

**An Exploration of Early Career Teachers'
Changes in Professional Identities across a
Postgraduate Teacher Inquiry Programme**

James Matthew Thomas Snook

Thesis presented for the award of Doctor of Education

Cardiff University

2021

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, a huge thank you to the participants of this study, for giving the time and space to take part.

I would also like to thank my supervisors, Dr Kevin Smith, Dr Dawn Mannay and Dr Yvonne Barnes, for their continued support, guidance and advice throughout this research project –words will never be enough.

I would also like to show my appreciation to Dr Caroline Daly, Dr Alex Morgan and Emmajane Milton for their time, advice and motivational mentoring.

To Adriano and Corinda, you are consummate professionals. Thank you for your support and the careful organisation that keeps the EdD wheels turning.

Thank you also to Caroline Grennan for the venting runs and constant foot on my behind.

Dr Sophie Bartlett, you are an inspiration, I am so proud to have supported you on your own doctoral journey. You continue to amaze me. Thank you for your encouragement and support.

To Lew, thank you for the seven years of patience while our lives have been on hold, with evenings, weekends and holidays covered in articles, and analysis-strewn festivities. Thank you for keeping our family happy while I channelled the identities of the majority of the other dwarfs: Grumpy, Dopey, Bashful, Sleepy, Sneezy and, finally (hopefully), Doc.

To Jack and Dawson, the light of our lives, they are for whom we keep going.

To my parents, and more specifically my mother, it has been touch and go whether you would see the submission of this thesis. I dedicate it to you, the mothership. Thank you for everything, without you and Dad, literally none of this would have been possible.

Summary

This study examines the collaborative and sociocultural approaches foregrounded in a postgraduate teacher inquiry project that formed part of a Master's in Educational Practice programme. The thesis focuses on early career teachers' professional learning and how it impacts their developing identities.

The study explores the perceptions of early career teachers (n=16) from various educational phases and geographical distributions in Wales. It also draws on the perceptions of External Mentors (n=6) and Academic Tutors (n=9) as they engaged in the supervision and mentoring support of a nine-month teacher inquiry project. Qualitative data for this study were generated through focus groups and interviews and were analysed thematically.

The study found that teacher inquiry projects fostered agency and empowerment in early career teachers. However, early career teachers in challenging school environments that lacked support and were aligned to performative ideals of education found it difficult to express their sense of agency and to share and develop the expansive practices developed as part of the course. A novel finding was that some ECTs may have become dependent on the MEP as a temporary support structure, to survive their demanding school environments. These early career teachers attempted to fit into their schools to avoid being viewed as difficult, particularly those on temporary employment contracts. External Mentors and Academic Tutors supported alternative notions of being a teacher through supported deconstruction and reconstruction of early career teachers' beliefs and values, in safe, dialogical spaces. These reconstructions aligned to social justice, a greater moral purpose, and teaching being led by learners' needs. The participants also recognised the difficulties early career teachers face in enacting this approach to practice in their schools.

The thesis concludes that support in Wales for early career teachers' induction and professional learning, needs reconsidering. This point is especially salient with the advent of curriculum reform in Wales, as the school environment can negatively impact the professional identities of early career teachers and their ability to support the educational needs of their learners.

Abbreviations

AT	–academic tutor
CoP	–community of practice
CPD	–continuing professional development
ECT	–early career teacher
EM	–external mentor
FG	–focus group
HEI	–higher education institution
LPP	–legitimate peripheral participation
MEP	–master’s in educational practice
MTeach	–Master’s of Teaching
MTL	–Master’s of Teaching and Learning
NFER	–National Foundation for Educational Research
PGCE	–Postgraduate Certificate in Education
PISA	–Programme for International Student Assessment
QTS	–qualified teacher status
SLT	–senior leadership team
STEM	–science, technology, engineering, and mathematics

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the study, which focuses on how a nine-month teacher inquiry project impacted the professional identities of early career teachers (ECTs) as they engaged in the Master's in Educational Practice (MEP). The MEP was a Welsh Government initiative providing a voluntary, funded, bilingual, blended professional learning programme for ECTs on contracts of 0.4 (two days per week) or above. The study draws on data generated from interviews and focus groups with Academic Tutors (ATs), External Mentors (EMs) and ECTs between 2016 and 2017. The study explores the supportive relationships in the teacher inquiry project to consider the role of teacher inquiry, mentoring provision and supervision of ECTs by ATs, and how this support acted upon the ECTs' developing professional identities.

This chapter summarises the policy contexts that led to the development of the MEP. It also describes the organisation of the programme – its principles, relationships with policy structures and its implementation. Then, crucially, the chapter explores the conceptual foundations from which the programme was developed and delivered through an alliance of four higher educational institutions (HEIs). The chapter then progresses to the rationale for this study, which considers my own personal and professional interests as a transient-insider researcher, a lecturer, and AT and EM on the MEP. The chapter concludes by considering the organisation of this thesis.

1.1. The study

This study considers how ECTs, EMs and ATs perceived the developing professional identities of ECTs engaging in a nine-month master's level teacher inquiry project on the MEP programme. The research is an intrinsic case study (Stake 1995) articulated through a sociocultural stance (Vygotsky 1978), which utilises these perspectives to consider learning and identity development. It employs situated learning theory, legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 1991) and community(ies) of practice (CoP[s]; Wenger 1998) as lenses to understand the developing professional identities of ECTs undertaking teacher inquiry.

The research presumes that learning and human cognition is founded on purposive human action, and is mediated by artifacts both semantic (symbols, language, discourse) and material (tools) in a social domain (Scribner 1997). Learning may occur through social human activity and in interaction with actors and in culturally organised settings, that are situated. These complex social negotiations can be a form of enculturation into a community's practices, discourses, and norms (Packer and Goicoechea 2020). Therefore this study presumes learning is a process that involves construction of identities, and as Lave and Wenger, (1991, pp. 51–52) highlight “one way to think of learning is as the historical production, transformation, and change of persons” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, pp. 51–52).

These sociocultural perspectives were utilised using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis (2006) to analyse rich and deep data from focus groups and interviews involving ECTs, ATs and EMs. Accounts of their experiences and perspectives were utilised to consider their multi-membership between different CoPs, including the MEP and their schools.

1.2. The Welsh policy context

Education policy in Wales has been devolved since 1999, creating a significant educational divergence from the UK Government. From 2009, a narrative of underperformance was based on the realisation that Wales had performed poorly in relation to other UK member states in the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) assessments (Andrews 2011a 2014). This narrative accompanied the perception that initial teacher education (ITE) in Wales was not preparing initial teachers adequately (Furlong 2015). This perceived underperformance resulted in Leighton Andrews, the then education minister, to develop a range of educational reforms aimed at improving Welsh education (Andrews 2011b).

These reforms included the establishment of a school standards and delivery unit by the Welsh Government, regional consortia broadly charged with the aims of school improvement, and a performance-based school categorisation system. Further reforms included the development of the MEP for ECTs. The MEP's design aimed to ameliorate the perceived deficits from ITE and raise capacity within the Welsh education system (see Section 1.3).

The categorisation system was criticised for operating as a covert league table despite attempts by the Welsh Government to frame it as a system designed to best-assign support and resources for struggling schools (Evans 2017; Senedd Research 2017). Connolly et al. (2018a) argue that the accountability leveraged into the system during this time had the effect of realigning the lived role and identity of headteachers in Wales towards an organisationally orientated conception of professional practice that broadly embedded neoliberal approaches. This political environment impacted the development of this study and its context, which are addressed in the following section.

1.3. Context for the study: Master's in Educational Practice

The MEP was a three-year modular programme commissioned by the Welsh Government. It was conceived as a vehicle to enhance teacher provision in an underperforming education system and to improve the professional learning of ECTs, who would then support each other and other colleagues in schools. This progress would be achieved through pedagogical innovation at classroom and school level and cultural change; the ECTs would act as agents of change for the system through sharing practice and developing expertise in joint-practice development (Hadfield, Barnes, Connolly and Snook 2017). These developed collaborative networks of inquiry (introducing more-experienced schoolteachers as EMs, as well as the ECTs undertaking the MEP) would act as an increased source of capacity-building for school improvement nationwide. This would further act as wider support for teachers, not just ECTs on the MEP, with the potential of producing whole-system change.

The aspiration for the MEP programme was that it would simultaneously develop human and social capital (Hargreaves and Fullan 2012), a mix reflected in the proposed outcomes for individual participants in the programme. Individual participants were expected to:

- *develop and improve their professional practice to improve the outcomes for children and young people;*
- *develop and extend their understanding of current thinking in relation to key professional learning areas;*
- *develop and extend their ability to analyse, critique and develop their own and others' practice;*
- *develop and deepen intellectual, organisational, personal, communication and professional skills;*
- *engage in and eventually lead professional learning communities within and between schools as defined by the National PLC [Professional learning community] Model; and plan and sustain their professional development throughout their career.*

(Welsh Government 2012, p 4)

The launch of the programme in September 2012 followed a tradition in the wider member states of the UK in developing three-year inquiry-based master's programmes for ECTs, such as the Master's in Teaching (MTeach), and Master's in Teaching and Learning (MTL). The general aims of the programme were to deliver key educational policy initiatives through MEP modules. The foci included literacy and numeracy, inclusion, behaviour management, additional learning needs and how poverty impacts attainment. The tender for the programme originally outlined the Welsh Government's responsibility to provide academic content for the MEP, with an alliance of HEIs supplying assessment and accreditation. The design responsibility for the programme ultimately fell to the alliance of HEIs based around the specifications and briefs designed by the Welsh Government. The HEIs were required, at short notice, to design the content and deliver the programme. It had been envisaged that ECTs would work through a suite of theoretical content with their EMs. The alliance of HEIs was, therefore, able to moderate and mediate the less-critical aspects of the policy requirements from the Welsh Government's approach and to apply more-critical and reflective approaches to policy and practice compared with those initially set out in the original visions of the MEP.

The ECTs were supported through cycles of increasingly complex inquiry (e.g. forms of small-scale informal action research as part of their pedagogical practice thus called teacher inquiry) in order to be critical and reflexive about their teaching and their pupils' learning. This approach was developed through working closely with a dedicated EM who engaged in professional dialogue and collaboration with ECTs about their developing practice. The ECTs engaged with the MEP through blended-learning approaches utilising collaborative, cross-phase, face-to-face and one-day learning events that brought ECTs and their EMs together with the academic team, working in geographical cohorts¹ of 100 ECTs and forming small,

¹ Due to the large number of ECTs in each cohort (up to 400), which were geographically dispersed throughout Wales, the programme arranged learning events for each module in each region across one week, delivering four one-day face-to-face learning events to smaller groups of 100 ECTs and their external mentors. These were arranged by consortia area: Central South, South East Wales (both delivered in hotels in Cardiff), South-West-Mid-Wales delivered in Swansea, and North Wales delivered in Bangor. All events utilised both Welsh and English mediums, and simultaneous translation

cross-phase learning-event groups² within those cohorts (12–18 ECTs and two or three EMs). These collaborative groups worked together throughout the duration of the course, moving between small-group and whole-cohort activities. These activities and events were designed to introduce and relate the MEP module content to ECTs' practice and to develop collaborative dialogic opportunities in which different forms and perspectives of practice could be considered given the various experiences of the ECTs in their learning groups. A pre-task (starter activity) acted as a reflective prompt to bridge the gap between practice and the discussion at the learning events. Then, a core task built upon the reflections and a discussion after the learning-event day were conducted. These tasks fed into the formal inquiry-based assignment, providing further opportunities for collaboration between ECTs, EMs and the module team through professional dialogue opportunities in school mentoring meetings. Each module team consisted of two academics, one Welsh medium and the second English medium, drawn from a range of academic staff across the alliance. The cohort in this study engaged with six modules over two years, which then culminated in the third year with the seventh final module, a nine-month extended teacher inquiry project supported by their EM and a dedicated AT.

The programme engaged 1,238 ECTs spread across three cohorts from all areas of Wales. Two further smaller cohorts of ECTs who had interrupted their studies and returned to complete the programme, followed. Ultimately, funding for the programme was withdrawn due to political changes, and its capacity as a support structure for ECTs ceased in 2019.

occurred. The majority of modules had Welsh and English medium convenors when individual staff expertise allowed this to occur.

² Collaborative cross-phase (special school, foundation phase, primary and secondary teachers) breakout groups run by two or three mentors and containing 12–18 ECTs. The learning groups would meet at a learning event and engage in collaborative activities around a module, allowing ECTs to share practice, discuss perspectives, and to foster a collaborative group that would work together throughout the three years of the MEP.

1.3.2. Implementation of the Master's in Educational Practice

The Welsh Government's suggested design for the programme stressed the need for collaborative-working within schools and across the system. It would involve participants in:

Collaborative work with fellow programme participants and other professionals/experts within their school and outside their school.

(Welsh Government 2012, p.2)

The design involved experienced teachers released from schools while they were still practising to be supported and upskilled as EMs on the programme. This approach was viewed as part of the suite of capacity-building strategies for schools that would result in system-wide improvements in education in Wales. Co-constructed teacher inquiry between ECTs on the MEP, their school colleagues and the support of school-based EMs would result in system change through influences on school culture, ideology and notions of autonomous practice development through promoting teacher inquiry stances that would then be co-constructed in schools. Due to political, financial and time pressures, headteachers across Wales were unwilling to release their staff to be involved as EMs. In this political climate, it was a high-risk for schools to have key members of staff outside of the school environment and to fill their roles with less-experienced, temporary teachers. Therefore, most EMs on the MEP were recruited from retired headteachers, retired teachers, senior leaders, teacher educators and independent educational consultants, who became consultant EMs.

Initially, professional learning of the EMs was undertaken by Welsh Government, but this was transferred to the responsibility of the MEP programme team in 2013 after the first module had been delivered. No additional funding covered this provision, and general programme expenses continued to be covered by Welsh Government. These consultant EMs delivered practice-orientated elements of learning events and provided ongoing support in schools and online to the ECTs.

1.3.3. The modular structure of the Master's in Educational Practice

The modular structure of the programme was set out in the original tender and, with minor alterations, was utilised with the first cohort of students in 2012. It originally consisted of eight 15-credit modules, followed by an extended 60-credit teacher inquiry project in Year 3. By the arrival of the second cohort, the programme had been altered following feedback from ECTs, EMs and academic staff, recommending the second year contain two 30-credit modules and a 15-credit module, rather than four 15-credit modules. These modules covered approximately the same content as in the previous year but provided students with a more-defined path through each, with greater opportunity for in-depth inquiry processes to be introduced.

1.3.4. Master's in Educational Practice inquiry project

From its inception, the MEP was inquiry based. A blended-learning approach was utilised to support a more cost-efficient mode of delivery. The ECTs and EMs attended one learning event per module, with three modules a year for the first two years and then the teacher inquiry module for the final year, which included two learning events.

The alliance of HEIs adopted several design principles. First, the MEP was based on the idea that professional learning required ECTs to develop their ability to self-direct and manage their own learning. Consequently, involvement in the MEP was not based on the passive reception of expert knowledge but on processes through which individuals created professional knowledge together (Timperley 2013).

Second, the inquiry was embedded through each of the modules and their assessments, and it was envisaged that these small-scale inquiries would increase in complexity through the modules. This approach enabled changes in ECTs' beliefs, dispositions and various forms of knowledge to be evoked from critical reflection on their own practice change as much as from their experiences of new and alternative theories and ideas. The gradual

introduction of more-complex interventions in each module was key for developing ECTs' trust in the process of inquiry.

The final extended teacher inquiry projects offered an opportunity to engage in more-complex and sustained interventions in teaching and learning in the classroom, with a far higher level of AT support (five hours of time at distance) and two 10-minute one-to-one sessions at learning events. As well as the support of their EM (31 hours of allocated time) and a mixture of face-to-face meetings, online support and written feedback was also provided to facilitate greater use of the existing knowledge base and improve the quality of the evaluative data being collected.

Third, the programme was designed to be flexible to the needs of ECTs and their learners and contexts. This meant that the stimulus for ECTs' interventions in their practice could arise from a variety of sources, but in all cases should be based upon their pupils' perceived learning needs, which was not always the case due to school pressure (see Section 4.2.1).

Finally, a great deal of attention was paid not just to the mediums used in the blended approach, for example, how to integrate online and face-to-face mentoring and academic tutoring better, or increase engagement with online materials, but also to layer the different formats of learning involved in the programme. This approach meant considering how to support teachers in crossing the boundaries between different forms of expertise, moving in and out of various CoPs, landscapes for learning, and working within a range of learning relationships. This required a design that,

- moved from critical reflection on their own practice to reflection on outcomes for pupils,
- encouraged structured and informal dialogues within professional learning relationships between peers and colleagues,
- encouraged engagement with new theories and practices within the triad created by the ECT, EM and AT in the final year.

1.4. Rationale

As a lecturer, module convenor, AT and, eventually, a hybrid role of AT and EM for the final remaining study cohorts for the MEP, (who returned after interrupting their studies), I supported ECTs' engagement with their modules and teacher inquiries. While supporting ECTs through the programme and engaging in professional and personal dialogue, the ECTs talked of how they felt changed by the experience of the MEP. I was interested in their perceptions of this notion of what 'changed' meant for them, whether they had truly been changed and in what ways. I questioned whether these ECTs were so invested in the process of completing their master's, in which time, effort and continued focus had been sustained, that they may have convinced themselves that teacher inquiry was a worthwhile and transformative experience for them, or whether it was something they believed I wanted to hear. I, of course, felt that teacher inquiry was a vital element in supporting their developing stances towards professional learning and practice development.

I also questioned the self-declared challenges they were facing in their own school cultures, which seemed to oppose their involvement with the MEP. The ECTs articulated their lack of autonomy and the constant pressure from school management to develop a focus for their project that was aligned with school or departmental improvement rather than their pupils' needs. This conflicted with the notion of starting from the needs of the ECTs' learners, which was a central premise of the MEP.

For some ECTs, the challenges they faced were overwhelming and, at times, seemed to act as barriers to their ability to think deeply and critically about issues related to their own learners. This issue engendered a shift in their focus towards finding quick fixes for whole-school issues that could be applied across the entire institution or department as 'best practice'. This uncritical approach proved an obstacle to engaging in the slower and more difficult work of taking time to understand the developing learner experience and unpicking the issues in a more-nuanced way.

I was interested in what ways the written and verbal interactions between EMs and ATs (both central to the MEP programme) were supportive of ECTs at an academic (MEP) school boundary. I also wanted to examine any developing shifts in ECT identities (as previous cohorts had mentioned), as they navigated membership of the different CoPs and learning landscapes – crossing boundaries.

This focus was directly relevant to my own developing practice as a novice academic, but also as an ex-teacher in a Welsh context. Ultimately, this point became more relevant when, in the final year of the MEP, I inhabited the roles of both AT and EM. The developing findings from this research informed how I interacted with the ECTs to best support their practice development, professional learning and developing identities.

Little research is available on the role and effect of teacher inquiry on the professional identities of ECTs, although there are more studies relevant for initial or experienced teachers (see Chapter 2). The practices of the external mentoring and supervision of teacher inquiry, which support ECTs and especially their developing identities, are also under-researched and almost non-existent from a Welsh educational policy and practice perspective. This contextual research is vital due to the significant divergence of policy and practices of Wales when compared with other UK member states, as education in Wales became a devolved power of the Welsh Government in 1999 (Power 2016).

This research has become more relevant given the recent reviews of the Welsh Government's induction process for ECTs in Wales (Waters 2020), which highlighted that ECT induction practices are not supportive and need considerable improvement. With a 3.4% increase in teachers in Wales leaving the profession, and a significant problem in recruiting to ITE programmes (Waters 2020), the consideration of supportive processes for ECTs' experiences is vital. Additionally, a new national master's in education for teachers in Wales is due to commence in September 2021, and the new Welsh curriculum developed and co-constructed by teachers for teachers and learners in Wales will be delivered from 2022. These developments fall beyond the remit of this study; and it is hoped that the findings presented in

the later chapters will be useful for informing ongoing educational policy and practice that relate to these aspects.

Overall, this research poses questions and develops theoretical and empirical viewpoints that could contribute to the discussion on the professional learning and identity trajectories of ECTs in a Welsh context, following their engagement with teacher inquiry. I am interested in how authentic teacher inquiry can be supported and undertaken to foster local knowledge creation, and in the insulating impact this might have against the effects of the negative experience of socialisation of the ECTs into school cultures, which foster reduced collaboration, performative ideals, or low expectations of their teachers (Connolly, Hadfield, Barnes, and Snook 2018).

The central research questions of this study are as follows:

- What role do External Mentors play in engendering changes in the professional identity of early career teachers?
- In what ways do Academic Tutors support the development of professional identities in early career teachers?
- How does undertaking a teacher enquiry project impact the professional identities of early career teachers?

1.5. Structure of the thesis

The remainder of the thesis is presented in six chapters. Chapter 2 explores the international literature to consider the negative experiences and lack of support ECTs face when entering the profession, and how negative socialisation impacts ECTs' long-term dispositions, identities and attitudes to professional learning. The chapter also examines the role of external mentoring as an antidote to poor induction experiences and links teacher inquiry to the development of positive ECT identities. It concludes with a focus on sociocultural concepts and the theories of situated learning theory (Lave and Wenger 1991), CoPs and legitimate peripheral participation (Wenger 1998) that underpin the design of the MEP and act as the theoretical lens for this study.

Chapter 3 describes the epistemological and ontological perspectives of the thesis. The chapter provides a rationale for the intrinsic case-study design and justifies how this approach is aligned to data generation within focus groups, interviews and documentary data. The chapter outlines the methods of data analysis, drawing on Braun and Clarke's thematic approach (2006). The chapter also explores ethical tensions and issues of reflexive practice, particularly those relating to my role as a transient-insider researcher, and concludes with the procedures of data analysis for the study.

Chapter 4 introduces the findings of the qualitative data produced from ECTs, ATs and EM. The chapter frames the following two chapters containing findings, by exploring the ECTs' perceptions, which highlight their positioning as outsiders in their schools due to being participants of the MEP. This point is framed due to ECTs' school perceived anti-intellectualism, a policy of funding in relation to the MEP and a lack of funding for wider professional learning of teachers who were not ECTs or engaging in the MEP. Feeling on the periphery of school CoPs, the ECTs felt unable to influence colleagues' practices and experienced a lack of agency to inform practice development in school. This situation led to feelings of tension between competing ideals and competences of practice between that ECTs

felt between schools and the MEP, in which schools were portrayed as having more-reductive notions of teaching and learning with performative ideals compared with the more-expansive formats portrayed in the MEP. This contrast and positioning led to ECTs' reduced ability to broker knowledge between school CoPs and the MEP.

Chapter 5 focuses on the vital role of EMs in creating a safe space for ECTs to engage in 'risky talk' (Eraut 2002). The EMs acted in a pastoral role, supporting emotional and personal issues that allowed ECTs space to reflect on and critique their practices, as well as supporting their personal effectiveness. Some EMs found it difficult to achieve a total educative mentoring stance as co-constructors of practice and teacher inquiry. Inherent power dynamics contributed to transmissive models in which EMs acted as academic interpreters or gatekeepers to the AT. Furthermore, some EMs resorted to a practice described as helicopter mentoring (Buria 2010), which reduced the agency of their ECTs. The chapter sets out the complex role of EMs in supporting teacher inquiry and the developing identities of their ECTs.

Chapter 6 examines the role of the MEP inquiry project and the support of ECTs by the AT. The ECTs considered the misunderstandings of inquiry and their apprehension of working with an AT. The AT feedback was positioned as vital in supporting alternative reflections, especially regarding ECTs' moral and ethical identities in relation to practice. These included understandings of participatory teacher inquiry, the importance of learner voice, pupils as partners, the role of qualitative research and teaching, and learning success beyond reductive ideals of attainment or outcome. These reflections led to an awakening of some of the ECTs, who then felt they were unable to unsee the difficult practices in their schools, an insight that contributed to some ECTs wanting to leave the profession. Other ECTs, in less-demanding schools, sought to replicate the supportive practice of the MEP CoP through informal networks, and there was a desire to form networks of support, to share practice and mentor other NQTs.

Finally, Chapter 7 outlines how these findings address the central research questions of the study. It also considers the limitations of the study and offers a series of recommendations for the Welsh Government, schools and HEIs related to the support of ECT induction and the professional identity development of ECTs. The study culminates by considering future research and making a final conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The sociocultural nature of this study highlights the need to consider the wider situated nature of ECTs in their profession. This position incorporates their professional lives and interactions, but also their professional learning. Therefore, this chapter explores international literature that considers the impact of the interrelations between the cultures and relationships that ECTs are developed in and move between. It also explores how research on ECTs' induction and early experiences in the profession are constructed in the literature. The positive and negative modes of support during their enculturation period in schools is also examined, with an emphasis on how this situates and positions ECTs.

This chapter then considers the political and performative backdrop that ECTs internationally, and, more specifically, in Wales, are exposed to and how this impacts their developing identities. Research related to the professional learning of teachers through the medium of teacher inquiry and action research is synthesised, drawing on a body of literature that concerns initial and experienced teachers and their developing identities. This review evidences a gap in the literature in relation to the effects of teacher inquiry on ECTs, and this gap is amplified in the specific political educational backdrop of Wales.

This chapter engages with literature that situates external mentoring as a means to address the challenges of providing positive support for ECTs. The research related to external mentoring highlights the benefits of external perspectives, that disrupt normative thinking and practice in schools. There is a lack of research that relates to the external mentoring of ECTs through inquiry processes.

This chapter concludes by focusing on sociocultural frameworks, including situated learning, legitimate peripheral participation, and CoPs. These conceptual frameworks acted as a key theoretical design principle of the

MEP in relation to collaborative and interdisciplinary professional learning in multi-overlapping CoPs. They also act as the theoretical lens of this study.

The following section considers ECTs' induction and enculturation into the profession as a reality shock. International and Welsh research has portrayed ECTs as developing in environments of performativity that provide limited support.

2.2.The reality shock – Early Career Teachers socialised into performativity

The status of ECTs is defined as the first three years in the teaching profession and has been described as the ‘reality shock’ of entering the world of work (Veenman 1984; Hobson 2017). Becoming a teacher has been positioned as one of the most demanding inductions to a profession, more challenging than many other careers (Schaefer et al. 2012). The period of transition from ITE to ECT status has been portrayed as a ‘rite of passage’ and an induction into a profession through trauma (McGinnins and Parker 2000; Flores and Day 2006; Kelchtermans 2019). For Halford (1998, p.33), education is ‘the profession that eats its young’. These descriptions allude to the lack of support and the significant challenges that ECTs have historically faced while embarking on teaching. More-recent international literature has continued to highlight the same issues, underlining the pervasive ‘sink or swim’ culture of education (see Mansfield and Gu 2019; Kutsyuruba et al. 2020; Marent et al. 2020).

These early years of teaching are a vital enculturation into school practices, politics, beliefs and ideologies (Weasmer and Woods 2000; Jokikokko et al. 2017; Kelchtermans 2019), when the language, values and cultures of specific schools impact and foster ECTs’ construction of professional identities (Garet et al. 2001; Hodgen and Askew 2007). As such, the interactions, relationships and school cultures that ECTs are exposed to act as a period of professional socialisation, during which their located experiences form the teachers they may become (Feiman-Nemser et al. 1999; Feiman-Nemser 2001; Romar and Frisk 2017; Beijaard 2019).

This period, it has been argued, determines teachers’ overall wellbeing, retention, development and job satisfaction, as well as any future professional identities (Wang and Odell, 2002; Grudnoff 2012; Spooner-Lane 2017). For example, Marent et al. (2020) highlights concern about the impact of negative experiences of ECTs on their developing prospects. They identified lasting negative effects on dispositions and outlook regarding professional learning, which impacted ECTs’ growth as teachers, based on

ECTs feelings of job insecurity, especially in relation to temporary contracts. This can lead to problems for the teachers, but more widely for the profession and, ultimately, for learners.

With significant literature detailing teacher quality as the most significant effect on pupil learning (Coe et al. 2013), this highlights the importance of ensuring the transition into the profession provides all ECTs with the best opportunities to develop. Goodwin et al. (2019) have called for a greater understanding of the tensions that ECTs face and the impact this has on their development, in order to improve induction programmes. Teacher retention and, particularly, ECT retention are growing concerns (see Ghosh and Worth 2020). Although not as prominent as in England, retention data from Wales highlight an increase (3.4%) in teachers leaving the profession between 2009 and 2019 (Ghosh and Worth 2020). Over the same period, there was a 19% increase in teachers moving to other careers (Ghosh and Worth 2020). The report points to primary and secondary schools finding it challenging to recruit, with fewer teachers applying for positions and an increase in the number of unfilled job vacancies in schools. This issue is coupled with entries to ITE being below target for three years (2017-2020), targets are calculated in response to the required projected number of teachers needed for future populations and cohorts of learners (Ghosh and Worth 2020). The literature attributes this international problem of teacher attrition to workplace conditions (Day et al. 2007), problems with school leadership, accountability (Skinner et al 2021) and how ECTs are inducted into unsupportive environments. Ingersoll (2017) contends that increased workload and the aforementioned lack of support are driving teachers out of the profession. High stress and lack of professional autonomy arguably mean that teaching is no longer an attractive career (McDowall and Kinman 2017; Toropova et al. 2021). As discussed in the following section, a report commissioned by the Welsh Government by Professor Mick Waters (Waters 2020) highlights the unsupportive and variable school induction environment that ECTs face across Wales. This may account for the negative trend in attrition in Wales.

The development of the MEP was an attempt to counter and address what was described by Moir and Gless (2001) as induction methods that are non-

supportive by design; for example, those that usually avoid, development opportunities that involve a sustained package of ongoing learning opportunities, and those that allow the fulfilment of the potential of ECTs and the ability to retain them in education systems (Borman and Dowling 2008; Ingersoll and Strong 2011; Sims and Allen 2018; Perryman and Calvert 2020). The MEP induction and professional learning package supported 50% of the cohort of ECTs each year from 2012 to 2014. The final cohort of ECTs to be supported through the three-year induction on the MEP was in 2014, completing the programme in 2018. This may account for some of the increased attrition in Wales, as the mechanism for supporting ECTs on the MEP ceased for new cohorts from 2015.

The next section focuses on the challenges for Welsh ECTs' induction into the profession and reflects on international literature related to ECT induction.

2.2.1. Early Career Teacher induction: the inconsistencies of becoming a teacher in Wales

The Welsh Government commissioned two independent reviews on ECT induction in Wales, which were published in 2020 (OB3 2020; Waters 2020). Both reviews drew on data collected from Research on Teachers' Statutory Induction (OB3 2020), which included qualitative semi-structured interviews and focus groups of 37 Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs), from across all Welsh consortia regions. In addition, the study employed desk-based research and in-depth interviews with 10 local authorities from across Wales, four representatives from each consortia, four external verifiers involved in the induction process, four Welsh teacher supply agencies, and three representatives from the Education Workforce Council ³(EWC). The findings from these reviews clearly highlight that induction in Wales is currently not good enough:

³ The Education Workforce Council is the regulator for Wales for teachers in state schools, further education and wider support staff.

Rarely can a review of an aspect of schooling have met such a wave of unanimity. In consideration of the induction of newly qualified teachers there was widespread agreement that processes, and practices are not good enough. Everybody involved demonstrated a commitment to new teachers and their professional and personal well-being, believing that they should be part of a professional community helping to bring out potential in young people. Equally everybody articulated aspects of the current processes and practices which caused frustration and professional disappointment. While everybody agreed that the process has to be better, the consensus around solutions was less forthcoming.

Waters (2020, p.1)

The review highlights that the Welsh procedures, process and practice for ECTs during their induction do not support the transition from ITE into the profession due to what is described as 'systemic hindrances', and 'this period which should be their (ECTs) most accelerated professional learning becomes burdened by the managerial expectation upon them and those who support them' (Waters 2020, pp.3–4). The Welsh context seems consistent with international literature on ECT induction, which indicates that support is often missing and induction systems do not provide a beneficial transition from ITE, lacking supportive and growth processes (see Mansfield and Gu 2019; Kutsyuruba et al. 2020; Marent et al. 2020).

The review of ECT induction in Wales points out the challenges that ECTs find in securing teaching posts and the negative effect these have on their professional growth and identity formation. The report highlights the high number of teachers in temporary posts, with 31% (322 out of 1055) of ECTs on short-term supply for the school year 2019/2020, compared with 158 (15%) in permanent posts (Waters 2020). The remainder (54%) were on fixed-term contracts or not involved with teacher-based roles, such as being a teaching assistant. Many ECTs in Wales are documented as having to undertake supply or teaching assistant roles for their induction. Other ECTs are forced to extend the designed mandated one-year induction period that confirms competence to be allowed to continue as a practising teacher. Others spend two or three years in this period because of not being able to fulfil the required number of teaching sessions due to not securing a full-time

or long-term post. Marent et al. (2020) identify in their study of 15 Dutch ECTs that concerns over job insecurity and (short term contracts) impacted negatively on ECT developing identities. The Welsh induction review evidences the significant volume of schools withholding and not supporting professional learning and development of ECTs, particularly those in supply, part-time and non-permanent posts, which the majority of ECT cohorts occupy (85%). These unsupportive practices impact ECTs' sense of professional wellbeing and satisfaction (Fletcher-Wood and Zuccollo 2020) and may account for dissatisfied and unsupported ECTs.

This is a concerning issue, considering the data in Section 2.2 on recruitment and retention points to schools not filling teaching positions despite there being a shortage in some areas, some subjects, and an increase in teacher attrition in Wales. These data seem to contradict each other but may illuminate the labour force issues created by the pressures or expectations on headteachers to wait to secure only the best ECTs for positions, leaving those deemed less attractive to seek supply work. Professor Waters (2020) alludes to this reasoning,

Many schools are reluctant to offer permanent posts to NQTs, allowing themselves flexibility should their annual budget reduce or as a way of avoiding difficult decisions if the teacher falls short of expectation. The balance needs to shift from the process and proof towards the person and the profession. Yet everywhere, people are burdened by the need for proof.

(Waters 2020, p.5)

Headteachers are under intense pressure to balance the financial and accountability expectations of the school and to ensure they get the best value and talent from ECTs at the lowest cost. Skinner et al. (2021) highlight the tensions headteachers and teachers face in attempting to merge new managerialist views of being a teacher (informed from enactment of neoliberal policy structures), and the idealised democratic social view of what it means to be a teacher as a social good. They demonstrate, the internalised tensions that impact on teachers' identities, as well as the negative consequences on emotional and mental health, in their qualitative study of 39 teachers and 6 school leaders in England and Wales. It is, therefore, vital to consider the macro- and meso-level politics, policy and,

thus, the enactment of these policies linked to the environments in which ECTs find themselves in Wales. Like other areas steeped in neoliberal policies, the work environment and practices of teachers in Ireland, like Wales, have intensified (Mooney Simmie and Edling 2016). It is contended that the shift of school leadership priorities towards market ideologies has had deleterious impacts on teachers' professional identities (Burns 2016). These effects can be attributed to and explained by situated learning theory, as ECTs are apprenticed and participate in the activities, discourses, mutual engagement, and joint repertoire of neoliberal ideology (Lave and Wenger 1991), constructing their professional identities in these images. I argue that ECTs are products of the environments, cultures, and socialisation in which they develop; therefore, the contextual policy and political backdrop that led to lack of support for ECTs are important considerations when examining the context of ECTs engaged in this study. The next section considers the policy environment that can direct headteachers' practices and, therefore, school cultures that impact ECTs identities.

2.2.2. Top-down pressures in the system that impact Early Career Teachers

Head teachers are often positioned as business leaders, a complex role that has moved away from being leaders of learning and teaching (Crow and Møller 2017), which can be argued to align with new managerialist perspectives of teaching. The negative impacts on the emotional health and identity of teachers, has been attributed to the competing ideals of the moral purpose of education, verses the required enactment of neoliberal policy. These issues have been documented by Skinner et al. (2021) in England and Wales. As Egan and Keane's (2018, p.133) study with 15 headteacher's from Wales expressed:

I think that we have reached a position whereby the pressures on schools and on leaders in schools is having a detrimental effect on the culture in schools and across the whole system because too much focus on the metrics can compromise professional values and can affect everyone's morale.

In Wales, as examined in Section 1.2, the developing accountability regimes since the 2011 education reforms have produced policies focused on external accountability, which prioritise technocratic assumptions and organisationally orientated headteacher roles (Connolly et al. 2018a; Davies et al. 2018). This view is supported by Milton et al. (2020) in their demand side analysis of headteachers' roles, as articulated through job descriptions for headships (n=67). Their research presents evidence that the expectations of the role of headteachers within these accountability regimes have shifted to the requirements of a neoliberal agenda, causing a significant lack of agency for headteachers and governing bodies to oppose the requirements of neoliberal policies in Wales.

