply as an additional procedure in the research design (Tracy 2010). The thorough, intensive, often personal disposition of qualitative research requests the necessity to seek access to the research site prior to beginning the proposed research. A gatekeeper is a person within an authoritative position within the research site and can aid researchers in gaining access to the site (Creswell 2012). Gatekeeper consent was first be sought from the principal of the school in order to carry out research at the proposed site. The principal confirmed in writing that he/she understood and agreed that data gathered is to be utilised solely for research purposes and may not be used in any additional manner. The gatekeeper was provided

with an overall description of the proposed study in enabling an informed decision regarding the researcher's access to the site (*Appendix 5*).

Voluntary informed consent was sought from all participants in the study. The purpose of the study, the entire research procedure and requirements from participants was fully disclosed prior to beginning research. Participants were informed when seeking voluntary informed consent of their right to withdraw from the research process at any given point up until data analysis (British Educational Research Association 2011). Participants were asked to provide a signature to guarantee that observations made during the visit to a fellow staff member's classroom would be strictly confidential and would not be discussed outside of the research project (*Appendix 2*).

The twofold role of practitioner and researcher must be assumed with due cognisance of confidentiality of both teacher participants and students present during classroom observations ensuring anonymity and safeguarding of data collected. Participants were given pseudonyms within the study in an attempt to protect participant confidentiality and anonymity. In an additional effort to protect participant anonymity it was decided that the original interview transcriptions and reflective logs would not be included as an appendix in this paper. The small-scale of the study limited to the context of one school may make the participants easily identifiable should these be attached. Data collected throughout the study is stored on a password protected device accessible only to the researcher and the research supervisor. Data analysis occurred in a home office accessible by key to only the researcher.

As a practitioner I ensured that research procedure did not unduly increase the workload of teachers and colleagues participating in the case study and also had minimal impact on the daily classroom practice and students' learning during the classroom observation period (British Educational Research Authority 2011).

Research was carried out in adherence to LYIT's (n.d.) ethical policies and procedures. An ethical application was submitted to the LYIT Ethical Committee and in December 2017 ethical permission was granted to carry out the proposed research.

3.11 Conclusion to Methodology

The holistic, inductive case-study design was deemed most appropriate in exploring the research questions within this ethically considered study. A background-data gathering questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and reflective logs were employed in data collection and thematic data analysis was subsequently implemented in the triangulated analysis of the data.

3.12 Evaluation

3.12.1 Findings and Discussion

The previous section described explicitly the design and justification of the research methodology, the ethical procedure and data analysis carried out within this qualitative study. The study aims to explore peer observation of teaching in the Post-Primary sector addressing existing literature gaps. This section details the results and findings that have emerged from the data and from the rigorous exploration and analysis of the data. It will address the over-arching research question and the sub-questions underpinning the study. The research questions previously specified at the beginning of this chapter are reiterated as follows:

Central Research Question:
  ➢ What are teachers' experiences of peer classroom observation of teaching in a Post-Primary School in Donegal?

Sub-Questions:
  ➢ How can in situ peer observation act as an addition to externally facilitated professional development?
  ➢ What is the role of the teacher leader in facilitating peer observation of teaching and continuing professional development?
  ➢ How do teachers reflect on their practice following peer observation of teaching?
  ➢ How do teachers view staff collegiality and collaboration and to what extent does peer observation enhance the professional learning community within the school?

The data in collected in this study arose from a background data-gathering questionnaire, interview transcripts and reflective logs. The results and findings evolving from each data collection method are not considered in isolation but interwoven and subsequently presented and discussed thematically. The themes that have been crafted from the data are 'Personalised Learning through Reflective Practice', 'Peer Observation of Teaching in a Professional Learning Community', 'Openness as an Attribute of Teacher Leaders' and 'Teacher Self Efficacy' with sub-themes 'Teacher Affirmation' and 'The Value of Feedback in Enhancing Teacher Self-Efficacy'.

3.12.2 Theme One: Personalised Learning through Reflective Practice

Cosán, the new national framework for teachers' learning recognises the role of teacher autonomy in their professional development and learning (The Teaching Council 2016b). The main finding of this research study suggests that peer observation of teaching enables and encourages personalised learning and teacher autonomy. The majority of literature based on peer observation of teaching concentrates heavily on the mechanisms and structures of introducing a peer observation programme (Hammersely-Fletcher and Orsmond 2004). Hendry and Oliver (2012) ascertain that peer observation of teaching enables practitioners to pay attention to what matters to them and that peer observation may result in different outcomes for different teachers. A comprehensive search of the literature, however, fails to identify previous studies that specifically detect or account for the rich, varied and distinctive learning that can potentially occur for each individual teacher during and following one peer observation session.

The background-data gathering questionnaire attests to the many varied and individual motivational factors encouraging staff participation in peer observation (*see Question Six -Appendix 7*). It became evident to the researcher during further analysis of the data that each participant devised their own meaning and constructs from the peer observation session which led to developed thinking regarding their own teaching practice or in certain instances a change in their practice. Each respective participant assimilated information and learning that was unique to their teaching strategies, their subject area,

the particular stage in their career and weaknesses in their teaching that they identified as requiring improvement.

The results furthermore identify the role of teacher reflection in the personalised learning journey. It became apparent from the data that individual teacher learning and teacher reflection are intertwined. Each participant arrived at their individual learning by reflecting on their own teaching or by reflecting on their own teaching in light of the observation of a peer's lesson. The observed teachers were asked to reflect explicitly on the lesson they taught, however, the visiting teachers participated in interviews and were not required to reflect on the lesson in writing. Despite this, by simply observing a lesson the visiting teachers were organically prompted to engage in reflection. This creates parallels with previous studies indicating that peer observation of teaching leads to personal teacher reflection and self-dialogue (Cosh 1998; Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond 2004; Carroll and O'Loughlin 2014). Additionally, it reaffirms findings by Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond (2004) that peer observation of teaching is of significant benefit to both the observed and the observer. The learning and reflection experienced by each participant markedly differed, therefore, the personalised learning acquired by each participant will be exhibited and discussed.

Anna

Anna observed a peer teacher implementing a group work strategy, Marketplace, during the peer observation lesson. She commented that students were energetic and enthusiastic throughout the group work activity. As Anna also teaches the same class that she observed in the lesson this prompted her to reflect on the various approaches she implements with this specific class. She reflected that often she avoids group work and tends to focus on pair work strategies.

> *"I suppose it made me realise I should do more group work with them…I had tended to use paired work rather than group work and more recently I was doing media studies with them and started using more group work*

and getting them to use each other for guidelines for what they should be doing." (Anna)

The effective modelling of the group work strategy by the observed teacher gave Anna the impetus to undertake this approach with the class in question in later lessons. This is comparable to the results of a study by Hendry and Oliver (2012) displaying that peer observation leads to learning of new teaching strategies.

Beth

As a Modern Foreign languages teacher, Beth highlights the importance of making crosscurricular connections in her subject area. During the peer observation, Beth was most engaged with the content being taught, although in a different language, it encompassed content also taught within her own subject and she states that she could bring elements of the lesson into her own teaching.

> *"You get an insight into cross-curricular because I find with languages that they're very much based on cross-curricular so History, Geography, Art, Irish."*

> *"The students were given homework that involved research to do with the clothing, they type of clothing the Matador would wear and it's very specific vocab in Spanish but it at times it does appear on the syllabus so again they are learning it in Irish. They are doing the same thing but maybe in a different language with myself but it's all cultural and so that could seep into my subjects aswell."* (Beth)

The observed teacher modelled craft knowledge, the subject content and relevant activities (Barth 2001). Beth reflecting on the cross-curricular nature of the lesson benefited by observing that craft knowledge and effective practice being shared.

Cora

During the peer observation session, Cora detected the observed teacher's interactions with the students within the class. Cora comments that the teacher used a high level of praise to encourage students during the lesson which elicited reflection on her own interactions with students and her praise methods.

> *"I found that Mary* uses a lot of praise and I just reminded myself that I don't think I praise enough so they are good reminders to see are you doing those things"* (Cora).

Cora apparently perceived that the observed teacher's level of praise stimulated a positive atmosphere within the classroom contributing to an affirmative learning environment. This is echoic of Wiliam (2016) noting that each individual teacher has an awareness of what will advance the learning of their students in their classroom. Hence, Cora has become cognisant that she could increase the level of praise afforded to students in her classes in order to enhance learning.

Dylan

Dylan reflected deeply on his lesson structure due to the practice witnessed during the peer observation. The observed teacher utilised Microsoft PowerPoint technology to outline each stage throughout the lesson. Dylan comments that this appeared to provide contentment to the students as the element of routine made students aware of what was occurring at each stage in the class.