The findings of Milton et al.(2020) align with the research of Davies et al. (2018) in their qualitative semi-structured interviews with headteachers in Wales. Davies et al. (2018) utilised a distributed sample of headteachers in various phases of education (n=30) and demonstrated that headteachers felt their role had been limited and reduced to concerns of performativity due to the increased cultures of accountability in Wales. This change is argued to have shifted practices to align to more-performative perspectives and reduced the numbers of teachers willing to move into senior-leadership positions. This argument is further strengthened by an OECD (2018) report that is critical of leadership in Welsh schools. It identified that Welsh school leadership lacked the capacity to lead innovation and insufficiently developed collaborative school cultures to support inquiry-focused learning for staff and pupils.

This evidence suggests that some ECTs may be in unstable school environment, in which many headteachers are caught between delivering the expectations of policy and national informal league tables, and the needs of their schools. Burns et al. (2016) explored this position in Irish schools and found that it significantly negatively impacted all teachers' professional identities. This led to narrow conceptions of teaching and learning that aligned to teaching to the tests and a focus on attainment and outcome. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that this environment impacted vulnerable teachers more, as well as those in more-challenging environments such as those new to the profession. Burns et al. (2016) calls

for a focus on schools as learning environments for all teachers, as there is a considerable need for them to develop to become sites for the capacity-building of the profession.

The Welsh ECT induction review also highlights the inconsistent experience and opportunities that a large proportion (85%) of ECTs in 2018/2019 experienced in relation to the Welsh performative agenda:

This is sad and reductionist and shows a lack of the professional outlook that Wales wishes to engender in its leadership. The system's inability to welcome the teachers it trains is a significant problem at the root of the quality of the induction period.

Waters (2020, p.10)

Schools are positioned as being unaware of their responsibility in supporting ECTs and, therefore, the wider professional learning of the Welsh teaching workforce.

Similarly, in their small-scale qualitative study of nine school leaders in Norway, Sunde and Ulvik (2014) attribute leaders' lack of consideration of ECTs' perspectives, to the dominating agendas and discourses focused on managerial- and accountability-orientated objectives. They found that ECTs were assimilated into the established practices of the school.

Correspondingly, Milton et al. (2020a), in their bilingual validated survey, utilised an adapted form of the Langdon induction and mentoring survey (LIMS). This survey's 78 questions considered 12 areas considered critical for induction and mentoring. Teaching professionals were surveyed (n=99), including ECTs, mentors and headteachers, from a geographical spread of Welsh schools in different phases. The researchers reported a disconnect and disengagement in classroom teachers' focus during the induction and mentoring process of and for ECTs. The participants highlighted the lack of relevance between supporting mentoring and induction of ECTs and their general teaching roles, suggesting a gap between what is supposed to be happening in induction and mentoring and the realities of school-wide practices. Milton et al (2020a) identified a considerable mismatch in the perceptions of experienced teachers' consideration of their role to support ECTs' practices and the induction of ECTs into the school compared with the

perspectives of senior leaders in the same schools. The evidence points to ECTs in Wales being under-supported.

Key recommendations from the Welsh Government report for ECT induction foreground the importance of induction in Wales being supported by quality-assured, trained and developed induction mentors. Waters (2020) in the induction review report calls to raise the profile of the role, including greater remuneration and professional learning, as part of any new practices and policies regarding induction in Wales; and mentoring has been demonstrated to be a key area of support in induction in the international literature (Ingersoll and Strong 2011; Hobson and McIntyre 2013; Carr et al. 2017; Daly and Milton 2017; Heikkinen et al. 2018). For example, in a qualitative study of mentors and mentoring of NQTs by 15 mentors in 10 schools in Malta, Attard Tonna (2019) demonstrated that the dialogue and open reflection supported through building mentoring relationships led to professional growth in the mentees.

External mentoring was a key role in the support process of the MEP, and the value of external mentoring is considered further in the following section.

2.3. External mentors: an immunisation for poor induction practices

Mentoring is a key component in induction to the teaching profession (see Ingersoll and Strong 2011; Hobson and McIntyre 2013; Carr et al. 2017; Daly and Milton 2017). Through mentoring, ECTs can develop their practice and knowledge of teaching, as well as their professional identities (Ingersoll and Strong 2011; Carr et al. 2017).

Two key areas have been highlighted to counter the negative experience impact of ECTs in induction. These areas are developmental professional learning, which supports agency, and the support of a more-experienced other, such as a mentor (Helm-Lorenz et al. 2012; Hobson et al. 2009; Daly and Milton 2017; Shanks 2020; Schaap et al. 2021).

Lynch et al. (2016), in the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) English study on teacher retention, sampled 1,000 teachers from a geographical spread from all phases in England, utilising teacher voice surveys. The teachers were sampled three times per year, in the autumn, spring, and summer terms. Ninety percent of those teachers self-categorised as professionally 'engaged' and were not considering leaving teaching. The teachers attributed this 'engagement' to factors including engaging with professional learning opportunities and having a mentor (Lynch et al. 2016). Teachers (n=21) who left the profession during the study were interviewed. They highlighted pressures from senior leaders and being in environments with little support and flexibility in their roles as reasons for leaving. These ex-teachers felt it was culturally unacceptable in their schools to display weakness and receive help, as this led to being deemed as failing or stigmatised as underperforming. They unanimously felt undervalued by school leaders, school, government, parents and pupils. Although this sample is not specifically ECTs, the findings provide evidence of the toxic environments that teachers work in and can be encultured into. The study makes recommendations about the important role mentors play for all

teachers, but also the roles of authentic professional learning as a support mechanism for sustaining the profession.

Cameron and Grant (2017) studied the effect of mentoring on the professional identity formation of physics ECTs. They found that EMs acted as a lifeline for supporting ECTs through their induction period, especially in schools where the support was deemed deficient and ECTs were left vulnerable to leaving the profession. In the study, EMs significantly impacted bridging the gaps and developing a sense of positive professional identity in the ECTs, despite this not being the design of the physics mentoring programme by the Institute of Physics. The programme was designed to support physics pedagogical approaches regarding the shortage subject of physics rather than general support for ECTs. It was also found that EMs who were not committed could compromise professional identity if mentoring practices were ineffective, or if the mentor was unresponsive and not involved with the mentee. The study drew on 88 ECTs, eliciting their perspectives in semi-structured telephone interviews over a 12-month period while engaged in the novel Institute of Physics ECT mentoring programme. The 30 EMs distributed across England were recent or retired physics teachers employed in a flexible part-time approach following general recruitment. Cameron and Grant (2017) discovered that ECTs' urgent needs were related to more general support within unsupportive school environments, rather than specifics regarding the teaching of physics. The research demonstrated that without the support of their mentors, the ECTs would have struggled to express their identity of being a teacher. Only with this support in place could more subject-specific mentoring and support be offered.

The literature contains numerous studies on teachers becoming empowered through engaging with research, which is often supported by teacher educators who act in a mentoring role. These studies often include participants who were initial or experienced teachers, not ECTs (see Banegas et al. 2013; Borg 2013; Smith et al. 2014; Yuan and Lee 2015, 2016; Edwards and Burns 2016). There is little research related to the roles of EMs in supporting teacher inquiry or action research, which is the focus of the following section.

2.4. Professional learning through teacher inquiry and its impact on Early Career Teacher identities.

The commissioning of the MEP (see Section 1.3) was, in part, a way for the Welsh Government to address some of the reality shocks of ECTs transitioning from ITE into professional practice and to counter the perceived shortcomings of ITE in Wales (Furlong 2015). As a programme of support, the MEP was not compulsory and relied on ECTs to engage voluntarily, with the permissions of their headteachers. The support was not extended to part-time ECTs (those on contracts of less than 0.4) or ECTs on supply or contracts less than one term in length. With parallels to its predecessors, the MTeach and MTL, the MEP was built on a similar premise to that of the Australian graduate teacher induction programme and was deemed a mode of support for ECTs by developing their inquiry skills and their collaborative network, as well as being an opportunity to raise capacity in the Welsh education system. The MEP sought to address what the literature has documented as the variable experiences that ECTs face during induction and within the first three years of their participation in the profession, which have significant implications for the effectiveness and practice of those ECTs.

A qualitative study by Connolly et al. (2018, pp.248–249) on MEP ECTs' professional identities drew on surveys of three cohorts of ECTs (n=886) and focus groups and interviews (n=60). The study deemed the MEP had been a disruptive influence on the Welsh education system's normative practices, and that engagement with the MEP had resulted in an emboldening of the professional agency of ECTs. The researchers attributed this impact to the opportunities of collaboration afforded by the MEP through peer collaboration and external mentoring. For Connolly et al. (2018), ECTs' developed agency that should allow them to make choices around accepting, rejecting or to make changes to school norms, rather than having practices imposed by government or schools. This large-scale study suggested the significant development of agency of ECTs was the result of the MEP. There was no follow-up study, and although the study considered ECTs' self-perception as looking forward while completing the MEP, it would have been useful to

understand if those feelings of agency were transferred into practice in schools, and if ECTs disrupted the dominant cultures imposed upon them.

The importance of teacher identity on and for professional learning has been highlighted (Yuan and Burns 2017; Dikilitas and Yayli 2018). There is no clear, single definition of teacher identity, but many approaches have been discussed (see Beijaard et al. 2004; Izadinia 2013). This present study considers an amalgamation of characteristics to explain identity, that is influenced in a sociocultural environment. This includes that identities are dynamic, fluctuating, and multifaceted (Sutherland et al. 2010). Identity is influenced by several factors, including agency, legitimate peripheral participation CoPs, the interaction between the ECTs and their social and physical environments, and the self-directed take-up of professional learning in relation to self-defined goals (Beauchamp and Thomas 2009, p.177). This positive identity work has been linked to enhanced effective teaching practice and the development of collaborative endeavours, which helped teachers to navigate complex work environments (Kosnik and Beck 2009). The literature indicates a clear link between the agency a teacher develops, their acts of professional learning and their socialisation in the environment they find themselves. In the communities of practice of schools identity 'is shaped and reshaped in interaction with others in a professional context' (Beauchamp and Thomas 2009, p.177).

Teacher action research and teacher inquiry can be important elements in the professional learning of teachers to bring about change to their practice, beliefs, and identities (Weiner 2010; Sharon et al. 2017). McNiff (2013, p. 23) articulates a relationship between teachers' action research and identity construction, as it allows the teacher to develop 'an enquiry of the self into the self'. Similarly, for Yuan and Burns (2017), teacher inquiry develops teachers' self-exploration and the study of their own identities through reflection on their practice, which is a mode of professional learning.

Education reform has often drawn on external research and is often applied and implemented politically from above, either through policy or via the reaction of the enactment to policy through school senior leaders (see Section 2.1.2) in an attempt to develop teaching practice in the profession

(McGuinn 2012). This top-down approach ignores the teachers' professional judgements and the views of learners (Biesta and Stengel 2016). Arguably, top-down approaches implemented upon teachers and schools, such as those seen in education reform movements, do little to improve teacher practices (Fullan 2010; Hofman et al. 2012; Milton et al. 2020a).

Regarding teacher professional learning and development, short-term and short-duration workshop-based professional learning away from school have also been found to be insignificant regarding practice development for teachers (Hammerness et al. 2005; Darling-Hammond et al. 2017). There is a need for a more-sustained and connected professional learning approach, within a community, that is collaborative and related to authentic experiences in the classroom (Hawley and Valli 1999; Putnam and Borko 2000; Fullan 2010; Darling-Hammond et al. 2017). These are the experiences the MEP attempted to foster in its three-year collaborative design, which is discussed in the following section.

2.5. Teacher inquiry as a form of professional learning

Teacher inquiry has been regarded as the ‘magic bullet’ for the professional learning of teachers, and this informed the main premise of the MEP.

Teacher inquiry, a form of action research, is the considered, systematic intentional reflection on practice that can result in practice change (Stenhouse 1981; Cabaroglu 2014; Connolly 2018). More specifically, Avramides et al. (2015, p.146) define teacher inquiry as a process whereby ‘teachers identify questions for investigation in their practice and then design a process for collecting evidence about student learning that informs their subsequent educational designs’. Action research has been conceptualised as a disruptive practice, moving teachers away from taken-for-granted norms and providing an increased focus on social justice (Herr 2015; Anderson 2017; Herr 2017). This project assumes that both action research and teacher inquiry are synonymous and can and will be used interchangeably.

Teacher inquiry includes the voices of participants presenting the opinions and perspectives of learners and teachers to shift away from neoliberal top-down approaches (Anderson 2017). Inquiry approaches have been demonstrated to foster democratic and emancipatory forms of research that deliver local change for the needs of the participants (McNiff 2016). Moreover, by situating teachers as the forefront, as the producers of localised knowledge and as scholars in their own practice and their pupils’ learning, this can offer immunisation against the reforms, policies or practices designed to de-professionalise teachers (McNiff 2016).

As Lawton-Sticklor and Bodamer (2016, p.396) contend, the literature on the impacts of teacher inquiry is significantly underdeveloped in relation to ‘how an inquiry stance is learned and developed’. This is still the position in 2021 and, as this literature review demonstrates, there is a significant gap in the literature in relation to teacher inquiry being undertaken by ECTs and how teacher inquiry processes are supported and facilitated to develop ECT identity and professional learning, which this study seeks to address.

Action research and research to inform practice have become central concerns for teachers in Wales, with the embedding of action research and

evidence-informed practice into the new practising and initial teacher standards (2017):

Practising teacher descriptor. There is structured engagement in an action research community and evidence of practice informed by wider reading and research findings on a national and international scale.

QTS descriptor: The teacher has an informed understanding of the contribution of research, including small-scale action research, to the development of practice.

Welsh Government (2017): Professional standards for teaching and leadership

Concern has been raised regarding the roles of teacher inquiry in professional learning programmes such as the MEP which are vehicles for Government policy, also, its inclusion as a mandated professional requirement for teaching. For Sahlberg (2011), policymakers have mis/appropriated action research as a tool in the neoliberal performativity world to raise standards and performance on international league tables. Kemmis (2006, p.459) claims this is an inappropriate form of action research.

Much of the action research that has proliferated in many parts of the world over the past two decades has not been the vehicle for educational critique we hoped it would be. Instead, some may even have become a vehicle for domesticating students and teachers to conventional forms of schooling.

As outlined in Section 1.3., the MEP was envisioned by the Welsh Government as a policy vehicle to deliver change to the perceived underperforming system in Wales, but also as a vehicle for the then political focus of the effect of poverty on attainment, additional learning needs and literacy and numeracy and data to inform practice. Kemmis (2006) argues that action research can lead to the uncritical adoption of dominant practice, which does not challenge existing practice structures in schools and society, perpetuating neoliberal efficiency while ignoring learners' voices and the voices of those directly affected by such actions. Ultimately, he argues, these forms of action research do not lead to the emancipatory changes for learners, teachers and society they were originally conceived to facilitate. This view resonates with the challenges the MEP faced in supporting ECTs to develop their understandings of social justice and learning in their

classrooms away from practices aligned to attainment, school and departmental improvement and narrow conceptions of learning in line with neoliberal policy.

Daly et al. (2020) explored how notions of neoliberalism may have created a directed profession that has broad consequences for the action research and coding conducted by teachers in schools. They argue there may now be a need to reclaim action research from the neoliberal agendas in schools. Notions of easy, ready-made solutions to problems of practice and the underperformance of learners can provide alluring quick fixes, especially under the guise of accountability. There is limited time and patience for the complicated, ethical messy work that deals with practice related to social injustices within schools through labour-intensive emancipatory teacher inquiry. There is also limited tolerance for difficult and disruptive conversations about sustained practices and cultures that require deep changes.

2.5.1. Effect of teacher inquiry on teacher identities

The literature has reported the positive effects of action research on teacher practices (McBee 2004; Banegas et al. 2013; Sullivan and Glanz 2013; Burns 2014; Cabaroglu 2014; Wang and Zhang 2014; Wyatt and Dikilitaş 2016; Connolly et al. 2018). The research has focused on experienced or initial teachers, with little reference to ECTs. This is in part due to the argument that undertaking action research may be inappropriate during the challenging professional socialisation period the ECTs find themselves in while they grapple to develop their practice and understand the profession. This is a view the Welsh Government and those involved in the design and delivery of the MEP did not subscribe to. The literature on action research centres on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects and English as a foreign language, highlighting the positive aspects to teachers engaging in action research; however, this does not necessarily include the nuanced and specific situated positions of ECTs transitioning into the profession. I argue that the specific nature of being an ECT in such

pressurised conditions means the participants in previous studies (who were initial teachers or experienced teachers) did not face the same issues that ECTs encounter regarding time, pressure, socialisation and lack of support, as explored in Section 2.2.

Nonetheless, the literature has detailed how teachers engaging in action research develop a sense of empowerment, agency and enhanced teacher self-efficacy that can lead to the development of teacher practice (McBee 2004; Sullivan and Glanz 2013; Banegas et al. 2013; Wang and Zhang 2014; Connolly et al. 2018). Teachers can better recognise the value of research to their own practice through action research (Adams and Townsend 2014), which develop a more-nuanced view of tailoring teaching to their students' needs (Burns 2014; Wyatt and Dikilitaş 2016), taking a much more systematic approach to their problem-solving (Dikilitaş and Yayli 2018a) with greater reflexivity (Kayaoglu 2015; Sato and Chen 2019).

2.5.2.Obstacles to teacher inquiry approaches

Considerable obstacles face teachers undertaking teacher inquiry. In their quantitative project evaluation reflecting on their development of action research projects with 80 kindergarten to Grade 8 teachers in Canada, Ross and Bruce (2012) investigated how action research impacted teaching practice and beliefs about student learning. They utilised pre- and post-tests to evaluate outcome measures, and self-rated surveys using Likert scales. Teacher attitudes, teacher efficacy, collaboration, prior research experience and demographic data from participants, such as qualifications and school culture developed, were collected. From the data, the authors note that action research impacted the teachers' practice in more noticeable ways in fostered professional learning culture compared with less-collaborative schools that were ambivalent or negative towards professional learning opportunities. Often, these schools were less successful or did not see the value in undertaking the project.

For VanOostveen (2017), when participation is authentically voluntarily and not mandated, a greater level of commitment and success is seen. These outcomes were extended when teachers could direct their focus to areas relevant to their practice and their pupils' learning (VanOostveen 2017). Similarly, Adams and Townsend (2014) found that success is attributed to projects in which teachers felt their needs and context were accounted for. They conclude that institutional support had to be present for action research to develop efficacy of teaching, but a key requirement for successful authentic action research was the support of a trained or qualified facilitator – someone steeped in action research for education (see also Peterson 2012; VanOostveen 2017). In studies in which efficacy of teachers was not improved, the teachers demonstrated a misguided notion of what teacher inquiry was for and how it was undertaken, leading to more-reductive formats of uncritically proving aspects of practice already being undertaken in their schools (Peterson et al. 2010)

2.5.3. Supervision of teacher inquiry

As identified above, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding how an inquiry stance is developed, supported and, more specifically, supervised. A call for greater research into the skills and dispositions of those supporting teacher inquiry is vital. Previous research has suggested a skilled practitioner in inquiry is required to support the best outcome of the projects (Peterson et al. 2010; VanOostveen 2017). Research does not capture how practices developed the inquiry stance in teachers, nor which practices supported their inquiry understanding. Therefore, I argue this present study is well situated to address some of these gaps.

The most recent literature that documents the role of supervisors in developing action research in schools is Solis and Gordon's (2019) study of supervisor facilitation action research at a central Texas private school specialising in students with dyslexia. The research details the process of supervising and supporting experienced teachers (n=50) engaging in

voluntary, long-term action research to address authentic problems of practice. The data gathered were from fieldnotes and individual and small group meetings with participants and facilitators. The researchers utilised beginning- and mid-year open-ended teacher surveys to capture individual and group progress, teachers' written reflections on the impact of the projects, end-of-year surveys and the finally, research projects produced.

Solis and Gordon (2019) report that those involved developed new orientations to practice (both facilitators and teachers) informed by their own research and which also led to extensive professional learning of wider teachers not involved with the action research directly. Through collaboration, presentations and discussions, the teachers' action research impacted others' practice, views and beliefs throughout the school, resulting in an increased focus on student learning. Although these data were self-reported in surveys, and there may have been a desire to display impact, the consensus from the 50 teachers is clear. This impact may have been intensified due to the critical mass of teachers undertaking action research in one school, and the more-supportive nature of American private schools may also have allowed a greater capacity for change and a better disposition towards action research as a development tool. The researchers point out that the school was very supportive and had an expanded vision of teacher professional learning, which was already deeply embedded in the culture of the school. The researchers found a desire in the department for cross-curricular research and a team desire for collaboration on research. The researchers conclude that having a supportive facilitator steeped in action research and research methodology and aware of the pressures and challenges of being a teacher led to this success.

2.6 Sociocultural learning in communities of practice

Communities of practice are an element of sociocultural theory developed by Lave and Wenger (1991), who built directly on the earlier work of Lev Vygotsky (1978) and his approach to sociocultural studies and learning. From a sociocultural perspective, learning occurs not only from an individual's cognitive process, but also from social engagement and interaction in social practices and spaces (Vygotsky 1978). Forms of cognition become situated in time and place and are distributed among participants through collaboration (Pea 1993; Lave and Wenger 1991; Rogoff 1998). This implies that social learning through collaborative processes occurs in relation to a group of social entities, for example, in CoPs, but also in relation to individuals. For example,

Legitimate peripheral participation provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about activities, identities, artefacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. It concerns the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice

(Lave and Wenger 1991, p.29)

Lave and Wenger (1991) contend it is through the affordance of legitimate peripheral participation that new members to a community learn. This developed a notion of sociocultural learning from one which was related to apprenticeship from a 'master-student or mentor-mentee relationship to one of changing participation and identity transformation in a community of practice' (Wenger 1998, p.11).

The key features of a CoP are mutual engagement, in which learning occurs in active engagement, and interrelations with others in a specific situation, in which reciprocal relationships occur that enable another member's practice to contribute to other members' learning. This process involves establishing norms, expectations and relationships within the CoP. In this instance, schools, the MEP and higher education establishments act as CoPs, with their unique discourses, practices, sustained opportunities for learning, and peripheral and full members.

Mutual engagement is closely related to membership of a CoP, which has a unique identity and should not be considered just part of an organisation or group. Joint enterprise is the focus and aim of the CoP and is related to the collective mutual accountability related to practice. Joint enterprise and accountability are negotiated, which means tensions exist when individuals have differing purposes to the wider collective. The learning of ECTs in schools takes place through participation, supported by more-experienced 'old timers' to raise the attainment and outcomes of their learners. Those not in the CoP cannot influence the CoP joint enterprise, nor can individual participants, as it requires collective negotiation.

Shared repertoire relates to the communal resources that members share to achieve joint enterprise. This notion draws directly on the conceptualisation of Vygotsky's (1978) cultural tools, those tangible and symbolic tools that support learning, such as the language and discourse of the community, culture, and any artefacts, processes and methods, standards and tools. Therefore, these tangible or intangible repertoires become important parts of practice and, therefore, learning in a CoP.

Wenger (1998) states that when people participate in a CoP, they express their belonging through three modes of identification: engagement, imagination and alignment. The actions and interactions between members, producing artefacts, talking, and the products of action and practice together signify engagement. These actions may be related to direct instruction, but also through observation and via hearing snatches of conversations. Imagination relates to reflection, constructing images of the current and future practices of the CoP and its members, as well as identifying and seeing themselves as part of the CoP. Alignment relates to working within the direction, expectations and roles of the CoP. This means individuals aligning with the expectations and standards of practice and coordinating actions towards a common goal. In becoming part of the community there are expectations that they will take on-board norms established by the community, as they moved towards the identities which are aspired to by community members (Wenger-Traynor et al. 2014). For a CoP to become a site of learning, these three elements need to be present.

Wenger (1998) points to learning in a CoP as a form of becoming, or not becoming, in which identities are changed, as individuals acquire new knowledge through participation and interaction in the CoP. These social participations and relations are vital to the process of learning (Lave and Wenger 1991).

From a broader interpretation, there is an argument that people need to belong to something, in order to learn, and wherever you belong, could be deemed a CoP. This notion is related closely to Bourdieu's concept of field (Bourdieu 1990). Teachers are members of many overlapping CoPs. Secondary school teachers, for example, exist in CoPs of teachers, but also CoPs of specific disciplines, such as science or art. They may be in wider professional networks of CoPs, or involved in leadership CoPs or communities of pastoral care. More recently, these arguments led Wenger to develop situated learning and CoP to incorporate landscape of practice, in which multiple overlapping CoPs exist as people pass through, stop, exist and pass between various CoPs (Wenger-Traynor et al. 2014).

The notion of CoPs has been criticised in terms of the structure being seemingly self-fulfilling and static, with suggestion that practices are replicated from old timer to newcomer. As Fuller et al. (2005) and Cox (2005) elaborate in their studies, the role of newcomers in developing and changing existing practices is vital. The fresh perspectives of newcomers shift and develop practices in the community, so the community learns from those new to it. Cox (2005) is particularly critical of CoPs' lack of discussion about non-conventional newcomers; for example, an experienced professor in a new community of researchers. Although a newcomer to the community, the professor brings her/his significant experience to the community. The nuances of such situations are not always captured by the conceptualisation of CoPs.

Hodgkinson and Hodgkinson (2004) explored the power relation that often exists in organisations. There are inherent power dynamics and loci of control in pre-existing hierarchies in organisations. The researchers highlight the lack of consideration of perpetuating power dynamics in organisations that form CoPs. Vesciso et al. (2008) also considered the impact of authority

in directing CoPs. They identified how this impact often lies with the elders of the organisation, or the leaders. Such leaders provide guidance, direction and instruction for the actions, motives and requirements of a CoP and, thus, legitimate certain practices and learning. This point is omitted from Lave and Wenger's conceptualisation, but is highly relevant when thinking about the learning of ECTs, who are informed directly by more-experienced others in schools, but also by the requirements of leaders. Vann and Bowker (2001) in opposition contend, CoPs are a coalescing of likeminded free relationships. This may not be the case in organisations where structures and hierarchical relationship are key, or where groups are heavily structured by tasks and formal control, for example schools.

Cox (2005) developed the viewpoints of Eraut (2002), arguing that work situations inhibit the definitions of a CoP, particularly when organisations frequently rotate and change their staff. This point is relevant to ECTs in Wales due to the nature of contracts and their shifting involvement in various CoPs as they move to different schools, and the modes of work tha teachers undertake (see Section 2.2.). This situation does not allow relationships to grow, inhibiting learning and mutual engagement.

Hierarchy and management structures have been suggested to dictate or own the focus and tasks of the community directing mutual engagement, (O'Mahony and Ferraro 2007) the current agenda in education, and the practices that can lead to enhancing the school or departmental improvement plan. It is important to consider fragmented work in which professionals have limited time for group and community work, and dyadic working conditions or competitive environments that do not allow for collaboration. Schools are sites where collaboration is a challenge due to the nature of the roles, with teachers working in classroom silos for most of the day, leaving little time or opportunity for collaboration or discussion. Therefore, the extent to which schools can be considered CoPs is questionable. Brouwer et al. (2012), in a mixed-methods study of 72 teachers in one school in the Netherlands, considered whether secondary school teachers work in a CoP. Observing the teachers over a four-month period and analysing teacher self-perception surveys, the researchers deemed that CoPs did occur in school. The teacher teams in the school generally

demonstrated modest degrees of mutual engagement, shared repertoire and joint enterprise (see also Fuller et al. 2005).

2.7. Summary

Research has illustrated the challenges faced by ECTs entering the teaching profession. Much of the research has focused on the challenges at the entry stage, with less work on ongoing professional learning and the needs of ECTs as they progress in their teaching careers. The literature situates ECTs as vulnerable to accountability regimes and susceptible to enculturation into those performative ideals, which has a lasting effect on teacher identities and notions of being and doing teaching.

The roles of teacher inquiry, external mentoring and the supervision of teacher inquiry have been demonstrated to impact professional learning and the identity development of experienced teachers and initial teachers positively, but there is a gap in the literature regarding ECTs. There is also limited research that considers the practices of supervising teacher inquiry and the external mentoring of inquiry and how these impact ECT identities. There is also a lack of attention on teacher professional learning programmes that combine these elements, particularly in the social and political education landscape of Wales.

More research in Wales is vital as Welsh education is governed separately, to wider UK member education policy, and the conditions that support positive effects on ECT identity development have not been considered in this specific context. This research, therefore, addresses this evidence gap by considering the direct roles of EMs and ATs in supporting ECTs' developing identities. This research also explores the effects of teacher inquiry on ECTs' identities, a considerably under-researched area due to notions that teacher inquiry at this stage in the profession adds too many challenges to the developing professional. The following chapter outlines the methods adopted to fulfil these research aims and explores the roles of EMs, ATs and teacher inquiry in supporting ECTs in Wales.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Methods

3.1. Introduction

In Section 1.4., I introduced the central research questions of this study:

- What role do EMs play in engendering changes in the professional identity of ECTs?
- In what ways do ATs support the development of professional identities in ECTs?
- How does undertaking a teacher inquiry project impact the professional identities of ECTs?

This chapter outlines the methodology adopted to answer these research questions. It introduces the rationale for the research design, which was informed by a sociocultural stance (Vygotsky 1978). This position led to the design of an intrinsic case study (Stake 1995), utilising my own 'transient insider' position as a lecturer, AT and EM on the MEP (Roberts 2018, p.114).

This chapter sets out my ontological and epistemological perspective that humans are social and historical products of their settings and are therefore constructed through the activity and participation in communities and cultures (Kukla 2000). Therefore, knowledge is a socially and culturally constructed subjective phenomenon, that occurs in communities with specific cultures (Packer and Goicoechea 2000).

These tenets informed the design of the study and the choice of data-generation methods.

This chapter discusses these methods and provides an account of the

- focus groups that drew on the collaboration and interaction that exist within the MEP teacher inquiry support triad between the ATs, EMs and ECTs;
- interviews with ATs, EMs and ECTs to consider individual perceptions;
- documentary analysis of teacher inquiry projects as artefacts and reflections of social constructions engaging with the process of teacher inquiry.

Regarding documentary analysis, it is important to note that these data do not feature in the findings chapters of the study. These sources were included in the initial stages of analysis; however, the reflections of the ECTs were inherent in the assessment processes regarding the MEP. As such, in examining these accounts in relation to the wider dataset, it was decided that their content was too embedded in the summative assessment process of the MEP to be a useful resource for answering the key research questions.

After outlining these methods of data generation and data collection, the chapter reflects on the research process. It discusses my positionality as a 'transient insider' (Roberts 2018, p.114) in the research process and the ethical considerations of this project. The chapter ends with a description of the analysis of the qualitative data using Braun and Clarke's (2006, p.6) six-point thematic analysis, explaining the processes of how coding occurred, the generation of themes and the triangulation between the datasets.

3.2. Ontological and epistemological position

In this study I adopted a sociocultural stance. The following assumptions informed my position:

Regarding professional learning and coming to know, I conceive that learning is a social process achieved through the interaction and collaboration of actors in a situated community. As Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 98) contend, learning is a 'set of relations among persons, activity and world, over time and in relation to tangential and overlapping communities of practice'. They highlight that 'learning involves the construction of identity' Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 52), and is a process of 'becoming' that can impact on actions or 'doings'.

Learning, must therefore involve enculturation, through becoming a member of a community, being immersed in its culture and (not) developing practices, behaviours, and discourses (Brown et al. 1989).

As Packer and Goicoechea (2000, p.234) state,

Human beings are formed and transformed in relationship with others, in the desire for recognition, in the practices of a particular community, and in a manner that will split and initiate a struggle for identity.

Therefore the overlapping nature of participation in variety of communities can lead to individuals, 'split' and struggling with varying identities, outlooks, knowledge, skills, discourses and artefacts of the world. These experiences are situated and subjective.

By acknowledging subjectivity, it is important to consider a range of perceptions from different lived experiences of the MEP programme. This study adopted a qualitative approach, and meanings were constructed and negotiated socially in focus groups and in interviews. The design of the data generation factored in the located inquiry process and the interactions of ECTs, EMs and ATs and these participants' shifting interpretations of reality within their many identities and multiple overlapping memberships of communities of practice. The study sought to reflect participants' experiences

and the contexts in which they interacted to highlight the links between the professional learning of ECTs, the setting, and the social interactions in which the learning takes place. Therefore, the activity/participation in which knowledge is developed becomes inseparable to any learning and sense-making (Lave and Wenger 1991). As a researcher, it was my responsibility to engage with participants and to develop an understanding of their subjective realities and communities and how their participation and interaction sociocultural activities had impacted on their professional identities.

This approach meant that I also needed to consider deeply my own subjective perceptions of reality, knowledge and learning that had been formed by my own participation on various overlapping Communities of practice as well as any biased value-laden assumptions I bring from my own experiences, identities, and participation (see Section 3.4). Therefore, I embraced the value- and bias-laden nature of this research, and rather than searching for 'external order', I constructed 'order' from meaningful interactions with participants. In line with a community of practice perspective it was wholly appropriate that both participants and I contributed to the data generation, which influenced the interplay of interaction and interpretations by all parties involved in the research situation. The emphasis on data generation was focused around producing rich descriptions of the phenomena, participants' accounts and lived experiences, and allowed an exploration of meanings, interpretations, processes and contexts (Guba and Lincoln 1994). Accordingly, the methodology was designed to enable deep exploration of participants' subjective experiences; therefore, detailed verbatim quotes are shared with the reader in the findings chapters to demonstrate how the underlying themes are interpreted.

3.3. Methodology

3.3.1. Intrinsic case study

The case-study method provides holistic and rich contextual non-numeric data (Mason 2002) generated by working with participants in a setting natural for them, for example, the MEP learning event (Creswell 1999). Accordingly, this study employed a case-study approach to understand the complex social interactions on the MEP programme and how they have impacted the identity formation of ECTs. Therefore, I followed several ECTs, EMs and ATs through the final year action inquiry project of a master's level professional learning programme.

The boundaries of this case study were the nine-month teacher inquiry project on the MEP for the third cohort of students, between 2016 and 2017. Defining this case study within this boundary made the research more manageable (Baxter and Jack 2008). It also indicated the perceptions of participants as they crossed through boundaries and landscapes of practice (Wenger-Trayner et al. 2014), moving between the CoPs of schools and the MEP. This approach arguably accounts for any learning or shifts in identities from such boundary-crossing events as a sociocultural phenomenon, which may be inherent in professional learning programmes of this type.

For Gomm et al. (2000, p.9), case studies are concerned with understanding 'the case studied in itself, with no interest in theoretical inference or empirical generalisation'. This case study included a small sample of participants and is not generalisable to the wider population. Features of a case study include multiple sources of evidence in relation to the phenomenon under investigation, which is a feature of this research.

Taking an inductive approach, this research sought to discover and interpret at the same time, employing a flexible approach during data generation and analysis. My perspectives were informed by Wenger's (1998) views on sociocultural learning in and between CoPs, as well as the concepts of situated learning theory and legitimate peripheral participation, (Lave and Wenger 1991). The utilisation of theoretical perspectives acted as a final lens

for analysis, further helping to make sense of the data as and after they were generated (Stake 1995, 2005).

Not incorporating a rigid conceptual framework at the outset of the project allowed a greater flexibility in exploring phenomena, and this was important as I knew rigid frameworks may inhibit the inductive approach. Therefore, I kept journals that captured my thoughts, feelings and decisions regarding this project. These journals were utilised to discuss my approach with my supervisors and to consider whether any developing preconceptions towards the data, or whether my own lived experiences and interpretations, were being overlaid on the data because of my positioning as a transient-insider researcher (Roberts 2018, p.114). This positioning is the focus of the next section.

3.4.The transient-insider researcher: my positionality

The researcher is 'the (human) research instrument' (Gillham 2000, p.27) in case-study research. In such settings, the researcher must keep an open-mind and avoid or, at least, minimise any personal bias. Finding myself aligned with what Erin Roberts (2018, p.114) describes as the transient-insider researcher, I was neither totally inside the research nor outside.

My transient-insider status was marked by being a lecturer on the MEP programme between 2014 and 2020, and then undertaking a hybrid role of lecturer and academic external mentor (2017–2020). Being a doctoral researcher and a professional learner undertaking research to inform my professional learning at the same university and in the same department as the participants further aligned my experience with the ECTs. My professional experience of having been a secondary school teacher in Wales from 2009 to 2014 and having studied for my own master's in education during that period as an ECT, I knew there were significant similarities between my professional experience and that of the participants involved in the study.

Furthermore, I was privileged with access and detailed insider-knowledge of the MEP programme through supervising and mentoring ECTs. Therefore, I was always conscious of the similarities between myself and the participants, and that my perceptions of being a teacher engaging in master's level professional learning would pose a challenge to making the 'familiar strange' (Mannay 2010, p.93). Additionally, the struggles of undertaking doctoral study while working on a programme of this nature at the same university in the same department as the participants set up parallels. I posed many questions in my journal and sought to consider these when I was thinking about how I would deal with my assumptions.

Working closely with my supervisors, I spent time discussing the following issues.

- How might my perceptions of my own challenges of doing part-time study through inquiry-style formats impact my perception of the ECTs' experiences?
- Would my frustrations, hurdles and annoyances of part-time research be overlaid onto the ECTs' perceptions?
- Would my own supervisory experiences as a supervisor and a supervisee impact my interpretations?

I knew my own experience and cultural understanding of the setting and my views may lead to things being taken for granted or provide an inability to challenge any preconceived assumptions (see Delamont and Atkinson 1995; Delamont 2002; Mercer 2007; Mannay 2010).

Bonner and Tolhurst (2002, p.156) highlight that an insider researcher can strengthen the research, as this positioning leads to a better understanding of the issues being studied, as some nuances of a detailed case study cannot always be captured or observed by outsiders. Being a transient-insider researcher had its advantages, with access to the MEP and its participants and a deep understanding of its 'workings and formats'. As a member of the team on the MEP, it was easy for me to blend in with ECTs, ATs and EMs, and this allowed them to feel at ease with me (as I was a known entity). I believe this helped reduce the effect of my influence on the research setting (Mercer 2007, p.52) as I was steeped in the language and culture of the MEP and of teaching in Wales.

I was not a total insider. I am a career-changer, with multiple successful careers in retail, medical science, construction, teaching and then academia. I am a white, middle-aged male undertaking a doctoral study. I have also had very different experiences, identities and approaches than many of the participants, which act to position me more as a transient-insider with moments of contextual similarity and an understanding of the landscapes of practice, but also with considerable differences.

Being aware of the problems associated with insider research / transient-insider research and keeping the ethical implications at the forefront of the research (see Section 3.6.) made me more cognisant. I discussed aspects of

my data generation with my supervisors when I felt that areas were perhaps highlighted as 'risky', or I felt too close or too opinionated on themes that I perceived to be arising out of the data.

Utilising an unbiased research mentor–colleague–supervisor approach allowed me to be reflexive about data generation and analysis. I reflected on how I came to my interpretations of the data and how that related to my supervisors' perceptions and interpretations of my perspectives. This process enabled me to mediate and moderate my bias. This reflexivity helped me to distance myself from my assumptions about supervising my ECTs being transferred to the experience of the participants through my own transient-insider experience, and this further encouraged me to go back to the evidence where the data suggested certain themes, rather than stumbling across data that confirmed my emerging and existing thoughts on certain themes.

While it was possible to try and minimise the 'researcher-effect' (Morriss 2016, p.534), I do not believe it is possible to remove myself from the research entirely, nor do I think this is helpful. As someone with lived experience of teacher inquiry, supervision and mentoring of inquiry, and of being a teacher and having unique expertise on the MEP, the practices and dispositions I have developed on the programme, its development and implementation, and my perspectives all influenced the design of the research. It is precisely my expertise within the programme and my proximity to it that add depth of meaning. Therefore, research subjectivity cannot be overcome, but I have been careful with the design, fieldwork and analysis to acknowledge my own position and be reflexive throughout.

3.5. Triangulation

To mitigate the perceived problems associated with a qualitative intrinsic case study regarding reliability, validity and bias, triangulation was built into the project. This project utilised various types of triangulation: the between-method triangulation from focus groups, interviews and documentary analysis (Bryman 2001, p.32); and the reflective conversations and interpretations by my 'critical colleague' (second supervisor) were, in part, a form of informal investigator triangulation (Crooks et al. 2011, p.121). This process provided an external interpretive check-in point to make me more conscious of any intrinsic bias from being close to the research, participants and research environment. It was also via collaboration that I was sustained through the challenging emotional and isolating impacts of being a part-time doctoral researcher. This experience seemed to create a myopic silo; I was consumed by my research to the detriment of socialising outside of work hours, unable to do activities that sustained my wellbeing. Lisiak and Krzyżowski (2018), in their accounts of their research, portray the emotional impacts of qualitative research, especially on early career academics. This description resonated with me and confirmed my feelings that collaboration, discussion and the social enterprise of collaborating on my research provided a form of emotional support. This collegiality of teamwork was a welcome factor.

Data triangulation was utilised through sampling strategies, with ECTs, EMs and ATs being interviewed or involved in focus groups, providing differing perspectives on the same area of research, but also at different times throughout the study (Trochim 2002, p.10). By utilising a variety of data from different participants at different times through different methods, it was hoped that these would reflect the interpretations of the participants. Moreover, the only data that contributed to the emerging themes were those in which themes were generated from multiple, differing datasets or participants. The research process was documented to demonstrate transparency and consistency (see Section 3.7.). At this point it is important to consider the ethical protocols adopted in the study.

3.6. Ethical considerations

Alderson (2005, p.56) believes that the research design and entirety of a project should be permeated by ethical considerations, not just as a final step or hurdle in a research project.

I applied for and obtained ethical approval from Cardiff University's Social Research Ethics Committee in July 2016 (see Appendix 1) utilising BERA guidelines. In relation to the ethical considerations of this project, some issues were identified and responded to during the research. First, the challenge of being a transient-insider researcher on the MEP required reflexivity to and critiquing of the inherent power dynamics in the relationships between myself, as an AT, and the participants as ECTs. I ensured that the participants involved in the study were not directly my supervisees but were from the wider body of students that I was not working with directly (see Section 3.3). I was also aware of being in a position of knowing and, to consider my practice in supporting professional learning and developing the identities of my ECTs, I reflected on my practices and the similarities and experiences of the ECTs I was supervising but who were not participants in this study. I worked closely with my supervisors to ensure that my views and approaches were not ethically clouded, did not cause harm, or have a detrimental effect on participants, and that data generation and data analysis were not compromised by my proximity to the participants who were not my supervisees but who would have known of my involvement with the MEP programme as a module convenor.

I was conscious that some participants would feel tensions due to involvement with research while still engaging with the programme. I wanted to ensure that potential participants were fully informed before consenting to participate. I provided an information sheet about how the research would be undertaken (see Appendix 2), for what purpose and how any data would be used, providing time for the participants to consider if they wished to participate. Feedback from the participants after taking part was positive; they felt they had learned through being part of the process and that their involvement had supported perspectives for data generation in their own projects.

I provided space and time for participants to consider their involvement, and I constantly reiterated their right to withdraw. Those who wished to take part were provided with and invited to sign an opt-in consent form (see Appendix 3). Ensuring that the participants knew and could exercise their rights of withdrawal without consequence was paramount. I did not want the participants to feel obliged to take part or feel informally pressurised as students on the course, and thus, feel any awkwardness about withdrawing. It was agreed that if participants did not respond to any future emails related to the study, they would not be re-contacted, allowing anyone who wished to withdraw to do so comfortably. Those who wished to withdraw could withdraw verbally or in writing at any point.

Methodologically, the ethics committee referred to my bias in the research in relation to my interpretation as a transient-insider. Furthermore, it was highlighted in a meeting that utilising a critical colleague to support reflective discussions around my interpretation of the data was an informal expectation. The Social Research Ethics Committee suggested that this set-up would support strategies for making the familiar strange and increase research validity.

Initially, I felt that the Social Research Ethics Committee was hedging their approach by not allowing me to commit to being a 'researcher near' in deep qualitative research about my practice and supervisees (Mannay 2010, p.94). I also could see the potential institutional risk of a member of academic staff researching with their own students.

3.7. The research process

3.7.1. Pilot study

An initial pilot study was conducted with four ECTs from the second cohort of students who had graduated from the programme. This initial study was informed from the review of the literature and the emerging issues identified from my professional understanding of how to support ECTs through inquiry. It was also informed by professional conversations undertaken during programme meetings and with my supervisors. Some issues raised in these conversations included the following:

- Reductionist views of research by ECTs and their school colleagues.
- ECTs seeking to prove something 'worked' for their school.
- A focus on the needs of the school and or Estyn requirements above the needs of pupils and/or above their own professional needs.
- A focus on quick fixes to teaching and learning that can be generalised across all classes and pupils.
- Discomfort with pupils as partners and use of pupil voice.
- Teachers' positivist views of research: notions of scientism in education research linked to a 'what works' agenda.
- Challenges of mentor, academic tutor and teacher collaborating at a distance.
- Challenge of ATs entering the pre-existing mentor/mentee relationship to support teacher inquiry.
- MEP as a mandated professional learning programme, and as a policy device for the Welsh Government.
- The challenges of supporting these teachers regarding the pressures of accountability and performativity in the early part of their career while physically distanced.
- Perspectives of school colleagues and senior leadership that a master's programme and/or being close to practice research does not support the enhancement of teaching and learning.

I include these discussion points to enable transparency about my early assumptions. These 'issues' formed the early reflective discussions with a

small group of four teachers who were my academic tutees from the previous cohort and who had completed and graduated from the MEP the previous year and consented to a reflective dialogue. They were contacted via email, and informed consent was sought to participate in an open discussion.

Two open discussions were mediated via Skype: the first discussion was 59 minutes, the second 64 minutes. These discussions provided the perspectives of a previous cohort of ECTs in relation to their professional learning and identities, the inquiry process from the previous cohort of teachers, and the impact of input from mentors and ATs. The perspectives from the discussion informed the subsequent design of the actual focus-group interview questions for ECTs in the project (see Appendix 4). I also sought feedback from these teachers following the construction of my semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix 7). The teachers were asked to critique the draft protocol in the second open discussion. They were asked to consider the language and meaning of the questions to ensure that the proposed questions elicited the potential discussion and interactions desired in the research.

The teachers highlighted that some of the discussions in a focus group might be inhibited if the group utilised any of my supervisees, but as none of my ECTs were recruited (for ethical reasons), this was not a problem. The questions were deemed to be clear and led to open discussion central to the perceptions of ECTs developing notions of inquiry, support, and identity.

3.7.2 Focus groups

3.7.2.1. Overview

Due to the sociocultural perspectives of the research, I utilised focus groups. The interactions between ECTs, EMs and ATs in the groups allowed differing or similar experiences of engaging with the MEP to emerge out of the social interaction, which might not have been the case in one-to-one interviews (Kreuger and Casey 2009, p.67). This design reflected the interactions that occurred on the programme in learning groups, in which teachers reflected, critiqued and discussed practice and theoretical perspectives with each other, with EMs and with ATs in groups. This design sought to probe, clarify and refocus the discussions needed, but I ensured that I was not present as an active participant in the discussion, just as a facilitator, with the hope that my own views or perspectives were not elicited (Wilkinson 2006, p.53). The focus groups for the ECTs were designed to reflect on the challenges of developing their inquiry focus and any factors they believed supported or impinged on their progress at the start of the inquiry project. It also explored whether they felt any factors at this stage in the inquiry project had or would influence them, their teaching, their focus and, thus, their professional identity. All focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

3.7.2.2. Early Career Teacher focus-group recruitment

Focus groups were recruited on the face-to-face learning-event⁴ days on the MEP. There were three focus groups with ECTs. The first and second groups consisted of five ECTs and one EM, and they were facilitated by me, on different learning-event days in the same week. The third focus group involved six ECTs. The focus groups lasted between 47 and 51 minutes (see Table 1) and were audio recorded. A semi-structured approach guided the overarching framework of questions but allowed free movement to adjust to the discussion without exerting influence over the participants (see Appendix 4)

This approach utilised a purposeful sampling method (Patton 2002, p.12) in terms of ECTs and EMs self-selecting to participate. This allowed those who possessed the perspectives and knowledge about their professional identity and experience to be involved in a format replicating the CoPs that existed in the MEP. A summary of the participants in each focus group is provided in Tables 1, 2 and 3.

Table 1 Participant Demographics – Focus Group 1 – 52 minutes

Pseudonym	Gender	Education Phase
ECT 1 (Anna)	Female	Secondary
ECT 2 (Janet)	Female	Secondary

⁴ Face-to-face learning events were full-day learning events at which new modules were introduced to the ECTs in preparation for the blended-learning formats of the programme. The learning events were divided geographically due to the large number of ECTs from across Wales. Each learning event took place for each geographical region, as dictated by the local education consortia in which they taught; for example, Central South (CS), South, West, Mid Wales (SWMW), North Wales (NW) and South East Wales (EAS), following broad consortia regions.

ECT 3 (Mark)	Male	Primary
ECT 4 (Kian)	Male	Secondary
ECT 5 (Phoebe)	Female	Primary
EM 2 (Andrew)	Male	Practitioner, Assistant Head

Table 2 Participant Demographics – Focus Group 2 – 50 minutes

Pseudonym	Gender	Education phase
ECT 6 (Rachel)	Female	Foundation
ECT 7 (Kira)	Female	Foundation
ECT 6 (Kathryn)	Female	Primary
ECT 9 (Ross)	Male	Secondary
ECT 10 (Sophie)	Female	Primary
EM 3 (Jane)	Female	Retired SLT member, now an NQT Assessor

Table 3 Participant Demographics – Focus Group 3 – 47 minutes

Pseudonym	Gender	Education phase
ECT 11 (Ayla)	Female	Foundation
ECT 12 (Susan)	Female	Secondary
ECT 13 (Lynette)	Female	Primary
ECT 14 (Jack)	Male	Secondary
ECT 15 (Bree)	Female	Primary
ECT 16 (Gabiella)	Female	Special school

As this was the start of the inquiry project, the ECTs had some early input from mentor meetings to provide support about undertaking inquiry-style research. During the learning event, the ECTs received academic input about the structure of the first half of their inquiry project. The ECTs had

arrived with a developing notion of what their focus for their teacher inquiry project might be after engaging with an assignment in the previous module that asked them to outline a focus. Through working with their EMs and engaging with online material on ethical considerations, this initiated the development of early project ideas that could be further refined through collaboration with ATs, EMs and other ECTs.

I limited participation in the focus groups to a maximum of six individuals to ensure everyone was able to collaborate and be involved in the discussion. On reflection, the balance between having access to busy professionals at learning events to participate in the focus group versus being constrained by the limits of a one-hour lunch time was pragmatic. At times, however, I felt the discussions were rushed, and more depth could have been developed. I moved perspectives on to obtain breadth rather than depth. Sometimes, when arriving at what I perceived to be key moments and thoughts in the focus-group discussion, we had to stop to prepare for the learning event to continue. The focus groups lasted between 45 and 51 minutes due to the limits on the lunch hour, as participants were invited to grab lunch before participating. Nonetheless, overall, the focus groups provided valuable data.

3.7.2.3. External Mentor focus-group recruitment

Mentor recruitment occurred at the face-to-face mentor training event⁵ that occurred before each set of learning events for all modules on the MEP. The specific mentor training was for the teacher inquiry project module the ECTs were about to begin. During the event, EMs were invited to participate, and I highlighted the purpose of the research and how it would be undertaken, providing further information about the research on an information sheet (see Appendix 2). Those EMs interested in being involved were asked to contact me via email. Fifteen EMs initially volunteered to participate via email. I contacted these 15 EMs via email, expressing the rationale and purpose of my study, in addition to a digital consent form and information about the research. The six EMs who consented to participate (by returning signed consent forms) were then involved in two focus-group interviews at the next mentor training event in June. These focus groups were not a full hour because, like the ECT focus groups, they occurred during the mentor training event lunch hour. The participants needed time to get their lunch and bring it to the focus group while they participated, which meant the focus groups were 45 and 48 minutes.

⁵ Mentor training events occurred ahead of all ECT learning events for each module. This was a time to share and support mentor understanding of module tasks, assessments, and the requirements for the mentors' professional dialogue opportunities. It also provided an opportunity to utilise the social and cultural capital of the experience that EMs have input into the materials, with some of the materials to be developed considering feedback from the mentors. Therefore, the mentors were prepared for how they would support their mentees. There were three of these events per year, occurring four weeks before the commencement of a new module.

3.7.2.4. External Mentor focus groups

Two focus groups were held with EMs, and these were audio recorded and fully transcribed. Points of inclusion for the design of the focus-group protocol included:

- The EM's role in supporting the ECT
- The EM's views of the teacher's developing understanding and practices of teacher inquiry
- The perceptions and experiences of the EM in supporting the ECT in their teacher inquiry project
- How the EMs perceived developments and shifts in values and ethics, and what it meant for the teachers to 'be, and do teaching', and, thus, their developing identities and professional learning

Two EMs in the focus groups were involved in the ECT focus groups. Having them in both groups set the tone for the focus of the research and provided depth and further meaning to their participation.

The collective accounts between the two focus groups were discussed in a supervisory meeting with my critical colleague and supervisor to start to draw meaning and to reduce personal bias from the findings. The two focus groups were also compared. I reflected on whether including the EMs in the ECT focus groups had inhibited the responses of the ECTs. I found that including them had enhanced the discussions and produced deeper discussions about the challenges imposed upon teachers in schools and how that impacted the ECTs, probably because these EMs were not the direct EMs for the specific ECTs in their focus group.

Both focus groups followed a semi-structured protocol design that considered previous data analysis from ECT focus groups (see Appendix 5). This semi-structured format provided both a focus and flexibility to probe into areas deemed 'rich'. This aspect was important as the ECTs had been working with their EMs for two years prior to their final year and had built

long-lasting working relationships. A summary of the EM participants in each focus group is provided in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4 Mentor participants in Focus Group 1

Pseudonym	Gender	Experience
EM 1 (Charlotte)	Female	Experienced teaching practitioner, mentored all three cohorts of teachers on the MEP
EM 2 (Emily)	Female	Experienced teaching practitioner, mentored all three cohorts of teachers

Table 5 Mentor participants in Focus Group 2

Pseudonym	Gender	Experience
EM 1 (Mike)	Male	Experienced teaching practitioner, head of science, mentored all three cohorts on the MEP
EM 2 (Andrew)	Male	Experienced teaching practitioner, senior leader in school
EM 3 (Jane)	Female	Experienced teaching practitioner, senior leader in school
EM 4 (Claire)	Female	Experienced teaching practitioner, retired, involved in NQT induction

3.7.2.5. Academic Tutor focus-group recruitment

The ATs from the MEP were recruited via email. During a programme meeting, my colleagues consented to take part in a focus group of ATs and assessors of the teacher inquiry project. Some participants were senior mentors leading the mentor cohorts. The senior EMs were intrinsically involved in the design and delivery of modules on the MEP. A summary of the AT participants is provided in Table 6.

Table 6: Academic participants in focus group

Pseudonym	Role
AT 1 (Monica)	Module leader (English medium), Assessor
AT 2 (John)	Module leader (Welsh medium), Assessor
AT 3 (Evie)	Lecturer (English medium), Assessor
AT 4 (Beatrice)	Lecturer (English medium), Assessor
AT 5 (Cheryl)	Lecturer (English medium), Assessor
AT 6 (Lewis)	Lecturer (English medium), Assessor
AT 7 (Kevin)	Lecturer (English medium), Assessor
Senior EM 1 (Mags)	Cohort 2 Senior Mentor lead, Assessor
Senior EM 2 (Barbara)	Cohort 3 Senior Mentor lead, Assessor

3.7.2.6. Academic Tutor focus group

The nine ATs involved in the study were recruited based on a 'purposive sampling approach' (Patton 2002, p.12). They all consented to participate in the research. The focus group discussed the views and opinions of each of the alliance universities involved in delivering the MEP and generated viewpoints from academics delivering in both Welsh and English mediums, as a bilingual programme. The focus group was conducted via the medium of English due to my own inability to facilitate the focus group through a bilingual approach or through the medium of Welsh. The Welsh-medium academics were comfortable being interviewed in English to aid dialogue and discussion. English was also the main language format of pedagogy and

curriculum meetings in which this focus group took place. Perhaps this may have blocked reflection for those whose first language was Welsh, and some meaning may have been lost in translation (especially as Welsh was the medium through which they were supervising). Given the time and resources, it would be beneficial to conduct Welsh-medium or even bilingual focus groups in addition to English-medium discussions, especially regarding capturing the Welsh sociocultural and political dynamic.

The focus group ran for 57 minutes and was audio recorded. The focus group occurred after the ECT focus groups. I aimed to clarify the role of the academic in supervising and supporting inquiry-project students to aid professional learning at distance and, thus, the identities of ECTs, and for the ATs to consider what effects this was having on their students. I was also interested in the challenges facing ECTs engaging in teacher inquiry (see Appendix 6).

The semi-structured focus-group enabled dialogue to ebb-and-flow around critical points, which had been adapted following conversation with a critical academic colleague who was also an insider on the programme, as well as utilising my reflections from the initial focus groups with students. The questions were designed to consider any 'mediating' and 'moderating' factors involved in the students developing their inquiry-project focus, reflecting on their previous experiences, and 'adjusting thinking' to this new cohort with significant overlaps with what has been asked by ECTs and EMs in previous years. These focus groups took place in a university conference room during the lunch break of a pedagogy and curriculum meeting. They were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

3.7.3. Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured, individual telephone interviews were held as follows:

- Four interviews with five ECTs
- Two ATs, one in English medium the other in Welsh medium
- Two EMs who participated in the EM focus groups

The individual telephone interviews were between 44 and 59 minutes. They were facilitated by me and were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim (see Table 7). Telephone interviews were required due to the geographical distance of the participants. All parties had consented initially to take part in the focus group study and were asked to consent to participate in the interviews, with the ECTs consenting at three further stages throughout the inquiry process, and to allow the opportunities for participants to withdraw if they wished (see Appendix 3).

Interviews are an essential component of research utilising case studies (Yin 2003). They allow knowledge generation about the specifics of people's beliefs, lived experiences, values and interests and offer insights into how they view the world and, thus, their actions, views and thinking (Schostak 2006). Following on from the focus groups, the interviews provided a more-specific and intimate understanding of the changing experiences, perceptions and professional identities of ECTs, with the ability to refine and focus key ideas and themes developed from analysis of the focus groups. The interviews were undertaken at different times across the inquiry project to capture any changing perspectives, actions, beliefs and, thus, identities after their participation in the focus groups.

The interviews were structured around a series of questions (see Appendices 7–12) to provide guidance and some areas of consistency but acted as prompts to what turned out to be developing conversation around a focus (Yin 2003, p.7). The participants were more than willing to express their views, and, at times, this meant managing the conversation to move it on to the next area of focus or reigning in wider conversations as the areas of focus were large and complex. This flexibility meant I could allow for

clarification or expand and focus on key areas for further exploration (Corbetta 2003, p.15). The range of questions was changeable despite utilising similar and overlapping questions between interviews and between types of participants, which allowed me to compare responses between ECTs, ATs and EMs. I often followed up and explored with more probing questions the trajectories the participants were taking to generate more information around a specific area without leading the focus. Accordingly, the interviewees could express themselves and their views and perceptions while covering the key areas designed in the semi-structured format as co-equals in an informal conversation (Schostak 2006, p.25).

As noted in Section 3.4, I was conscious of my own positionality; however, as a supervisor on the programme, and not working with my own students, it was appropriate that I was involved in the generation of the narratives of some of the interviewees, as this aligned with the sociocultural approaches to the research (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). This approach enabled participants to explore how their circumstances in school, on the MEP and their positionality was important (Sayer 2010). I reflected on my role as an academic on the programme and the inherent power dynamic, despite not knowing the participants. This situation could potentially have changed the conversations, and this made me consider further questions:

- How critical would the participants be about this process knowing my involvement with the programme?
- Would they explore any challenges they faced, or perhaps might this provide an opportunity only to consider issues?
- Would colleagues express their true perspectives in fear of judgement from other colleagues on the programme?

These questions further cemented the requirement for greater triangulation with the wider data and with the analysis of the focus groups. The reciprocal nature of data generation and analysis was exemplified through audio recording each interview and through a process of getting close to the data by listening to them regularly. They were then fully transcribed, and coding occurred as described in more detail in Section 3.8.

3.7.3.1. Early Career Teacher interviews

Following five ECTs through the process of their inquiry project allowed me to interview them at four critical moments. They had all participated in the previous focus groups. These interviews were focused on the ECTs' developing inquiries after gaining ethical approval, then during their literature review and research design phases, then when they were undertaking their data analysis, and the final interview occurred after submission of the teacher inquiry projects. The final interviews offered an opportunity to obtain a reflective, informed and holistic perspective after the ECTs had engaged in all aspects of the inquiry. I was interested in their perspectives on the inquiry process, their shifting perception of their own identities as professionals, and their notions of their engagement in research through teacher inquiry, what and who had supported them, and what effect this had on their developing identities. Although I was conscious not to ask questions about their identities directly, I was interested in their perceptions of what had changed in their practice and professional learning, and their views in relation to inquiry, which could infer shifts in their identities.

This information was useful to triangulate with the documentary data of the teacher inquiry project and the reflections on inquiry they contained. I later removed documentary data that did not pertain to ethics (Section 8: Making a difference: reflection on their professional learning) from the analysis as I felt its inclusion was too inherently biased towards the purpose of assessment and may not have considered the meaningful reflection of the teachers (due to overly positive perspectives and the reflections serving a specific purpose, and perhaps coached by the AT and EM). It should be noted that the interviews with the ATs, EMs and ECTs occurred at different points of the inquiry process. On reflection, it may have been enlightening to interview the ATs, EMs and ECTs and compare the perspectives at the same point of the inquiry for each stakeholder, but time constraints prevented this. The questions in the semi-structured interviews overlapped between different participants, which allowed comparison of perspectives on similar foci. I valued the iterative nature of data analysis informing the next stage of data

production, and this helped me to identify areas that should be reflected on in the next set of interviews.

3.7.3.2. External Mentor interviews

Two EMs participated in phone interviews that ranged from 54 to 74 minutes long. These were the corresponding EMs for the ECTs involved in the one-to-one interviews. These interviews were also semi-structured to ensure consistency but considered each individual ECT's development and progress throughout the project (see Appendix 11). The EMs were also asked to consider their wider mentoring experiences for me to understand their perspectives, values and beliefs while mentoring the students. These interviews were designed to capture the specific experience of mentoring in real-time during the project, including aspects of how they believed the ECTs from this cohort were developing and what impact they felt they were having in supporting the development of ECTs' identities.

3.7.3.3. Academic Tutor interviews

Two ATs from different regions in Wales, one supporting through the medium of Welsh language and the other supporting through the medium of English, were interviewed about their perspectives on supporting their ECTs through the inquiry project. The ATs were asked to reflect on the current MEP year in comparison with previous years and any notable experiences. As an AT on the programme, I wanted to ensure that my biases and perspectives were not clouding my interpretation of the data. By considering my colleague's perspectives in depth, I could reflect on my positionality and become more aware of the assumption's that were inherent in my involvement with the MEP and the similarities and differences between our experiences. This meant I could attempt to distance myself but also see the process from a wider perspective.

The AT interviews occurred towards the end of the inquiry process, which provided the ATs with the ability to discuss the whole process. The interviews also asked the ATs to reflect on the general support of prior cohorts. Although these were semi-structured, and the questions were sent ahead of the interviews (see Appendix 12), the interviews were structured less formally to elicit a more general response. The interviews sought to understand the attitudes, experiences and beliefs of my colleagues in relation to their ECTs. I hoped to capture critical moments of their supervisory experiences that might have impacted the ECTs' developing identities. The interviews also allowed me to reflect on some other aspects, and I noted the following thoughts and key questions in my research diary:

- Were the experiences of other ATs on the MEP inquiry project like my own experiences, and what does that mean for supervision for teachers and ECTs undertaking inquiry? What effect does understanding other AT experiences have on my professional learning as an early career academic?
- What challenges and benefits did the ATs see for ECTs engaging with the inquiry process?
- Consider the shifts, changes and developments of the ECTs throughout the inquiry process, where those occurred, and what may have precipitated them.

3.8. Dealing with the data: Process of analysis

The research activities generated a breadth of data, as illustrated in Table 7. Overall, there were 1,442 minutes of recorded interviews and focus groups, and 128,438 words transcribed.

Table 7. Data Generated

Data Generation Type	Numbers of Words Transcribed	Audio Recording Length (Nearest Minute)
ECT Focus Group 1	6998	56
ECT Focus Group 2	6663	50
ECT Focus Group 3	6028	47
EM Focus Group 1	6451	48
EM Focus Group 2	5854	45
AT Focus Group 1	7139	57
ECT First Interview 1	4218	50
ECT First Interview 2	3900	51
ECT First Interview 3	3856	48
ECT First Interview 4	3654	45
ECT First Interview 5	3800	56
ECT Second Interview 1	3767	54
ECT Second Interview 2	4354	57
ECT Second Interview 3	3986	53
ECT Second Interview 4	3556	44
ECT Second Interview 5	4124	56
ECT Third Interview 1	4100	48
ECT Third Interview 2	4354	52
ECT Third Interview 3	3986	56
ECT Third Interview 4	3556	57
ECT Third Interview 5	4020	55
ECT Fourth Interview 1	4047	52
ECT Fourth Interview 2	3901	49
ECT Fourth Interview 3	3856	47
ECT Fourth Interview 4	3654	45
ECT Fourth Interview 5	3600	34
AT Interview 1	4864	59
AT Interview 2	4306	55
EM Interview 1	4646	54
EM Interview 2	5124	74
Total	128,438	1,442

I conducted thematic analysis utilising Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage framework, taking an inductive and iterative approach to code my data and

form emerging themes (Patton 2002, p.12). My initial data analysis commenced while listening to the audio recordings repeatedly and transcribing them. I read and re-read the transcripts and wrote memos that highlighted sections, using sticky notes to group codes to develop early themes. As data were produced, they were coded, and salient themes were used to inform the next stage of data generation. As further data were gathered and coded, I returned to previously coded data, re-coding took place, and emergent themes were grouped from different data sources.

While acknowledging that researchers cannot free themselves entirely from their own epistemological and theoretical understanding (Braun and Clarke, 2006), I wanted to enable themes to be developed from these data without presupposing what they might be in relation to the research questions. As a transient-insider on the MEP programme (see Section 3.4), it was initially difficult to distance myself from my understandings of the programme. Through reflexivity, note-taking and my second supervisor, I sought to understand how the themes arising out of these data related to my research questions and the existing literature.

3.8.1. Analysing the data: forming codes and themes

Starting with the ECT focus groups, a process of getting close to the data occurred. Listening to the audio recordings and then fully transcribing them supported the process of becoming immersed in the data. This familiarisation process meant returning to the audio-recorded data after they had been transcribed to hear intonation and capture the mood, which was vital considering the volume of spoken word generated. This approach also allowed me to ensure that what had been captured in a written format accurately and appropriately reflected the meaning constructed in the focus group (Gibson and Brown 2009, p.15). The focus-group transcripts were printed out on A4 sheets, with line numbers and spacing between each line, and a wide margin for coding. As illustrated in Figure 1, coding occurred manually using highlighter pens, sticky notes and markers. Text lines related to analysis were highlighted, and early codes were written in the margins,

which allowed me to draw out aspects of participants' views that seemed relevant to the research questions (Corbin and Strauss 1998, p.4).

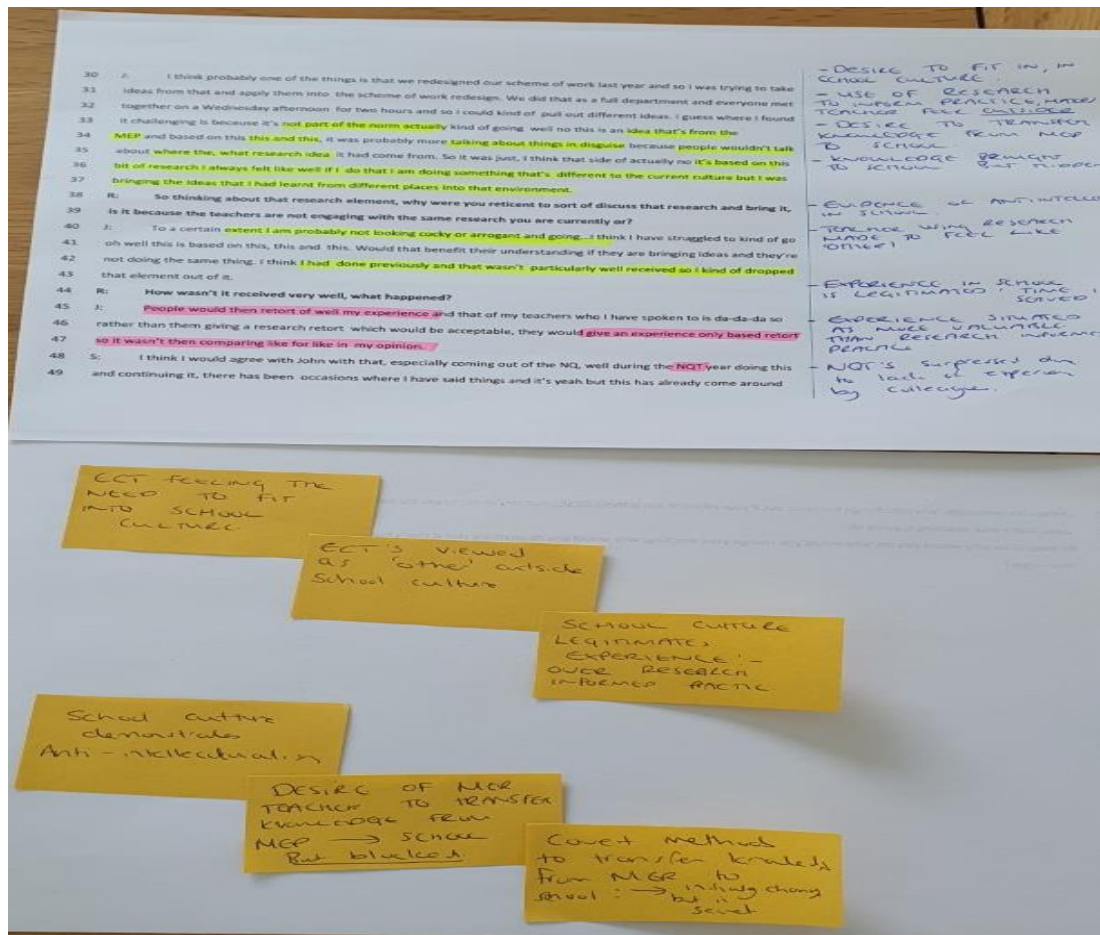


Figure 1: An example of open coding for focus group data

Open coding continued for the three ECT focus-group transcripts. Emerging codes from the transcripts were compared with each other, and if required were developed to reflect new understanding. To keep track of this, a process of memo-ing occurred in notebooks to aid the recording of relationships between insights, codes, ideas and emerging themes.

Early codes from the ECT focus groups were transferred to sticky notes and cut out quotes and placed on A1 sheets of paper (see Figure 2). This enabled the visualisation of any relationships between codes from the three focus groups, and the formation of overlapping themes. Any codes that seemed similar were grouped, and themes were identified out of these groupings. Regarding generating themes, the meanings behind the codes were reviewed, and these started to be classified as emerging themes (when compared with other datasets, and similar themes were seen to appear

elsewhere). Relationships between codes were further documented in the notebooks, with any reflections and decisions noted.

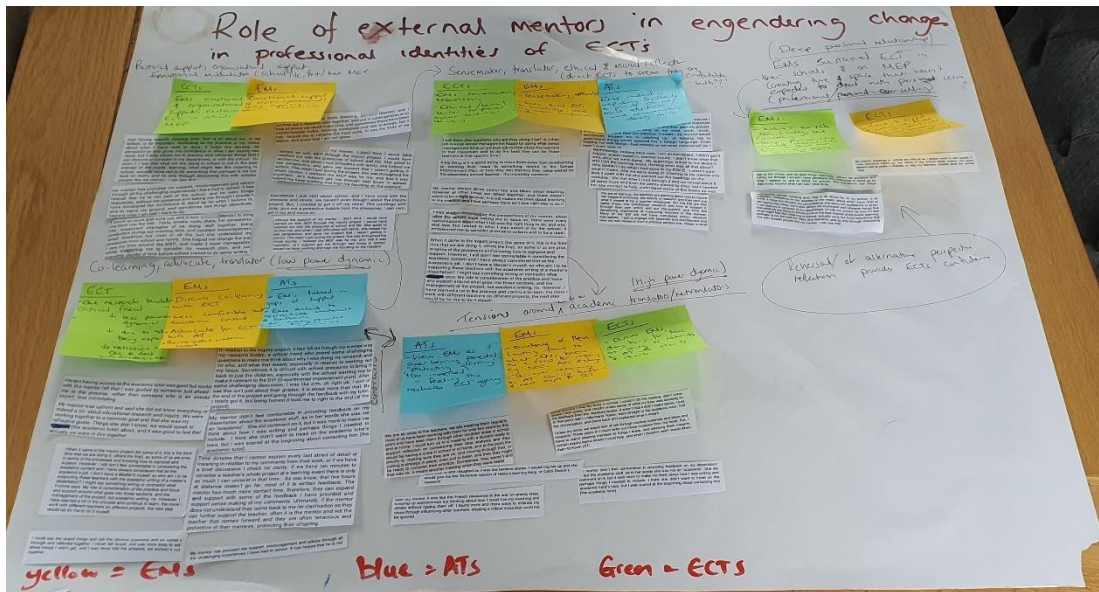


Figure 2: Theme generation around research questions with focus group data from ECTs, AT and EMs

This process produced three A1 sheets of paper, themes around research questions. The three sheets were laid out on the table and floor in the room so all could be viewed simultaneously. Using a constant comparison method, comparing codes with codes within the focus group and between focus groups allowed the formation of tentative themes (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

As complexity increased, codes were further captured in an Excel table document, which noted relevant quotes and emerging themes, as well as which dataset the quote and code had emerged from (see Figure 3).