> *"I do think if you have that element of routine it can be very beneficial. Sometimes you know I will give homework and I will encourage classes to share it and there are some times that I won't so you know you might have students who are ill prepared for their lesson or they might not have their homework with them because they aren't aware of the fact that they could be asked to share it."* (Dylan)

The practice observed prompted Dylan not only to reflect on his own teaching practice but to also reflect on student experiences in his classes and this unearthed that on occasion the lack of lesson structure may impact negatively on students. Acting on this discovery, Dylan attempted to ensure a more structured and schedule conscious approach to his lessons following the peer observation signifying a change in practice.

> *"I think sometimes I can rush the homework towards the end and I definitely have started to take that approach more now that I will give homework earlier in the lesson."* (Dylan)

Reflective processes as a result of observing a peer's lesson facilitated Dylan in understanding how his learning and a change in practice could benefit his students in their learning and on a more composite level their engagement, comfort and satisfaction (The Teaching Council 2016b).

Vivian

Whilst reflecting on the lesson she taught whilst being observed by a colleague, Vivian identified that the pace of the lesson appeared more efficient during the observed lesson creating an enjoyable lesson with strong student participation. She recognised that throughout the lesson she was more time conscious and aware of the elements of work that she had planned for the lesson.

> *"I felt that it progressed at a good pace. Sometimes I would find that I allow students more time than I initially allocate and this can make the lesson drag and it also must be frustrating for the better students who finish their work within the given time limit."* (Vivian)

The observation of Vivian's lesson promoted reflection on both teacher practice and student experience as a result of that practice. Vivian comments that time-keeping during lessons is a component of her lesson planning and execution that requires a greater

emphasis in future. Similarly, this conforms to findings by Kenny *et al* (2014) that teacher self-evaluation leads to pragmatic learning regarding changes they would implement in future teaching.

Wendy

Wiliam (2014) testifies that teachers must engage in professional development that is of direct benefit to students. This is evident in the case of Wendy when reflecting on the Home Economics lesson she taught while observed by a peer. She concluded in a reflective log that one of the stitches attempted by the students during a practical revision lesson on sewing proved challenging for a number of students.

> *Throughout the activity I noticed that the timing allocated to the task was unrealistic and I could have awarded more time to each stitch activity e.g 2 minutes extra. This was particularly evident when the students reached the 'chain stitch desk' as this was perceived as a more difficult stitch.*

Teacher reflection in this instance identified that the students could not carry out the assigned activity correctly due to time constraints. The teacher reflected that the difficulty of certain stiches could be decreased by students recording the various steps involved on a handheld device and uploading it to the virtual learning environment for future reference. The professional development experienced by Wendy is directly linked to classroom and will have a direct impact on learners (The Teaching council 2016b).

Yvonne

Yvonne taught a music lesson and was observed by a fellow colleague. She reflected on her teaching throughout the lesson.

> "*I think I could have been more relaxed and given the students more time on the tasks. I think maybe setting a timer for the class might be a useful tool to incorporate. At least this way I will ensure that the students are given enough time to answer and also to work on their groups.*" (Yvonne)

Powell (cited in The Teaching Council 2016b) adopts the stance that teachers' own judgements and intuition surrounding their needs to grow and develop are of vital significance. Yvonne realises that her temperament during the lesson may have impacted on student interaction with the lesson. As she did not feel relaxed, the lesson was rushed as a result. She possess an intuition of what is required to improve the lesson conducted. She has shaped her thinking regarding future improvement by advocating that the use of a timer may reduce the potential impact her state of relaxation could have on the lesson and subsequently student learning.

3.12.3 Theme Two: Peer Observation in a Professional Learning Community

Descriptive statistics garnered from the background-data gathering questionnaire administered to all teaching staff provide a valuable insight into the relationship between peer observation of teaching and the wider community of practice within the school based in the context of this study (*See Appendix 6*). The questionnaire generated a response rate of 55.5 per cent. 66.7 per cent of respondents have previously engaged in peer observation by acting as a visiting teacher and 73.7 per cent of respondents have been observed by a colleague while teaching, indicating that a high proportion of staff have engaged in peer observation to a certain extent. Question Eight on the questionnaire provided participants with a range of activities and asked them to identify which collaborative practices they currently engage in. 26.6 per cent replied that they teach while fellow teachers observe their lessons and 16.6 per cent responded that they observe peers teaching. The disparity in results between those who responded that they have previously participated in peer observation and those who currently participate in peer observation may demonstrate that whilst peer observation is evidently occurring within this community of practice it may be sporadic and not a continuous, ongoing practice.

Have you previously observed a fellow teacher teaching a lesson?
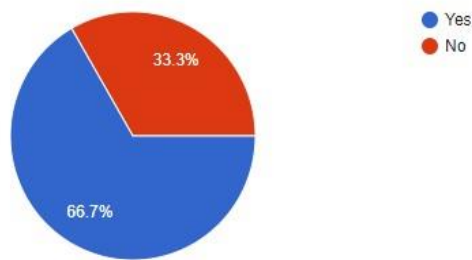
30 responses

Has a peer teacher ever observed you teaching a lesson?

30 responses
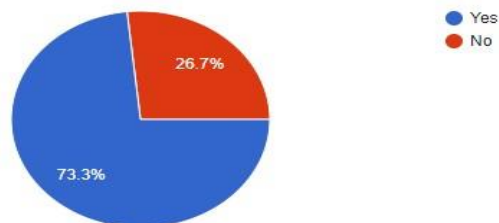
Figure 3.5 Pie charts indicating prior experience of peer observation of teaching

Questions relating to staff willingness to participate in future peer observation produced overwhelmingly positive results. 96.7 per cent of staff respondents would be willing to observe a colleagues lesson while 90 per cent of respondents would be willing to permit a fellow staff member observe their lesson while they taught. The current interaction with peer observation may possibly be sporadic and episodic, however, these figures highlight that the interaction appears to be generating a positive attitude to collaboration and that peer observation of teaching is enhancing collegiality and a community of practice. The positive figures also suggests that this particular educational institution is a learning enriched school with a robust learning community of practitioners (Bolam *et al* 2005).

Would you be willing to participate in peer classroom observation of teaching by observing a fellow teacher teaching?

30 responses

- Yes
- No

96.7%

Would you be willing to participate in peer classroom observation by permitting a fellow teacher to observe you teaching?

30 responses

- Yes
- No

10%

90%
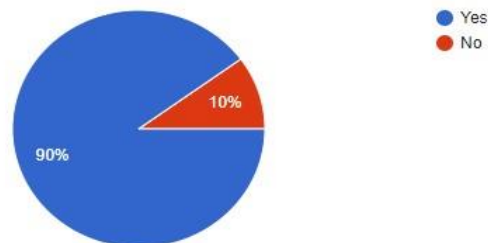
Figure 3.6 Pie charts indicating staff willingness to engage in future peer observation of teaching

The interview data and reflective logs provide a further lens through which peer observation and the community of practice it operates within can be evaluated. CPD programmes are frequently condemned as they separate teacher professional development from teachers' daily work and context (The Teaching Council 2016b). Participants reflected that traditional, external CPD is frequently repetitive, unrealistic and not empathetic towards different circumstances. Peer observation places teacher CPD in situ.

> *"I think it's better to see something in a more realistic context, you actually see it happening in front of you rather than learning it from a slideshow from any training company or whatever they are doing with us. So I think that I would like to do more of it (peer observation) anyway."* (Anna)

"They (external courses) do give you recommendations of what you can do but it's until you are actually doing something then only can you learn… but I think you need to use them (methodologies) to see if they work for you, you know in the natural setting." (Cora)

"Or you know is there always one or two students who are always that bit disengaged and you're wondering what approach that you think students would respond to. You could observe someone's class to see what they do." (Dylan)

The data extracts confer the paradigms and theories of various international theorists and research papers highlighting the pertinence of situatedness in engaging in collaborative professional development within a learning community that results in tangible, observable teacher learning (Svendesen 2017; Hendry *et al* 2014; Lowrie 2014). Feedback to The Teaching Council (2016b) from practitioners during the consultation process for the development for the Cosán Framework avows that teacher learning must be real and situated in relevant contexts situating this data in line with former Irish research encasing professional development.