Emerging codes and themes were compared, and global themes started to emerge from and between datasets regarding similarities and differences between the codes and themes in the data from ECTs, EMs and ATs.

Data Extract	First-Phase Coding	Second-Phase Coding
<p>“I guess where I found it challenging is because it’s not part of the norm in my school. Actually kind of going well no this is an idea that I have developed from the MEP and based on this this and this, it was probably more talking about things in disguise because people wouldn’t talk about where the, what research idea it had come from. So it was just, I think that side of actually, no it’s based on this bit of research I always felt like well if I do that I am doing something that’s different to the current culture but I was bringing the ideas that I had learnt from different places into that environment”</p>	<p>strong culture in school,</p> <p>secrecy/reluctance to discuss source of knowledge</p> <p>not wanting to be seen as different/outsider to other teachers</p> <p>knowledge and understanding transferred from MEP to school</p>	<p>Normative culture in school strong that resist changes/outside views</p> <p>reluctance to explain source of ideas knowledge from research, due to anti intellectualism in school</p> <p>Social monitoring/accountability that maintains the current views on practice/theory in school, maintain a mono culture</p> <p>Incognito brokering between CoP’s</p>

Figure 3: Example from the Excel document used after initial manual coding

This process was expanded and repeated for each new cycle of data production, with constant comparison between the different methods of data generation for each group of participants – ECT, EM and AT focus groups, then individual interviews for ATs, EMs and ECTs, followed by the inquiry projects of the four ECTs (which were later removed from analysis).

There was an iterative approach to data analysis throughout, but further detailed analysis was undertaken when the total dataset was established. Once data saturation was observed, as per the Braun and Clarke’s (2006) qualitative-coding method, no further coding was undertaken.

3.8.2.Reviewing global themes

Analysis occurred multiple times as new data were generated. I returned to review and refine themes, utilising the entire dataset as comparison. This led to a hierarchy of themes, with global themes supported by broad themes from different datasets underneath.

An example of this process is illustrated in Figure 4, in which codes were taken from a variety of focus-group data to start to synthesise themes. Themes were also cross-checked against other data from interviews and documentary data (later removed) and by reviewing their relevance to theoretical perspectives informing the project outlined in Section 2.2.

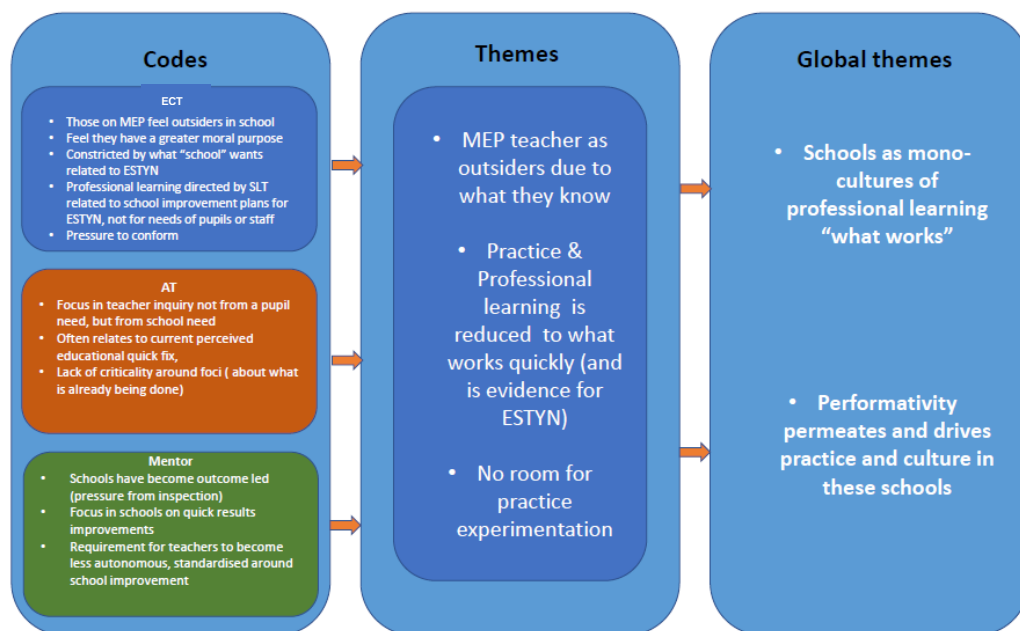


Figure 4: An example of global theme generation from various datasets

The key themes developed were then reflected on through a sociocultural lens. I utilised CoP (Wenger et al. 2014, p.5), as well as legitimate peripheral participation (Wenger 2008, p.3), to make sense of the themes and make links to the conceptual framework.

3.8.3. Reflections on data analysis

I chose not to use NVivo as a tool for coding, instead using Post-it notes, large A1 pieces of paper, sticky notes, markers, notebooks and Excel for the comprehensive collection of codes and themes. I felt the process of utilising digital packages removed me from the data. Using more-traditional methods enabled a more-tactile and visceral interaction, which allowed me to be closer to the data and to visualise and collate it more easily. I found it easier to become familiar with the data via my own handwriting to forge connections that a digital package would have inhibited. This approach offered analytical flexibility, especially when dealing with a large dataset. Maher et al. (2018, p.20) suggest that digital software such as NVivo do not fully scaffold qualitative data analysis and, thus, limit a researcher's ability to conceptualise the data, which confirmed my thinking.

On reflection, the volume of data enabled me to consider the case in depth, but it was also a hinderance to the analysis process as deriving themes from such large volumes of qualitative data and re-analysing each time new data was generated was not only time consuming, but also challenging. Trying to refine and narrow down the themes that seemed most relevant and important, especially as more themes emerged, was particularly difficult. This meant many other themes and findings have not been reflected on in detail; only the themes most relevant to the research questions have been considered in the findings. It also meant I needed to adapt the process of documenting codes and themes. The use of transcripts on A4 and A1 paper and sticky Post-it notes for codes and grouping them continued throughout the data analysis process, as did documenting any interrelation between the codes and themes. As the dataset grew larger, I needed a more systematic way of keeping track of quotes, codes and themes.

The importance of this need was further exemplified when my curious niece was staying over and found my data analysis paper sheets with colourful sticky notes and rearranged them into a flower for me. As I had documented the process both visually and in my notebooks, I was able to rearrange the analysis back to its original arrangement. In that moment, I felt like I should

have done a better job of archiving my analysis. I also saw the humour of the incident and was eventually glad I had documented the relationships both visually and in note form. When I was satisfied with the initial, physical exercise of coding and analysis, I created a digital representation of the state of analysis in an Excel document. I then continued my analysis through two distinct phases of coding to derive themes. As the dataset grew, I colour coded these in relation to the specific themes emerging. This approach supported theme generation in comparisons between data types. This digital approach was also always accessible online and in different locations, meaning the data analysis process became more physically manageable.

3.9. Summary

This chapter outlined the research design of this intrinsic case study and documented the alignment of a qualitative approach as appropriate for exploring and discovering the perceptions and views of participants. The ethical dilemmas arising from involving participants were considered. This discussion highlighted my positionality as a transient-insider researcher on the MEP, my own biases and how I attempted to fight familiarity through reflexivity. The chapter offered a detailed overview of the research methods, the various datasets and triangulation. It also portrayed how the data were analysed using thematic analysis, including coding and theme generation. These in-depth accounts were provided to aid transparency and to offer the reader an insight into how the findings discussed in the following chapters were generated.

Chapter 4 – ‘I did not want to rock the boat’: Early Career Teachers on the Periphery of the Community of Practice in Schools

4.1. Introduction

This chapter is the first of three focusing on the findings of the study. It draws on the accounts of ECTs, ATs and EMs from focus groups and interviews. The chapter explores how school CoPs impacted ECTs’ professional learning and developing identities. The ECTs’ accounts detail their positioning on the periphery of the school CoPs. Although some ECTs felt they had developed alternative practice repertoires through communities on the MEP, they were unable to apply those experiences in school or exert influence due to being marginalised. Unable or unwilling to ‘rock the boat’ in relation to practice development, the ECTs attempted to fabricate and blend into competing cultures between the school and the MEP.

First, this chapter considers the accountability cultures created by policy practices in Wales that led to high-stakes accountability in schools, which I argue acted to form monocultures of professional learning focused on a ‘what works agenda’, reducing the capacity of ECTs to explore more-expansive forms of learning and teaching.

Second, ECTs positioned on the periphery of school CoPs are explored, with evidence for schools legitimating forms of practice aligned with performativity. Some ECTs struggle to build their confidence as their suggested alternatives regarding practice were rejected by their schools, and some felt that their contractual uncertainty led to them trying to fit in to their school culture to avoid unnecessary repercussions.

Third, the ECTs struggled to ratify the competing competences between the dominant practice and cultures in the school CoPs and those explored on the MEP. I argue that the ECTs formed a hybridised approach in which both competences exist and are utilised in their practice.

Finally, the chapter explores the ECTs' desire to develop their practice and that of others. Those ECTs in challenging environments could only make small ripples to 'nudge the boat' as lone MEP ECTs within the competing dominant cultures of their schools.

4.2. School environment as a monoculture of professional learning

Most ECT participants (14 out of 16) in the focus groups referred to the challenges of feeling the need to conform to the teaching and learning requirements of their school. This feeling was amplified when preparing for Estyn inspection visits.

My school is so focused on the inspection. They have known we were due one for six months and that is all that we have thought about. Not the teaching and learning of pupils, but what quick things can we do that makes us look good for Estyn.

ECT 16, Gabriella, FG 3

In some cases, ECTs felt the strategies implemented by senior leadership were superficial or tokenistic attempts to improve learner outcomes quickly. This contrasted with the genuine engagement with the wider approaches to teaching and learning fostered and co-constructed during the MEP programme.

In their schools, these strategies were described as not being designed to support 'all pupils', and that it was better to focus more on Estyn's advice or a perceived area of improvement that would 'look good' (Ross) for inspection purposes. Such discussions, Sachs (2016) argues, are reminiscent of managerial discourses embedded in neoliberal approaches to education, which act to direct and develop regimes of teacher standards and accountability. The focus group data point to the embedded accountability that has developed in the Welsh education system following the 2011 reforms in Wales, and they align with a techno-rational approach and type of organisational professionalism that Connolly et al. (2018a) consider in their research (see Section 1.2). They point out that these forms of organisational professionalism foreground professional knowledge and practice that can be measured and, thus, quantifiably improved through greater standardisation. It is argued, therefore, that the skills of teaching are reduced to those of technicians.

These notions were explored in the focus groups when discussing the teaching and learning conversations that occurred in each participant's school. These conversations with colleagues and senior leaders were designed to inform ECTs' thinking about their teacher inquiry and to support their developing teaching practice. Thirteen out of 16 ECTs reported a lack of focus and time when discussing and critiquing the learning needs of their pupils and how best to support their learners' development. They felt the time available for discussion with leaders in their schools regarding pupil needs from teaching and learning was insufficient. When discussion did occur, the ECTs described them as 'procedural in nature' (Jack), focusing on the dissemination of teaching and learning strategies decided at a senior-leadership level, with little regard for ECTs' ideas and suggestions or the specific needs of individual learners.

These descriptions of teaching and learning align with the techno-rationalist reductive views of teaching related to managerial discourses, in what has been described as the corporate model of teaching (Ball 2003; Skeritt 2019). This model is one in which the successful professional is someone who works to efficiencies and standardised school criteria set for the benefits of both student and teacher evaluation, contributing to the school's formal accountability processes (Connolly et al. 2018a). There was a consensus that the ECTs' schools were very 'reactive' and quick to implement new techniques to initiate rapid changes. Emily, an EM, commented that schools often implemented 'untried and untested methods of improving results driven by results,' which Ozga (2009) calls governance through data, and which Ball (2015, p. 1) refers to as the 'tyranny' of numbers.

Fourteen out of 16 ECTs indicated their allocation of resource, time and professional learning had been skewed towards areas that supported the school improvement plan. Ross, an ECT, stated, 'unless it fitted in the school-improvement plan it didn't happen'. This is consistent with previous descriptions of accountability systems that demonstrate increased bureaucracy, teaching to the test approaches, and a disregard for teacher professionalism. This situation is evidenced through greater top-down control with regulations on teacher work and professional learning, often driven by

school data (Lingard 2010; Luke et al. 2013; Selwyn 2020). This top-down approach was also mentioned by other ECTs:

Yeah, everyone is busy. When you have meetings, they're really structured around data, you've got X Y Z to talk about; it's kind of just as though everyone is getting through everything rather than having discussions about pupil learning.

ECT 1, Anna, FG 1

The ECTs felt that fitting into their school environment and culture was important. Consequently, they felt pressured to do as instructed by senior and experienced colleagues, as pointed out by Gabriella (ECT 16) in the focus groups: 'I do everything I can to fit in and be part of the team'.

With nine out of the 15 ECTs on temporary one-year contracts (three years into their career as a teacher), this may have added to the pressure to conform to the requirements of their school. Arguably, the precarious position of ECTs amplifies the control held by senior leaders and more-experienced colleagues with the power to decide whether the ECTs' contracts are renewed or extended. This illustrates the hold 'old timers' may have in keeping newcomers on the periphery, or even to excommunicate the newcomers from the CoP altogether if they do not fit the required routines, cultures and practices of the school (Lave and Wenger 1991). This could lead to what Seddon (2008) describes as the normative demands of practice of the accountability regime, which suppress the professional processes of context-specific practice that would emerge through authentic professional collaboration opportunities.

Rachel, an ECT, described her attempts to fit into the culture of her school to avoid her contract not being renewed.

My headteacher doesn't like me already. I try not to point out too many issues as I know my contract won't be extended, so I tell her what she wants to hear.

ECT 6, Rachel, FG 1

Rachel's comment and other accounts from ECTs (Rachel, Ross, Jack Garbiella, Lynette, Bree, Kathryn, Sophie, Mark and Kian) suggest that they adopted the dominant practices, cultures, routines and discourses of teaching and learning in their schools, even those embedded in

accountability, in an attempt to secure their contracts. This demonstrates a lack of teacher agency and autonomy (Priestly, Biesta and Robinson 2013). The ECTs are positioned on the periphery of the school CoP. With nine of the above ECTs under more pressure due to having fixed-term contracts that may not be renewed, it may have led to pressure to conform. This situation is reminiscent of what Ball (2003, p.87) describes as the use of sanctions to demand compliance, which drive only towards 'what works', as teachers are encouraged to no longer have a rationale for practice, leading to 'inauthentic practice and relationship'. This approach can also lead to ECTs concealing the difficulties they may be experiencing due to a need to 'fit in' to schools' established norms and routines (Hobson and McIntyre 2013). This impairs the potential for learning relationships between other members of the school community and ECTs, as well as the wider professional learning and positive identity work that can be done to support and develop ECTs.

Despite the risks of repercussion from not fitting into school culture, some ECTs still attempted to exert passive influence, but through camouflaged methods to avoid being seen as difficult.

I learned quickly in my school that sometimes speaking up and voicing my opinion in relation to the newest fad in the school wasn't the best move, and I learned other, less-direct strategies to share my opinion with other trusted colleagues first, to see whether there was support: often, there wasn't any. But I didn't want to rock the boat and be seen as too difficult.

ECT 4, Kian, FG 1

Consequently, the ECTs found it difficult to build their self-esteem and confidence in their competence. For example, Jack reflected, 'I felt not listened to, I don't feel like I am part of them[the school]'. Phoebe expressed her frustrations at 'not being listened to', and Mark added that he was 'not taken seriously and dismissed'. Similarly, Sophie noted the 'I can't change anything in my classroom or outside, and Bree spoke about being 'constantly reminded of my position, as a new teacher in the school'.

Rachel and Jack both shared their disappointment about how their MEP experiences were undervalued.

I thought doing the MEP would make me more valuable and my views would be useful by other members of staff, but my headteacher listens to me less.

ECT 6, Rachel, FG 1

I had all of these new perspectives to share on teaching and learning from collaboration on the MEP, but no one was interested. In fact, as soon as I mentioned the MEP, people actively were disinterested.

ECT 14, Jack, FG 3

The data suggest many of these teachers already felt marginalised at school (15 out of 16). Their involvement with the MEP and their developing identity tensions between practice at school and alternative views of teaching and learning developed on the MEP seemed to increase their feelings of marginalisation at school. They were also reminded of the costs attached to their professional learning on the MEP.

Our assistant head for teaching and learning told me that the training budget for all of Wales had been spent on my master's, so I had better pass it. She wasn't happy that other teachers in the school, in her words, were 'losing out'.

ECT 15, Bree, FG 3

With the redistribution of finance for teacher development and professional learning, wider budgets were cut from schools and reallocated to fund ECTs' ability to engage with the MEP. There is evidence from two ECTs (Bree and Jack), as well as EM Jane and Senior EM Mags, that some senior leaders did not agree and 'were not happy' with the funding format of the MEP, which redistributed finances from schools' professional learning funds.

Some heads weren't happy. Mrs Xavier from FHS [Anonymised high school] would not allow any MEP teacher to be released for mentoring or learning-event days as she felt they didn't need it; school professional learning was good enough. One of my mentees left teaching after working there, she was never released for a learning event.

EM 3, Jane, Interview

The redistribution of local school funding from the professional learning of all teachers to support a national programme for ECTs caused tension. The Senior EM for the MEP programme during the academic focus groups alluded to these challenges.

Head teachers were very angry and frustrated at the funding set-up for the MEP, which caused them to push back against supporting it. This led to ambivalence and, at times, obstruction.

Senior EM 1, Mags, AT FG

It was articulated that some senior leaders were frustrated at their lack of control and autonomy, around the removed funding for local professional learning for experienced teaching staff. This may have influenced some of the negative interactions some ECTs on the MEP faced with their colleagues.⁶

Some of these data point to wider teacher and senior leaders, in the schools of the participants, marginalising the MEP ECTs due to the nature of the funding redistribution. Some alluded to this issue as professional jealousy or anti-intellectualism, and I argue it further added to the positioning of those ECTs on the periphery of their school. This issue is likely to have reduced their influence on the professional learning of colleagues through collaboration, which was a main design feature of the MEP. As it was hoped that the ECTs, as newcomers, and through participation would work with experienced teachers, supporting their school communities' development of alternative repertoires via teacher inquiry in established CoPs with 'old timers' (Fullan 2005). This marginalisation may account for why some of the 'newcomers' to a school CoP (and some, given the contractual situation, may literally have been new to the school that year) were perceived as being constrained by 'old timers' and being on the periphery of the CoP based on their lack of perceived social and cultural capital. 'Old timers' have power, control of resources and access to them, and thus, control of peripherality in the CoP (Wenger 2008). Experienced teachers and senior leaders can support, control, mediate or moderate ECTs' professional learning by affecting the ECTs' involvement in the CoP (Lave and Wenger 1991, p.37).

⁶ All newly qualified teachers on a minimum of 0.4 contract (two days per week) who had the permission of their headteacher and who were in either foundation, primary, secondary or special schools were allowed to take part in the MEP. Forty-five percent of the NQT cohorts were able to take part between 2013 and 2016.

4.2.1. Early Career Teachers as living contradictions

It is interesting to note that the same teachers who expressed the challenges of working in performative environments geared towards preparation for Estyn (14 out of 16) also used the language and discussions of teacher inquiry to develop approaches to teaching and learning that incorporated perceived accountabilities. This situation is reminiscent of what Philpott and Poultney (2018, p.56) consider the 'ever-increasing demand for knowledge creation' that is geared towards neoliberal concerns of developing learner performance for international league tables. Some of the reductive notions of teaching and learning were exemplified in the developing foci of the ECTs:

My focus for my inquiry is about my borderline D/C students and how I can ensure that I can get them to a C grade

ECT 1, Anna, FG 1

Outcomes of my learners is what counts. Parents and the schools and learners need to get Outcome Level 5, so I want to look at strategies to improve this

ECT 7, Kira, FG 2

The school's previous Estyn inspection focused on challenges to literacy, and my department improvement plan is to focus on disciplinary literacy, so I want to focus on strategies for evidence for my Head of Key stage

ECT 13, Lynette, FG 3

These quotes could indicate the strength of the accountability cultures in schools and the requirement of the ECTs to fit in with school CoP as they align themselves with what it means to be a 'good teacher' in their school through relating to outcomes. Working together with the ECTs on the MEP over the two years before the study, the EMs tried, collaboratively, to deconstruct notions of reductive views of teaching and learning aligned to accountability regimes and to co-construct more-expansive formats of learning in the mentoring meetings and at learning events. The fact that the ideas in the quotes permeated the perspectives of those ECTs suggests either that it was difficult to step away from the strong ideals, values and

cultures of their schools, or that the MEP was unsuccessful in its endeavour to expand perspectives of practice. Alternatively, it may have been that the ECTs attempted to fit in with the dominant views of the MEP to 'pass the course' without really taking the underlying values on board; instead, they may have 'fabricated' their involvement, in similar strategies that some ECTs suggested they used to fit into the cultures of their schools.

Conversely, these perspectives could be examples of what Hardy and Lewis (2017) call the 'double think of data', in which teachers hold two very contradictory views and believe in both simultaneously.

These tensions I argue point to a hybridisation of the views discussed above. That hybridisation, I suggest, came with an internal challenge and conflict for the ECTs, who, during the focus groups and interviews, divulged their struggle to balance the overlapping regimes of competence between their schools and the virtues instilled by the MEP.

I sometimes feel that I am being ripped in two: the MEP has made me see things that I am doing and that other teachers shouldn't be doing, but I have to do them, otherwise I will be seen as a bad teacher...but what can I do? Sometimes, I think I want to just leave teaching.

ECT 3, Mark, FG 1

The hybrid identities of ECTs raised greater tensions and awareness of issues that may not have been obvious to ECTs not engaging in the MEP. I argue that multi-membership between CoPs both supported the ECTs in recognising alternative modes of practices, but also constrained them in their schools. This constraint developed through their realisation of their lack of agency in their schools, which led to frustrations and tensions due to an inability to move away from practices they did not approve of (Wenger 2008). For some, this also meant fabricating or assimilating both views to survive (Tickle 2000). Susan, an ECT, articulated this point in her interview:

I feel guilt. It is just assessment after assessment for the children. I can see the joy of learning falling away from them. I can't do anything about it; it's what the HoD⁷ wants.

ECT 12, Susan, Interview 1

⁷ Head of Department

The ECTs were in untenable positions between these competing discourses. They were aware of the challenges of the accountability agenda and articulated the need for alternative ways of teaching and learning, but then resorted to language and modes of teaching and learning steeped in performativity. These tensions were not always ratifiable for the ECTs and, I argue, placed greater pressure on them, when they were already in a position of conflict, which potentially led to some questioning their positions in the profession. A programme that sought to improve the resilience and retention of the profession, as well as initiate change from the bottom up to support ECTs, may have, for some, inadvertently created tensions that became difficult to live with. The MEP highlighted issues that ECTs may have been unaware of if they had not taken part in the programme.

Throughout the focus groups, there were direct references to the 'survivalist view' of becoming a teacher (Tickle 2000), and the ECTs' experiences in school having been about 'surviving these few years':

Whereas with ours, I think the conversation is just about survival strategies, so there's not much time for talking about learning. I mean, we share resources, but again in a very ad-hoc way. So, it is quite difficult, but one thing that the MEP has shown me, particularly with Module 8, I think, is that actually it highlights where the issue is. The issue isn't with the teachers, it's with the leadership, and it just filters down. And obviously it's not entirely school leadership, it's departmental leadership, because within the same school you could be different in schools with the different departments, couldn't you?

ECT 12, Susan, FG 3

This viewpoint was prominent across the focus groups. Although this cannot be generalised to every school in Wales, the significance of the agreement between the participants in the focus groups points to the accountability agenda being prevalent throughout the Welsh education system, which is supported by the wider literature (Davies et al. 2018; Milton et al. 2020; Milton et al. 2020a).

Although the ECTs positioned school leadership as the source of the accountability agenda, this did not acknowledge the nuanced pressures faced by headteachers and senior leaders to conform to Welsh Government policy that drove the development of such practices.

Connolly et al. (2018a) suggest that senior leaders in school in Wales had their own agency reduced, and that this had been an increasing problem since the suite of policy changes in Wales in 2011. These changes included the development of the MEP, which was designed to reform education in Wales positively but may have acted inadvertently in some formats to reduce capacity within the system.

Jane, an experienced EM working across many schools in Wales, felt there had been an increase in pressure on school leaders thanks to policy reforms, which had resulted in a shift towards 'kneejerk reactions' to Estyn recommendations, or changes in government policy, rather than consideration of what is best for the pupils.

I think, looking at it from a mentor's point of view, when I go around to different schools, it seems to be the 'in thing' at the moment, that it is a more of a top-down approach rather than there being a variety of strategies, which moves it away from what they think is going to work best for their children. It seems to be more of kneejerk reaction to things from SLT [Senior Leadership Team].

EM 3, Jane, FG 2

There is evidence to suggest a school's focus on teaching and learning strategies and values is driven by senior-leadership priorities, which are linked to more short-term perspectives about 'quick gains' in teaching and learning, driven by the policy reforms in Wales in 2011 (Hill 2013; OECD 2014, 2017; see Section 2.1). I argue these policy initiatives have increased the pressure school leaders are under, and that their enactment of policies into practice, which had to be seen as creating responsive schools, were reactive and designed to remain on track in a highly accountable newly created league system.

4.2.2. Importance of collaboration and alternative practice

In the focus groups, the ECTs discussed the importance of collaboration and learning between ECTs and wider teachers, and dedicated space and time for reflection and consideration of alternative practices beyond the normative ones of their schools. In these discussions, there was considerable evidence of 'joint enterprise', 'shared repertoire' and 'mutual engagement' between ECTs cross-phase in learning groups and between them and their EMs. There was evidence that the ECTs perceived that the discourses in schools were being narrowed to 'what works' and, thus, 'they are trying to make us teach in the same way, using the same tools. I can't be creative' (Kathryn).

Mayer et al. (2008, p.81) called this situation,

the development of the generic teacher, branded as a corporate entity and defined in terms of generic competencies, skills, and as interchangeable parts in a global education system with uniform practices including testing, mandated textbooks, scripted teaching, school-based management, marketisation and economic management issues.

The lack of collaboration, alternative ways of teaching and development of learning in school were exemplified when Jack described the differences between school perspectives and the MEP learning-event days.

I don't feel that in school I have the opportunity to speak as much as when as I am on the MEP day. I think it is beneficial to especially meet with other schoolteachers from other schools because everyone is having a different experience elsewhere, so even if I do speak to someone in my school about things, it's not, it's not like I am seeing new challenges or other ways of thinking about things. So, I think the MEP has been beneficial for me in terms of that aspect of things, especially to have the designated day and time to be able to speak...this has helped me see my teaching and myself in different ways, and has changed the way I work with learners and my teaching.

ECT 14, Jack, FG 3

This point highlights the collaborative and participative nature of the MEP learning events and their role as a CoP in which honest accounts of different practices and alternative ways of thinking about practices were considered and permitted to be reimagined in a collective forum in relation to wider literature. This situation allowed alternative practice to be considered in an

open and honest way, without fear, an opportunity that some ECTs did not have in their schools. Through what Wenger (2008) would refer to as reification, the ECTs could discuss, imagine alternative ways of doing and being a teacher in collaboration with their colleagues from different educational phases (Unwin 2019). Through dialogic exploration those alternative perspectives were developed in to changing practices, while also engaging in mutual construction of teaching and learning artefacts in learning events. This process has been argued to impact identity development positively (Teng 2019).

The conflicted living tensions of the ECTs, which Lewis and Hardy (2017) describe as 'the double think', contrast with the collaborative approaches fostered on the MEP. I argue that some ECTs in demanding environments became living contradictions, embodying the performative ideals to survive in the organisation while also being equally critical of them. Meijer (2011) contends that these tensions are vital for moving through and developing changing notions of what it means to be and do teaching. Living with discomfort and conflict is what potentially moves teachers to foster new perspectives. According to Meijer (2011), these intense emotions and conflicts in ECTs need to be processed, acknowledged and reflected on to move forward and foster commitment through channelling the right support.

These tensions have been identified as an important process in professional identity formations. Having difficult and opposing contexts, issues and factors that take time to overcome leads to reconsiderations of teachers' views, beliefs and practices and, thus, identities (Smagorinsky et al. 2004; Alsup 2006; Olsen 2016; Meijer 2011). Herbers et al. (2011) go as far as saying that, in a supportive environment, tension is a tool that should be fostered for transformative learning outcomes and may be vital in the process of reification for teachers. Schutz (2014) supports this view, highlighting unpleasant emotions resulting from challenges to beliefs and current identities that can lead to a reconceptualisation of identities in teachers.

In contrast, the ECTs discussed the value they placed on having the time, space and trust to have discussions of and insights into practice from different viewpoints with peers at learning events on the MEP. This support

network acted in the opposite way to ideas of tension and conflict, maintaining and nourishing ECTs in CoPs with other ECTs, EMs and ATs.

This view aligns with Borzillo and Kaminska-Labbe's (2011) finding that when participants from a CoP are from different schools, different geographical areas and with different experiences, the members are exposed to different ideas, practices and beliefs, which supports the generation of new ideas and perceptions. There was consensus that these reflections from different people on the MEP allowed ECTs to re-evaluate, reflect and consider their own practice, situation and experience based on what others were experiencing. This process led them to reflect on their developing identities and to attempt to ratify those competing demands from multi-membership of different communities. Janet's account indicates the sustaining role these trusted environments that legitimated the views the ECTs had on their survival.

The learning events (of the MEP) are like meditations in my school madness. I feel pampered...coffee, pastries, lunch and an opportunity to speak to others going through the same as me. Sometimes, that is just enough.

ECT 2, Janet, FG 1

Teaching communities that develop critical reflection through discursive formats and sharing practice have been demonstrated to undergo shifts in teaching stance and implementation (Servage 2008; Herbers et al. 2011). I suggest, for some of these ECTs, the MEP was not fully effective in moving them to a position of critique and criticality about their school practices, and that the performative ideals inherent in some schools were still permeating the perspectives of practice of some of the ECTs. Through participation in the CoP of the MEP, a set of conflicting ideals, ideologies, practices and discourse was highlighted, leading to internal conflict for ECTs. Despite engaging with the MEP for two and half years, this conflict challenged the ratification of new ways of being a teacher and moving away from the dominant cultures of their school. This issue demonstrates the strength of the climate, cultures and political landscape that some schools have regarding legitimating more-reductive forms of practice. This context also alludes to the power CoPs have regarding directed participation in the community, (Cox

2005) access to resources, or even the fear and control of temporary contracts being used to modulate teachers into perpetuating the dominant practices and discourses of some schools.

Further discussions between the participants highlighted that schools would only provide professional learning opportunities connected with the top-down strategies implemented by the senior-leadership team that linked to school priorities:

I would just say, maybe, I think particularly after things like inspections, when kind of something is brought to the senior management team's attention, and I think things like CPD [Continuing professional development] opportunities and, you know, additional training, are all kind of focused, and the school kind of drives towards meeting those targets, so maybe, and maybe those targets are not necessarily related to the children in your class or maybe other children in the school at all.

ECT 3, Mark, FG 1

When considering if this was a common feature, all the focus group indicated that development opportunities and resources were directed towards priorities in school, and as ECT Lynette pointed out: 'if it doesn't fit, then senior leadership are not interested in supporting it'. This reflects the findings of Taylor (2020, p.9) who points out that leaders direct the professional learning and development of staff and this can be 'experienced as supportive, empowering or criticising'.

There is some evidence that the pressurised policy environment that schools are operating in seems to drive teaching and learning strategies that are reductive due to high-stakes accountability. This situation reduces practice opportunities and professional learning opportunities for ECTs and teachers, which is counterintuitive to what the Welsh Government was trying to achieve through policy reform with the introduction of the MEP.

The ECTs also talked of the pressure they faced from senior leaders to align their MEP inquiry projects to department or school-improvement plans, with the lure of extra time, resources and support. Lynette demonstrated that she can be agentic and had the confidence to explain to her headteacher that her focus for her project lies elsewhere, but she expressed her concern about future repercussions for not following the needs of the 'school'.

My headteacher guided me strongly to consider literacy intervention for KS3 learners across the school, as this is an area we are underperforming in, and Estyn are due in at some point this year. He said he would support me all the way with it, but I am worried what will happen when I say this is not my focus, as this is not what my pupils need to be concerned with currently.

ECT 13, Lynette, Interview 1

The tension some ECTs faced going against the dominant discourses and needs of their school are evident in Lynette's account. It highlights the conflicting policies, some of which support organisation professionalism, and others support more-occupational forms of professionalism, such as the MEP (Connolly et al. 2018). This difference led to intense conflict in ECTs who were asked to inhabit both CoP-MEP and their CoP-School.

Another EM, Andrew, added to this discussion about the lack of wider development of ECTs:

There is that disparity, I think, between the school strategically, and government-wise, as well what needs to be or what they want to see and what actually has to happen for the needs of the children in the classroom, and that's where the mismatch is, because they're not looking at what the children need, they're looking what they want as 'outcomes' at the end of the two.

EM 2, Andrew, FG 2

The focus groups illuminated some perspectives of ECTs and EMs concerning the performativity and accountability agenda that directs professional learning and, thus, the identities of ECTs. There is pressure on schools to perform, and this seems to be enacted by senior leaders in schools to make sure that activities are aligned with the strategic objectives of the school, which themselves are aligned with the inspection and accountability regimes. This situation relates to an emphasis on the types of support and learning opportunities and resources that impact results quickly, or areas for school- or department development are legitimated. Heikonen et al. (2016) discovered ECTs and experienced teachers were organised through restrictive languages and practice that were aligned to secure the required attainment grades from pupils for a performative agenda.

I argue these dominant discourses are perpetuated in CoPs in some schools in Wales. In schools under tighter scrutiny from Estyn or league table pressure,

teachers are socialised into dominant discourses that legitimate quick, reactive responses to ensure that any issues or problems with teaching and learning are rectified ahead of government inspection. For some ECTs, the school CoP encouraged the status quo of their culture, as practices were perpetuated, and the professional learning and identity development of teachers may have been limited, as well as available support. This issue has been linked to teaching and learning that is reactionary and aligned to a reductionist viewpoint of simply outcomes for performativity league tables (see also Wilkins et al. 2012). Therefore, the tensions some of the ECTs faced were expected, as ECTs struggled to understand to what extent they identified with the different regimes of competence in each CoP. In their schools, they struggled to ensure the best Estyn inspection outcome, as opposed to the ideology of the MEP, which dealt with more-expansive notions of teaching and learning in collaboration with others' practices. The challenge to reconcile those competing demands, I argue, for some ECTs, this led to 'the double think', in which both perspectives existed simultaneously, providing cultural camouflage when needing to fit into varying CoPs, but also allowing boundary-crossing between practices. This position, I argue, demonstrates the considerable pressure some of the ECTs faced in their schools.

4.2.3. Outsiders in the 'community of practice' of school

The previous section highlighted some of the effect the worldwide performativity agenda has had on some Welsh schools following the 2011 raft of educational policy reforms, and its ongoing impact regarding developing ECTs entering the profession. Some views of the teaching communities in their schools positioned the ECTs as 'outsiders' on the periphery of the CoP (Lave and Wenger 1991). Following on from Wilkins et al. (2012), who postulated that the performativity agenda is the single largest effect on the (re)development of teacher identities, this perceived marginalisation reinforced the power dynamics of 'old timers' and their power to move boundaries and participation with the community. This I argue acted to support or deny participation in mutual engagement, shared repertoires and joint enterprise throughout the membership of the community. This also highlights the extreme pressures ECTs, teachers and senior leaders in schools are under to demonstrate performance in the accountability systems in Wales.

The ECTs reviewed their engagement with wider discussions about their everyday practices in schools, highlighting the different ideals, perspectives and approaches to considering teaching and learning they had developed through engaging with the MEP, compared with the 'cultures' of their school:

I guess where I found it challenging is because it's not part of the norm in my school. Actually, kind of going 'well no this is an idea that I have developed from the MEP and based on this, this and this...' it was probably more talking about things in disguise because people wouldn't talk about where the, what research idea it had come from. So it was just, I think that side of, actually, no it's based on this bit of research I always felt like, well, if I do that, I am doing something that's different to the current culture, but I was bringing the ideas that I had learnt from different places into that environment.

ECT 14, Jack, Interview 1

This view highlights the desire of the teachers to share ideas and notions developed in the CoP of the MEP with the school CoP (Hobson et al. 2007). Jack was also aware of being 'other', and he felt further marginalised by demonstrating expertise and knowledge and his developing identity supported on the MEP CoP. He looked for covert ways to influence his colleagues and school. The marginalisation of ECTs due to their lack of

experience (perceived social capital) has been documented in the literature (Ulvik and Langørgeren 2012; Woodgate-Jones 2012). For Fuller (2010), ECTs can be valued for their new knowledge and new ways of teaching, as they bring ideas, perspective and repertoires into CoPs to freshen them and drive forward new practices, but there is evidence in this study to suggest that the positioning of some of the ECTs in the school CoP inhibited this ability.