While the figures highlighted previously in this section assert that peer observation is occurring at some level within the school in question, the research raises an interesting finding regarding teacher isolation and the antiquated notion of the classroom as a locked, protected, territorial space. Each of the visiting teachers highlight their surprise at the lack of student reaction to their presence in the classroom during the observation session illustrated by the following extracts:

"I found that with the class that I went in to observe there wasn't a reaction from the kids, they weren't turning around and looking. They weren't questioning why I was there. They didn't act any differently, they weren't quieter. They were the same just natural." (Dylan)

"I think pupils these days are so used to these days having someone come into the room, it didn't faze them. It certainly didn't faze the students that I saw anyway…They certainly didn't pay any attention to me or make a big deal or say hello when I came into the classroom as I expected them to do, they just got on with their work. They didn't seem nervous or anything like that." (Anna)

This data may indicate that peer observation is enabling teaching to become a more open, collaborative, communal profession reducing the isolation encountered by teachers within their classrooms. While this finding may not fully dispute the claims of King 2016, O'Sullivan 2010 and Fullan and Hargreaves 1992 that teaching is a lonely, isolated profession it may indicate that a cultural shift enabled by peer observation is currently occurring within the Irish Post-Primary school studied by this resarch.

3.12.4 Theme Three: Openness as an Attribute of Teacher Leaders

Eight staff from a total teaching staff of fifty-four self-volunteered to participate in the peer observation stage of the study in question. This represents 14.8 per cent of the teaching body. It may be advocated that the participants could be defined as teacher leaders based on the premise that they openly volunteered to participate in a noncompulsory school-based project and serve outside of their own classroom in collaboration with colleagues (Wenner and Campbell 2017; Hunzicker 2012). Each of the individual teachers involved are classroom teachers, none of whom hold formal leadership roles within the school. This is a stimulating finding as it may confirm claims by King (2016) regarding the emergence of contemporary teacher leaders within Irish schools, those without formal titles or roles in middle management.

Contrary to this idea of teacher leaders, it could be debated that volunteer bias exists within the study and that the peer observation participants may have volunteered for many various reasons. Question Seven on the questionnaire prompted the wider staff to divulge challenges associated with peer observation participation. Staff responses were quite

extensive and varied with challenges such as "nerves", "anxiousness", "fear of judgement" and "time constraints" mentioned as challenges faced by teachers (*See Question Seven – Appendix 6 for further data*). Interestingly each of the interview participants avowed that the peer observation process was not challenging in any aspect, however, they did attest to the fact that it may be challenging for other staff members. Therefore, this element of self-distinction by the visiting teachers between themselves and other staff members strengthens the argument that these practitioners present as teacher leaders.

The analysis of data enunciates an attribute common to each of the peer observation participant , encompassed by the term openness. This is a trait of teacher leaders similarly proclaimed by Leithwood *et al* (2007). The interview transcripts and reflective logs data set were permeated with an openness to learning, feedback, risk taking and collaboration. Each participant teacher merely by their inclusion in the study adopted the role of the learner and evidence of the pursuit of professional growth was evident throughout the data.

> *"You'll never be a fully established teacher if you don't continually learn and be open to change and different methods"* (Cora)

> *"I suppose if I observed a subject I don't teach at all like science, I might get a method there that I've never thought of being used before and I could see it being used then. That would be great"*(Anna)

> *"I think that if you're honest and upfront and say, explain that this is the area I would like to focus on or if it was your own subject 'I teach is aspect of grammar, students from first year right through to senior cycle seem to have difficulty with it, I would love an opportunity to see how your teach it and things like that'"* (Beth)

> *"I didn't go into the lesson thinking why am I here… It was something I was looking forward to going in to (the lesson)"* (Dylan)

These data extracts illustrate the participants' candidness towards their experiences of peer observations and the growth potential offered by observing a peers lesson or teaching with a peer observing. The participants are convincing in their language; "great", "love an opportunity" and "looking forward to going", demonstrating their passion and frankness regarding learning opportunities. This emulates findings and theories by various researchers that teacher leaders incline to easily assume the role of the learner and seek professional evolvement implying that teacher leaders in an Irish context possess similar attributes to teacher leaders internationally (Bell and Cooper 2013; Taylor *et al* 2011; Hargreaves and Fink 2006).

Participants declared their high level of receptiveness to feedback and valued feedback received by stating that feedback was welcomed and in certain instances the feedback was accepted and informed the teachers' future practice.

> *"I might consider having another teacher observe my lesson again to get feedback on the delivery of my lesson".* (Yvonne)

> *"My awareness was drawn to certain things in my classroom that I wouldn't have really noticed myself for example, I did a group activity one day and you know I had it well planned beforehand and paired the appropriate learners together and I thought it was thoroughly done, however, I was informed afterwards that there was one particular learner that appeared focused whenever I was circling and monitoring the room and the activity and as soon as I turned my back they withdrew from the activity although I thought that student was engaged for the entire duration of that activity for the five minutes or whatever it was so that really helped me to focus with a different strategy the next time I did that same of activity".* (Beth)

"I suppose in one instance she told me that I maybe did too much information at once and then I thought about it and it probably was too much and just to be mindful of that moving forward" (Cora)

A strong degree of openness to feedback may also signpost that teacher leaders are similarly open to risk-taking and constructive criticism. Peer observation of teaching exposes staff to vulnerability, criticism of their practice and their classroom management. Dylan openly commented that he would be extremely welcoming of feedback even if it highlighted negative aspects of his teaching. Bell and Cooper (2013) mention the risk associated with relational negotiations involved in a peer observation of teaching programme. However, participants within their study claimed the benefits outweighed the risks and it appears that the participants within this specific study are of a similar disposition.

3.12.5 Theme Four: Teacher Self-Efficacy

The research data implies that peer observation of teaching can impact upon both observed and visiting teachers' self-efficacy. The data supports Bandura's theory of observational learning (1977) as detailed in the evidence of the personalised learning encountered by each visiting teacher in *Section 3.12.2*. Each of the visiting teachers learned modestly by observing a colleague and this consequently increased their confidence to try new teaching strategies, explore new ideas, to focus on the mechanisms of their teaching and on their interaction with students supporting claims made by Donnelly (2007). The analysis of the data also fostered indications that peer observation of teaching contributes to teacher self-efficacy on distinct levels by also affirming teachers' practices. It also signifies the merit of feedback in enhancing the observed teachers' self-efficacy. The subsequent part of this paper will depict these conclusions in greater detail.

3.12.5.1 Sub-Theme: Teacher Affirmation

The data furnishes persuasive evidence that affirmation of teaching practices is one of the motivational factors encouraging teachers to observe a peer teaching and that reassurance can occur when one teacher observes another teacher's lesson. Two of the interview participants whilst reflecting on previous peer observation sessions remarked that they pursued self-assurance during peer observation.

> *"I asked another teacher here if I could observe her lesson in teaching Higher Level Maths because it was the first time I was teaching Higher Level Maths so I wanted to see what it was like and it just made me more relaxed because I felt like I wasn't doing it right and you know just to see another person doing it and it's just affirming really that you are doing that aswell and you are doing what's being done" (Cora)*

> *"Seeing other people and how they are approaching things in their own classrooms and being able to share and I suppose with Leaving Cert. English to be able to kind of seek reassurance of the approach that you are taking to it".* *(Dylan)*

A third visiting teacher participant felt reassured when the ICT being utilised by the observed teacher failed to work during the lesson. This comforted the visiting teacher in realising the occasional turbulent nature of teaching and the difficulties that also arise for fellow colleagues. These examples signpost that observing a peer's lesson may reduce the isolation often associated with teaching and boost teacher assertion accordingly. Correspondingly, Carroll and O'Loughlin (2014) reveal similar findings in a study of Third Level nursing teachers regarding the positive effect of peer observation in raising self-assurance and confidence. Carroll and O'Loughlin (2014) and Bell and Cooper (2013) highlight the confidence-boosting impact of peer observation on early career teachers in particular. A divergence from their findings occurs in this study as the teachers seeking reassurance from peer observation have 5, 6 and 11 years teaching experience

respectively, denoting that peer observation is also influential in reassuring teachers with significant teaching experience.

3.12.5.2 Sub-Theme: The Value of Feedback in Enhancing Teacher Self-Efficacy

A number of participants reflecting on both previous lesson observations and the observation component of this specific study signified the influence of peer feedback received after they had been observed by a colleague.

> *"It's always nice to hear the things you are doing well."* (Anna)

> *"Well it's naturally intimidating but it's also affirming aswell because you receive feedback of where the strengths and weaknesses were." (Cora)*

> *"It was nice to know that the teacher had taken certain things from the class that they could actually use…..it's nice to know you are passing on information to people." (Dylan)*

> *"I felt that the feedback I got from my colleague was very helpful and gave me confidence in myself and my lessons. It was really nice to get some feedback on my teaching style and also good to hear that my colleague felt it was a nice class environment and that the students were well engaged." (Vivian)*

The verbal feedback provided to observed teachers following a peer observation session informed teachers of what the visiting teacher perceived they were doing well and this convinced teachers of their teaching ability. Teachers also took pride and confidence in the awareness that they could impart techniques and craft knowledge to other teachers by modelling their own teaching (Barth 201).