In the above quote, Jack acted as a broker, attempting to move knowledge between the two CoPs, and there was an effort on his part to be a 'closeted broker'. This situation demonstrated his developing identity and difference to colleagues, but also his defiance and broadening perspectives of what it means to 'be a teacher' as he pushed to influence his colleagues to see teaching and learning in alternative ways, virtues supported and developed on the MEP to support ECTs in seeing themselves as change agents. This was done tentatively, however, as Jack was still attempting to maintain his position in the school CoP and fit into school culture, especially in the high-risk environment of ECT temporary contracts (see also Correa et al. 2015).

Another ECT, Bree, communicated her experiences of sharing the perspectives she had developed on the MEP:

When I talk about my perspectives and my reflections in relation to research or things I have experienced on the MEP, I am slapped to the floor by my colleagues, with the usual 'We have been there and done that, education is cyclical and that doesn't work' or 'what do you know you have only been teaching two years?'

ECT 15, Bree, FG 3

There was much agreement in the focus group in relation to this final comment, regarding ECTs feeling marginalised by their perceived lack of experience, and the more-experienced teachers not legitimating or valuing their opinions, perspectives or critical views. This point was especially prominent when ECTs discussed research – a finding that resonated with accounts in earlier studies (see Ewing and Smith 2003; Ulvik and Langørgeren 2012).

The lack of legitimation of research-informed practice demonstrates notions of anti-intellectualism and highlights the theory–practice divide within the profession (Shalem and Sholinsky 2013). Further discussions regarding the

ECTs' school colleagues demonstrate that 'experience' and 'practice were the legitimated forms of knowledge, and that research and academic theory were cast as irrelevant by experienced teachers, 'as it won't make you a better teacher' (ECT 15, Bree).

The ECTs described how this made them feel about being a teacher:

I find it hard, when I am working so hard to make a difference to my learners, but my colleagues won't accept my perspective. I am not listened to, and my ideas, points of view, are dismissed. It makes me think, why am I here? But ultimately, I remember I am there for my learners, and I try to ignore it, but sometimes I walk away feeling actually, maybe they are right. Perhaps I don't know anything, I should just do as they say.

ECT 6, Rachel, Interview 1

Rachel's account highlights the challenges caused by these environments, in which ECTs are positioned on the periphery by the CoPs in schools, which may lead to a lack agency, identity and autonomy (Ball 2003). This situation suggests that ECTs are influenced to adopt the practices, ideals and values of their school, which, I argue, is an enculturation into the values, dispositions and practices of the school CoP. Through social learning and engagement and the replication of these values, the ECTs gain membership of the CoP of their school. There seems to be evidence to suggest that in more performative school more-experienced colleagues 'police the norms' of the CoP to maintain the status quo, to ensure those on the periphery are either kept there or are pressured into doing things the way they 'have always been done' (ECT 11, Ayla).

Ayla described the role the MEP had in encouraging her to do 'what is right' and to have autonomy and develop her agency, despite feeling marginalised.

When I tried to discuss the changes to my teaching I had developed on Module 4 of the MEP during the assignment, I was told to stop, and that wasn't what we do in this school. No further discussion to be had. Only after speaking to my mentor, I did it anyway, I didn't tell them (the school), and they didn't know, but it worked so well.

ECT 11, Ayla, FG 3

Ayla's experience poses challenges, as despite being encouraged to do 'what is right', this could have resulted in disciplinary action or wider consequences. Despite being told to not use the practice experimentation

developed in Module 4 to enhance the teaching and learning experience, Ayla was willing to subvert and covertly develop herself and her practice in alternative ways. This example demonstrates the risky nature of being marginalised in school, but also the developing notions of the morals and ethics and future imagination of the type of teacher she wanted to become (Wenger et al. 2002, p.155). The support of the EM, as discussed in Chapter 5, was vital in encouraging confidence development, the rehearsing and legitimising of the ECTs' voices, and, thus, their agency. I argue that through these small rehearsals in mentoring meetings and learning events with other ECT in previous modules, the EMs were able to set the tone and space for more-elaborate and deeper reflections encountered on the teacher inquiry project.

Susan articulated a shift in her professional viewpoint, drawing together reflections on her values of 'being' a teacher and wider notions of what 'success' looks like in her students, beyond outcomes.

I see my learners in a different light, and the power of their feedback and collaboration is vital in my understanding of developing my practice and their learning needs. I never would have considered this nine months ago.

ECT 12, Susan, Interview 2

Susan's experience is consistent with the literature demonstrating that ECTs' engagement with action research improves their understanding of learner needs and perspectives (Burns 2014; Wyatt and Dikilitaş 2016; Dikilitaş and Yayli 2016). This was something the MEP was designed to achieve through utilising the emancipatory practices of teacher inquiry (Lewin 1946). These practices support ECTs to understand the social inclusion of learners in their own professional learning, with a shift in thinking towards student-centred approaches and a movement towards understanding the role of learner feedback in directing teaching and learning. Not only was the collaboration and discussion with their peers at learning events vital, so was the shift in perspective developed through discussion with learners, meaning the ECTs were able to reflect and view their own teaching practice through the perceptions of their learners. This resulted in a movement away from more-accountable formats of learning only being evidenced through quantifiable

data. Groundwater-Smith (2005, p.335) asserts that, 'action research has been popularised and appropriated as an implementation tool instead of as a social change method'. Kemmis (2006) describes this point as the 'domestication of educational action research', suggesting this adoption of action research serve the neoliberal 'what works' agenda and leads to a technical form of action research that lacks criticality and emancipatory efforts. It seems there is evidence to suggest that, in part, the MEP supported more-expansive, emancipatory practices that highlighted the social justice that forms of action research such as teacher inquiry can foster.

Rachel also highlighted a shift in her thinking about control over her learners and methods of teaching and learning that may not have been appropriate for all her learners (see also Section 6.5.).

I am aware of the things in my practice I could never have thought about, power relations between me and the children, the control I have and had to influence and force certain teaching and learning, but also, weirdly oppositely, how constrained I am in my school. I will try to make changes, but I do sometime feel my hands are tied behind my back

ECT 6, Rachel, Interview 4

This subtle shift in thinking highlights some of the tensions experienced, such as the slowly developing awareness of imposed teaching and learning practices from the school CoP that are not always appropriate for all learners. Despite recognising the lack of appropriateness, Rachel mentioned there is little she could have done to change what was imposed. Importantly, while development of understanding and awareness are presented in these accounts, there is an acknowledgement that the ability of ECTs to make changes is constrained by the CoP of the school.

Rachel articulated how the inquiry project supported a 'values-change' about how she views learner success. This success is beyond reductive formats of attainment and outcome, and this shift in her educational values impacted her teaching and pupils' learning. This point is relevant to wider research on the impact of teacher inquiry to promote new values and morals (McDonough 2006; Wigglesworth and Murray 2007) and, thus, to develop teacher identities through professional learning (Williams 2013). This finding also

supports the view that engaging in teacher inquiry is an identity-forming process (Goodnough 2010).

4.3. Making small ripples to nudge the boat

As considered in the previous section, the dominant discourse across many of the ECTs' schools seemed to be highly performative. Through engaging with a three-year programme and an extended nine-month inquiry project, there is evidence to suggest some ECTs began to recognise the performative values that had previously been accepted as central to their teaching practice. The collaboration with EMs, ATs and ECTs in a longer cycle of teacher inquiry via a process of participation and reification were all attributes that helped to establish alternative practice (see also Wenger, Trayner and de Laat 2011).

The ECTs' accounts were congruent with previous research findings in which teachers undertaking an inquiry developed enhanced perceptions regarding how research can inform practice (Cabaroglu 2014; Burns 2014; Yuan and Lee 2015, 2016). For example, Susan commented:

I have the research skills to answer problems in my own practice, pose problems, critically use literature to relate to those problems and inquire to make a change. This is empowering, I know I can do this...

ECT 12, Susan, Interview 3

The MEP supported ECTs to undertake teacher inquiry in their classrooms and to generate local knowledge, which could be used to inform teaching and learning. This resulted in the ECTs imagining alternative identities and starting to form alternative trajectories, both within and across the CoP (Teng 2019). For Wenger et al. (2002, p.155), emerging alternative trajectories and, thus, identities 'incorporate the past and the future in the very process of negotiating the present'. In this regard, a range of trajectories representing different paths of identity formation emerged, connecting past (previous school notions and attitude towards teaching and learning, learners and dispositions to the notions of research) and present experiences (more-expansive versions on the MEP, emancipatory, social and collaborative) with future possibilities, leading to changes within the ECTs' identities. Rachel, an ECT, articulated the power and autonomy of engaging in inquiry at the end of the programme.

I feel different, more confident to defend my viewpoint and more confident in my teaching. I feel like I know more than my colleagues, and actually I am the one with the Master's in Educational Practice, so I feel like now I shouldn't be ignored.

ECT 6, Rachel, Interview 4

This attitude, coupled with the MEP qualification providing legitimisation to her knowledge, and endowed her with confidence in her teaching and her beliefs. Rachel's experience is consistent with the findings of wider research in which teachers undertaking inquiry modules reported a greater sense of autonomy (Cabaroglu 2014; Wyatt and Dikilitaş 2016; Connolly et al. 2018).

Lynette expressed her desire to engage in further research in her classroom and demonstrated the values and importance of her MEP studies.

The process was hard and uncomfortable and didn't make sense at first. I felt awkward and confused throughout, but looking back now I think this was me making sense of new ways of working, doing things...

I think differently, I think about using research to inform my practice, I am more critical of things...and I feel I will continue to think like this.

ECT 13, Lynette, Interview 3

Lynette recognised the changes to her practice because of engaging in the MEP and the inquiry process. This process of recognition has also been documented in previous studies of ECTs undertaking inquiry practices (see Connolly, Hadfield, Barnes and Snook 2018). Lynette also discussed the challenges and discomfort associated with engaging in teacher inquiry.

I have more awareness of research skills, and I bring that to my teaching, but also it informs my teaching and vice versa, so I think I would say I have learned to become a teacher-researcher, and hope to continue to research into my practice, but it is not a comfortable relationship between the two.

ECT 13, Lynette, Interview 4

She continued by describing the conflicting tensions between the roles of teacher and researcher, and how the interrelation had resulted in her seeing herself and practice from a different perspective.

frustrated and feel, sometimes, like I am powerless to change things happening in my school. It's more frustrating, I am noticing more things that I find difficult in school since doing the inquiry project, when I know things work so well for my learners. I've researched it and seen changes in their learning and my teaching. I can attempt to change my own practice within reason if I am allowed. But all I seem to be doing is nudging my colleagues to consider what I've done, and I am doing. It's just me on my own, I am not sure how much impact, I alone can have.

ECT 13, Lynette, Interview 4

Lynette discussed an imagination of her future of practice and potential future research. Lave and Wenger (1991) regard these codifying experiences within CoPs as a reimagining of future practices through consideration of learning from a CoP (see also Burns 2014; Yuan and Lee 2015a; Yuan and Burns 2017). The MEP aimed to influence practice in schools across Wales to lead a national change in perspectives of learning and teaching. There is evidence that effects on individual ECTs sometimes occurred, but without systems-level support and cultural change at multi-levels, these individuals are islands in a vast strong sea of competing cultures steeped in accountability and performativity. As Lynette communicated: 'I am not sure how much impact I alone can have'.

4.4. Summary

A raft of educational policy reform in Wales in 2011 led to the development of the MEP as a national professional learning programme, but they also introduced a more-performative system in Wales. These accountabilities in relation to resources and funding have reduced forms of reflexive practice, resulting in more temporary contracts for new teachers, a lack of risk-taking and an increase in the 'what works' mentality. I argue, based on a series of interactions, that some of the ECTs on the MEP were positioned further on the periphery of the CoPs of their schools. In the school CoP, politics about the funding of the MEP, anti-intellectualism and professional envy appeared to marginalise newcomers. On the periphery of the community, the ECTs were able to exert little influence on the practices, artefacts and culture of

school CoP, in contrast to what had been envisioned in the design of the MEP. Therefore, ECTs were unable to broker knowledge from the MEP CoP into their schools. This resulted in a lack of agency, but also tension among the ECTs as they held onto competing ideals of teaching and learning from multi-memberships of CoPs (the MEP and their schools).

This chapter presented evidence suggesting that some ECTs were kept on the peripheries of school CoPs while attempting to negotiate hierarchies of power and fabricating their inclusion within the community in an attempt to be seen to participate in the cultures and practices of their schools. The ECTs were not always able to influence and change practices and cultures from within schools, contrary to the objective of the design of the MEP programme (Fuller 2010). I argue that the tensions developed between holding two conflicting regimes of competence from the two conflicting CoPs (the MEP and the school) led to internal conflicts that made it more challenging for ECTs to reconcile practice when they had limited agency. Those 'closeted broker' ECTs who tried to influence others did so cautiously, fabricating their allegiance to the dominant discourses and practices in their school to avoid being positioned as difficult and awkward, mitigating the risk of their contracts not being renewed. The chapter also reflected on the supporting roles of EMs. Chapter 5 further examines how EMs on the MEP influenced the developing identities of ECTs in their roles in supporting teacher inquiry.

Chapter 5: ‘A Critical Friend’: The Role of the External Mentor in Supporting Early Career Teachers

5.1. Introduction

In this second chapter of the findings, the EMs support of ECTs and their teacher inquiry is the focus. The chapter reflects on how these interactions and support mechanisms, and the close relationships of EMs as ‘critical friends’, impacted the developing identities of the ECTs.

First, this chapter presents the EMs’ role as vital in supporting the emotional conditions that created the environment for ECTs’ professional learning and identity development. The safe Third Space created by EMs embodied the conditions for reflection and personal effectiveness, with the EMs acting as co-constructors, collaborators and advocates for the ECTs. This support helped ECTs to accommodate the difficult tensions created from spanning multiple CoPs with competing regimes of competence, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Then, the EMs’ role as academic interpreters for the ECTs, with both positive and negative consequences, is explored. Drawing on an educative mentoring process, the EMs supported ECTs to reconsider their moral, ethical and value base, which highlighted performative ideals inherent within their practice and ideology. The reciprocal nature of sociocultural learning that took place between the EMs and ECTs within the MEP CoP supported the developing agency of the ECTs in suppressive school environments.

Through EMs providing safe spaces, emotional modulation and helping ECTs to move past personal and professional issues, the ECTs were able to reflect on their identities and the type of teacher they would like to become. The ECTs discussed the shift in their values brought about by the risky talk fostered and rehearsed in meetings with EMs. These discussions with EMs are reminiscent of Eraut’s (2000) ‘risky talk’ with an outsider, when difficult and frowned-upon conversations (by the school) about school practices and

culture occur. Such risky talk allows for critique and criticism. Helping to reinforce alternative ways of thinking, provided space and a platform for reflection, and developed ECTs' self-confidence, positive teacher identities, and awareness to have alternative perspectives beyond the normal culture of their schools. The meetings with EMs provided legitimacy to think in alternative ways. Throughout this section, the EMs are portrayed as a central component to the MEP. The EMs attempted to provide an educative mentoring approach, but this was variable and difficult to achieve due to differential power relations related to the EMs' knowledge and experience, which were amplified at various points of the inquiry project.

The chapter concludes by considering how aspects of the power relationships between the EMs and ECTs during sections of the teacher inquiry project were flattened (and therefore provided a more educative approach). In those moments, the EMs were considered co-learners, which highlighted the importance of ECTs engaging in teacher inquiry in which EMs were non-experts or framed as a 'critical friend'.

5.2. Close relationship and trust

These data from the ECT focus groups and interviews established the importance of the EMs in supporting the ECTs through the early stages of their career. Overall, close relationships and trust had developed over the three years working with their EMs on the MEP. The ECTs valued their EMs being external to their school, as Susan an ECT pointed out: ‘it allowed me to trust her more quickly, as I knew what I was saying wasn’t getting back to my school’. The EMs’ in-depth working knowledge of schools, education in Wales, and having legitimate authentic experiences and insights of the classroom were praised by the ECTs and highlighted as supporting the ECTs’ alternative ways of engaging in teaching and learning (see also Hobson and McIntyre 2013):

My mentor has provided me support, encouragement and advice through all the challenging experiences I have had in school. It’s helped that he is not part of the school, and he sees things objectively. Without his guidance and talking me through, I wouldn’t have developed the confidence to stand up for what I believe in, and to stand my ground, and sometimes see things objectively, beyond what I am told I have to do.

ECT 5, Phoebe, FG 1

As discussed in Chapter 4, and highlighted in Phoebe’s account, there were significant discussions about the EMs’ direct effect on the ECTs’ abilities to challenge the assumptions and routinised thoughts in their schools. This aspect aligns with earlier research by Hobson et al. (2009), who demonstrated that deep and supportive meetings, over a prolonged period, provided ECTs with legitimacy to see other perspectives on teaching and learning in their schools.

Rachel, an ECT, described her EM’s support as a ‘reflection board [that] helps me to make sense of the realities of what is happening in my classroom and school, not just what I want to think is happening’.

Correspondingly, Emily, an EM, stated, ‘we support the teachers to be able to see themselves and their practice clearly, and also what they might like it [practice] to be without the distorting effects of their school’s influence’.

The ECTs communicated the importance of being listened to about their views, experiences and ideas. Mike, an EM, commented that it was vital that 'the teachers (ECTs) were able to speak their mind and feel safe to articulate their viewpoints regardless of what those ideas were'. This helped the ECTs to construct and deconstruct their perceptions of teaching and learning strategies, and the priorities around their practice. This point alludes to the support that Lave and Wenger categorise as 'self-affiliating within a community of practice', engagement, imagination, and alignment that occurred with ECTs aligning themselves with the 'old timers' of the MEP CoP, not the 'old timers' of the school CoP (Lave and Wenger 1991).

Just having [a] specific meeting time, that is all about me, in my school, is so important. Reflecting on my practice or my views, about what I have read or done, it helps me develop my perspectives and gives me confidence in what I am saying has value, but it also allows me to practise and rehearse things that I can discuss or consider in my department, or with the school. Or even if I feel that what we are doing in school is not in the best interest of the pupils' learning, what might feel like moaning in school, actually turns out to be something that perhaps is not the best for them (the learners), and it's only through discussing this with outside people, like my mentor, I can see that.

ECT 13, Lynette, FG 3

The spatial and temporal importance of such meetings was highlighted by both the EMs and the ECTs, which was reminiscent of the development of a Third Space, which acted a conceptual and discursive hybrid space neither totally the ECT's school nor just part of the MEP and was important in supporting ECT reflections (Gutiérrez 2008). These critical discursive meetings with the EMs are consistent with McIntyre and Hobson's (2016) application of Gutiérrez's (2008) 'Third Space' for the external mentoring of ECTs. They emphasise creating a conceptual Third Space where authentic, non-judgemental collaboration and discussion can occur without fear of repercussions, leading to the expansive professional learning of the teachers. This conceptual Third Space enabled the ECTs to discuss critically their practice and identity from a different perspective than either the school or the site of the MEP. This impact seemed amplified, as the conceptual Third Space was created in the physical dominant culture in which the ECTs were reflecting on, their school. This boosted the double think and the competing

regimes of competence, which, I argue, led to further evaluation of current practice and, therefore, identities.

As Ross considered,

My mentor meetings in school are difficult as I always want to talk quietly in case someone hears us, but being in my school really makes me more determined to make a change, to help my learners, despite what the school says.

ECT 9, Ross, Interview 2

Jack described a similar feeling, using a 'French Resistance' analogy as a secondary school teacher of history. He employed the metaphor to illustrate how meetings with his EM were empowering and assisted with his agentic teaching.

With my mentor, it is like the French Resistance in the war on enemy lines, keeping up appearances but thinking about how I can free my teaching and others without tipping them off.

ECT 14, Jack, Interview 2

Hodkinson (2009) identified boundary-crossing as a vital professional learning tool for ECTs. The exposure to external perspectives in school, she argues, disrupts the status quo and the homogenising impacts of stale CoPs and strong power structures that exist, helping to change accepted practices. The process of boundary-crossing can bring together people, objects and practices from different CoPs to achieve what Engestrom et al. (1995) describe as a hybrid situation. Through boundary-crossing and hybridisation, new learning conditions are created from exposure to new conditions, perspectives and practices. Jack's tone was militant, and he seemed determined to supersede his oppression; however, as considered in Chapter 4, this was a risky situation for someone in such a strong school culture, in such a contractual position.

The EMs supported the agency of the ECTs despite some of them being in highly suppressive school environments. As Lynette commented, 'I feel too constrained in my school, if it wasn't for Mike (EM) I would have left the school, perhaps even teaching.' This view is reminiscent of those in Cameron and Grant's (2017) study of EMs supporting early career physics teachers. The EMs were a lifeline in unsupportive schools, helping the ECTs to survive against the odds.

As presented in Chapter 4, the emotional consequences of moving through boundaries and attempting to reconcile the competing demands, regimes of competence, practices and discourses of different CoPs resulted in feelings of failure. These threats to ECTs' identities and their feelings of incompetence resulted in a sequence of negative thinking in relation to engaging with opposing viewpoints and elicited negative feelings towards teaching and towards themselves as ECTs.

Sometimes, reflecting on my practice makes me feel like a bad teacher. In fact, that I shouldn't be teaching, and I've gotten it all wrong.

ECT 6, Rachel, Interview 2

As discussed in Chapter 4, tensions were caused by engaging with the MEP and the 'uncomfortable truths' that led teachers to question whether they should be teaching. The role of the EM as disruptor and as an emotional and social supporter in working through some of these emotional and cognitive conflicts caused by crossing between CoPs was mirrored in some of the participants' accounts.

These data suggest the EMs were key for navigating the challenges of developing resilience, supporting the emotional fallout of spanning multiple communities, and what Korthagen (2013) argues is the development of growth competence while existing in multiple competing CoPs. This support was vital in relation to ECTs' provisional and temporary engagement across the inquiry projects with EMs and ATs and the MEP CoP over their three-year course. It is important to note that the time allocated under the supervisory support was 31 hours for EMs, but only five hours for ATs.

The EMs' involvement in legitimising the views of the ECTs and encouraging them to express themselves, to rehearse awkward, risky, different and difficult conversations was evident in the participants' accounts. I argue that those conversations supported an agentic vision of what the ECTs could be and supported alternative ideas about their practice and, thus, their identities within these ideas of future practices (Evans, 2006; Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2003).

These findings revealed similarities to the role of EMs in Cameron and Grant's (2017) study on EMs for early career physics teachers. The Institute of

Physics' EMs emotionally supported ECTs and developed their positive teacher identities, which allowed them to move forward to reflect on their physics pedagogy in difficult school environments in England. The MEP was designed to encourage disruptive thinking and support boundary-crossing so that participants were encouraged to move beyond the familiar and reconsider any taken-for-granted assumptions.

5.3. External Mentors as co-constructors and collaborators

The ECTs discussed the complex and diverse role of an EM in supporting their professional learning and identity. The relationship between ECTs and EMs was characterised in many formats and shifts based on context, activity and time. The ECTs talked about EMs as a ‘buddy’ (Jack), ‘critical friend’ (Phoebe), ‘co-constructor’ (Kathryn) and ‘collaborator’ (Rachel), but also in the role of ‘parent’ (Ross) or ‘expert in practice’ (Sophie). These descriptions capture elements of the educative model of mentoring that the MEP strived to achieve, but also aspects of more-traditional transmissive models of mentoring. This variety demonstrates the challenges of achieving expansive educative formats of mentoring, which have been documented in the literature (Young et al. 2005; Hobson 2016).

As Bradbury (2010, p.1051) states, ‘unlike more traditional forms of mentoring, educative mentoring seeks to meet the immediate needs of novice teachers while also focusing on long-term goals for growth’. The reflective approaches the EMs undertook, I argue, exemplify some of the styles of educative mentoring and more-traditional models. Ayla, an ECT, recounted the ways her EM supported her to develop her answers to her problems through careful reflection. In her discussion, she reflected on what are considered more-traditional transmissive models of mentoring, as her EM attempted to impart knowledge, tips, tricks and ideas. Her account demonstrates the challenges to achieving educative mentoring provision.

My mentor always gives useful tips and ideas about teaching; however, at other times we reflect together, and there doesn't seem to be a right answer. It just makes me think about teaching or my practice, and I feel perhaps there isn't one right way to do it, but allows me to know I can answer my own problems.

ECT 11, Ayla, FG 3

Other ECTs noted the role of mentor in relation to the inquiry project as being a 'critical research friend', supporting the process and, at times, constructing those ideas of inquiry together (see also Daly and Milton 2017).

In relation to the inquiry project, it has felt as though my mentor was my research buddy, a critical friend who posed some challenging questions to make me think about why I was doing my research and for who, and what that meant, especially in relation to working out my focus. Sometimes, it is difficult with school pressures, to bring it back to just the children, especially with the school wanting me to make it relevant to the DIP (departmental improvement plan). After some challenging discussion, I was like, erm, oh right, ok, I sort of see this isn't just about their grades, it is about more than that. By the end of the project and going through the feedback with my tutor, I totally got it, but being honest, it took me right to the end (of the project).

ECT 14, Jack, Interview 2

This view indicates the changeable dynamic of the mentor–mentee relationship and the flattening of the power relationship between the dyad in the inquiry project. The EMs, as non-experts in teacher inquiry, acted, at times, as a 'collaborator' (Rachel) or 'research-buddy' (Jack) through the process, but equally seemed to hold a mirror up for the ECTs in relation to their values, identities and moral purpose of what they were doing (see Mockler 2011). This description reflects the views of McGee and Lawrence (2009, p.148), who advocate for the 'creation of a safe learning environment' in which teachers can feel 'secure enough to take risks and share challenges about their practice'. This sense of security and collaboration is also evident in Rachel's account of the ECT and EM relationship.

My mentor is upfront and says she doesn't know everything, she is not the best with research and inquiry, we just work through it together, she's like my guide. Things she doesn't know, we ask Evie (the academic tutor) about, and it is good to feel that we are in this together.

ECT 6, Rachel, Interview 2

The focus groups and interviews revealed that some EMs were reticent to provide specific academic advice, which is congruent with the expectations of the role of the mentor being practice-focused (see also Daly and Milton 2017).

My mentor didn't feel comfortable in providing feedback on my dissertation about the academic stuff, as in her words she was not an 'academic'. She did comment on it, but it was more to make me think about how I was writing and perhaps things I needed to include. I think she didn't want to tread on the academic tutor's toes, but I was scared at the beginning about contacting them (the academic tutor).

ECT 13, Lynette, Interview 2

Lynette's account highlights the challenges of trust and the importance of time and space for building a relationship with ATs, especially when mediated at distance. This situation was even more pronounced for the MEP, as the AT was brought into the pre-existing ECT and EM relationship in the final module for the teacher inquiry project. As ECT Ross commented, 'At first, I didn't know my tutor, and I didn't want to, I had Julia (the EM)'. The ECTs' accounts suggest that ATs being brought into a trusted mentoring relationship, at a late stage, caused initial friction within the supervisory triad, positioning the AT as an outsider in the supervisory relationship. This positioning is explored further in Section 6.3.

Jack and Lynette also discussed their reticence in contacting their AT for fear of 'looking stupid' or for the written project 'not being very academic'. This point stresses the importance of the trust and relationship built with the EMs, who had been working collaboratively with them for two years, and the time it takes to build that same trust with the ATs. The salience of trust in mentoring relationships has been widely documented (Meyer 2002; Armour and Duncombe 2004; O'Sullivan 2007; Parker et al. 2010; Heokka et al. 2017).

5.4. External Mentors as academic interpreters

In the ECT interviews and focus groups, EMs were described as ‘interpreters’ for the ECTs, working with them to support translation of the ATs’ discussion and feedback and to understand the course materials in the virtual learning environment. The role of mentors as interpreters has been considered previously (see Higgins et al. 2002; Hyatt 2005), and there is evidence to suggest that the EMs acted to support the transfer of information and knowledge in a way that was digestible for the ECTs. This approach is challenging given the hope for an educative approach to mentoring, rather than transmissive modes. This approach may have been adopted because cohorts of ECTs were part-time, busy professionals balancing many commitments. Nonetheless, some EMs were positioned in a parenting role, with the suggestion of helicopter mentoring (Buria 2011). As Buria (2011) points out, helicopter mentoring is similar to helicopter parenting, with mentors buzzing over their mentees, waiting to support and become advocates for the mentee’s cause without necessarily providing the growth, experience and space to make mistakes as a learning process. This view was exemplified by Susan, an ECT:

Jane (EM 3) and I laughed as it was like bedtime stories. I would ring her up and she would give me the 10-minute version of Hattie’s learning thing, or Carol Dweck’s research.

ECT 12, Susan, Interview 2

This quote points to some EMs being more comfortable than others at transferring and transmitting module content into practice following mentor training events and familiarity with module materials.

When EMs were faced with less-familiar academic content during the inquiry project, in which the ECTs' focus varied, there is evidence of some EMs being less comfortable. Jane, an EM, talked about manoeuvring her ECTs to areas of knowledge and experience for their inquiry project that she was comfortable with. When she was not comfortable, she would signpost the ECTs to the AT.

I know my limits. We would sort of talk through module materials and ideas and research. Three years in, I can write out those modules from my head. But sometimes its better of the mentees do something I know, so sometimes I encourage them towards certain inquiry topics where I can help more, and when I can't, well I direct them to Kevin (AT).

EM 3, Jane, Interview

Some ECTs felt as though they were unsure of the academic language, research content or feedback from their AT. Some ECTs were confident enough to ask for clarification from their AT, while others took a much more passive role. In some cases, EMs took it upon themselves to be advocates for the ECTs, again, aligning with helicopter mentoring (Buria, 2011). Other ECTs utilised EMs initially to help them decode the meaning behind feedback on draft work; or, as Ross, an ECT, pointed out, to 'understand the academic technical language' or terms that had been used. Susan, Ross and Rachel described scenarios in which their EMs took it upon themselves to engage in conversations with their AT on their behalf, leaning into notions of mentoring as 'parenting' (Buria, 2011). This point is complex, as these data may suggest a reduction in the power dynamic between ECTs and EMs when focusing on the aspects of engaging with the academic elements of inquiry and lessening the novice/expert divide. In other aspects, the power hierarchies reappeared, for example, when the EMs became advocates for ECTs within the AT triad, or when translating or transmitting module content into digestible formats (as in Jane's account above). Perhaps some EMs found it difficult to avoid practices and identities from their previous professions, such as consultants, in which these transmissive skills may have been prized practices. Andrew, an EM, displayed a very strong identity and affiliation to his previous career as an experienced teacher, now a consultant. Andrew's discussion in the focus group demonstrated he wanted to teach his ECTs: 'I was a teacher for 40 years, and will always be a teacher despite what I do, sometimes they (ECTs) just need to be shown'. This view points to the challenges of ensuring

consistent support and external mentoring on a large-scale programme like the MEP. With considerable variability among EMs' experience, and robust, collaborative professional learning, with significant time and support to form strong and sustained practices and identities that fully align with an educative mentoring stance is required. This is something Daly and Milton (2017) call for in their research.

This point relates to Ganser' (1998) study considering metaphors for mentoring relationships between ECTs and mentors. Ganser highlighted the common metaphors for ECT and EM interactions focussed around close relationships, such as grandparent/grandchildren, or parent/child dynamics, all inherently imbued with power, politics and steeped in close relationships, but with a disequilibrium of power and knowledge.

The notions of EM as academic interpreter were fraught with power dynamics, for example, ECT Lynette commented:

Some aspects I was too busy [for] in school. I couldn't do the reading, didn't know where I was going, and couldn't make sense of what my tutor was advising on my feedback from the literature review. It wasn't that it didn't make sense, I just at that point didn't understand. Karen, went straight to the academic tutor, had the conversation, and came back and explained what it meant.

ECT 13, Lynette, Interview 4

This issue seemed particularly acute when ECTs discussed engaging with the inquiry project in relation to ethics, methodology and data analysis. The ECTs discussed feedback and ideas with their EM (a non-expert) but avoided contacting the AT.

I didn't get, like ethics. I've done ethics before, I did the form, but my tutor kept talking about 'power relationship' I had over my pupils and providing them all (pupils) with the same opportunity, which confused me in relation to differentiation. I didn't always understand my feedback on it. It took some time with my mentor to get to the bottom of what that meant; otherwise, I would have been going around in circles. as I didn't know my tutor well, so didn't want to look silly and ask.

ECT 12, Susan, Interview 4

This quote raises some of the challenges the ECTs faced in not having an established relationship with the ATs. Therefore, when uncertain or when the

ECTs had a lack of time to commit to study, they leaned on the EM for additional support and for sense-making, either directly or indirectly.

Analysing the interview data from the ECTs across the timeline of the inquiry project, there was a shift in their viewpoint regarding their confidence with inquiry. This shift ranged from uncertainty, misunderstanding and apprehension, to a feeling of accomplishment and an understanding of the process. From the four ECTs interviewed, it is clear from them all that the full appreciation for teacher inquiry only developed after completing the entire inquiry.

The reflections from the ECTs' interviews allude to notions of legitimate peripheral participation. The EMs and ATs were vital in different ways in supporting the ECTs into the MEP CoP and developing the engagement of the ECTs in inquiry on the MEP. This factor is characterised by the EM taking a 'brokering role' between the CoP of the MEP and research through to the school CoP.

Methodology: looking back now, I am embarrassed. I didn't get it. Inquiry, action research, teacher inquiry, I didn't know what we were doing. My supervisor talked to me about it, and I left the learning event, thinking what was all that about? Why couldn't I do what I had done in my PGCE? I wasn't sure what it meant, why we were doing it. Chatting to my mentor, she took it apart with me and pointed out the readings on the modules. We met after I read through it and we talked about it all, some more, and then the penny started to drop, but I needed her (the mentor) to help understand some of the books as well.

ECT 13, Lynette, Interview 3

The ECTs positioned the EMs as academic interpreters, and this was further confirmed by the EMs themselves. Related to this, in both the ECT and EM accounts, there were reflections on the time pressures for the ECTs to understand the requirements and engage in the research.

I just couldn't read everything – the readings, the module materials on learning central – and teach and mark, and then plan my project. It was often the last thing on my mind: work, family, everything else, and then the master's. It meant my mentor would sometimes support me in catching up, or for me retranslate what I didn't get, into a quick and easy format. I think this was often for things I had missed or not even thought of (as I hadn't even seen it).

ECT 14, Jack, Interview 4

John, an AT, reflected on the conditions that led to EMs taking an interpreter role for the ECTs. His account also suggests traits of mentoring being aligned to 'parenting'.

Time dictates that I cannot explain every last shred of detail or meaning in relation to my comments from their work, or if we have a brief discussion I check for clarity. If we have 10 minutes to consider a teacher's whole project at a learning event, there is only so much I can unravel in that time. As you know, that five hours at distance doesn't go far, most of it is written feedback. The mentor has much more contact time; therefore, they can expand and support with some of the feedback I have provided and support sense-making of my comments. Ultimately, if the mentor does not understand, they come back to me for clarification so they can further support the teacher. Often, it is the mentor and not the teacher that comes forward, and they are often tenacious and protective of their mentees... as you know the inquiry projects were only suggested to be 12–15,000 words long, but the majority of time they have been in the order 20,000-plus words. The model for supervision resource was based on shorter inquiry projects, not this, and coupled with 18 tutees, it is a challenge

AT 2, John, Interview 1

The ATs supervised large numbers of master's-level students (15–22) with just five hours of formalised paid time per ECT. The EMs, being more local and with 31 hours to support their ECTs across the project, were more accessible. This lack of academic resources perhaps further intensified the need for EMs to step in and bridge the gap in support due to reduced hours of supervision.

Arguably, the additional communication and questions between ATs and EMs, with the restricted hours of the ATs, might have been too much, and the resulting frustrations may have been communicated informally to ECTs, making them more reliant on the EMs. With the EMs acting as go-betweens, this perhaps made the ATs resentful, further positioning the EMs as overbearing parents.

The positioning of EMs as overbearing parents contrasts with the flattening of the power relationship when teachers were being supported during the inquiry. Given that productive ECT/EM relationships can be difficult to achieve (Graham 1997; Stanulis and Russell 2000; Maynard 2017), it seems consequential that the co-learning events created additional opportunities to foster these relationships. The ECTs portrayed EMs as collaborators, friends and research buddies, but John, an AT, described the EMs as being like

overbearing parents (see also Ganser 1998). This difference highlights the complex relationship between ECTs, EMs and ATs, which was steeped in the relational elements of family but still contained elements of power hierarchy. Educative approaches to mentoring can be difficult to achieve (Young et al. 2005), and teacher education scholars have emphasised the need for more power balanced, reciprocal relationships in which EMs and ECTs 'collaborate as partners to solve problems of practice' (Bradbury 2010, p.1051).