54

An interesting finding arose regarding the significance of feedback dialogue following the peer observation that was undertaken specifically as part of this study. Two of the visiting teachers when interviewed underlined the self-criticism they witnessed from the observed teachers during the post-observation feedback.

She started to bring up all of these negative things I hadn't even thought of. Tiny little things… So it was interesting to see that she was pulling up negative things that I hadn't even noticed…I think as professionals we can be quite critical of ourselves so I know when people leave after being observed they feel like everything went wrong (Anna)

Aoife* thinks that one of the students was acting up but I didn't notice it. (Cora)

Kenny *et al* (2014) discern levels of self-criticism in observed teachers' reflections on their teaching. Comparably, the exemplars above express that the observed teachers were self-critical of their own teaching or of their classroom management when in discussion post-observation. The observed teachers focused on elements of the lesson or on student behaviour that they perceived as negative. However, these elements went unnoticed by the visiting teacher during the lesson. This suggests the essential inclusion of feedback following a peer observation lesson to relieve often unnecessary self-criticism experienced by observed teachers empowering teachers to progress with self-confidence as also stated by Carroll and O'Loughlin (2014). Additionally, this potentially highlights that in absence of feedback, the observed teacher may feel discouraged after an observation and as a result the lack of feedback may impact negatively on a teacher's selfefficacy.

Section Four: Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions and Recommendations

This research study had the overall aim of exploring teacher peer observation of teaching in a context based study of one Post-Primary school in Ireland. The findings of this research as emergent from the four themes identified concludes the significantly positive experiences of participants engaging in peer observation which is largely reflective of findings throughout Irish and international literature (King 2016; Carroll and O'Loughlin 2014; Hendry et a 2014; Bell and Cooper 2013).

The findings suggest that peer observation of teaching enhances the professional learning community, encourages collaboration in a situated learning context and reduces teacher isolation as also previously revealed in prior research (Svendesen 2017; Lowrie 2014; Bell and Mlandovic 2008). Teachers volunteering to partake in peer observation of teaching appear to have been identified as informal teacher leaders and seem to possess openness as an attribute as confirmed by preceding studies (Donnelly 2007; Bell and Cooper 2013). The findings also correlate with preceding findings that peer observation of teaching boosts teacher self-efficacy (Bell and Cooper 2013) and raises an interesting awareness regarding the significance of feedback inclusion in the peer observation process.

A counterintuitive finding emerged regarding the positive influence of peer observation of teaching on the individualised, personalised learning that occurred for each participating practitioner, both visiting and observed teachers in developing their pedagogical capacity. This is a judicious finding considering the movement of teacher professional learning towards the national framework, Cosán (The Teaching Council 2016b). Cosán promotes both an autonomous and collegial approach to CPD and this study supports the apparent potential of in situ peer observation as a merger between these approaches to provide real, beneficial and valuable professional development to teachers with the aspiration of improving student achievement.

Furthermore, the data analysis exposed the interconnected relationship between personalised learning and teacher reflection. The evaluation reveals that learning occurs

as a by-product of teacher reflection on their own practice. This raises an imperative question surrounding alternative CPD approaches that do not enforce a level of teacher reflection and it is suggested that further research should be designed to investigate the impact of teacher reflection within teacher CPD on teacher professional learning in Ireland.

The reflective logs collected express the reflection skills of the research participants. The written reflections approached reflection on a descriptive level with a limited level of deep, analytic reflection. If the Cosán framework for teacher professional learning assumes that practitioners will engage in continuous, informed reflection of their practice then it is imperative that teachers are given the appropriate tools to guide and develop their skills in reflection. It is recommended that teachers engage in CPD focusing particularly on reflective practice.

It appears evident that the school within this context-based study is in a favourable position to move forward with a more continuous programme of peer observation. Hammersely-Fletcher and Orsmond (2004) are apprehensive of the 'cosiness' that may prevail if participating pairs in a peer observation situation are self-selecting. This study discloses that teachers value the trust and assurance of working with a colleague that they are familiar with and it seems that the benefits of the pairing outweigh potential negativities that may exist. It is thus recommended that a peer observation programme in infant stages would entrust teacher autonomy in volunteering to participate, in pair selection and in the assignment of observation classes and a longitudinal investigation of peer observation would be welcomed.

This case study involving a small sample, conducted by a single researcher has focused on teachers' experiences of peer observation of teaching in one Post-Primary school, therefore, the findings are limited and not generally applicable to external contexts. The study may however resonate with fellow practitioners and begin to provide an insight into a field with a stark absence of literature regarding the subject of peer observation of teaching in Ireland and hence inspire further research within this area.

4.2 Researcher Growth and Reflection

The implementation and evaluation of this research has been an invaluable learning experience and has contributed to my professional and personal growth and development. The research study has raised my cognisance of the iterative and intricate nature of research, particularly of data analysis. My initial perception was that the data analysis steps (Braun and Clarke 2006) would be simply and neatly applied to the data collected. The realisation occurred, however, that the analysis procedure for qualitative data is much more complicated that first anticipated. The data analysis process whilst challenging and complex for a novice researcher greatly enhanced my capacities as a researcher and theorist.

The transition from practitioner to researcher in developing my researcher identity was interesting and testing simultaneously. Conducting interviews with fellow colleagues and peers as a researcher proved difficult to begin with, yet my interviewing skills became additionally refined with each interview carried out. The study also challenged me to be continually mindful and self-reflexive regarding my impact as a practitioner researcher on the study.

The research study has aided in the development of a critical mind set in reading and reviewing existing literature by questioning methodologies, theories and findings. It has also prompted me to challenge my professional values and will guide my own CPD in future in realising the integral roles of reflection and collaboration in teacher professional development.

REFERENCES

Ainscow, M. (2015) *Towards Self-Improving School Systems: Lessons from a City Challenge*, New York, NY: Routledge.

Alexandrou, A. and Swaffield, S. (2012) 'Teacher Leadership and Professional Development: Perspectives, Connections and Prospects', *Professional Development in Education*, 38(2), 159-167.

Bandura, A. (1977) 'Self Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavourial Change', *Psychological Review*, 84(3), 191–215.

Barth, R. (2001) 'Teacher Leader', *Phi Delta Kappan*, 82(6), 443–449.

Bell, A. and Mladenovic, R. (2008) 'The benefits of peer observation of teaching for tutor development', *Higher Education*, 55(6), 735–752.

Bell, M. (2001) 'Supported reflective practice: a programme of peer observation and feedback for academic teaching development', *International Journal for Academic Development*, 6(1), 29–39.

Bell, M. and Cooper, P. (2013) 'Peer observation of teaching in university departments: A framework for implementation', *International Journal for Academic Development*, 18(1), 60–73.

Bolam, R. Mc Mahon, A., Stoll, L., Thomas S., Wallace, M., Greenwood, A., Hawkey, K., Ingram, M., Atkinson, A. and Smith, M. (2005) *Creating and Sustaining Effective Professional Learning Communities*, Annesley: DFES Publications.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.

Bryman, A. (2012) *Social Research Methods* (4th ed.) New York: Oxford University Press.

Buchanan, D.A. (2012) 'Case Studies in Organisational Research', in Symon G. and Cassell C., eds, *Qualitative Organisational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges*, London: SAGE, 351-370.

Campoy, R. (2010) 'Reflective Thinking and Educational Solutions: Clarifying What Teacher Educators are Attempting to Accomplish', *SRATE Journal*, 19(2), 15–22.

Carcary, M. (2009) 'The Research Audit Trail - Enhancing Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research', *Journal of Business Research Methods,* 7(1), 11-24.

Carroll, C. and O'Loughlin, D. (2014) 'Peer observation of teaching: enhancing academic engagement for new participants', *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 51(4), 446–456.

Chamberlain, J.M., D'Artrey, M., Rowe, D.A. (2011) 'Peer observation of teaching: A decoupled process', *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 12(3), 189–201.

Chester, A. (2012) 'Peer Partnerships in Teaching: Evaluation of a Voluntary Model of Professional Development in Tertiary Education', *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning,* 12 (2), 94-108.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2007) *Research Methods in Education*, 6th ed. London; New York: Routledge.

Creswell, J.W. (2012) *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, 4th ed., Boston: Pearson.