5.5. External Mentors supported the personal effectiveness of Early Career Teachers

Time management throughout the research process was identified as a constraint, especially balancing the pressures between school, personal life and the MEP. The EM role was important for supporting strategies for teacher inquiry management, but also the pastoral-supportive role. The EMs were charged with ensuring ECTs stayed on track with their research amid widening and conflicting pressures while surviving any pressures in school (see also Daly and Milton 2017).

I found time management hard. School, my children and family and the inquiry project, at times, was too much. Jane (EM) would bring me back into the fold. Texts, emails, visits, chats, her consistency. Her suggested strategies of us doing stuff together, being productive during our meeting time, and constant encouragement, small deadlines, but most of all, the fact she understood my pressures from school and family. I suppose, she helped me change the way I see my time around the MEP, and made it more manageable. But, whilst supporting me to consider my research plan, and just spending chunks of time before school started to do some writing

ECT 12, Susan, Interview 4

Planning, planning and more planning. Yvette (EM) and I worked out a research plan together and put in contingencies, or to look at where we could make time, and sometimes these have been hard nuts to swallow. Working weekends and late evenings, but it has helped me to reframe the hard work, and know that I am not alone.

ECT 6, Rachel, Interview 2

The EMs' relationships were considered by Susan and Rachel to be supportive and collaborative, and the language used suggests they viewed their collaboration as a partnership in the inquiry-project management and planning. This view aligns with the educative styles of mentoring built into the design of the MEP (Ambrosetti et al. 2014; Bradbury 2010).

5.6. External Mentors as pastoral care and emotional modulators

Rachel and Susan, two ECTs, talked about the EMs' roles in terms of 'supporting their wellbeing' and supporting them to deal with not only 'time-management issues', but also with professional and personal challenges and how these impacted their ability to work and engage with the MEP and inquiry project.

There were discussions that described the EMs as 'gateways' to the university pastoral support, as Monica, an AT, pointed out: 'they (ECTs) don't always know the protocols and what support is available to them, and their mentor signpost the information and then we follow up'.

The EM role was not primarily a student-support role, especially in relation to their employment as associates within the university. Rather, it was a requirement that MEP academic staff dealt with specific university protocols on student-support issues in addition to whole-university student-support teams. The EMs were still providing these forms of support and acting as go-betweens for the ECTs and ATs, perhaps further supporting the challenges of AT supervision at a distance and on reduced hours. The EMs mediated support through personal knowledge of the local areas and schools. In the focus groups, the ECTs talked about pressure and stress (in relation to school issues). All the participants noted pressure due to preparation for an Estyn inspection, or experiencing bullying, or stress in the workplace, or experiencing wider personal issues related to family, for example, parental responsibility, some form of caring responsibility and the death of a family member during the time frame of the MEP:

Without the support of my mentor, I don't think I would have carried on with MEP. I would have washed out with the pressures of school and life. When I had difficulties with family, she helped me and gave me support that I wasn't getting in school. This wasn't just during the project; this was throughout the whole course. I realised the MEP was for me, and that it was important. Jo's support got me through bad times in school, helped me keep working and kept me focusing on the masters and who I was.

ECT 14 , Jack, Interview 3

The EMs and ECTs both highlighted the importance of the pastoral element of the EMs' work in supporting the MEP, but wider emotional support evidenced the depth of some of these mentoring relationships. In the EM focus groups, Claire discussed the need to consider 'the stresses and pressures that the teachers are facing first at the start of any meeting', and this experience was confirmed by the others in the EM focus groups. Emotional issues had to be 'consolidated first to reflect on the MEP' (Claire, EM 4). This view suggests that the EMs' role in emotional support for both private and professional issues was an important aspect of the ECTs' developing identities by providing the emotional space to reflect on practice and identities.

Pillen et al. (2013) highlighted the stress and anxiety brought on by competing idealised beliefs and hopes concerning expectations of what a teacher is versus the realities in practice. This point suggests that EMs offer important support mechanisms that assist ECTs to move through barriers, trauma and stress so they can effectively reflect on their practices, their identities and their inquiry projects. More important, such support may be why these students stayed on the MEP or worked through challenges in difficult school environments.

We are so close to the teachers; we are meeting them regularly. Most of us have been working with them for over two years by this point and have seen them through other troubled times in school and at home. I could turn up to a meeting with a student ready to support reflection on considering their data analysis and they would be having a crisis in school or at home, and at that point the priority is making sure they are okay, and moving through that, or putting a strategy in place, even just to listen, and then they might be ready to consider their practice. Sometimes, they weren't, and that was okay, it meant another meeting when they were ready.

EM 5, Charlotte, FG 2

Anna also expressed the need to deal with stresses before thinking about engaging with the MEP:

Sometimes, I just vent about school, and I have cried with the pressure and stress, we haven't even thought about the inquiry project. But I needed to get it off my chest. The meetings with Patricia give me a protection from the pressures. I can vent, get it out and move on.

ECT 1, Anna, FG 1

These perspectives again consider the importance of the safe Third Space that the mentoring meetings provided, in which ECTs explored their professional teaching identity, supporting personal effectiveness, project management and academic interpretation. Gutiérrez et al.'s (2008) central feature of a Third Space is that it develops dynamic perspectives that offer individuals new forms of being, and representation. I argue this Third Space was mediated by the EMs acting as knowledge brokers between the CoPs but most importantly creating the vital conditions that bounded that conceptual Third space, that fostered reflection (Engeström et al.1995; Wenger 1998).

5.7.Shift in teacher values and morals through External Mentor discussions

The development of ECTs' values and perspectives were evident in the discussions of how they view their roles as teachers and who and what teaching and education is for. As discussed in Section 4.2. in relation to accountability, the EMs mentioned the challenges of supporting the ECTs to move away from an inquiry project aligned to their school or departmental improvement plan and was, instead, focused on the needs of their pupils in their classrooms.

A big thing of it is about trying to move them away from shoehorning or tailoring their focus to something related to the school improvement plan, or how they can improve their value-added for the secondary school teacher. It's incredibly common.

EM 6, Emily, FG 2

The EMs expressed that teacher inquiry foci and the foci of practice developments for ECTs were often related to the following:

- raising the attainment or outcomes of the pupil
- improving the department ranking
- related to a school-improvement plan
- proving something they were already doing worked for the whole school

The EMs stated that it was a 'surprising challenge' even in Year Three of the MEP to get the ECTs to break away from 'the use of numerical data' (quantitative data) and 'outcomes and attainment as the only way of viewing success in teaching and learning' (Andrew, EM 2). The first module the ECTs engaged with on the MEP was a critical look at different types of data that could inform practice and understanding of learning and teaching. A critical engagement with both quantitative and qualitative data, the module was designed to support ECTs to consider more-nuanced approaches to understanding learning through formats such as observation, pupil voice and collaborative action inquiry, not just outcome statistics. This is why Andrew was surprised. Even by considering accountabilities, reflecting critically on the

challenges of data interpretation, and different ways of knowing about learner success (as discussed in Section 4.2.1), all the ECTs in this study attempted to design foci aligned with performative regimes. These designs were related to outcomes, attainment and hard accountability measures for the school, further demonstrating the deep enculturation of these discourses in schools, which is similar to a finding in Irish schools (Burns 2016).

The EMs contemplated their ECTs' positions and the reasoning for these methodological selections. Jane (EM 3) offered the explanation that 'their worth as a teacher is caught up in the value-added⁸ they achieve with their GCSE results or outcomes'. Accordingly, ECTs' abilities and values of being a teacher are wrapped up in the outcomes and grades of their learners (see also Skeritt 2019).

As has been argued in the literature in relation to performative systems, a school's legitimization of certain values, practices and opportunities, as well as the barriers within their school CoP, and the policing and reward of certain practices further embed these approaches (Ball 2003; Skeritt 2019).

You'll get additional support from your school, whereas if it's not part of the school-improvement plan, then the school are not as supportive because that's not their focus. So, although it might be the focus in your classroom, it might not be the whole-school focus, and then that causes conflict of interest then, doesn't it?

EM 5, Charlotte, FG 2

The EMs considered their role as supporting agency within the ECTs to see beyond the pressures and expectations of the school and to consider what education and schooling means and who it is for. For all six EMs in the focus group, this meant bringing it back to the learners every time.

I ask them (the ECTs) who are they doing it for? Is it their job to keep senior management happy by doing what senior management think, or is it their job to think about the learners in that classroom and to do the best they can for those learners at that specific time?

EM 6, Emily, FG 2

⁸ Value-added is the outcome progress made by learners over and above what would normally be expected based on their prior attainment and gender (Statistics for Wales 2019)

Two ECTs, Jack and Rachel, discussed EMs being ‘rebellious’ and ‘throw spanners into the works’. This view is consistent with what Hobson and Malderez (2013) found in their research on EMs acting as disruptive influences to normative thinking in schools. Rachel noted that this ‘disruptive’ talk moved her thinking on to consider alternative ideas, and this supported her empowerment to develop, re-evaluate and explore her teaching beliefs and alternative identities. She continued, ‘I didn’t feel like I had to follow the crowd in school, that actually I could believe in my own perspectives’. This follows the work of Rachamim and Orland-Barak (2016), whose research findings illustrate how disruptive talk with outsiders can develop agency within teachers. Rachel’s comments are mirrored in the account by Jack (ECT 14), the history teacher, in Section 5.2, who felt empowered to change his practice and to influence others covertly as a ‘closeted broker’.

This type of support from EMs was described by Kira:

There were many conversations (with the mentor) about what I felt was the right thing to do, and why, and how this related to what I was asked of by the school. It empowered me to consider alternative options and to be a rebel.

ECT 7, Kira, FG 2

These accounts suggest that the close relationships formed between EMs and ECTs allowed the former to foster a safe Third Space for risky conversations. The formation of this conceptual and physical space was brought about through the social and emotional wellbeing and support of the ECT. This head space and legitimation enabled deeper reflection, which led to empowerment for some of the ECTs in an attempt to be agentic in their schools. This point confirms the findings of Connolly et al. (2018) in their study of ECTs on the MEP. For some ECTs in more-performative schools, this was not the case; the desire seemed present, but a more-covert, ‘closeted broker’ approach seemed to ensue.

5.8. External Mentors as co-learners

The EMs' discussions about supporting the ECTs encompassed areas of their own professional learning. The EMs expressed how they had developed their own ability, practice and identity while supporting the MEP ECTs. They discussed changes in their own understandings of teacher inquiry and research:

When it came to the inquiry project (for some of it, this is the third time that we are doing it, others the first), so some of us are pros, in terms of the processes and knowing how to signpost and support. However, I still don't feel comfortable in considering the academic content, and I have always thought of that as the academic's job. I don't have a master's myself, so it feels a bit like who am I to be supporting these teachers with the academic writing of a master's dissertation? I might contradict what Evie says. My role is more the consideration of the practice and what goes into those sections, and the management of the project, but academic writing, no. However, I have learned a lot in the process and continue to learn. The more I work with different teachers on different projects, the next step would be for me to do it myself.

EM 1, Mike, FG 1

The ATs believed there to be a three-way learning process taking place, as illustrated in Kevin's interview:

We are all learning, the teachers are learning about how to inquire into research protocols, the culture of research and their own and what it means to be a teacher-researcher. But the EMs are also being drawn into practitioner research and how to support it through their own action and our interactions, and from this developing experience of supporting teachers in this manner. Many of the EMs will not have completed action research themselves...I get to engage with teachers and practitioners and view my own research from a practice perspective, closer to what is really happening in the classroom, and it improves the way in which I support students and adult learners.

AT 7, Kevin, Interview

Two ECTs commented on this process and reflected that having a mentor provided opportunities for them to obtain support with the process of teacher research, but, at the same time, having a non-expert made it easier to engage.

Always having access to the academic tutor is good but working with the mentor is less intimidating. Its more like I am being guided by someone just ahead of me in the process, rather than someone who is an absolute expert.

ECT 14, Jack, Interview 3

Rachel, an ECT, stated that she learned better '*with* her mentor, rather than *from* her', and that the 'our relationships helps me learn better' as she felt able to make mistakes and learn from them, and this learning was often in conversations with the EM about the feedback from the AT. This was only after developing a strong bond and relationship over a period.

I could say the stupid things and ask the obvious questions and we talked it through together. I never felt stupid and was more likely to ask about things I didn't get, and I was never told the specific answers; it was more like working it out together.

ECT 6, Rachel, Interview 4

This quote demonstrates the core tenet the MEP was designed to encourage, which aligns with the sociocultural perspective that learning in a CoP is not unidirectional and takes place between members of the community, learning from each other in a reciprocal fashion (Fullan 2005).

5.9. Summary

The data presented in this chapter suggested that EMs have been vital in creating a safe Third Space for ECTs to voice their ideas, reflections and notions of teaching without judgement. This space supported the ECTs' agency to consider alternative practices to the dominant cultures in their schools. These safe conceptual and physical spaces were created through pastoral care and support, encouraging ECTs to reflect on their values, morals and ethics, and through the co-construction of ideas and collaboration with the EMs for some aspects of the inquiry project. This opportunity seemed limited in the face of those ECTs in highly performative schools.

In some cases, the EMs achieved aspects of an educative style of mentoring that supported the developing identities of the ECTs. There was also evidence of other, more-transmissive models of mentoring steeped in hierarchy and power relations, with EMs positioned as overbearing helicopter mentors by some ATs. This helicopter metaphor was used in relation to EMs interpreting and reinterpreting feedback, academic advice and support from ATs. This situation was perhaps due to the reduced hours available for AT supervision (five hours) compared with EMs (31 hours). Chapter 6 further considers the role of ATs and how they impact the developing identities of ECTs.

Chapter 6: ‘It was a journey to understanding’: The Role of the Academic Tutor in Supporting Early Career Teachers’ Identities

6.1. Introduction

This chapter considers how ATs supported ECTs in engaging with inquiry and how this impacted ECTs’ developing identities. The chapter documents how ECTs were initially reluctant to engage with their ATs. Barriers to engagement with ATs included the lack of an established relationship, supervision at distance, reduced time for supervision, and apprehension about the ATs’ position as ‘experts’.

Through legitimate peripheral participation, receiving feedback, reflecting on practice and their writing from feedforward and then engaging in further academic writing, the ECTs were able to envision different versions of themselves and their practice. Critical AT feedback generated emotional responses, and these responses, discomfort and tensions prompted the ECTs to reconsider their practice. This chapter discusses the changing ways ECTs understood inquiry, its purpose and process, and how alternative forms of data generation provided them with a more-nuanced view of their teaching and their pupils’ learning.

The chapter also examines how ATs created informal networks of collaboration in sociocultural digital spaces such as WhatsApp. Through these digital means, ATs expanded the range of sociocultural learning taking place through extended, informal forms of the CoP, beyond the barriers of place, space and time in backchannels of learning. The ATs’ use of wider social and culture spaces driven by the ECTs generated a legacy of collaboration that extended beyond the end of the MEP programme.

6.2. Reluctance to engage in research

Twelve out of the 16 ECTs in the focus groups discussed their feelings of uncertainty regarding the expectations for the teacher inquiry project. The ECTs Janet, Kathryn and Ross described 'research' as 'an intimidating concept'. The inquiry project elicited feelings of being 'underprepared' and not 'knowing a lot about research or literature'. These responses follow McLaughlin and Ayubayeva's (2015, p.63) study, in which teachers felt under-skilled and underprepared for teacher inquiry. The size and intensity of a prolonged teacher inquiry project proved a daunting task for the ECTs.

There was a reticence to engage with inquiry that stemmed from 'uncertainty' (Lynette). This aspect is surprising given the engagement with previous assignments on the MEP in small cycles of informal inquiry. The new forms of academic work and skills on the inquiry project were less familiar for the ECTs, and the previous MEP modules seemed to have not prepared them for the deeper methodological and research skills required for the extended inquiry project. The ECTs felt they lacked experience of reviewing literature, methodological design, data generation and analysis, which were not significant areas of focus for the previous modules.

The two one-day learning events for the teacher inquiry module offered opportunities to support the development of these skills in collaborative workshops. The workshops were designed to enable a range of support, not just academic provision, and due to the Welsh Government requirements of the programme to serve a wide variety of purposes some of these elements of the programme may have been diluted. The learning events included elements of collaboration, socialising, pastoral care, and the development of academic understanding. There were expectations from programme that the EMs and ATs could expand on research design methodology and literature and take these aspects further in their EM meetings or supervision after the learning events. The data presented in Section 5.8 suggest that some EMs may not have felt confident in bridging the academic elements of the inquiry project (so this may have been done less successfully), and that the ATs felt

stretched to support the ECTs in their five hours of supervision time across the nine-month project.

Arguably, introducing more-focused research skills, such as data analysis, and smaller literature reviews relevant to teacher inquiry throughout the course could have reduced the learning curve for the ECTs in developing these skills. The MEP programme had limited time to perform many roles. It was required by contract to be a policy vehicle for the Welsh Government, and it needed to develop inquiry skills, knowledge of key priority areas in teaching and learning, literacy and numeracy, how poverty impacts attainment, and additional learning needs. It was also required to support collaborative learning and develop capacity-building and raise national teaching capacity through joint-practice experimentation. Consequently, there may not have been time for ECTs to reflect genuinely and develop skills for inquiry during the module phase while being socialised into the CoP of the MEP, its cultures, ways of working and balancing the challenges of being a busy professional with wider commitments.

Three ECTs (Susan, Kian and Anna) felt more confident with the research process given their prior experiences of study. They described research as being 'experimental', and related to 'proving what works in education' notions more associated with a positivist paradigm:

My research project is going to find a solution for pupils who struggle with QWCs⁹ in Geography, and I will share that with my colleagues. I want to implement my changes in the school and share my research with the consortia, to change that for other learners.

ECT 12, Susan, FG 3

At the start of the inquiry project, the ECTs talked of expecting their intervention to result in a positive correlation of grades and attainment, including indications of quantifiable effects on pupil learning. As ECT Ross stated, 'I would expect my research to show a significant improvement in attainment, otherwise it has not been successful'.

⁹ Quality of written communication: long-answer questions in exams that are usually six marks or longer that assess the written communication ability as well as content knowledge of the learners.

These comments are illustrative of the dominant views of the ECTs that teaching and learning priorities are linked only to positive educational attainment. These views negate the premise of teacher inquiry, which focuses on cycles of understanding pupil needs and learning, and the development of changes to practice that support the needs of learners. This democratic emancipatory approach allowed reflection of learning and teaching, with pupils as partners in their learning and the ECTs' teaching, which informs future cycles of inquiry. The ECTs' views suggested the ECTs did not, at this stage, understand the premise of teacher inquiry, despite working on small cycles of change throughout other assignments. The dominant paradigms of positivist research dominated the ECTs' perspectives and influenced their developing inquiry project, as discussed in Sections 4.2.1 and 5.7.

6.3. Academic Tutor as other: a barrier to engagement

Reticence to engage with ATs was a common theme in discussions with the EMs, ATs and ECTs. Rachel, Ross and Kira (ECTs) were concerned that their AT would highlight their 'inadequacy', or they felt they were an 'imposter' and 'not good enough to be completing their master's dissertation'. In response, EMs Charlotte and Emily described how they would 'encourage' and 'cajole ECTs to share their work, with their tutor', but 'it was not easy to get them to do it'.

This sense of reluctance was articulated by ECTs, including Rachel, who said:

It was difficult at first, I didn't know Evie (AT), she just appeared at a learning event, and I was expected to work with her. I was told I had so many hours of her time, and off we went. I only got to physically meet her twice for short periods of time, so it has taken the whole project to build a relationship with her.

ECT 6, Rachel, Interview 3

Other barriers to engagement with ATs have been discussed in the literature, including school workload, physical distance, timing and fear of not being good enough (McLaughlin and Ayubayeva 2015, p.63). These issues were also raised in the focus groups of the ECTs:

Sharing my work was and is hard and exposing, and at times I didn't feel good enough, but once I had, it really benefitted me, and I wish I had done it sooner.

ECT 9, Ross, Interview 3

The lack of developed relationships between the ECTs and ATs at the start of the teacher inquiry, the nature of supervision at distance, and the short five hours of time for AT supervision may have contributed towards the barriers and delays of ECTs utilising their AT support (see also Scalzo Willson 2018, p.2).

Interviews with the ATs confirmed this perspective, which concerned the challenges of the ECTs opening themselves up to ATs. Some suggested that more time was required to build trust due to an apprehension about the critical nature of the role of ATs regarding feedback on the ECTs' inquiries:

Many of the students didn't engage with me until mid-way through the project. Some of this was due to pressure and time in school, but also, I think, because they didn't know me. However, when they did, there was a realisation that the feedback and discussions were supportive and not judgemental. They had already exposed themselves to the EM, and were over that hurdle and had that relationship, but it took some time with me. Once the students start to send work, they realise that we are useful and that we have a function and a role that isn't about judgement. There is that worry, so they hold off.

AT 3, Evie, AT FG

This view suggests that the lack of established relationships and the perceived social hierarchy of ATs as experts were barriers to engaging with feedback and guidance earlier in the teacher inquiry project. In the focus group, Janet (ECT 2) commented:

Dr Graham is my academic tutor. I sent my ethics to him, and the feedback was critical. I don't want to look at it again.

ECT 2, Janet, FG

This was the first time the ECTs had received formative feedback from an AT. Janet expressed discomfort at the feedback, as she was socialised into new ways of thinking about ethics beyond her current perspectives of what ethics was for. Feedback acts as enculturation into the processes of supervision and practices of the Academic field and ECTs required time to adjust to the critique of their work more directly.

Janet's discomfort may have been due to the individual AT's interactions, personality, or style of feedback. Considering the range of ATs involved with these ECTs, the geographical spread of the ECTs and the range of similarity of feeling among the focus group, I suggest this is not an adequate explanation.

I had the role of AT on the MEP. At the time, I believed that I did my best to ensure I was approachable and not intimidating. It is useful for me to consider in my future practice how my position, role and perceived status

impacted my supervisory relationships. This is not to suggest that these findings would be the same for all ECTs, but for this sample of ECTs there was a general reluctance to engage with ATs.

These delayed opportunities in seeking feedback and support from an academic perspective resulted in delays in the ECTs' reconsideration of their approaches to inquiry. It may also have acted to delay the deep reflections enabled from reciprocal feedback provided by the ECTs' ATs (see Section 6.4). This situation could have been further impacted by some of the EMs not feeling able to step in to support academic guidance in the spaces between supervision.

Janet's, and wider ECTs discomfort with formative feedback points to the challenges of the MEP introducing an AT into a supervisory relationship at a later stage, with reduced hours for supervision. Tensions were created by EMs not being confident in teacher inquiry and academic practice (see Section 5.4), which meant there may have been less support at the start of the process for some ECTs if their EMs were reluctant to engage. This issue highlights the challenges of dividing roles between practice for EMs and research for ATs. As the inquiry project is a crucial phase of the MEP programme, the point at which ATs are utilised, this issue may be worth considering for future programmes.

6.4. Seeing alternative identities: writing and feedback as reflection

There were several discussions about ECTs being supported to consider deeper reflection beyond surface-level approaches to their practice. The MEP used guided-teacher inquiry supported with detailed online learning materials to prompt the ECTs in their thinking about their project. Previous research has documented how these 'modes' of written reflection and undertaking writing, receiving tutor feedback, making sense of feedback and then redrafting, develops deeper reflections about ECT identities (Mann et al. 2009; Mockler and Groundwater-Smith 2015a; Wald 2015).

Reflective writing has been considered a scaffold to teacher reflection that supports practice development through how reflecting and re-experiencing what was done. Pereira, Parente and da Silva (2016, p.616) state that, 'writing about experience extends thinking, allowing thinking about thinking, and this meta-cognitive dimension of writing has a powerful heuristic force....'. Feldman and Bradley (2019) link reflective writing to the teacher inquiry process and claim this writing process is about sense-making in the inquiry and helps the teacher to understand the inquiry processes. These notions were confirmed by Cheryl, an AT.

For some of the teachers, it became about getting them to think about their practice through their writing and reflection. It is much easier to do this through discussion, and getting them to reflect, at times, in the written format, seems alien. They make assumptions that the reader knows what they are discussing or they are vague with their discussion about how they are increasing in confidence, and I say, what does that really mean?

AT 5, Cheryl, AT FG

For Cheryl, the dominant mode of reflection often occurred through verbal formats while engaging in dialogue and conversations. ECTs often lack the time and resources to reflect deeply on practice through discussion and written reflections as tools for considering their own practice and the practice of others.

Written artefacts created by the ECTs for their master's inquiry projects were forms of reflection focusing on different CoPs and, therefore, positioned as boundary objects (Wenger 1998; Akkerman and Bakker 2011). These artefacts had meaning to the ECTs, ATs and EMs and helped group members coordinate their negotiations of the regimes of competence between the CoPs of the MEP and schools and, more specifically, the supervisory triad of ATs, EMs and ECTs. In this respect, ATs could be argued to be acting as brokers for coordinating and supporting ECTs in modes of belonging between their practice and their scholarly writing, incorporating theoretical perspectives (Wenger 1998a; Akkerman and Bakker 2011a).

The feedback from my tutor is different to what I could get from my mentor. More relating my ideas to research and literature, but it really made me question things that I do. Perhaps I should be thinking about other ways of doing them. Sometimes, I was just writing things that filled the pages. The questions in the feedback make me think, yeah you are right (the AT), I am thinking about this in a superficial way, and those are not the reasons.

ECT 9, Ross, Interview 3

An EM, Andrew, also reflected on this process:

The tutors ask questions, I couldn't even think of. They bring their knowledge of practice and research to deepen the reflection. Sometimes, we had to work with the teachers to understand what that meant (feedback), or even to have deep discussion with the teacher, (to understand it) but it really shifted their thinking about themselves.

EM 2, Andrew, Mentor FG 1

Despite the initial reluctance to engage, Lynette pointed out the value she placed on the reflections and feedback from the AT, who supported her to deepen her critical reflections.

Only looking back on this, my tutor, from their feedback, made me think about my teaching and opinions in a different way. I was challenged by my tutor about things that I had always done and thought and asked to question those things. No one had ever really made me do that. Coupled with reflective readings, it made me think differently. It made me think more about my pupils and see things from a pupil perspective, rather from as a teacher.

ECT 13, Lynette, Interview 3

The AT feedback, questioning and ECT-guided reflection deepened the reflections ECTs were able to consider in their inquiry. I argue that through these reflections, the ECTs saw alternative identities, as they were socialised further into practices of the MEP CoP through scaffolded support. By creating the boundary object in collaboration with EMs and ATs, the reflection (both verbal and written), the feedback and practice were forms of mutual engagement and joint enterprise, creating a boundary object that spanned both CoPs. Creating boundary objects (the written reflections, the teacher inquiry sections and teacher inquiry design) that span the CoPs of school and the MEP provided a direct contrast between the regimes of competence of the two CoPs. The ECTs were encouraged to cross boundaries, with ATs and EMs acting as brokers and making explicit links between practice, reflections and the purpose and ideals of teacher inquiry to rethink practice in school and see it in a different way, imagining a future self who develops aspects of their (ECTs) practice. The ATs provided deep critiquing so that the ECTs could question taken-for-granted assumptions about their own practice.

Master's level academic writing creates expectations around structures and formats that are not solely focused on reflection and developing practice. In Section 4.2., I was critical of some of the ECTs' schools for fostering teaching and learning that legitimated standardised practices related to outcomes. It is also difficult to move away from some of these elements in the practices of the EMs and ATs in higher education. These reifications and boundary objects that act as evidence for learning are graded and must, therefore, serve the expected legitimated priorities of a master's level teacher inquiry project on the MEP. This includes the expectations of how it should be structured, written and reflected on to 'pass'. Thus, it could be argued in the supportive relationships formed the critique, reflections and feedback may have been coached and skewed to ensure the 'correct' aspects in the final documents are presented for the markers, and for the programme outcomes. This point raises some of the challenges of having graded master's level professional learning with a dual purpose. On the one hand, the system is about professional learning, but, on the other hand, it became about fulfilling the requirements to pass a course. In parallel to the 'old

timers' of school CoP, the ATs acted to legitimate certain formats and forms of reflections and modes of theory geared towards areas dominant on the MEP, and around higher education Masters degrees at a Russell group university; thus, reproducing and supporting these conventions. Everyone on the MEP wanted their students to pass. Some ECTs did not pass, and that was fine, and expected; perhaps this led to a narrowed form of standardised teacher inquiry that fitted a particular mould or vision of teacher inquiry perceived by Welsh Government, a Russell group university, or the reinterpreted vision of the ATs.

I reflected on whether some of those supported, guided reflections were truly the views of the ECTs or whether they were in some ways fabricated to fit into the MEP CoP. After all, the ECTs and the ATs and EMs were also very invested in the ECTs gaining their master's qualification, and not just the professional learning precipitated through the process. As discussed in Section 3.1., these reflections on ECTs structured formulaic evaluations of their development guided my decision to remove the ECTs' written reflections as a data source for analysis in this study. Again, aware of my own practice of critiquing the ECTs' reflection to deepen their submissions, I questioned whether I had really achieved this or developed their understanding of the relationship between theory and practice, which was reflected in their writing. Perhaps the ECTs had reflected on my comments and read into what I wanted written and developed their responses to match the brief of the project outcomes. I suspect in terms of their written reflection producing a document for submission, this was a combination of both approaches, and that this was part of the ATs' role in enabling legitimate peripheral participation in the MEP CoP. In the moment, perhaps these changes were made by ECTs, to align to the expectations of ATs, MEP, markers to provide a standardised reflection on their inquiry, and at times seemed to be tailored towards expectations, rather than genuine reflections with significant overlaps between each ECT (this may have been due to the overly structured sections on reflects in the module guidance), so as a precaution this data was removed.

The ECTs accounts in their interviews seemed to portray it was only upon completion of the entire inquiry project and with opportunity of deeper

reflections about the entire process, their shifts understanding occurred. This I would argue led to more widespread changes around their values and beliefs of the impact of teacher inquiry (see Section 6.9.).

6.5. Seeing alternative identities: alternative morals, ethics and values of being a teacher

There was a shift in the opinions of the ECTs regarding the ethics and values of teaching from the start of the inquiry process (during the focus groups) through to the final interviews held at the end of the projects.

Ethics were constructed during the focus groups by the ECTs as a gateway process, something the ECTs had to 'get through' (Mark) or 'pass' (Phoebe) as an 'obstacle or hurdle' (Ayla) to get underway with their project. There was a lack of critical reflection and consideration of ethics, morals and values and how they impact 'being' and 'doing' teaching and learning – and the effect these ethics and virtues had on supporting learners. Moral identity and the concept of self as a dynamic construction have been linked to overall teacher identity (Hardy and Carlo 2011; Jeong and Han 2013; Bryan and Burstow 2018). As Husu and Tirri (2003, p.347) point out, moral and ethical identity discloses 'our being and action at a given time and place'.

The language in the ECTs' reflections on ethics provided insights into how they viewed the subject at the start of their inquiry projects. Some of the ECTs engaged with their understanding of ethics to write an ethics form to start collecting data for their inquiry projects. Some of these views were captured during the focus group.

It seems irrelevant; I get to choose what happens to my pupils in my class, so what is the point of me getting a form signed off from the university who don't know me, my pupils, or what my teaching is about?

ECT 3, Mark, FG 1

The ECTs articulated ethics in terms of the initial 'application form' for the university. This is not a surprising finding as the majority of ECTs would have completed their ethics forms at the time of the focus groups and were then waiting to be signed off by the Ethics Sub-Committee.

Susan, an ECT, discussed how she had 'failed' her ethics when she received feedback on her application. She was worried about her project not being

able to move forward. This highlights how courses and, more specifically, the MEP positioned ethics as a bureaucratic, static and finite affair, but also how the ECTs viewed ethics in relation to practice and research. This point was further articulated by Gabriella:

We don't have to get sign-off from an ethics committee in school for what we teach, so it seems a strange way to start our project, and I don't see why as professionals we need this when we are governed by professional standards.

ECT 16, Gabriella, FG 3

As in Gabriella's account, there is evidence that some ECTs did not see the relevance of ethics to their practice, to the profession or to their research, despite having engaged in discussions about ethics throughout the course in careful professional dialogue opportunities, readings and reflections.

Regarding the data generated across the teacher inquiry, there was a shift in some of the ECTs' perceptions of ethics, which was evident when interviewing the ECTs at the end of the inquiry process. In contrast to my assertions in Section 6.4. on the written artefacts and reflections for submission being skewed for marking, the ECTs reflected that their changes in perspectives were prompted by feedback from their ATs, which was then further used to deepen conversations with their EMs.

As ECT Lynette reflected:

Going through the ethics process, and getting feedback, was hard. I didn't see what was wrong with what I had written. Even after reading BERA [referring to British Education Research Association ethics], and what is his name...erm Alders. You know, who I mean. I thought at the time people in school are doing their master's in education using that sort of experimental method (*clarified this was with the participant that this was a comparative method with one class as a control and the other involved in an intervention*), so it made feel think why couldn't I? Looking back now, I don't know what I was thinking.

ECT 13, Lynette, Interview 3

Lynette thought about her students in a new way, as illustrated in Figure 5, which contains a section of Lynette's initial ethics form for the inquiry. In the application, she uses language that does not match the social view of ethics regarding pupils as partners. Lynette, in her interviews at the end of the inquiry, articulated that she recognised that, rather than experimenting on

research subjects, she was actively working with participants. This shift resonated with how participants and children and young people, have been reframed in the new sociology of childhood and policy initiatives to do research 'with' and not 'on' children (Mannay et al. 2019). It is interesting to note that Lynette mentioned colleagues who had undertaken more-traditional forms of a master's in education that utilised a more-comparative method, with learners/colleagues/participants as subjects to be tested. She initially framed herself in comparison to them, further highlighting how the ECTs position themselves, behaviours and practice in terms of others within their CoP.

Sophie, another ECT, discussed the process of gaining ethics consent as 'hard and confusing to begin with'. This is consistent with research that has claimed moral and ethical reflection can be difficult for teachers (Willemse et al. 2008; Bruster and Peterson 2013), despite teaching being often seen as a moral and ethical career.

Lynette's initial discussion of ethics suggested it was 'irrelevant to my practice' as 'being ethical is part of the teacher standards'. This view mirrors research that has revealed teachers, at times, lack a nuanced moral understanding of how research practices around ethics relates to their teaching practice and ethical and moral obligations (Bergem 1992; Sockett and LePage 2002). This is also reminiscent of some of the findings of Bryan and Burstow (2018) on their study of research ethics in school-based research. This finding could be attributed to some of restrictive regimes of performativity, as argued in Section 4.2.

There were clashes of perspectives between ECTs regarding the command-and-control role of teaching, pupil voice and pupils as partners. These contrasting perspectives were noted in the draft-ethics forms of participants, on which, despite considering some of the ethical protocols, such as informed consent and pupils as partners, the language used suggested that pupils 'would be made to participate', as seen on Lynette's ethics form (see Figure 5). This phrase perhaps exemplifies a clash between the social and power dynamics that exist in a classroom, and the democratic, rights-driven ethics of educational research (Mannay et al. 2019). Reflecting as a previous

AT, this positioning of researcher and research subject was typical of the vast majority of first drafts of ethics forms on which I provided feedback to not only prompt reflection, but also to prompt ECTs to engage in further discussion with myself and the EMs.

- b) What is the nature of your classroom intervention?
How will you ensure there will be no potential harm to participants in your inquiry (for example ensuring that any change you make is applied to the whole class rather than a group of students in that class). *(What sort of changes you are thinking of making and why you think this will be an improvement on existing practice.)*

The change I am considering is to **make** the children undertake different activities, so they are **forced to use** their skills through active mathematics lessons. I aim to develop a series of activities that **will** engage active mathematics in lessons which **will cause** the pupils to improve their number bonds to twenty. I will deliver the active math lessons **to half of the class**, and undertake my usual methods **with the other half**, supported by teaching assistants. I believe this inquiry project will cause no harm to the children in my class.

Figure 5: Extract from Initial Ethics Form – ECT Lynette

Moral and ethical identity can be flexible and dynamic and shift over time (Mockler 2015). Through the inquiry project, there was evidence of the ECTs' moral and ethical perspectives shifting. If the ECTs were in schools in which reductive forms of teaching and learning were driven by their performative agenda, arguably, the school CoP could have influenced the ECTs' morals and ethics, and the morals and ethics of teachers have been attributed to organisational culture in previous studies (Weaver 2006, pp. 347–351). Performative schools foster cynical and demoralising school cultures and can negatively impact the moral and ethical identities of teachers (Ball 2009). In contrast, research by Sanger and Osguthorpe (2011, p.576) suggests that schools with ethically committed teachers and in which open, professional learning is being engaged foster 'critical and ethical self-awareness'.

Both ATs and EMs discussed the challenges of supporting the ECTs to embrace a more ethical and moral approach to teacher inquiry. As AT Lewis explained:

It took long discussions and detailed feedback to get the teachers to consider it (ethics). At the beginning, I felt that the teachers still didn't get it, they just changed it (ethics form) because we were telling them they wouldn't get ethical clearance. I believe the real shift took place when they started reading about data collection in more depth and designing their tools. And, in some cases, it took until the end of the project for the teachers to go, oh I get it, this is about safeguarding and doing what is 'right', and about causing no harm. The pupils are partners with me on this research, they have rights and I have a duty of care not only as a teacher but also as a researcher. It was a challenge getting them to consider both aspects at the same time.

AT 6, Lewis, AT FG

The ECTs also disclosed tensions in their own values and the values of data-driven approaches:

I see things differently now at the end of the project. For example, looking back about ethics, I was seeing things as a teacher who had always done things a specific way, never really perceived my power as a teacher to force students to do things, even just thinking about ethics and the impact on the decisions I make in my classroom for the pupils. I can't imagine thinking like I used to.

ECT 12, Lynette, Interview 4

I didn't get ethics, I thought it was just paperwork for research that I had to do. This was actually to do with my morals and attitudes to learners and doing the right thing, despite being told perhaps to do the opposite in school.

ECT 9, Ross, Interview 4

I felt my feedback around ethics was harsh and personal, raising questions about assumptions I had made about my teaching and my learners. It made me think hard about my pupils. To be fair it annoyed me and I vented at my mentor. But I might not agree at the moment, but the feedback has prompted discussions with my mentor. We have had some deep conversation, I wouldn't have had otherwise.

ECT 3, Mark, FG 2

Mark highlighted the effect of AT feedback on ethics, which posits 'unwelcome truths' (Mockler and Groundwater-Smith 2015a), questioning and challenging Mark's assumptions. This critical reflection engendered

Hardy and Lewis' (2017) 'double think', and created an emotional response. The example highlights the role of moral and ethical learning in developing the ECTs' moral identities (Sockett and LePage 2002) and that, as Clarke (2009, p.195) highlighted, 'identity work and ethics are inextricably linked to the operation of critique'.

The questions posed by Mark's AT caused him anger and annoyance and is an indicator of competing ideals, which acted as a catalyst for what Meijers (2002, p.158) would consider discursive meaning-giving. During this interpersonal process, Mark attempted to connect a sense of self, perhaps from competing notions, through processing new information and participation through 'finding – together with others – the concepts that give an explanation that is logically and emotionally satisfactory for all involved in this dialogue' Meijers (2002, p.158). This view aligns with a study by Solis and Gordon (2020), in which teachers were analysing beliefs and behaviours with critical friends and colleagues. The emotions and discomfort provided a means to stimulate a change in the teachers' perspectives. The researchers demonstrated when participants evoked emotion. Often, the emotional response was an indicator that the teacher had realised that they may have lost touch with the purposes and passions for moral teaching and acted as a catalyst for re-evaluation.

I argue that such feedback from the AT supported a more-critical response from the ECT. It was the distance of the AT being outside the close relationship of the EM and ECT, that amplified the emotional responses. Therefore, the AT did not disrupt the close relationship of EM and ECT but prompted critique and discursive meaning-giving, which facilitated and prompted moral and ethical identity work. This approach demonstrates a benefit to the distance that existed between the ECT and the AT, compared with the closeness of the ECT and the EM.

6.6. Seeing alternative identities: paradigm shift in the nature of research

The EMs contemplated the considerable challenge of supporting wider research skills and knowledge, especially in relation to ECTs' developing notions of methodology and the design of the inquiry projects. Emily, an EM, pointed out that she felt the ECTs were 'underprepared from previous modules for this':

I think the biggest hurdle mine faced (the ECTs) was they have no grounding in research methodology.

EM 4, Claire, EM FG 1

Despite the ECTs utilising small cycles of inquiry in previous module assignments and having engaged in module materials that supported reflection on inquiry, some EMs still felt the ECTs were not prepared. This view suggests that the ECTs did not fully conceptualise inquiry in the small cycles in the module assignments despite participating in six prior to the inquiry project. Arguably, it required a prolonged, nine-month inquiry project that fully utilised a range of academic and research skills for the ECTs to understand the nature of inquiry.

The lack of conceptualisation could be attributed to a diluting of the focus of inquiry in the six modules' assessments in Years 1 and 2 of the programme. Arguably, this dilution occurred because of the careful balance and tensions regarding the requirement to deliver contractually the Welsh Government policy foci while balancing those requirements with the need to embed criticality, questioning and not taking policy as a taken-for-granted requirement. Accordingly, the challenge of integrating academic skills that promoted critical, autonomous professionals developed by the alliance of HEIs delivering the programme versus the requirement to consider mandated, top-down, more-performative views of policy, provided tensions. For example, there was a requirement to deliver the policy foci of 2012 educational changes, such as literacy and numeracy and how poverty impacts attainment. As such, any focus on 'inquiry' may have been lost (see Section 4.2.1).

They haven't got a clue where action research is coming from. They don't know what makes good research. They don't know the 'in's and out's' of the methods. So, they were finding it hard to frame a problem and were always thinking 'how can I measure it?' That was a big obstacle. So, I've spent a lot of time talking about research methodology, paradigms. A lot of mine wanted something they could do, 'we'll test them, we'll do the intervention, and we'll test them again and we'll get X percent of pupils now perform[ing] at Level Y better than before' kind of research.

EM 1, Mike, EM FG 1

The consideration of qualitative data collection and the challenges to the ECTs considering it were problematised by some of the EM in focus group. The EMs felt that a large proportion of the ECTs did not know what to do with qualitative data, and their schools' data were predominantly quantitative.

The majority of teachers don't know how to collect qualitative data and how it can be used. There is the feeling that [it] is not good enough, or it is bad data compared to statistics and numbers, this strange perversion that we can only understand teaching and learning through numbers and figures, which is worrying.

EM 3, Jane, EM FG 1

The EMs could see a change in the ECTs' understanding during the learning events when talking to their colleagues, seeing the different perspectives and qualitative data generated:

And the idea of when they met up with other MEP students and they talked about the reconnaissance interviews, that was like a light going on in a lot of people's heads, going, 'Ah, that's how we can identify it, that's how we understand learning is taking place, by observing, and speaking to the pupils and making them partners in this process'. This was a monumental shift.

EM 4, Claire, EM FG 1

The analysis and engagement with how the data could be interpreted and utilised, the cognitive conflict, misunderstanding and challenge that came from drafting and redrafting, and working with the EM and AT to support discursive sense-making (Meijer 2002) were all an important area of the MEP.

Evie, an AT, pointed out that, 'collecting the data at the beginning of the project, versus synthesising meaning, undergoing the coding process, and getting to know their data more intimately has supported a change in them'.

The learning-event coding activities were not well timed, and this was lost and forgotten. Feedback and collaboration and working with examples to understand what they needed to do with it was the clincher.

EM 5, Charlotte, EM FG

Mike, an EM, stated, '70% of mine have tried to put a graph or meaningless table into their results, despite us highlighting pupil voice as the priority'.

Often, those who completely misunderstood the concept of the teacher inquiry being predominantly qualitative to prioritise the experiences of the ECTs, their learners and teaching and learning in their classrooms had the largest shift in understanding. From my own experiences, many ECTs initially attempted to take a quantitative approach followed by a qualitative one, utilising graphs and statistics to explore pupils' learning. The learning event acted to consolidated coding with both ECTs and EMs (who had little to no research experience) for those that felt confident enough to do so they could mediate this later with their mentees:

The teachers struggle with the qualitative data until they get into the thick of analysing it and get close to it.

AT 4, Beatrice, AT FG

During early analysis, the draft-data analysis included graphs and statistics about the pupils and learning, and very little qualitative data...the teachers were uncomfortable and didn't know what to do with their qualitative data, it was a journey to understanding.

Senior Mentor 1, Mags, AT FG

Feedback on my draft work was to the point. I would take it quite personally and feel emotional, and come away thinking either I can't do this, I don't understand. Really, I just needed to think about things more, but I didn't always have time. It meant looking at research and thinking, and I didn't always want to do this. If I'm honest I also think I was protecting myself from seeing things a different way. So it took a while.

ECT 14, Jack, Interview 4

The ECTs discussed having to 'find the space' to engage with the project during pressurised term times. In reference to data analysis, Rachel commented that this task was 'one that took [a] considerable amount of time, and I had to do this in the summer to get my head around it, even then I got it wrong to start with'. Similarly, Ross used his summer holiday period to focus on analysing data, despite collecting them in May:

I did my analysis in the holidays and contacted my tutor for help. They said start with the voice of the pupils about their learning, let their voice come through and tell the reader about their learning, and write around this with other data collected to tell the story of what is coming out of my data from my analysis.

ECT 9, Ross, Interview 3

I expected to just be able to write my data analysis, but my tutor said it will take time, and drafting and returning to back and fore to the data, and that I should ensure that I had a chunk of time.

ECT 6, Rachel, Interview 3

Jack, an ECT, stated 'that if only I had known what I knew at the end of the project at the beginning, it would be easy.' This view demonstrates a shift in understanding of how to conduct inquiry, and that going through the process itself was a socialisation into teacher inquiry. In addition, Jack commented:

I didn't appreciate the power of speaking to the pupils and really considering what was happening in my classroom from observations. Reflecting on this data has made me see things in my class that were always there but I had never noticed.

ECT 14, Jack, Interview 4

The ECTs, through the guided process of inquiry, were encouraged and socialised in the CoP of the MEP and academic skills that supported their teacher inquiry through criticality, engagement with literature, alternative forms of data analysis, and deeper reflections guided by ATs. The data suggest that the ECTs needed to move through, undertake and then reflect on the process of conducting the teacher inquiry to conceptualise fully its significance to their own practice, to their learners, and, thus, to their identities.

6.7. Academic Tutors forming wider sociocultural spaces to cross boundaries

The AT supervised ECTs at a distance, with much of the communication with the ECTs taking place through email exchanges, phone and Skype meetings, as well as written feedback being provided on submitted sections of the project. The EMs were assigned so they were more geographically local to the ECTs and were able to meet physically in one-to-ones and small groups. The ATs occupied online virtual spaces and groups to encourage collaboration and communication, restricted by only five hours of supervisory time.

Two ATs articulated their use of tools such as WhatsApp as an informal way of checking in with ECTs, which was more immediate than an email. Group emails often disseminated information that might be timely and useful at a given moment and based on feedback from a section of the inquiry project. It was discussed by ECTs in focus groups due to time pressures that emails sometimes were not read and they did not allow collaboration as easily as formats such as a group chat on WhatsApp.

These two ATs utilised a pattern of formal and informal contact to maintain momentum with the ECTs. Keeping in contact with the ECTs enabled further support and sharing ideas that prompted the ECTs' thinking. This approach also led to further discussions taking place between the ECTs, which could be supported. Ross, an ECT, commented on the importance of these contacts:

The WhatsApp group was so useful. University emails, I wouldn't check all the time, but having my tutor at the end of the phone...a quick message to him, and a problem that could have stalled me for days was sorted, or if he didn't get back to me straight away, one of the other teachers had their own spin on it, and it was more often than not, very helpful.

ECT 9, Ross, Interview 4

When considering what these 'spaces' were used for, the ECTs talked about the importance of these informal meeting opportunities and their ability to communicate without barriers in their hectic professional lives (Ross et al.

2011). The spaces provided a continuous opportunity to share and exchange divergent experiences, resources, literature and ideas about their developing research at any moment and at times that fitted around the ECTs' schedules (without having to login), and in momentary sections of time, as Ross joked, 'on the toilet'. Ross continued:

Without Logins, or access to a PC...it was more flexible, on the go, dipping in out at any time but always having the support of the 'learning group and my tutor in my pocket'

ECT 9, Ross, Interview 4

In this study, the ECTs described WhatsApp as a positive tool that helped extend the sociocultural reach of the programme beyond the barriers of work, home, time and place. However, Bouhnik and Deshen (2014, p.57) postulated that using WhatsApp can lead to reduced autonomy and agency of learners in an educational context. The suggested ease of reaching out for support and the immediacy created what they describe as the 'here and now responses', denying learners the opportunities to wrestle with their uncertainty themselves (Bouhnik and Deshen 2014, p.57).

It is important to note that not all ATs used this approach; some used a blend of communication platforms:

I supported the teachers utilising email, and they would not always read or take in the content. So, I took a double approach: formal feedback and collective reminders, tips in emails. Then, quick updates, and 'have you thought about' WhatsApp messages. It also meant that I could see who was reading the messages and then follow up with those that were not.

AT 2, John, Interview 2

I argue that by taking this approach, the ATs utilising WhatsApp channels expanded the social learning taking place on the MEP by forming online CoPs between the ECTs and ATs, and between the ECTs themselves.

I spoke to the other teachers in my learning group on WhatsApp. We would also communicate one on one. Anything relevant that was important would be shared by the AT on the WhatsApp group so that we could all benefit. It helped us work together, and we definitely shared our ideas, especially when we didn't understand, or were stressed.

ECT 12, Susan, Interview 4

With the integration of social media in life and education, the concept of a communication 'back channel' has emerged in both online and face-to-face learning environments (Kearns and Frey 2010).

Kearns and Frey (2010, p.41) describe a backchannel as 'a network of out-of-class dialogues among students'. The use of social media tools that are free and accessible and, with the control and remit of the learners, they are suitable for extending dialogue beyond the teaching and learning space and time. With online or blended learners who are geographically dispersed, as is the case with the MEP ECTs, such communication may become a vital option in building connectedness that more formalised and less accessible options, such as blackboard communities, cannot provide.

We still keep in touch on the Inquiry WhatsApp group, even though we have finished. I think we are a group for life now, and WhatsApp makes it easy to stay in touch. I set up a transition project with two other teachers from different schools, and we are hoping to do some more teacher inquiry together.

ECT 12, Susan, Interview 4

This view is consistent with the findings of Bouhnik and Deshen (2014) regarding students using WhatsApp on their course, who continued to use it in an informal manner after graduation, highlighting the informal nature of the collaboration and communication and the democratic space owned by the students themselves, fostering CoPs. This point suggests that through their teaching and learning choices, by setting-up informal and longer-term professional collaboration, the ATs can foster wider CoPs beyond the MEP course (Unwin 2017). This aspect seems vital to the legacy of a programme such as the MEP. These extended networks of collaboration and practice, whether informal or formal, last, despite the end of the formalised learning process. This is important because when the MEP ceased, for these ECTs no formal collaboration or structured interaction remained and support structures stopped.

6.8. 'The red pill or blue pill' – awakenings, the realities of being a teacher

A theme among the ECTs was that of an 'awakening' (Rachel) or 'not being able to unsee, after the MEP' (Lynette). Ross, an ECT, described the experience by using an analogy of the film *The Matrix*, alluding to the MEP programme and inquiry

being like Morpheus offering Neo the red or blue pill. Without knowing what the consequence would be, I have taken the red pill, and I suppose I see the realities of being a teacher in my school, before now I was just existing without seeing what was going on.

ECT 9, Ross, Interview 4

The MEP, with its structured support from learning events through EMs' deep mentoring relationships and AT provision, was described as a supportive and emotional crutch by Rachel. This view was echoed by three other ECTs during interviews.

I didn't want this to end. The MEP has been my lifeline, and Yvette (mentor), without her I don't know where I would be. I'm not sure where or what to do next, and I'm not sure if I can get through this without the MEP.

ECT, Rachel, Interview 4

Rachel conveyed how the MEP provided a support network for ECTs, many of whom were working in challenging schools and conditions. After three years, this temporary support structure ended. The ECTs suggested that they felt more empowered after undertaking the inquiry projects and engaging with the MEP. This finding is consistent with Conolly et al. (2018) in their large-scale study of MEP student agency and inquiry, indicating they had been supported through the challenging initial years of entering the profession. However, post-MEP ECTs were thrown immediately into an environment without support. I argue that some, specifically the four ECTs involved in the interviews in this study, were in challenging environments and had become dependent on the MEP's support for survival in their school contexts.

As previously discussed (see Section 5.3), some EMs were described by ATs as helicopter mentors, and the MEP had provided ECTs with deep support but not with any mechanisms to support a transition to complete autonomy, especially for those in challenging schools. As such, the school environments that some ECTs were in made them dependent on the MEP as their sole support structure. This situation might have been what led to some EMs acting as helicopter mentors for continued structured support that some vulnerable ECTs required to survive in their schools. This is a complex issue, as the ECTs suggested they feel more empowered and agentic but, at the same time, need the support of a structure like the MEP to survive three years into the teaching profession. This factor points to some of the difficult and toxic environments that ECTs contend with in the profession.

This point did not go unnoticed by the ATs on the programme, as John reflected:

I do worry what we have set the teachers up for. Sometimes not knowing is easier than the battling against the challenges they will face in their schools.

AT 2, John, Interview

John drew out the perspective mirrored by some ECTs and EMs – that by doing the MEP, the ECTs were made aware of the disadvantages, challenges and tensions of a system over which they have very little control.

These tensions are difficult to ratify without support, and I argue that they may have led to some of the ECTs in very demanding schools either leaving the profession or taking the path of least resistance to follow the dominant cultures.

In the AT interviews, Kevin took this perspective further, considering the challenge of the frameworks of support and reflection on the MEP, which are then taken away.

Some of these teachers are in difficult school contexts, when the mentors and staff on the MEP have supported these teachers for three years, and then it has come to end. I am worried what happens to them, with no mentor, no MEP?

AT 7, Kevin, Interview

The MEP CoP dissolved for the ECTs at the end of the programme, and it had been hoped that they would have been imbued with the knowledge, practices and discourse skills that the MEP legitimated and perpetuated. When faced with the dominant discourses of other CoPs in challenging situations, the ECTs, without the support of the MEP CoP, without re-engaging with the dialogue, discourse and generating boundary artefacts, are much more likely to be re-enculturated into the school CoP cultures and practices. The path of least resistance leads ECTs to seek out the school CoP and move from the periphery through greater participation in encultured school practices; thus, returning to ways of being and doing teaching that are more acceptable to schools.

This seems a bleak perspective; however, as discussed in the previous section, some of the ECTs seemed as if they were looking to replicate and recreate the MEP CoP in local contexts, including supporting others, which bodes well for how they saw their future trajectories and finding ways to influence practices in their schools covertly. It would be beneficial to follow up these ECTs three or four years later and to consider their teaching trajectories and what happened next.

6.9. Replicating the Master's of Educational Practice Community of Practice

Among the final interviews, and on completion of the inquiry project, the ECTs seemed to be at a loss. With feelings of uncertainty, they conveyed an attitude of 'what next?' The ECTs had spent three years forging deep relationships with their EMs and other ECTs at schools far removed from their own teaching context.

I can't believe it is all finished, it has gone by really quickly, and I am going to miss the learning events, chatting to colleagues and friends about teaching, and about research. My meetings with Julia (mentor), I am not sure where I will be and what I will do? I'm hoping to keep in touch with her. I feel bad for those people that don't or didn't have an MEP. It would be good to set up something like this in my school, a journal club, or informal mentoring, perhaps where I can support and mentor NQTs.

ECT 9, Ross, Interview 4

Ross was not alone in articulating a desire to replicate aspects of the MEP CoP. I argue that the mourning phase of the end of the MEP sparked the ECTs to consider how the MEP CoP could be sustained or replicated, or an attempt made to foster supportive networks for themselves and others in a like-minded community.

Lynette (ECT 13) talked of utilising the informal networks that had been formed through WhatsApp (discussed in Section 6.7) and keeping in touch with the learning-event group of ECTs she had been working with for the past three years. She commented,

the 14 of us (ECTs in the learning-event groups collaborating for the past three years) are hoping to meet up regularly to share ideas and practice. A mini learning event, perhaps with wine. We also have WhatsApp, too, so I think we will all keep in touch and use that as a way of keeping the group alive, as a few of us are so far from each other.

ECT 13, Lynette Interview 4

Susan (ECT 12) spoke of trying to find someone to step into the role of her EM, and to continue a mentor/mentee relationship, but she outlined the

challenges of finding someone she trusted and who aligned with the wider vision of education she had developed on the MEP.

I want to take Jane (EM) with me. She has become a friend and it feels like losing a limb. I know that our relationship will not be the same as the MEP has finished, but I hope she stays in contact. There is an assistant head in work who has a similar perspective to me, she was in the first cohort of the MEP, and I am going to approach her to see if she will continue to mentor me.

Ultimately, I want to do for others what the MEP has done for me, and I would love to mentor some NQTs, so that I can support them in the way I was supported (she laughs), a mini-MEP.

ECT 12, Susan, Interview 4

The MEP was designed with the notion of encouraging system-wide professional learning in Wales (see Section 1.3.) with the hope of directly influencing the cohorts of ECTs enrolled on the programme, 15% of the total teaching profession over the three cohorts of newly qualified teachers (NQTs; Hadfield, Connolly, Barnes and Snook 2017). Ultimately, a wider impact of up to 30% of teacher population in Wales was speculated, as it had been hoped ECTs would draw on the collaboration and support from practitioners in their schools, disseminating practice, perspectives and dispositions through joint-practice development.

The ECTs discussed wanting to develop and perpetuate the collaborative practices and discourses of the MEP. This suggests an alignment with the regime of competence of the MEP CoP and indicates the ECTs' desire for more-expansive, democratic forms of education. There is tentative evidence of a lack of support for some ECTs in some schools. Arguably, there is a need for more-developed support at various levels of the profession to foster the changes that the Welsh Government envisaged the MEP would deliver, not only for ECTs undertaking the MEP, but also for teachers more widely.

6.10. Summary

There was a reluctance on the part of the ECTs to engage in teacher inquiry due to feelings of being underprepared, or due to prior experiences of research informing their mis/understanding of inquiry. The ECTs misunderstood inquiry when starting their projects but demonstrated a shift in understanding through being involved in longer cycles of inquiry. This change indicated that small-scale cycles of inquiry in previous module assignments did not sufficiently support the ECTs' understandings, dispositions or skills as intended. The ECTs described the ATs as 'other', as outsiders, which further provided barriers to their engagement in seeking support and feedback in the early phases of their inquiry project. This gap in support was not always filled by the EMs, who had more time for support but felt unqualified or uncomfortable with academic content. This issue points to the limitation of EMs' practice and the need for the deep, authentic professional learning of EMs regarding teacher inquiry. The ATs entering a supervisory relationship between EM and ECT at a later point in the programme highlights the challenges of distance supervision on reduced hours.

At the end of the process, the ECTs reported the importance of the critical feedback of ATs in supporting alternative reflections about their practice. Through engaging in writing and feedback, the ECTs were able to envision alternative identities and unpick taken-for-granted assumptions about their teaching and pupils' learning. The EMs and ECTs pointed out a notable shift in the ECTs' identities in relation to ethics, morals and perspectives on research and qualitative data and how this informed their practice. Through critical feedback from ATs, which resulted in emotional discussions with EMs, the ECTs had to deal with uncomfortable realities about how they viewed themselves, how they understood performance and success in the learning of their pupils, and their relationships to their learners. I argue that, through these difficult and emotional reactions to feedback, and the resulting discussions with EMs, the ECTs were able to unpick taken-for-granted

assumptions about themselves, their practice and their future trajectories of what it means to be a teacher.

Finally, in this chapter, the ECTs expressed how the ATs expanded their sociocultural learning via informal networks by utilising WhatsApp. This online collaborative area transcended place, space and time, which allowed collaboration between ATs and groups of ECTs beyond their two learning events on the nine-month teacher inquiry project and supported wider networks beyond the MEP.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Key Messages

7.1. Introduction

This research provided an insight into how the MEP teacher inquiry project and the roles of ATs and EMs supported development in the professional identities of ECTs in this study. This final chapter sets out the key findings in relation to the central research questions. The chapter considers the overarching context of performativity and its interaction with the ECTs' developing identities and make recommendations to inform future policy and practice. The literature is considered in relation to what this study offers to the existing body of research. The chapter also offers an overview of the limitations of this study and make suggestions for practice and future research. The chapter ends with a final conclusion and a call for consideration of the support for ECTs in Wales, as well as a caution about the uncritical adoption of teacher inquiry in schools.

The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

- What role do EMs play in engendering changes in the professional identities of ECTs?
- In what ways do ATs support the development of professional identities in ECTs?
- How does undertaking a teacher enquiry project on the professional identities of ECTs?

7.2. Summary of Key Research findings

7.2.1. Welsh schools: lack of support for Early Career Teachers

The influence of the Welsh school environment on the support of professional learning and the identities of the participants in this study was an important consideration. Sociocultural theory recognises that ECTs do not exist in a vacuum; the interplay of their school, the political and social background, and their engagement with professional learning were highly relevant to understanding the ECTs' developing professional identities during the inquiry project.

Despite this being a small-scale research project drawing on a geographical spread of ECTs from various phases of education, there was a large consensus from the ECTs, as well as from their ATs and EMs, that the support available to them in schools was, at best, variable and aligned to a performative agenda and, at worst, non-existent. Although this study took place between 2016 and 2017, Waters (2020) has since documented the widespread lack of support available to ECTs in Wales, which is in keeping with the findings of this study. This point illustrates the pervasiveness of these issues. The ECTs in this study discussed their survivalist strategies (Tickle 2000) in response to being 'othered' by colleagues in school, especially due to their affiliation with the MEP. The political issues related to school resources for professional learning being redirected to fund the MEP further acted to 'other' the MEP ECTs, as some senior leaders and colleagues articulated their frustrations directly to the ECTs in micropolitical aggressions.

Part of the survival strategy of ECTs in this study was attempting to fit in and 'fabricate' becoming a more-centralised member of their school CoP. This technique was achieved by replicating the dominant discourses, practices, artefacts and modes of being and doing teaching in their school. This approach allowed some ECTs to feel less marginalised by colleagues but led to a hybridisation of their identities. This enculturation into the performativity

agenda influenced ECTs' conceptions of what it meant to be a teacher, how they imagined themselves in possible futures, and how they engaged in professional learning.

Some ECTs in the study faced a clash of cultures and divergent regimes of competence between two CoPs: the MEP and their schools. The MEP was designed to disrupt normative practices in schools, to initiate change from the bottom up, to develop collaborative interactions with colleagues, to consider expansive forms of professional learning, and to reconsider the social justice view of education and teaching. Additionally, it sought to empower ECTs to develop their own knowledge creation through developing local knowledge with pupils as partners, and to initiate change in the Welsh education system.

Consequently, ECTs were confronted with conflicts and tensions in relation to their desire to reject some practices, beliefs and ideals from their school CoP in favour of the alternative perspectives developed during the MEP, but while remaining embedded in the school CoP.

Nonetheless, the MEP CoP supported the development of an alternative, shared repertoire, engagement and alignment between ECTs on the MEP, their EMs and ATs. This enabled the ECTs to consider alternative perspectives and ways of being and doing and 'becoming' a teacher, beyond the vision of what it meant to be a teacher in their own schools. This change posed challenges to the ECTs in an education system in which autonomy and agency are limited, and in which many ECTs are employed on temporary contracts, unlike the 'old timers' in the school CoPs.

Accordingly, ECTs were encouraged to move beyond dominant discourses and practice in school and to support change. They often did not have the capacity to enact these changes. This is a challenging issue as the MEP set out to do 'good' but perhaps could have resulted in unintended outcomes in which some ECTs were socialised into more-expansive notions of teaching and learning on the MEP and during the inquiry project but then returned to a fragmented system in which they felt trapped and conflicted. Some ECTs discussed feeling caught between cultures, having begun to construct

alternative identities and practices through shared repertoire, engagement and alignment via learning-event days, engagement in teacher inquiry in collaboration with their MEP colleagues, EMs and ATs, and were able, through critical reflection, trust, time and space to feel legitimately safe to explore alternatives and question taken-for-granted assumptions about their own practices through open reflection with others on the MEP. However, for some ECTs, these developing identities and practices did not fit with their school's organisational culture, and their temporary contracts seemed more at risk, leading to them feeling the need to fit in or fabricate alignment to their schools' practices.

7.2.2. What role do External Mentors play in engendering changes in the professional identities of Early Career Teachers?

The role of the EM was a vital component to the success of the MEP in supporting the developing identities of the ECTs, a finding consistent with earlier studies (see Connolly et al. 2018; Hadfield et al. 2017; Milton and Daly 2017). The EMs acted as brokers between the boundaries of the school and MEP CoPs, supporting ECTs in boundary-crossing into a Third Space (Gutiérrez 2009). The EMs also created the conditions for this boundary crossing, through their professional dialogue opportunities, to explore the tensions of the ECTs' multi-membership of the CoPs of school and the MEP and their various competing competencies. By working through those tensions, the ECTs were able to imagine alternative ways of 'doing' and 'being' a teacher, which supported the development of alternative identities (see also Pillen et al. 2013; Van der Want et al. 2015).

Working as emotional modulators, the EMs helped the ECTs to reflect and navigate the challenging events generated in school and in their private lives. These trusted relationships, developed through working closely during the first two years of the programme, allowed the ECTs to explore difficult conversations they felt unable to consider in their own school context. By engaging in different joint enterprises, reflective writing, co-construction of teaching and learning with their EMs and other ECTs from different phases, as well as critical reflection of theory in relation to their practice, and small cycles of inquiry mediated by the EMs and the wider learning group of ECTs in the MEP CoP MEP, the ECTs current professional identities began to be deconstructed, reconsidered and reconstructed (see Bryan and Blunden 2013). Through difficult conversations, supported by the EMs, the ECTs were able to consider alternative repertoires and to reify their developing perspectives in both written and discursive artefacts that contained alternative identities and allowed the ECTs to imagine future trajectories of being a teacher different to those envisaged in their school CoPs.

Difficult conversations with EMs enabled space for ECTs to feel safe to explore the morals and ethics of teaching without judgement. Drawing on the

directed reflective critique and feedback of ATs, the ECTs and EMs explored difficult issues that facilitated ECTs to question assumptions about their practices, identities and the ethics of their current teaching practices. This finding is consistent with the work of Gardiner (2017), whose study found that mentors support the questioning of assumptions of self and practice in teachers. This study confirms Gardiner's findings, demonstrating how EMs and ECTs began co-constructing knowledge, collaborating and, at points, becoming co-learners during the inquiry, which is in line with the literature (see Hobbs 2012; Daly and Milton 2017; Langdon et al. 2019).

In contrast to the findings of Daly and Milton (2017) and positioning as co-learners, the EMs also inhabited a more-directive role according to the ATs who regarded the EMs as helicopter mentors hovering over their offspring. These tensions seemed to have developed in response to the structure of supervision on the MEP and the relationships and resourcing between supervision of the ECTs by the ATs and EMs. This view may also be attributed to some EMs being recruited as consultants. As consultants who were previously headteachers and senior leaders, they were professionally equipped to swoop in and solve problems. Alternatively, EMs may have experienced a requirement to provide more-intensive structured support for ECTs in very difficult schools settings.

There is a need, too, to consider experiences in the recruitment of EMs while also providing a robust ongoing professional support and learning package that develops practices and identities that further embed an educative mentoring approach. Arguably, this was something the MEP struggled to do within its limited time, resources and support. Additionally, in the original Welsh Government contract, it was not envisaged that EMs would require ongoing and transformational professional learning to deliver a consistent educative mentoring approach. The existence of EM training events was mediated by the alliance of HEIs, but the events were built into the programme as a quality control mechanism to ensure consistency. This pragmatic approach largely focused on module content and EMs' developmental activities for the ECTs and suggested professional dialogue opportunities that could support alternative views of practice. I argue that the mentor training events were not broad or deep enough to embed educative

mentoring practices properly. Therefore, I suggest the need for deep, consistent professional learning for EMs and ATs in developing an educative stance to mentoring that is focused on developing a critical inquiry stance.

The EMs also felt the need to advocate for their ECTs, which seemed intensified as the ECTs' struggled with a lack of time and the challenge of balancing their teaching role with undertaking master's-level studies. Some EMs lacked confidence in the academic nature of inquiry due to a lack of professional learning or direct experience in inquiry processes, and the ECTs and ATs believed this impacted how the EMs presented themselves as experts or avoided aspects of wider academic skills in their role.

Nonetheless, EMs were positioned as academic translators for module content, and as meaning-makers and gatekeepers, roles described as having both positive and negative aspects. The EMs' positioning as knowledge brokers and translators acted in contradictory ways, both reducing and increasing the agency of the ECTs. These roles distanced the ECTs from the ATs and the socialisation process of becoming a teacher-researcher. This positioning also had the potential for knowledge retranslation, and AT feedback was reinterpreted through the EM, and then retold in alternative formats to the ECTs. This unusual and novel finding points again to the challenges of the power dynamics between novice and expert, with EMs positioning themselves as a conduit between ATs and ECTs, something that positioned the EM as an expert, inherently creating power dynamics. This act of becoming a conduit of translated knowledge can be a way of being 'expert' as the conveyor of knowledge and information. Despite concerns about confidence in their own abilities with the inquiry modules, the EMs, as translators, were 'gaining access to sources for understanding through growing involvement' (Lave and Wenger 1991, p.36). Some EMs were concerned with maintaining the perception held by ECTs that they were in possession of the answers and were still valuable in the triad of support with a more-experienced other, the AT, in the inquiry project.

This view illustrates the complexity of the EM/ECT relationship as supportive, caring and fostering agentic change in the ECTs, but also restricting the opportunities for the ECTs to engage fully in the MEP CoP. This finding confirms previous research that has explored the challenges of reducing

novice–expert power dynamics in mentoring relationships between mentors and teachers (Aspfors and Fransson 2015).

The EMs were integral in supporting developments in the identities of ECTs on the MEP, and the contribution of the EMs was considerable in comparison with the role of inquiry and the ATs. The EMs were supportive and enabled the ECTs to become agentive and to see alternative practices. Challenges remained in relation to perpetuating novice–expert tensions inherent in mentoring relationships, and the imbalance of roles between EMs and ATs that acted to push the ECTs inadvertently away from the centrality of CoP in relation to supporting teacher inquiry, specifically in relation to working practices between the AT, ECT and EM triad.

7.2.3. How do Academic Tutors support the development of professional identities in Early Career Teachers?

The ECTs were initially on the periphery of the academic CoP, but through working with ATs and engaging with the MEP they gained a more-central position. With access to ATs, the ECTs participated in a variety of opportunities that enculturated them into the MEP CoP, namely mutual engagement, shared repertoires and joint enterprise negotiation (Wenger 1998). As noted in Section 7.2.2., the inadvertent actions of EMs may have acted as a barrier to ECTs' direct involvement with ATs and, thus, a more peripheral role in the academic CoP.

However, ATs were important in socialising ECTs into the academic perspectives of teacher inquiry, which confirms the findings of Solis and Gordon (2019) and VanOostveen (2017), who emphasise that a knowledgeable facilitator is important to the success of any action research. The ATs provided critical academic feedback, but also offered critiques on more general and relative assumptions that the ECTs made about reflecting on their practice. Such critique often led to emotional responses from the ECTs, but unpicking these responses with the EMs led to a breaking down of unquestioned patterns of thinking and doing teaching. Arguably, the externality of the ATs was important in engendering annoyance, anger and resentment, as they were positioned as outsiders, not teachers, who were questioning the ECTs' teaching practice, but this emotion and agitation seemed to provide a catalyst for fostering reflection in the ECTs.

The ATs supported the ECTs to develop their scholarly skills and to link practice and theory, developing their repertoires through feedback. With their late introduction to the ECTs in the final year of the programme for the inquiry project, the ATs' offer of expertise was met with barriers and delays. The ECTs had formed strong relationships with their EMs, and they initially positioned the ATs as outsiders in the inquiry-project triad. Additionally, the ATs were not provided with enough time to support the ECTs at distance, which further positioned them as outsiders.

Nevertheless, the role of AT in consideration of ethics, morals and research paradigms became important. Working closely with ATs and their written feedback enabled the ECTs to consider their positions regarding research, the nature of what research was, what it was for and how it was undertaken. This consideration resulted in a shift in the views of the ECTs and an understanding of the nature and purpose of inquiry. The MEP integrated small cycles of the inquiry throughout the programme, as well as specific modules on the critical use of data to inform practice and research. It was not until working closely with the ATs in prolonged engagement with the process of the nine-month inquiry that a shift in the ECTs' understanding occurred.

Overall, working with the ATs over a prolonged period and undertaking their own inquiry enabled the ECTs to see the benefits of research and to foster a wider understanding and respect for qualitative data and pupil voice in research to inform practice. Guided writing also helped the ECTs to see alternative perspectives regarding the ethics of teaching, which profoundly impacted their practice and how they saw themselves and their learners.

7.2.4. How does undertaking a teacher inquiry project impact the professional identities of Early Career Teachers?

The teacher inquiry project had both positive and negative implications for the ECTs, their identities and their future trajectories. There is evidence that the ECTs felt empowered and more confident, which confirms previous research findings (Sowa 2009; Cabaroglu 2014; Edwards and Burns 2016; Connolly et al. 2018). The ECTs, EMs and ATs all pointed out that the ECTs seemed to have developed greater agency in relation to their practice, which is consistent with earlier studies in the field (Lankshear and Knobel 2004; Esposito and Smith 2006; Banegas et al. 2013; Cabaroglu 2014) that also found levels of agency increased for teachers engaging in inquiry projects.