Creswell, J.W. (1998) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design - Choosing Among Five Traditions,* London, UK: SAGE.

Donnelly, R. (2007) 'Perceived Impact of Peer Observation of Teaching in Higher Education', *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 19(2), 117–129.

Feilzer, M. (2010) 'Doing Mixed Methods Research Pragmatically: Implications for the Rediscovery of Pragmatism as a Research Paradigm', *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 4(1), 6–16.

Finlay, L. (2008) *Reflecting on 'Reflective Practice*, PBPL Paper 52: The Open University.

Fullan, M., Hargreaves, A. (1992) *Teacher Development and Educational Change*, London; Washington, D.C.: Falmer Press.

Fullan, M. and Stiegelbauer, S.M., (1991) *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, 2nd ed., Columbia University, New York: Teachers College Press, Teachers College.

Gibbs. G. (2007) *Analysing Qualitative Data*, New York: Sage Publications Ltd.

Gibbs, G. (1988) *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*, Further Education Unit, Oxford: Oxford Polytechnic.

Gosling, D. (2005) *Peer Observation of Teaching*, SEDA Paper 118, London: Staff Educational Development Ltd.

Guskey, T.R. (2002) 'Professional Development and Teacher Change', *Teachers and Teaching*, 8(3), 381–391.

Guskey, T.R. (2017) 'Where do you want to get to?', *The Learning Professional*, 38(2), 33–37.

Hammersley Fletcher, L. and Orsmond, P. (2004) 'Evaluating our peers: is peer observation a meaningful process?', *Studies in Higher Education*, 29(4), 489–503.

Hargreaves, A., & Fink, D. (2006). Sustainable Leadership. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hargreaves A. and O'Connor M.T. (2018) *Leading Collaborative Professionalism,* Victoria: Australia; Centre for Strategic Education

Harrison, C. and Killion, J. (2007) 'Ten Roles for Teacher Leaders', *Educational Leadership - Teachers as Leaders*, 65(1), 74–77.

Hendry, G.D., Bell, A. and Thomson, K. (2014) 'Learning by observing a peer's teaching situation', *International Journal for Academic Development*, 19(4), 318–329.

Hendry, G.D. and Oliver, G.R. (2012) 'Seeing is believing: The benefits of Peer Observation', *Journal of University Teaching and Learning*, 9(2), 1–9.

Herod, A. (1999) 'Reflections on interviewing foreign elites, praxis, positionality, validity and the cult of the leader', *Geoforum*, 30, 313-327.

Hicks, D. (2002) *Lessons for the Future: the missing dimension in education*, London: Routledge/Falmer.

Hunzicker, J. (2012) 'Professional development and job-embedded collaboration: how teachers learn to exercise leadership', *Professional Development in Education*, 38(2), 267-289.

Hunzicker, J. (2011) 'Effective Professional Development for Teachers: A Checklist', *Professional Development in Education*, 37 (2), 177-179.

Inspectorate (2016) 'Looking at Our School 2016 - A Quality Framework for Post Primary Schools', available: https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection ReportsPublications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/Looking-at-Our-School-2016-A Quality-Framework-for-Post-Primary-schools.pdf [accessed 9 Dec 2017].

Katzenmeyer, M. and Moller, G. (2001) *Awakening the Sleeping Giant: Helping Teachers Develop as Leaders*, 2nd ed., Thousand Oaks, Californaia: Corwin Press.

Kennedy, A. (2011) 'Collaborative continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers in Scotland: aspirations, opportunities and barriers', *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 34(1), 25–41.

Kenny, A., Mitchell, E., Ní Chróinín, D., Vaughan, E. and Murtagh, E. (2014), 'In their shoes: exploring a modified approach to peer observation of teaching in a university setting', *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 51(2), 218-229.

King, F. (2016) 'Teacher professional development to support teacher professional learning: Systemic Factors from Irish case studies', *Teacher Development*, 20(4), 574 594.

Korte, R. and Mercurio, Z.A. (2017) 'Pragmatism and Human Resource Development: Practical Foundations for Research, Theory, and Practice', *Human Resource Development Review*, 16(1), 60–84.

Lankshear C. and Knobel M. (2004) *'A handbook for Teacher Research - From design implementation',* England: UK:Open University Press: England, UK.

Leithwood K., Mascall B., Strauss, T., Sacks, R., Memon N. and Yashkina, A. (2007) 'Distributing Leadership to Make Schools Smarter: Taking the Ego Out of the System', *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 6(1), 37-67.

Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Beverly Hills: California: Sage Publications.

Lowrie, T. (2014) 'An educational practices framework: the potential for empowerment of the teaching profession' *Journal of Education for Teaching: International research and pedagogy*, 40(1), 34–46.

LYIT (n.d.) 'LYIT Ethics Policies and Procedures', available: https://www.lyit.ie/media/Research%20Ethics%20Policy%20&%20Proc.pdf   [accessed 10 Jan 2017].

Maguire, M., and Delahunt, B. (2017) ' Doing a Thematic Analysis: A Practical Stepby-Step Guide for Learning and Teaching Scholars', *AISHE-J,* 3, available: http://ojs.aishe.org/index.php/aishe-j/article/view/335/553 [accessed 3rd April 2017].

Mitchell, V.A. (2017) 'Diffracting Reflection: A Move Beyond Reflective Practice', *Education as Change*, 21(2), 165–186.

Moon, J. (2001) 'PDP working paper 4: reflection in higher education learning', *The Higher Education Academy* [online],available: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/resources/resourcedatabase/id72_Reflection_in_Higher_Education_Learning.rtf [accessed 13 December 2017]

Morgan, D.L. (2014) 'Pragmatism as a Paradigm for Social Research', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(8), 1045–1053.

O'Leary, M. (2014) *Classroom Observation: A Guide to the Effective Observation of Teaching and Learning*, London; New York: Routledge.

Peel, D. (2005) 'Peer observation as a transformatory tool?', *Teaching in Higher Education*, 10(4), 489–504.

Reid, B. (1993) '"But we are doing it already!" Exploring a Response to the concept of Reflective Practice in Order to Improve it's Facilitation', *Nurse Education Today*, 13, 305–309.

Robson, C. (2002) *Real World Research*, 2nd ed., Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.

Robson, C. (2011) *Real World Research*, 3rd ed.,London, UK: Wiley.

Saunders, M.N.K.and Lewis, P. (2012) *Doing Research in Business and Management: An Essential Guide to Planning Your Project*, Harlow, England; New York: Prentice Hall.

Saunders, M.N.K. and Lewis, P., Thornhill, A. (2009) *Research Methods for Business Students*, 5th ed., New York: Prentice Hall.

Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A. and Thomas, S. (2006) 'Professional Learning Communities: A Review of the Literature', *Journal of Educational Change*, 7, 221–258.

Svendesen, B. (2017) 'Teacher's Experience From Collaborative Design: Reported Impact on Professional Development', *Education,* 138(2), 115-134.

Symon, G. (2004) 'Qualitative Research Diaries', in Symon, G. and Cassell, C., eds, *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research - A Practical Guide*, London; Sage Publications, 98–113.

Taylor, M., Goeke, J., Klein, E., Onore, C. and Geist, K. (2011) *'Changing leadership: Teachers lead the way for schools that learn'*, Teaching and Teacher Education, 27, 920-929.

The Teaching Council (2017) 'Key Points of Information about Droichead', available: http://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/_fileupload/Droichead-2017/Ten-key-points-with growth-phase.pdf [accessed 20 Dec 2017].

The Teaching Council (2016a) 'Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers', Kildare: The Teaching Council, available:
https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/Publications/Fitness-to-Teach/Code-of-ProfessionalConduct-for-Teachers1.pdf [accessed 31st April 2018]

The Teaching Council (2016b) 'Cosán - Framework for Teachers' Learning', Kildare: The Teaching Council, available:
https://www.teachingcouncil.ie/en/Publications/Teacher-Education/Cosan-Frameworkfor-Teachers-Learning.pdf [accessed 17th November 2017]

Tracy, S.J. (2010) 'Qualitative Quality: Eight "Big-Tent" Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), 837–851.

Watson, C. (2014) 'Effective professional learning communities? The possibilities for teachers as agents of change in schools', *British Educational Research Journal*, 40(1), 18–29.

Wenner, J.A and Campbell, T. (2017) 'The Theoretical and Empirical Basis of Teacher Leadership: A review of the Literature', *Review of Educational Research*, 87(1), 134 - 171.

West-Burnham, J. (2009) *Rethinking Educational Leadership: From Improvement to Transformation*, Network Continuum Education: Open Library.