The ECTs' greater agency resulted in a motivation to support the development of alternative practice in their school CoPs, utilising alternative perceptions of teaching and learning to their dominant school cultures. There was some evidence of ECTs trying to exert influence in their school CoPs, but those ECTs in more-challenging environments did so covertly or not at all. Therefore, as outsiders or members on the periphery of the school CoP, the ECTs' relative locus of influence was minimal. Thus, the ECTs in this study were not likely to become part of the main driving force of cultural changes across schools in Wales, as envisaged by the Welsh Government. Accordingly, a main aim of the Welsh Government's plan for the MEP has not been achieved, and their lack of influence, and peripherality in the contexts of their schools may provide the reasoning for that. In part, ironically, this failure seems due to the dominant performative cultures fostered through the Welsh Government's own earlier policy reforms.

The ECTs did develop a greater understanding of the needs of their learners, which is in line with the findings of previous studies (see Wang and Zhang 2014; Burns 2014). The ECTs positioned learners as central to understanding their teaching and, more specifically, they began to see their students as collaborators in the teaching and learning process. This is consistent with the wider findings in the education literature that have demonstrated how teachers adopted a much more democratic distributed

approach (Moreira 2009; Cabaroglu 2014) and a deep understanding of the needs of learners (Wang and Zhang 2014; Burns 2014) through their engagement with emancipatory action research (Wyatt and Dikilitaş 2016; Dikilitaş and Yayli 2018).

Gaining the master's qualification acted to legitimatise the ECTs' knowledge, views and experience, in line with Connolly et al.'s (2018) study, in which ECTs felt that gaining a qualification added to their sense of agency and the legitimisation of their status within the profession. In line with the study by Connolly et al. (2018), some of the ECTs in this study felt more empowered to push back against the dominant cultures in their schools despite the contractual risks, but those in highly volatile environments did so more covertly or not at all (see also; Banegas et al. 2013; Yuan and Lee 2015a). Furthermore, some ECTs reported a shift in their identities to incorporate the role of researcher (see also Edwards and Burns 2016b; Yuan and Burns 2017).

A novel finding of this study suggests that those ECTs in more-challenging schools with more-performative cultures may have become dependent on the support provided on the MEP due to the lack of support in their school environments. The MEP was designed to be supportive and a bridging induction into the profession, but it was a temporary structure of support that ended without further networks of support to sustain those ECTs in the early phase of their career. This issue points to the important role a programme like the MEP plays in the induction and support of those relatively new to the teaching profession, especially those in unsupportive school environments. There needs to be a package of support that extends beyond temporary structures to provide educational support for newcomers. Milton et al. (2020) and Davies et al. (2018) reported that experienced teachers and senior leaders in schools in Wales do not understand their role in supporting ECTs as they enter the profession. This suggests that some ECTs may not have been able to access support in the CoP of their schools, which is consistent with the findings of this study.

The ECTs spoke of feeling empowered 'within' the provision of the MEP. The supportive structures of the MEP for those in very restrictive environments

may have made them more dependent on external support, rather than them achieving a more-autonomous and agentic profile.

The ECTs' capacity, skillset and approach to teaching and learning seemed to have developed in line with the expectations of the MEP. Tensions remained, as some ECTs seemed to hold multiple, conflicting beliefs and identities from spanning multiple CoPs with competing notions of teaching and learning. For some, the requirement to overlay and perpetuate the dominant cultures in their schools was just too strong, or it became a survival mechanism in camouflaging their developing identity difference from engaging on the MEP. Therefore, I argue the ECTs became more aware of the challenges and conflicts within their own environment and the profession throughout their engagement with the MEP. This living contradiction made it difficult for the ECTs to integrate into the school CoP, and at the end of the programme some felt displaced and less part of the school community. Of course, this outcome may have been due to many of the participants being on temporary contracts and, thus, feeling less part of their school also. This situation may have placed these ECTs at greater risk of being re-enculturated back into the practices of their schools to live with the competing challenges. Identities are movable and changing, and it is likely that the easiest route for those ECTs in difficult environments would have been to enculturate back into their school's practices. The worst-case scenario may be that these tensions were not acceptable for some ECTs and some of them may have left the profession, adding to the increasing levels of attrition in Wales (Ghosh and Worth 2020).

The MEP set out to support change and practice development across the profession in Wales. This was a significant weight to place upon ECTs' shoulders. The burden of instigating national cultural and practice change within the Welsh education profession added to the challenges already present due to the lack of wider support in the system for ECTs. Based on the participants in this study, there is evidence the MEP was a significant support mechanism for those in the study – a programme that fostered agency and shifted and developed the positive identities of the ECTs to incorporate a more-expansive view of practice and provided a survival mechanism in the profession for some ECTs. The Welsh Government's

ambition of cultural and systemic capacity-building may have been achieved if this process had occurred across many layers within the profession, at ECT, mid-career and later-career or senior leader positions simultaneously. This would have been the catalyst for real systemic-identity development, as those 'old timers' within the CoPs in schools across Wales may have been more open to developing joint enterprise and a shared repertoire that fostered a critical teacher inquiry stance. Such alignment and imagination may have fostered deep CoPs less aligned to performativity and more aligned to expansive notions of teaching and learning.

Participation in the MEP for those in this study was both a supportive and challenging experience, and these data suggest they did feel legitimately and positively changed by the process. The MEP may have prepared them for more-recent policy changes in Wales and was an evident lifeline for those in non-supportive environment. Nonetheless, there are concerns about what happened next for the ECTs when the teacher inquiry finished, and the MEP ended.

7.3. Limitations

While this case study offered a rich description of the complex interactions between ECTs, ATs and EMs, it has limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the MEP and this study were located in a specific period (2016–2017), and data generation took place within the Welsh policy context. Since this period, there have been further shifts in the educational policy landscapes in Wales. The MEP utilised a specific format to support ECTs during the inquiry project and blended learning with dedicated EMs and ATs with specific rations of time. Given these circumstances and the specific conditions, it would prove difficult to transfer the findings of the study.

This study did not seek to generalise its findings or to assume that all the experiences of ECTs, EMs and ATs on the MEP were similar to those in this study. Equally, in striving to provide a thematic description of the entire dataset while also attempting triangulation between the extensive data, I am aware that some of the depth and complexity may have been lost. In that respect, I leave it to the reader to decide the relevance of this study to their own context.

As a lecturer, AT and EM on the MEP, as well as having been a teacher in a Welsh secondary school, I have tried throughout to be reflexive in my roles. I am aware that my positionality will have impacted the study. It is difficult to measure what benefits were achieved and what limitations were placed on the study in relation to my insider status and the different perceptions within the various roles I occupied on the MEP programme. Accounting for this issue, I utilised a significant number of deep and rich verbatim quotes so the reader can judge my interpretations of the data. I have been clear and transparent about my approach to the research, and this is covered in significant depth in Chapter 3, again for the reader to consider how the data were generated and analysed. My perspective was strongly influenced by the theories outlined in Chapter 2, specifically by Lave and Wenger, whose work aligned with the design of the MEP. Furthermore, I acknowledge that, in co-constructing the data, there will be much I missed or inadvertently chose not to see.

Despite speaking to a range of geographically spread participants in various educational phases, there was a small number of bespoke experiences captured by specific ECTs in Wales; however, there were some significant similarities among the experiences also. Without trying to generalise these accounts, they reveal the highly problematic experiences of some ECTs in Wales. These challenging accounts were generated using only a small number of ECTs and represent their experiences, and while they may not reflect the wider population of ECTs, they may have some resonances that are worth further consideration. It would be interesting to see if anything has shifted or changed in the subsequent years since the data were generated, as further policy shifts have occurred in Wales.

7.4. Key recommendations and areas for future research

The key recommendations that emerged from this study are highly relevant to the current policy and practice climate in Wales. These recommendations consider the developing approaches to practices and curriculum in Wales in the new developing curriculum (Welsh Government 2017) as well as new teacher practising standards (Welsh Government 2017a) that seek to integrate teacher inquiry for both ITE and practising teachers at all stages of their career. The recommendations also attend to the call from Professor Mick Waters to overhaul the induction programmes and support for ECTs in Wales (Waters 2020). In response, I offer key recommendations for policy and practice in schools and HEIs.

7.4.1. Future Welsh Government policy

- Induction practices and early career professional learning needs to be designed to support ECTs both into the profession and throughout the transition to becoming a mid-career professional and beyond. I suggest this needs to go further and incorporate career-wide professional learning frameworks that support a critical inquiry stance underpinned by highly skilled career-long EMs and informed by academics steeped in inquiry practices. As highlighted by the participants in this study, EMs significantly impacted the developing identities of the ECTs and supported their transition into the profession, and ATs provided the externality and critiquing that supported critical engagement with inquiry.
- There needs to be careful consideration of how best to support schools and HEIs that provide ITE with the development of critical teacher inquiry approaches through collaborative practices. As ITE providers are inspected using the same neoliberal inspection regimes of schools in Wales, they too may be at risk of being pressured into narrow conceptions of practice aligned to neoliberal policy. Developing democratic critical teacher inquiry skills concerned with social justice and its implementation can help to avoid

situations in which research is only aligned to these performative ideals and school improvement. Therefore, through the new practising and initial teacher standards, schools could become sites of uncritical teacher inquiry that miss the emancipatory and transformational impact such approaches can have, or these may be diluted, or, at worst, steeped in the neoliberal agenda.

- The teaching profession in Wales needs to be provided with access to relevant, accessible, teacher-friendly research, and/or a repository of practice-based research co-constructed by the teaching profession for access by the profession that underpins the developing critical inquiry skills that can support teacher inquiry into their own practices.
- There needs to be dedicated and built-in time for all teachers at all levels of experience to consider authentic and transformational teacher inquiry aligned to the needs of their learners and not just school-improvement regimes. This needs to be done in a collaborative manner, supported by authentic, skilled facilitators who are themselves steeped in teacher inquiry and can underpin a critical inquiry stance within the profession.
- The new national master's in education programme for Wales commencing in September 2021 is marketed for all teachers, not just ECTs, and does not include EMs, likely due to the resource implications. Consideration of the inclusion of both EMs and ATs within the provision of professional learning programmes that attempt to embed teacher inquiry stances may be key to future programmes' success in achieving a critical inquiry stance. This inclusion can help to temper the challenging environments some teachers find themselves situated in. The embedding of key, in-depth, long-term professional learning for both ATs and EMs seems vital to developing the educative mentoring stances that support transformational experiences that ECTs experienced on the MEP. Careful consideration regarding balancing time between the roles and/or careful hybridisation that overlays both aspects of the roles is needed.

- The need for a formalised structure of sustained CoPs and support for ECTs was highlighted in this research. This is a call for the support of alumni of programmes such as the MEP and wider teaching cohorts. This support may involve physical and/or virtual sociocultural spaces designed to promote mutual endeavour, joint enterprise and a shared repertoire, including the ongoing discussion and critique of practices throughout teachers' careers.
- There is a call also for time and resources for school-wide professional learning that incorporates all stakeholders and brings together networks of schools, HEIs and policymakers to work collaboratively to raise the capacity within the Welsh educational system.

7.4.2. Initial teacher education

- Embedding critical teacher inquiry approaches that build local knowledge and identities of candidate teachers through skilfully supervised and mentored support from academics and school mentors should be a feature of ITE. This approach should be facilitated by a suite of professional learning and the development opportunities to build capacity within ITE to support academics' and mentors' approaches, understanding and practice of teacher inquiry as a mode of local knowledge generation. It should seek to engage school mentors, ITE providers, ITE teacher candidates and schools in the co-construction and co-generation of critical teacher inquiry. These critical inquiries should relate to individual teachers'/educators' practices and their pupils'/candidates' learning. This approach would support deeper networks of authentic collaborative practice that seek to raise the capacities of schools, ITE and initial teachers in preparation for their career-long professional learning and identities.

7.4.3. School practices

- Schools should seek to utilise existing key resources for professional learning, such as past MEP students, to facilitate and support collegial critical teacher inquiry practices in order to develop expertise within and across schools in Wales.
- Schools should consider their approach to teacher inquiry and the professional support that all teachers require, but especially ECTs new to the profession. There is a need to question what support is available to develop individual teacher's understanding of their own practice and that of their learners, and to inquire into issues within their classrooms, rather than uncritically solve whole-school improvement issues that may be too far removed from individual learners' or teachers' practice to impact their professional learning and identities.
- Develop critical skills within the profession to guard against the uncritical adoption of whole-school improvement regimes that can lead to monocultures of professional learning in which uncritical, untested ideas are adopted and applied to all learners and all teachers without wider consideration of their real need and impact.

7.4.4. Academics, research and higher education

- Careful consideration should be applied by researchers and academics to producing research that is short, accessible and written in a tone that appeals to the teaching profession. Research findings should be provided in formats that busy practitioners can access and share.
- Higher educational institutions should work towards legitimating and supporting wider formats of research, such as more-local teacher inquiry or action research formats, which have been viewed by some members of higher education as less-valued, more-bias-laden and less-robust forms of research. For some establishments, action research/teacher inquiry remains underutilised due to the epistemic perspective that it is a less-valuable and a less-valid form of research due to what has been perceived as a more subjective, localised approaches to knowledge generation and the challenges to generalisability this entails.

7.5. Future research

A follow-up study examining what happened next for ECTs who undertook the MEP would be highly relevant. The participants of this study graduated over three years ago, and it would be useful to consider the long-term effects of engaging with the MEP and teacher inquiry on their identities. Returning to the original participants would provide an opportunity to explore whether the development and changes suggested in this study were permanent or transitory. It would also be relevant to understand the longer-term impacts of the MEP inquiry in their schools and to their notions of being and doing teaching, and whether, ultimately, they were able to influence cultural change to develop capacity, and in what format. Further research into the process of teacher inquiry supervision and external mentoring in a Welsh and international context would also be useful. This research would enable comparisons of both practices and the wider sociocultural factors that influence policy, schools and notions of teaching and learning.

7.6. Final conclusions

The effect on the performative agenda for some of the ECTs in this study was pronounced. The ECTs were encultured into schools that were pressurised spaces steeped in accountability due to educational reforms in Wales. School performance fears seemed to have impacted the discourses, practices, pedagogical choices and identities of teachers at all levels in some school in Wales, and this shifted pedagogy to more-reductionist, technocratic formats. These environments can negatively impact ECTs' identities and future identities regarding what it means to be a 'good teacher', and they can prefer quick fixes that favour rapid development in outcomes rather than the holistic perspective of moral purpose and social justice that education requires. Ultimately, with teachers being the single most important influence in learner's education, challenges to the professional identities of teachers, impacts on their practices, and therefore can deeply affect learners in Wales.

This thesis was written during a time of considerable education reform in Wales. The National Mission for Wales 2017–2021 (Welsh Government 2017) was introduced, which included a new professional learning offer for teachers and the development of a New Curriculum for Wales (designed with and by teachers). The inclusion of new practising teacher standards that prioritise teacher inquiry/action research and the development of a new master's-level programme for teachers, delivered independently through various HEIs through Wales is being implemented from September 2021, which prioritises research informed practice.

If Wales is to provide the best possible education for learners in Wales through the provision of the new Welsh curriculum (as is suggested by Kirsty Williams the Minister for Education for Wales), it is vital that honest, critical perspectives on the support given to ECTs and all teachers are considered. Without time and opportunity for robust, authentic, critical professional learning, with ongoing support and facilitation, can ECTs and teachers be prepared to deliver the highest-quality curriculum and the best teaching and learning provision for pupils in Wales.

The integration of action research/teacher inquiry and emancipatory forms of teacher research that can be used to create local knowledge for teachers and their learners, is juxtaposed against the inclusion of action research in a mandated list of technicisms/competencies for teachers. This approach has been argued to reduce teaching to a series of actions and tasks. The concern is that forms of action research, rather than being a vehicle to new, local knowledge creation in classrooms, and increased responsiveness to learners needs, becomes a tick-box exercise in the tools of competency that the profession must achieve to be deemed competent teachers. This approach could lead to missed opportunities as teachers rush to prove, unsystematically and uncritically, their ability to engage in teacher research, drawing on reductive notions of teaching and learning in classroom silos aligned to whole-school improvement agendas. This approach will, ultimately, expend teachers' vital resources and energy while missing the transformational potential that action research can afford personally for their practice, but, more important, for the individual needs of learners.

This study stressed the importance of supporting ECTs, as their sociocultural environment in which early professional identities are formed, impacts their imagined futures and, thus, their practices. This issue points to the need for a network of appropriately skilled academics and EMs who are themselves supported by robust professional learning to underpin a more-critical and expansive perspective on action research in schools across Wales. These engendering spaces for critical, emancipatory views and practices can positively impact all those involved in the education system in Wales.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethics consent from SREC



School of Social Sciences
Ysgol Gwyddorau Cymdeithasol
Head of School, Pennaeth yr Ysgol
Professor, Yr Athro Amanda Coffey FAcSS

Cardiff University

Glamorgan Building
King Edward VII Avenue
Cardiff CF10 3WT
Wales UK

Tel +44(0)29 2087 5179
Fax +44(0)29 2087 4175

www.cardiff.ac.uk/social-sciences

14th July 2016

Our ref: SREC/1936

James Snook
Professional Doctorate Programme
SOCSI

Prifysgol Caerdydd

Adeilad Morgannwg
Rhodfa'r Brenin Edward VII
Caerdydd CF10 3WT
Cymru, Y Deyrnas Unedig

Ffôn +44(0)29 2087 5179
Ffacs +44(0)29 2087 4175

www.caerdydd.ac.uk/social-sciences

Dear James

Your project entitled '*A case study approach to factors that mediate professional development in stakeholders involved in a professional Masters in Education Practice programme*' has been approved by the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Cardiff University, at its meeting on 13th July 2016 subject to the following:

- The Committee did raise concerns about your focus on students whom you currently supervise, although it is not clear from the application the balance between current and past students. In circumstances where you are the supervisor, the Committee felt that students might feel under pressure to participate. Combining your role as supervisor and researcher in the same moment might also pose problems. The Committee therefore felt that these ethical issues would best be resolved by researching *past* students and/or students supervised by *another* member of staff. In this way you would be able to position yourself better as the researcher.

If you need clarification concerning this, please contact me.

If you make any substantial changes with ethical implications to the project as it progresses you need to inform the SREC about the nature of these changes. Such changes could be: 1) changes in the type of participants recruited (e.g. inclusion of a group of potentially vulnerable participants), 2) changes to questionnaires, interview guides etc. (e.g. including new questions on sensitive issues), 3) changes to the way data are handled (e.g. sharing of non-anonymised data with other researchers).

In addition, if anything occurs in your project from which you think the SREC might usefully learn, then please do share this information with us.



Registered Charity, no. 1136855
Elusen Gofrestredig, rhif 1136855

All ongoing projects will be monitored every 12 months and it is a condition of continued approval that you complete the monitoring form.

Please inform the SREC when the project has ended.

Please use the SREC's project reference number above in any future correspondence.

Yours sincerely

Professor Alan Felstead
Chair of School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

cc: A N da Silva
Supervisors: M Hadfield & Y Barnes

Appendix 2: Participant information sheet

Adapted for ECT, AT and EM

Perceptions of the impact of teacher inquiry on Early Career Teachers' (ECTs') developing identities.

Hello I am James Snook and I am undertaking my doctoral studies here at Cardiff University as well as being a lecturer on the MEP. The piece of research I hope to undertake is related to the impacts of teacher inquiry on early career teachers developing identities.

This information sheet is here to explain about the project and about what is involved if you choose to participate in the study. You do not have to take part in this research, but please read through this information carefully so that you are fully informed in case you wish to consent to take part.

The project

The piece of research I hope to undertake is related to the impacts of teacher inquiry on early career teachers developing identities. This includes considering the role of academic tutors and external mentors in supporting ECTs during the inquiry project.

What is involved?

If you wish to take part in the project, you would be asked to be involved in a 1-hour focus group that would take place during an MEP learning event lunch hour (lunch is provided as normal during the learning event). In this focus group you would be with a group of 6-7 people discussing your experiences of teacher inquiry, being an early career teacher on the MEP.

Those that were interested would also be invited for five one-hour follow up one to one interview that would take place on the phone throughout your inquiry project. The questions would relate to teacher inquiry, the support and how you felt this was impacting you as a teacher.

How is the information collected and stored?

If you consent the focus groups and interviews would be audio recorded, and then transcribed. All data generated would be anonymised so that participants are not identifiable and any data that identifies an organisation would also be anonymised. All data generated will be stored on Cardiff university encrypted S: drive and only accessible to myself. It will be anonymised. Any temporary data such as the audio recording will be deleted after transcribing. Confidentiality will always be maintained.

Do I have to take part?

No, you can choose to take part or not and have the right to withdraw at any point without consequence.

What happens if I do not want to be involved in the project after it has started?

You can withdraw at any point without consequence, and you do not have to explain why. A quick email, or verbal acknowledgement that you would like to withdraw and any data generated attributed to you will not be used in the project and will be removed. I will check

for consent that you wish to take part at each focus group and interview, and if you wish to withdraw, you can do so at any point.

If you have any further questions related to the project you can speak to me at any time during the study on my email (email inserted) or by phone (phone number inserted)

If you have any wider questions about the project or concerns you can also contact the project supervisors

Professor Mark Hadfield

hadfieldm@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr Yvonne Barnes

Barnesy1@cardiff.ac.uk

Many thanks

James

James Snook

Appendix 3 : Consent form

(Adapted for ECT, EM and AT)

Professional identities of ECTs

I am inviting you to participate in a piece of research towards my doctorate in education at Cardiff university. It is in relation to professional identities of early career teachers and focuses on the ways in which the MEP had influenced your professional learning and identity as an ECT, or the professional learning and identities of your mentee or academic tutee. You are in no way obliged to take part, and you should spend some time considering your participation. If you do take part, you have the right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

You will remain anonymous at all points, and your right to anonymity will be maintained.

Please read the following statements and initial the box on the right of each statement if you agree with them.

- 1 I confirm I have read and understood the Information provided and have had an opportunity to ask questions and they have been answered satisfactorily.

- 2 I understand that taking part is voluntary and I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

- 3 I agree for my comments to be audio recorded.

- 4 I agree to comments I make being used in publications where I will not be named.

5 I understand that my personal details (name, telephone number, email address) will not be shared with anyone.

6 I consent to take part in this research.

PARTICIPANT

Signed:

Print
name:

Date:

RESEARCHER

Signed:

Print
name:

Date:

Appendix 4: Early career teacher focus group protocol

This protocol is divided into four parts. In this focus group we are looking at the ECT motivations for educational research set against the backdrop of their school context and how the reflections on teaching and learning conversations may have changed or developed since the ECT engaged with the MEP. The ECT are asked to reflect on the process of refining their inquiry focus, the support mechanisms available to elucidate the process. ECTs then reflect on the instructional core to consider all aspects of developing pupils learning, from the pupils themselves, to their practice as teachers in order to understand the teacher viewpoint of this on starting the inquiry project. From this ECTs are asked to anticipate their needs from academic tutor and mentor in their inquiry.

Set up and introductions (10 mins)

Background and school and motivations for the MEP (10 mins)

- What is your experience of previous educational research, and how is this different or the same to your experiences on the MEP?
- What were your key reasons for applying to be on the MEP?
- What have you found most challenging about the MEP to-date?

Development of inquiry focus and the challenges (15 mins)

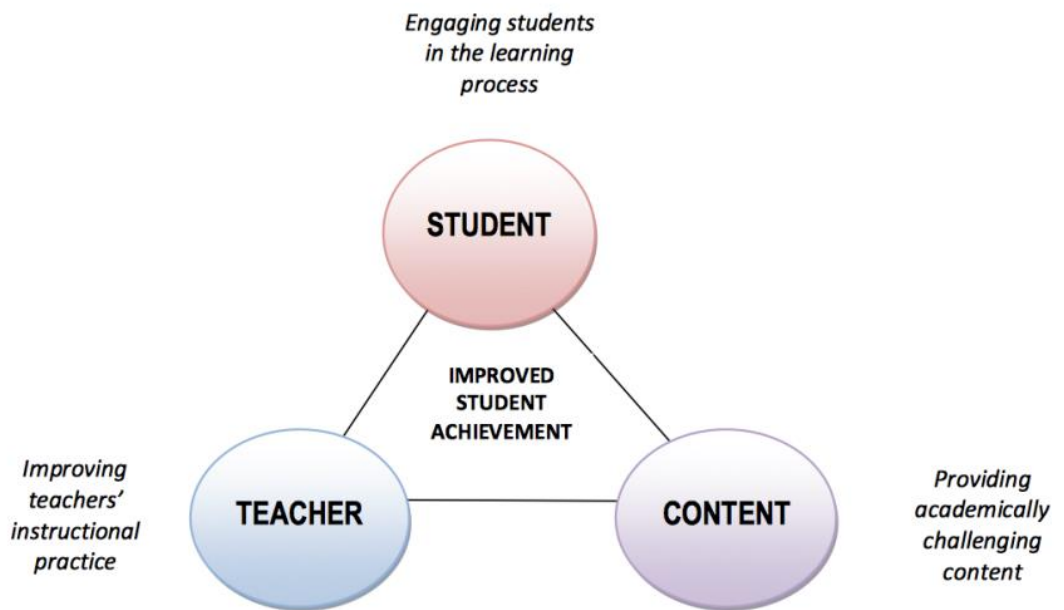
The guiding questions here should be:

- How easy has it been to start to identify a focus? Who/what has influenced this process?
- How did your mentor/materials on the VLE help you?
- What are the opportunities for you to have reflective discussion on teaching and learning in your school and has the MEP impacted on your reflection of teaching and learning?

Reflections on the instructional core to support the inquiry process (15 mins)

PROMPT

THE INSTRUCTIONAL CORE



The instructional core works together to support developing pupil achievement and will be a vital tool in your inquiry project.

- How can we understand pupils' development and how those reflections/observations impact on your practice as a teacher?
- How are your students, active collaborators in this research, and how are you planning to support this collaboration? What are the limitations to this approach if any?
- What are your expectations around the purpose of your inquiry project in your final year?
- How have these expectations impacted on your development of your inquiry focus?

Development needs around research and views around educational research (10 mins)

- Who and what will you need to support the action inquiry process in the coming months?
- How do you think your academic tutor and mentor will support this process?
- What do you see as the greatest challenges in trying to change what happens in your classroom(s)?

Appendix 5: External Mentor Focus groups protocol

Mentor protocol Draft. (40 mins long)

This protocol is split into 3 sections. The first sections draws on the development of the inquiry focus and how EM supported this focus. Section 2 moves to discuss teacher identity and the role of research in ECT developing identity. Section 3 seeks to explore the how our beginning teacher use literature, and the formation of their criticality skills.

Introduction: (10 mins)

Introduce yourself and the ways of working for the focus group. Briefly explain the purpose for this research. In this time ask a mentor who is willing to briefly take them through their annotated timeline, providing 5 mins for this, and 5 mins for discussion around the timeline.

Section 1: Development of the inquiry focus (10 mins)

This first section draws out discussion around the mentor's view on the challenges the MEP students face developing a sensible inquiry focus.

Please think about specific examples of your practice with mentees.

- What do you see as the top three key issues students face when selecting a sensible inquiry focus?
- What challenges do these key issues present to you as a mentor, how do you tend to overcome them?

Section 2: Early career teacher identity (10 mins)

This section explores EM view on how students' professional identities, are being influenced by their engagement with research and involvement in inquiry.

This is an extract from a focus group from a group of our MEP students:

Please look at the quotation below taken from an MEP focus group. What are your thoughts about what John is discussing?

John: I think probably one of the things is that we redesigned our scheme of work last year and so I was trying to take ideas from that

and apply them into the scheme of work redesign. We did that as a full department, and everyone met together on a Wednesday afternoon for two hours and so I could kind of pull-out different ideas. I guess where I found it challenging is because it's not part of the norm actually kind of going well no this is an idea that's from the MEP and based on this this and this, it was probably more talking about things in disguise because people wouldn't talk about where the, what research idea it had come from. So it was just, I think that side of actually no it's based on this bit of research I always felt like, well, if I do that, I am doing something that's different to the current culture, but I was bringing the ideas that I had learnt from different places into that environment.

R: So thinking about that research element, why were you reticent to sort of discuss that research and bring it, is it because the teachers are not engaging with the same research you are currently or?

John: To a certain extent I am probably not looking cocky or arrogant and going...I think I have struggled to kind of go oh well this is based on this, this and this. Would that benefit their understanding if they are bringing ideas and they're not doing the same thing. I think I had done previously and that wasn't particularly well received so I kind of dropped that element out of it.

R: How wasn't it received very well, what happened?

John: People would then retort of well my experience and that of my teachers who I have spoken to is da-da-da so rather than them giving a research retort which would be acceptable, they would give an experience only based retort, so it wasn't then comparing like for like in my opinion."

- Thinking about the ECTs you have supported to what extent do you think their use of research has been limited by other staffs' reactions?

- To what extent do you feel that being an action researcher or inquirer has become an established part of the professional identities of those teachers you have supported?
- What have been the biggest influences on whether ECTs see themselves as involved in developing/creating knowledge and insights into their own, and others, practice?

Section 3: Critical reflection skills with ECTs? (10 mins)

This section explores mentors' view on the types of literature or research that the MEP students find useful in respect of improving their practice, how students use research in the process of developing their practice and the development of their critical skills as to what they consider worthwhile outcomes.

Below is an extract from an MEP student focus group. What are your views on Ceri's discussion of her comparison of herself with non-MEP teachers trying to undertake research?

Ceri: And I think it is helpful as well, especially with our last module in terms of the leadership and if you're looking about making change with the way the curriculum is changing you know my headteacher was very keen that sort of letter that we had she shared with the whole staff in order to try and push people in the way that, not that I'm going that's not what I mean, but in sort of the practices that I am adopting because of the Masters. She is trying to encourage others (non-MEP teachers) to do it as well but of course like Jill said, they don't have the platforms, they don't have the online environment, they don't have the online library to do the research so they're a bit stuck because they've got nowhere to go to access that sort of information that we do have."

- What types of research do the teachers find most useful, and what are they most likely to use it for?

- What issues have you faced in getting ECTs to use research criticality, in the sense of challenging theirs, and others' views, about the sorts of educational outcomes they should be trying to achieve with pupils?
- How have you helped the students with their use of research?

Appendix 6: Academic tutor focus group protocol

In my focus group protocol for the early career teachers on the MEP stating their inquiry projects I am interested in discussing their relationship with the development of their inquiry focus, the factors which influenced that, and the supportive roles around the early stages of the inquiry development.

I move onto thinking about how the ECT (ECTs) visualise ‘improvement’ in the pupils’ learning and their own practice development. Ask how the ECT’s discuss how they see improvement in learning and what this looks like to them, and how they understand that it may or may not be happening.

Section 1: ECT and their focus

- In your roles supporting module 9 Inquiry project what are the challenges and contradictions that the ECT’s face in refining their foci?
- What challenges and contradictions do you face in supporting the ECTs in developing their foci?
- In your view what influences the ECTs selection of a focus?
- What support do the ECTs need to undertake the inquiry project?
- Do you think that the academic tutor and mentor play different roles in supporting the ECTs in their inquiry project?

-

Section 2: What is “better” for the ECTs

- In your experiences how do ECTs visualise the improvement in pupils’ learning to support the development of their foci?
- In your experience How do ECTs think about their own practice development to develop pupil learning?
- What are the challenges and contradiction to ECT thinking about pupil learning and their own practice development?
- What are the opportunities and challenges ECTs face in having reflective discussion around their teaching and pupil learning in their schools?
- Do you think involvement with the MEP has impacted on how they view those reflective processes or how they take part in them?

Appendix 7: Early career teacher semi-structured interview 1

Reflecting on engaging with your developing inquiry project

What influenced your developing teacher inquiry focus and how has your focus developed or changed since starting the inquiry project?

What opportunities and challenges have you faced so far in your teacher inquiry project?

How have these opportunities and challenges impacted you?

- How have you overcome them?
- Who has supported you and in what ways?

In what ways has engaging in the ethics process, literature review and early design of your data collection developed your understanding of inquiry?

- Who has supported this and how?

In relation to your values, beliefs and inquiry what does it mean to be a “good teacher” for you?

Appendix 8: Early career teacher semi-structured interview 2

- What opportunities and challenges have you so far faced in engaging with the MEP inquiry process, how have these opportunities and challenges impacted on you?
- Who has supported you with these opportunities and challenges and in what ways?
- In what ways do you feel engaging with the inquiry project is impacting on you professionally and personally and your pupils learning?
- In what ways has your EM supported you in your inquiry process?
- In what ways has your AT supported you in your inquiry process?
- What barriers have you faced working with your EM and AT during inquiry?
 - How did you overcome these?
- What opportunities and barriers have you face in engaging with inquiry from your schools?
 - How did you overcome these?
- In what ways has collaboration during the inquiry impacted on your inquiry?
- What have been the most positive and negative moments of the inquiry process so far and why?
- In what ways has engaging in the design of your inquiry and data generation developed your understanding of inquiry?
- Who has supported this and in what ways have they supported you?

Appendix 9: Early career teacher semi-structured interview 3

- What opportunities and challenges have you so far faced in engaging with the MEP inquiry process, how have these opportunities and challenges impacted on you?
- Who has supported you with these opportunities and challenges and in what ways?
- In what ways do you feel engaging with the inquiry project is impacting on you professionally and personally and your pupils learning?
- How are your students, active collaborators in this research, and how are you planning to support this collaboration?
 - What are the limitations to this approach if any?
- What are your expectations around the outcomes of your inquiry project?
- Have any of your perspectives on your inquiry focus or project changed, and if so why and how?
- What do you see as the greatest challenges in trying to change what happens in your classroom(s)?
- How would you describe the impact engaging in inquiry is having on you, your pupils and your school?
- In what ways has engaging in the data generation, and analysis and reflection of your practice developed your understanding of inquiry?
- Who has supported this and in what ways have they supported you?

Appendix 10: Early career teacher semi-structured interview 4

In consideration of your experience through your inquiry project reflecting at the end of the project.

- What opportunities and challenges have you faced engaging with the MEP inquiry process, what did you learn from these?
- In what ways do you feel engaging with the inquiry project has impacted on you professionally and personally and the learning of your pupils?
- In what ways has working with an Academic tutor in what ways has working with your external mentor in the inquiry process supported and or hindered your engagement with inquiry?
- What were the key moments of professional learning for you in this project and what prompted that learning?
- What role has your school played in the inquiry process?
- In what ways have you shared your findings with schools and colleagues and what were their responses to inquiry and your inquiry?
- What key recommendations would you make for future developments to programmes like the MEP engaging in teacher inquiry projects and why?
- What are your current views on the nature of research to inform practice and has this shifted throughout your project?
- Are there any key areas that you would like to highlight that relate your experience of engaging in teacher inquiry that you would like to note.
- In relation to your values, beliefs and inquiry what does it mean to be a “good teacher” for you?

Appendix 11: External mentors semi-structured interviews

In consideration of mentoring MEP early career teachers

- What opportunities and challenges have the early career teachers faced engaging with the MEP inquiry process, and how has this changed or developed over the inquiry project?
- In what ways did you support them to overcome to address the above.
- In what ways has your role as EM impacted on the ECT while engaging with inquiry?
- In what ways has the collaboration with AT in the inquiry process supported, and or inhibited the supervising teacher inquiry.
- What have been the key moments of professional learning and identity development that you have witnessed in your mentees across the inquiry project and what has prompted this development in them?
- In your opinion how has engaging with the MEP and undertaking inquiry impacted on your supervisees?
- What were the biggest challenges for mentoring ECTs through a teacher inquiry project on the MEP? How did you overcome these?
- What key recommendations would you make for future developments to programmes like the MEP engaging in teacher inquiry projects and why?
- Are there any key areas that you would like to highlight that relate to ECT experience of engaging in teacher inquiry or their developing identities that you would like to note.

Appendix 12: Academic tutor semi-structured interviews

In consideration of supervising MEP early career teachers:

- What opportunities and challenges have the early career teachers faced engaging with the MEP inquiry process, and how has this changed or developed over the inquiry project?
- In what ways has your role as AT impacted on the ECT while engaging with inquiry?
- In what ways has the collaboration with external mentors in the inquiry process supported, and or inhibited the supervising teacher inquiry.
- What have been the key moments of professional learning and identity development or change that you have witnessed in your supervisees across the inquiry project and what has prompted this development?
- How has engaging with the MEP and undertaking inquiry impacted on your supervisees?
- What were the biggest challenges for you supervising ECTs through a teacher inquiry project on the MEP? How did you overcome these?
- What key recommendations would you make for future developments to programmes like the MEP engaging in teacher inquiry projects and why?
- Are there any key areas that you would like to highlight that relate to ECT experience of engaging in teacher inquiry or their developing identities that you would like to note.