Wiliam, D. (2014) 'Teacher expertise: Why it matters, and how to get more of it' in Hallgarten, J., Bamfield, L. and McCarthy, K., eds., *Licensed to Create: Ten essays on improving teacher quality*, London: RSA Action and Research Centre, 32.

Wilkinson, J., Olin, A., Lund, T., and Stjernstrom, E. (2013) 'Understanding Leading as Travelling Practices', *School Leadership and Management*, 33(3), 224-239.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1
Questionnaire

Dear Colleagues,

International and national studies claim the merits of peer observation as a means of enriching professional development, collaboration, collegiality and teacher leadership (King 2016). This particular study aims to research the perceptions and experiences regarding participation in peer classroom observation within our own school context. With your professional assistance this research could provide information enabling us to assess the merits and potential of peer observation in enriching teaching and learning within XXXXX School

This questionnaire will take approximately 10 – 15 minutes to complete.

All data generated will be treated in a highly confidential manner. Your answers are anonymous and will be treated in an ethical manner according to LYIT Ethical Guidelines.

Thanking you in advance for agreeing to fill out this online questionnaire. I really appreciate your participation.

Deirdre Walker.

King, F. (2016) 'Teacher professional development to support teacher professional learning: Systemic Factors from Irish case studies', *Teacher Development*, 20(4), 574594.

Questionnaire

Question 1. How many years have you been teaching?

1 – 5   6-10   11-20   21-30   31-40

Question 2. Have you observed a peer teaching a lesson before?

Yes/No

Question 3. Has a peer teacher ever observed you teaching a lesson before?

Yes/No

Question 4. Would you be willing to participate in peer classroom observation by observing a peer teaching?

Yes   Uncertain   No

Question 5. Would you be willing to participate in peer classroom observation by permitting a fellow teacher to observe your teaching?

Yes   Uncertain   No

Question 6. List 3 factors that might encourage you to participate in peer observation?

_____

_____

Question 7. List 3 factors that might discourage you from participating in peer observation?

_____

_____

Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the statements below Question

8. From your own experience in teaching you engage in collaborative practice?

Strongly Agree   Agree Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Question 9. You have been appropriately trained to conduct peer observations.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Question 10. You are comfortable making constructive comments about a colleague's teaching.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Question 11. Compulsory peer observation of colleagues' lessons would be a good approach to help teachers improve their teaching.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Question 12. Continuous Professional Development should happen within the school.

Strongly Agree   Agree Uncertain   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

**Letter, Information Sheet and Consent Form for Classroom Observation and
subsequent Semi-Structured Interview and Reflection Log**

<div align="right">

XXXX

XXXX

Co. Donegal

</div>

Dear XXXX,

My name is Deirdre Walker, and I am a student of the Masters of Arts in Learning and Teaching programme at the School of Law and Humanities, Letterkenny Institute of Technology. I am researching peer classroom observation for my Masters' dissertation, and therefore I am inviting you to take part in the above research project. However, it is important that you understand what this study entails before you decide whether or not to participate.

Please read the information sheet included with this letter and feel free to ask me any questions in relation to the project. I am asking you to participate in an interview on the following themes: Peer observation, teacher leadership, collegiality and professional development.

You can contact me by email at XXXXXXXXXXXXXX, or by phone at 086XXXXXXX. My supervisors contact details are: Dr. Tena Patten, The School of Design, Letterkenny Institute of Technology, phone 074XXXXXXX, and email at tena.patten@lyit.ie.

Thank you for taking time to consider participating. If you are satisfied with the information provided, and willing to participate, please tick the boxes on the consent form attached, sign it, and return it to me in the envelope provided.

With Thanks,

Yours Faithfully
Deirdre Walker

Participant Information Sheet for Peer Observation, Semi-structured interview and Critical Reflection Sheet

A description of the study and why it is being conducted

The project will be carried out in a maximum of one research site. The key themes I will explore are: peer observation, teacher leadership, collegiality and professional development. The primary focus of the research will be the exploration of peer observation as a tool to enhance collegiality and enabling teachers to carry out Continuing Professional Development.

Why have you been chosen?

You have been chosen as you have voluntarily come forward to participate in further research

What will happen, and what will you be required to do?

Firstly, your participation is entirely voluntary. In fact, even if you consent now, but change your mind, you can withdraw from the study at any time without any explanation until the data are analysed and about to be written up. You will first act as an observer/be observed teaching for one class period. Following this you must arrange to meet your corresponding teacher and discuss the lesson observed. You will then be asked be participate in an interview on the following themes: peer observation, teacher leadership, professional development and collegiality (peer observer). The teacher who was observed teaching will be asked to write no more than two A4 pages of critical reflection based on their experience of the observation.

 I will meet with the teachers who acted as peer observers at an arranged location at a mutually agreed time within the school premises to carry out a semi-structured interview. The interview will be approximately 30 minutes long, and will be carried out in a sensitive and non-stressful manner. With your consent, I will record the interview on a handheld device. Remember, you have the right to cease participation at any time up until data analysis and without the need to provide a reason.

Benefits of the study

There are now claims internationally and nationally that collaboration in education leads to positive gains for both teachers and learners (King 2016). The study will research and analyse peer observation as a tool for teacher collaboration, development and will build on the strong community of practice already existing within the school.

Confidentiality

All data generated in hardcopy will be held securely in a locked cabinet and no names or identities will be used. Softcopy data will be stored on a password protected computer which is used exclusively by the researcher, and all individual documents will be password protected and encrypted. The data will be kept securely for 5 years after the completion of the project by my supervisor at LYIT when softcopy will be deleted. Any hardcopy will be shredded.

In relation to the interview and reflection sheet, it will be anonymised and transcribed, and an interview transcript will be sent to you. This is to make sure that you are comfortable with its content before the researcher proceeds to use it for the purpose of the overall project. You can request deletions or amendments to the transcripts. However, since there are very few participants, I must point out that this is a very small scale study. Though anonymity will be used, the small numbers involved can limit the level of confidentiality that can be assured. **Use of data and dissemination of results**

The content of the interview and reflection sheet will be used for my Masters' dissertation; all references to it will be on an anonymous basis. I may also write conference papers, or seek publication of my research in academic or professional education journals.

This project has been submitted to the LYIT, School of Law and Humanities, Ethics Committee, and has been approved in order to request interviews and critical reflection sheets from a number of personnel in XXXXX School.

Reference: King, F. (2016) 'Teacher professional development to support teacher professional learning: Systemic Factors from Irish case studies', *Teacher Development*, 20(4), 574-594.

Consent Form for Peer Classroom Observation, Semi-structured Interview and Critical Reflection Sheet

Title of project:
 Peer Classroom Observation in a Post Primary School Context

Name of researcher: Deirdre Walker

If you are in agreement with the statements below, please tick the boxes.
• I have read the attached information letter which explains the research project named above. Yes ☐
• I understand that the letter is asking me to participate in an interview. Yes ☐
• I understand that all the information gathered will be kept strictly confidential and that my name and the name of my organisation will not be included in any reports. Yes ☐
 • I understand that my interview will be recorded electronically and transcription of this will be kept securely in an encrypted file on the researcher's computer. Yes ☐
• I understand that participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time until the data are analysed and about to be written up. Yes ☐
• I understand that this research will be published in form of a doctoral dissertation and also possibly in conference papers and journal articles. Yes ☐
Also, please tick one of the following boxes to indicate whether or not you agree to take part:
☐ I AGREE to take part in the above research
☐ I DO NOT AGREE to take part in the above research.

Please also tick the following box to indicate that any observations made during the classroom observation an post-observation discussions will be regarded with strict confidentiality and will not be discussed outside of the purpose of this research ☐

Signature: _____ Date:_____
Name:_____

Interview Schedule

Semi-Structured Interview Questions posed to Visiting Teachers

1. Describe your experience of the peer observation session you participated in?
2. In light of your experience(s) of peer observation do you see peer observation of teaching as having value?
3. What previous experiences have you had with professional development?
4. What aspects of professional development have you found most beneficial?
5. What aspects of professional development have you found challenging?
6. Describe the challenges you faced when participating in the peer observation of teaching session?
7. Why were you interested in participating in this research by becoming involved in peer observation of teaching?
8. If you were to design an effective peer observation of teaching programme what would it look like?
9. How have you reflected on the experience of peer observation in light of your own practice as a teacher?
10. Was there anything you found that may be beneficial to your teaching practice and why?
11. Was there anything that you feel would not be beneficial or applicable in your own practice and why?
12. How did you find the experience of working directly alongside another staff member?
13. What types of supports and practices are most likely to be effective in assisting teachers engaging in peer observation?

Reflective Log Completed by Observed Teachers Post-Observation

Reflective Log Name: _____

(Pseudonyms will be utilised in the analysis and results of the study).

Gibbs' reflective cycle (1988) can be really useful in helping us to think through all the phases of an experience or activity. Please reflect on the lesson you taught while being observed using this cycle.

1.   Description.

What happened?

2.   Feelings

What were you thinking and feeling?

3.   Evaluation

What was positive and negative about the experience?

4.   Analysis

What sense can you make of the situation?

5.   Conclusion

What else could you have done?

6. Action plan

If this arose again what would you do?

Gibbs, G. (1988) *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*, Oxford: Oxford Further Education Unit

Appendix 5

Gatekeeper Consent Form Signed by School Principal

Dear Principal,

I am writing to ask your permission to conduct research in XXXXX School, Co. Donegal. This research is being conducted as part of a Masters of Arts in Learning in Teaching. The study has been approved by Letterkenny Institute of Technology - Ethics Committee and, as part of that approval process, I am required to obtain gatekeeper permission from any research sites where participants are located. The aim of this study is to research peer observation, collegiality, professional development and teacher leadership in a Post Primary school context (further information can be found in the attached Participant Information Sheet *Appendix B). The overall aim of the study is to enrich and strengthen the professional learning community that already exists within the school.

The project consists of a three stage process. Stage one is a data gathering questionnaire which will be distributed to all staff members. During Stage Two I will seek 8/10 staff members to participate in paired peer classroom observation of teaching for one class period. Stage Three will involving conducting a 30 minute semi-structured interview with each teacher who acted as a peer observer and teachers who had their lesson observed will fill out a critical reflection sheet.

If you are willing to be involved would you please sign the form below that acknowledges that you have read the Participant Information Sheet, you understand the nature of the study being conducted and the risks and likely benefits of participation in this study, that any data gathered is solely for research purposes and cannot be used to the benefit or detriment of any participant and you give permission for the research to be conducted in XXXX School.

Yours sincerely,

Deirdre Walker

Name: _____

Role: _____

Having been fully informed of the nature of the research to be conducted in XXXX School I give my permission for the study to be conducted. I reserve the right to withdraw this permission at any time.
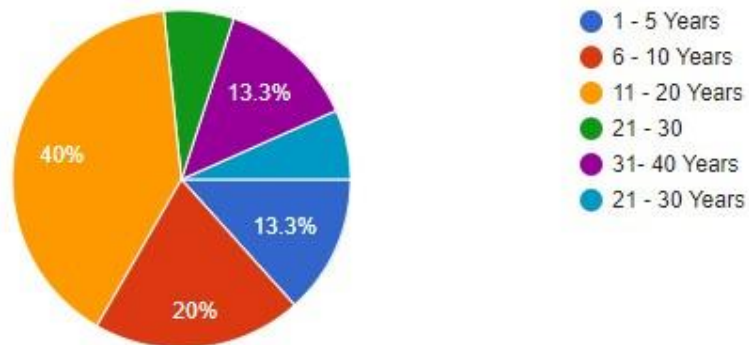
Signature:_____

Date:_____

Questionnaire Responses

Question 1

How many years have you been teaching?

30 responses

- 1 - 5 Years
- 6 - 10 Years
- 11 - 20 Years
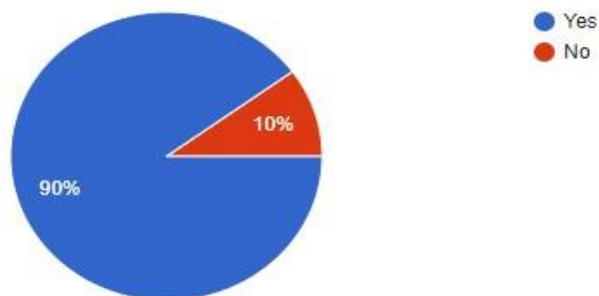- 21 - 30
- 31- 40 Years
- 21 - 30 Years

13.3%

40%

13.3%

20%

Question 2

Would you be willing to participate in peer classroom observation by permitting a fellow teacher to observe you teaching?
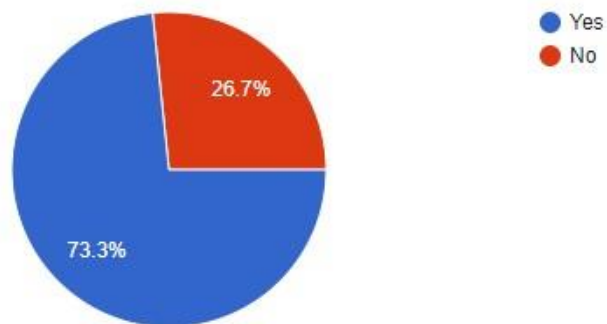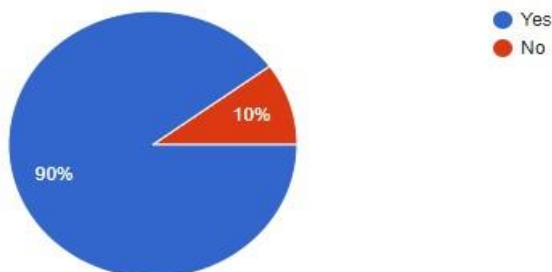
30 responses

- Yes
- No

90%

10%

Question 3

Has a peer teacher ever observed you teaching a lesson?

30 responses

- Yes
- No

26.7%

73.3%

Question 4

Would you be willing to participate in peer classroom observation of teaching by observing a fellow teacher teaching?

30 responses

- Yes
- No

96.7%

Question 5

Would you be willing to participate in peer classroom observation by permitting a fellow teacher to observe you teaching?

30 responses

Question 6

List 3 factors that might encourage you to participate in peer observation of teaching?

Staff responses *(Each grid represents the response of one individual staff member)*

Learning new methodologies, new strategies for classroom management and helping others to do the same.	1. Learn new ideas 2.Learn new skills 3.Improve my own teaching.	If I knew the other teacher well, If the class would cooperate, If there wasn't much extra planning involved.	Guidelines given, Constructive feedback given, Professional conduct of teachers.	Trust and confidentiality/ openness and positivity in the relationship.
1. Might learn from Peer 2. See other tools/ techniques 3. See best practice in action.	Topic of the lesson being taught, the year group involved, my relationship with the cooperating teacher (i) to gain 'insights' into existing Jnr Cycle subjects being taught (ii) to observe methodologies being employed by recently qualified teachers (iii) to observe management of groups (timing / roles etc)	Further insight into pedagogical methodologies even though observation maybe in a different subject to your own, offers an opportunity to observe teaching and learning through a different lens, provides you with a learning opportunity in sharing good practice with colleagues.	1. Gain an insight into different teaching methodologies which may be effective and which I could implement into my own lessons. 2. Observe how teachers deal with discipline within their classroom (is it similar too or different from my own means of discipline) 3. The chance to receive feedback from fellow staff members on what	The topic being taught, allocated time on timetable, time to review experience afterwards

			they believe to be the positive/negative elements of my own teaching still, how I could improve/change it for the better.	
Facilitation of peer collaboration and support, sharing of exemplary practice and reinforcement of good practice/effective teaching, learning and assessment.	The possibility of learning new strategies, the effect on peer trust and morale , the effect on the overall school and it's changing perception of teaching .	Seeing new methods and learning new skills / projects	Good practice, collaboration and reflective practice	Open and sharing spirit of information between myself and staff. Learn from what others are doing, consider new ways of thinking about teaching and my subject. It enables you to rethink your own teaching and approach
Feedback, experience, resources.	Opportunity to learn new methodologies, constructive feedback of areas to improve, potential to improve own teaching.	To get constructive feedback, to learn new strategies, look at different classroom discipline practices.	All staff involved objective not subjective clear rules and guidelines.	Observe how challenging students engage in other lessons. Competitive as you want to do well. Reminds you of techniques you may have forgotten about.
A class covered if observing another teacher rather than doing it in free time. There is very little free time when involved in other school committees etc.	Learning new methods, Might get some useful ideas, If free lesson needs to be used to get a non-exam class covered to get the time back.	Sharing resources, teaching common topics and time off to observe.		

Question 7.

List 3 factors that might discourage you from participating in peer observation of teaching?

Staff responses *(Each grid represents the response of one individual staff member)*

Afraid of what others may say, think and do	If the class were challenging, thinking you were being judged, feeling under pressure to do a "good lesson"	Guidelines not given Observing teacher discussing aspects of lesson in staffroom Observing teacher must observe only, not engage or criticise or interrupt during lesson	Lack of mutual respect/time constraints	1. Feelings of inadequacy 2. Being exposed 3. Being criticised
Trying to find a suitable time, who the teacher involved was, the class they were coming into I have been observed many times by others and received no follow up / feedback nor was my input sought. My experience is that it has been 'one-sided' ie not reciprocated, with no sharing of evaluations/ findings	1. Nervousness about having a colleague in my class to observe and vice versa (them/me feeling that I/they are there to be somewhat judged/to judge). 2. Observing a teacher from another subject area (perhaps more beneficial to stick to teachers within my own subject area) 3. Feeling that they are not getting a real and true insight into my class (often classes where I know I am going to be observed are over planned and the students are pre-warned about the observation	if I was teaching a really boring topic, if the amount of observation seemed excessive or lacking structure, or lack of time Time constraints, workload, open to judgement.	Being judged, time constraints.	Feeling awkward, self-conscious.

| Not willing to accept constructive criticism, set in ways and	Time constraints, unwillingness within department to collaborate, uneasy about	The dreaded feeling of being inspected even though you are not been	Different teaching styles, Negative feedback, observer can be biased and may	1. Formal setting - having to adjust what you would normally do to make the lesson
apprehensive about sharing	commenting on other teacher's strategies	inspected; students acting out in front of your colleagues;	give marks to avoid confrontation instead of constructive feedback.	look better for the sake of the observer because they are only getting a snippet. No real reasons!
Nerves, fear of being judged by colleagues, fear of the unknown	Having to do it in a class your free if I am under pressure for time as it is	Time issue / what would students think?	Takes time to do, not relevant to your subject, giving feedback.	Time, selfconscious,

.

Question 8

From your own experience in teaching, which of the following practices do you engage in? (A number of options can be selected if appropriate)
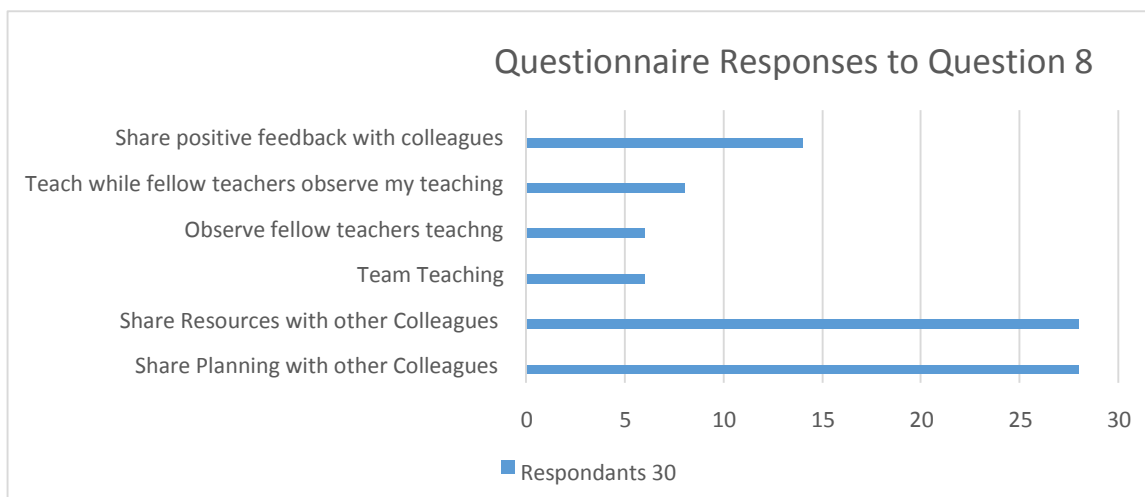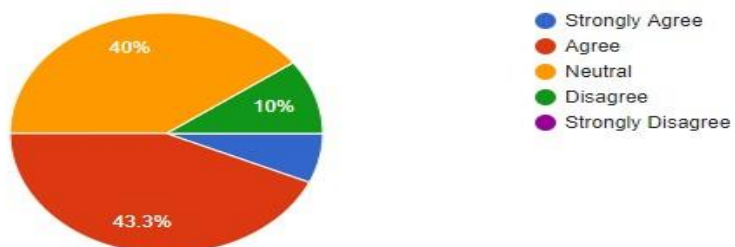
Question 9

You have participated in training in order for you to feel confident in observing a fellow colleague.
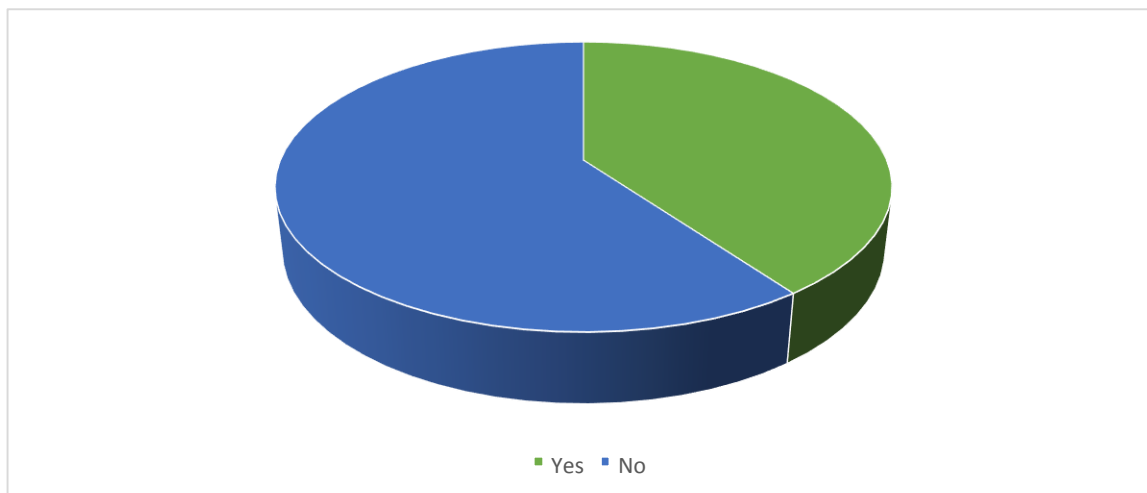
Question 10

You are comfortable making constructive comments about a colleague's teaching to observed colleague.
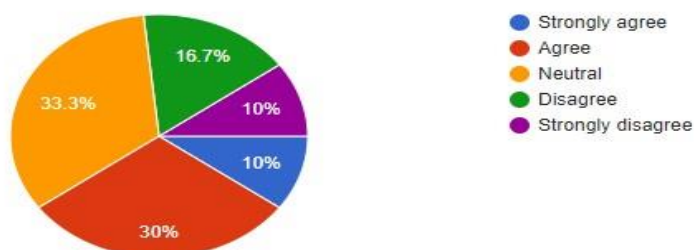
30 responses

Question 11

Compulsory peer observation of colleagues' lessons would be an effective approach in helping teachers improve their teaching.

30 responses

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

16.7%
10%
10%
33.3%
30%

Appendix 7

Primary Themes from Stage 3 of Thematic Analysis of Data

A selection of codes identified and assigned to potential themes

Theme: Personalised Learning	Theme: Reflective Practice	Theme: Attributes of Teacher Leaders
Codes	**Codes**	**Codes**
Noticed students not staying on task	I possibly rushed the lesson	Drive to continue lifelong learning
The next time activity used assigned specific roles	Must remain more relaxed	Open to change
Transfer of methods to different environment	Would reflect on the methods I am using	Would welcome constructive feedback
Reminder to praise students more often	Reflecting on own style of questioning	I would have an openness to trying anything and taking risks
Asked students to devise own interpretations	Reflecting on eliciting student discussion in class	
Observed aspects of the syllabus that can be used to spark students' interests	Comparison of own practice to that of peer teacher in setting of homework.	Adopted the approach of peer teacher
Hope to praise students like this in future		Willing to change teaching practices
	Evaluation of current methodologies implemented	Striving to develop current practice
Theme: Peer Observation in a Professional Learning Community	**Theme: Teacher Self-Efficacy**	

Codes	**Codes**
Change in practices occurring - classroom becoming more open	Observed teacher feels everything went wrong
Pupils experienced with someone new in the room	Teachers critical of oneself
Collaborative practice	Confidence boosting
Designing problems and lessons together	Teachers place pressure on themselves
Two heads are better than one	PO builds confidence
Value peer dialogue	PO focuses on positive elements of lesson
	Positive feedback feels nice

Abbreviations

CPD – Continuing Professional Development

NQT – Newly Qualified Teacher

PLC – Professional Learning Community

CAQDAS – Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis