

The role of online discussion in the context of the Master of Teaching (MTeach)

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I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work in this thesis is entirely my own.

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Abstract

This research concerns the professional development of teachers in their first year of teaching. It seeks to find out more about how online discussions (ODs) undertaken by teachers, as part of the MTeach, contributed to this development process. During the MTeach teachers in this study worked in online tutor groups. These were made up from teachers from different schools, phases (primary and secondary) and subjects. Their accounts of participation in the ODs, written towards the end of the first year of teaching together with interviews conducted with a selection of these teachers at a later stage in their career, formed the data gathered for the research. The research was guided by the main question: how have the ODs facilitated new teacher development within the context of the MTeach? It appeared that the ODs enabled new teachers to participate by writing for an audience of peers, and by providing a sense of community, which through an underlying practitioner focus developed their criticality. These new teachers developed a collegiality, reflexivity and an engagement with wider and longer term perspectives about their professional practice. The research concluded that the gains from the online discussions were the result of careful 'pedagogic design' at several levels. The overarching finding is that by foregrounding the situated experiences and interests of the teachers, a 'way in' is provided for them to understand more fully the complexities, dilemmas and strategies encountered in their own and others' professional practice.

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Glossary

BERA	-British Educational Research Association
CEPD	-Career Entry Development Profile
CPA	-Curriculum Pedagogy and Assessment
CPD	-Continuing Professional Development
CMC	-Computer Mediated Communication
DCSF	-Department of Children, Schools and Families
DS1	-Data Stage 1
DS2	-Data Stage 2
DfEE	-Department for Education and Employment
DFES	-Department for Education and Skills
EdD	-Doctorate in Education
EPD	-Early Professional Development
FOP	-Foundations of Professionalism in Education
f2f	-face to face
HE	-Higher Education
ICT	-Information and Communication Technology
INSET	-In-service Education and Training
IOE	-Institute of Education
ITE	-Initial Teacher Education
IT	-Information Technology
IFS	-Institution Focused Study
IWB	-Interactive White Board
LA	-Local Authority
MOE1	-Methods of Enquiry 1
MOE2	-Methods of Enquiry 2
MTeach	-Master of Teaching
MTL	-Masters in Teaching and Learning
NCSL	-National College for School Leadership.
NQT	-Newly Qualified Teacher
OD	-Online discussion
Ofsted	-Office for Standards in Education
PCK	-Pedagogic Content Knowledge
PC	-Personal computer
PD	-Professional development
PDP2	-Professional Development Portfolio 2
PGCE	-Post Graduate Certificate in Education
QTS	-Qualified Teacher Status
RATL	-Raising Achievement/Transforming Learning
SSAT	-Specialist Schools and Academies Trust
TDA	-Teacher Development Agency

TPCK	-Technological Pedagogic Content Knowledge
TPL	-Teachers Professional Learning
TTA	-Teacher Training Agency
UT	-Understanding Teaching
VLE	-Virtual Learning Environment
YTS	-Youth Training Scheme

Undertaking a professional doctorate (the 2000 word statement)

This statement explains firstly how my career long professional and educational interests have underpinned my professional development and my doctoral studies. It then goes on to review how my participation in the various components of the EdD programme allowed my understanding and approaches to research to become more refined, focused and meaningful.

Professional Biography

In the early 1980s I worked with London teenagers in social care and youth training contexts. It was while working on a Youth Training Scheme (YTS) with unemployed 16 and 17 year olds that I first engaged with new technologies and education. These young people often were disillusioned by education, schooling and society which seemed to offer them very little. They appeared to be rejecting of traditional classroom teaching approaches, yet having an opportunity to use micro-computers for various projects and activities seemed to enthuse and engage them. This may well have been due to the then newness of these early personal computers (PCs) or the different classroom dynamic and layout the technology enabled. This stimulated my interest in the role of technology in education, so much so that when I subsequently undertook a PGCE I took options that allowed me to explore this area. This interest, followed by further experience, gave me the confidence to start a teaching career as a Business and Information Technology (IT) teacher.

My early teaching career coincided with what was an initial period of growth of the use of micro computers in teaching. I took on responsibility for many IT centred curriculum and course developments. During this period I could be perhaps categorised as an 'IT enthusiast' something that would later resonate with my ITE role and early developments within the MTeach. I soon became aware of benefits and tensions that surfaced with new technologies in education. For example young peoples' enthusiasm, opportunities for more

individualised learning and the scope for a more collaborative teacher-student and student-student relationships; all these had pedagogic potential.

I was aware during this period of 'technophobia' being apparent for both staff and students. This was sometimes linked with assumptions being made about technology adding to the learning process without a critical engagement of the role it plays. As my teaching career developed I took on management responsibilities that necessitated wider curriculum and course development roles. My experience in these roles was critical in developing my understanding that education can be enhanced by collegiality and teacher development. This was my introduction to the importance of facilitating positive and developmental communities of practice, where teachers in this case would work in teams and sub teams on curriculum and teaching strategies based on shared and situated understandings of their students. It was apparent that this collegially around curriculum and course development provided a natural space for teacher development for both existing and new teachers.

The change from my professional role as teacher to teacher educator (in the first instance on PGCE courses in the late 1990s) re-engaged me with arguments, research and theoretical perspectives that were behind desired pedagogies. This was empowering where the practical approaches to teaching and learning I had developed over years now resonated with theoretical arguments. This move coincided with another important phase of development in the worlds of technology and education. The internet underwent phenomenal growth and became established in schools and education. Technology (such as Interactive White Boards (IWB)) and software provision (such as PowerPoint) became available in most classrooms rather than mainly computer suites. I was aware of the potential conflicts and difficulties that 'Information and Communication Technology (ICT) enthusiasm' could cause. Trainee teachers often under pressure to perform may well resort to transmission type pedagogies that PowerPoint and the IWB facilitate so neatly (and un-interactively), possibly using resources they have downloaded rather than created themselves. The technology it seemed was sometimes restricting them

from experimenting with a variety of potentially messy approaches to teaching such as group work, role-play and other more active techniques that allow their students to collaborate and communicate.

It was in this educational and technology landscape that the Master of Teaching (MTeach) was planned and started with its first cohort. I was part of the initial tutor team which grappled with how to use new technologies to underpin this course. A possible advantage was that this was a completely new course without existing approaches and pedagogies that might influence the design. It was also very specific that it was for teachers in their first year of teaching. What was agreed is that we wanted students (these new teachers) to use the technologies to communicate with each other (in a community) meaningfully about what was happening in their classrooms. How this online discussion process has worked in practice is the focus of this thesis. For me the doctoral research has allowed me to investigate elements of my professional practice but also develop deeper understanding of strands of my educational interest that started much earlier in my career. These synergies and overlaps were not apparent at the outset rather they developed as my research journey progressed. It became apparent to me that to focus on the role of technology was narrow. For this research to be interesting, meaningful and worthwhile required engagement with the pedagogies at play, the community of learners and their contexts. The next section specifically refers to the elements of the EdD programme in providing a formative role in relation to my research.

Foundations of Professionalism in Education (FOP)

My work in the FOP module investigated and debated the complex interplay between two aspects of HE that have witnessed rapid change: the HE teacher's professional role and the use of ICTs for teaching and learning. I reviewed writing, research and theory in these areas and drew out key themes. The work tentatively established the importance of professional learning communities that include ICT 'enthusiasts' and an integrated pedagogic approach to ICTs. The work suggested these factors can enhance the capacity of the HE teacher to

engage positively, collaboratively and critically with the growth of learning technologies. I was motivated at this early stage by finding a juxtaposition of issues that interested me where there seemed a lack of developed theoretical frameworks. Formative assessment of this work steered me towards making stronger linkages and connections between theory and my professional practice. This is something that has proved valuable in subsequent modules, where I have increasingly recognised the value of professional doctorate studies in making more sense of the interplay of theory and practice.

Methods of Enquiry - Research Proposal (MOE1)

There were several beneficial aspects to formulating a research proposal. It made me work out and refine what it was that I was trying to find out. The formulation of realistic research questions was harder than I expected. Work in the module, feedback and discussions with tutors made me grapple to establish an approach that 'fits' with the context both from a personal as well as a research perspective and philosophy. Once (in this case) I was clearer that I was interested in being an 'interpretative' researcher I could focus on the 'how' of the research. This made me consider what methods was I going to use, why these and not others. This interpretative approach meant qualitative techniques needed developing that allowed student views and perceptions to come out of the research. I also needed to engage with ethical issues, these were students that I taught/tutored and assessed this could well affect their responses.

Methods of Enquiry -Research Project (MOE2)

This enquiry was exploratory and small scale utilising part of the MOE1 proposal. It was designed to investigate MTeach students' experiences of the online tasks on one module. It used a questionnaire with deliberately open ended questions. What was positive about undertaking this research is that it has allowed me to consider my professional practice in a more reflective way. This research provided me with a deeper insight into the way students have approached online tasks and what they have found useful and less useful. Actually conducting the practical research brings home the potential 'messiness'

and pressures at the various stages. Formative advice from tutors and colleagues made me think more carefully about the research questions and how to best try to answer this within the various professional and time constraints.

Curriculum Pedagogy and Assessment (CPA)

This coursework focused on a framework proposed by Mishra and Koehler (2006) which had featured in elements of my previous coursework. They have developed Shulman's (1986) formulation of Pedagogic Content Knowledge (PCK) by introducing 'technology knowledge' as an explicit component. This TPCK framework, it is argued, can enable a more theoretical robust way of designing, implementing, analysing and evaluating the use of ICTs in education. The main aim my CPA coursework was to 'unpick' and 'critique' this framework from both academic and professional perspectives. I had experimented with the model in MOE2 and already identified potential problems about accepting it without question. I needed to go back to the original work (Shulman's PCK) that the model had been developed from, review this and critiques of this work. I found this process very interesting particularly as Shulman's ideas are prevalent in teacher education, but also because critiques of his early work resonated with my feelings about TPCK. This is that it lacks a focus on the role of the learner including little discussion about learner's (previous) knowledge and the process of situated learning. Undertaking a critique was invaluable at this stage of the course as it exposes one to other views on a particular model, idea or theory and it encourages an in depth analysis of something specific to your own research interests.

Institution focussed study (IFS) and thesis

The IFS allowed me to experiment with larger samples and a wider variety of research techniques (interviews and a focus group). My literature base widened and deepened as I drew on theory about communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) as part of the literature and analysis. The work built on the previous modules but it also provided a crucial formative and pilot stage for the thesis. The larger scale presented challenges. Whereas

the shorter taught modules could be more easily managed within my day to day workload, it was more difficult to find the amount of time to dedicate to this project with a full time job and family commitments. As the work moved into the latter stages I encountered problems which were due to overambitious data collection and weaknesses in the research design. For example the data from my interviews with staff proved richer and more meaningful than the data from the students. Elements of the analysis and discussion became difficult and skewed. I had attempted to look at e-learning from both staff and students views and neglected the specificity of their different contexts. This was a learning process in itself it made me realise that if the work was to be worthwhile it could not be rushed. A professional doctorate for me needed to work with my other commitments rather than conflict with them. This experience made me re-evaluate the direction and nature of my research. I could see that e-learning and online task design was too generic; I had lost a focus on the actual learners (the teachers). I planned the thesis to address such issues. I made the work more bounded; I was concerned with new teachers, I was interested in what was happening in the online discussions (ODs) rather than the e-learning and online tasks that facilitated this process. My reading and literature base was strengthened by considering the contexts of my research subjects and the contested views of teacher development. I spent more time on my research design including presenting a proposal as part of an upgrade process. Early thesis stage feedback helped avoid some of the IFS research difficulties. This refocusing made the thesis process a fitting final stage to my doctoral work. The data provided rich and interesting ways in to addressing my research questions.

The doctoral study has very much been a research journey with many of the twists, turns bumps and false starts that travel often entails. It has been insightful and rewarding managing to draw together elements of my historic interests with my contemporary professional life.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research focus

This research investigates aspects of teachers' early professional development (EPD). It is concerned with teachers in a particular phase of EPD, their first year of being a teacher, often referred to as the induction year or newly qualified teacher (NQT) year. The teachers chosen for this study have undertaken the Master of Teaching (MTeach) degree at the Institute of Education (IoE) during their induction phase. E-learning is an integral and key feature of the way the MTeach course is structured and operates.

Within the context of the MTeach, this research aims to find out what forms of EPD teachers value, why this is the case and the role a particular e-learning activity, the online discussion (OD) plays in facilitating these teachers' EPD. The research will include a critical appraisal of the MTeach course (the course aims, the approaches used, how modules are structured, content selection etc), but the core investigation concerns the teachers' experiences, perceptions and views of the model of EPD adopted and developed by the MTeach.

Aspects of the research are not new; much has been researched and reported about teacher development at this early formative stage. (Bubb and Earley, 2006 ; Hobson *et al.*, 2009; Kyriacou and Kunc, 2007; Pickering, Daly and Pachler, 2007; Tickle, 2000; Totterdell *et al.*, 2002). What is new is that the research is situated within the context of one course (the MTeach) where e-learning is an integral element, and claims to be 'innovative higher education based teacher education and development' (Daly, Pachler and Lambert, 2004, p. 109). The course in turn is situated in an ICT-rich HE and socio-economic world, in which the increasing role of e-learning in education is often assumed to be positive and is encouraged without critically evaluating the pedagogic

implications (Fisher, Higgins and Loveless, 2006; Laurillard, 2002; Mishra and Koehler, 2006; Oliver, 2003).

The teachers undertaking the MTeach are working in London schools and are subject to current Government policy initiatives, albeit mediated by their school contexts. Their EPD, and the way they work as new teachers, is influenced by their schools. However by working with other teachers, facilitated by new technologies, the MTeach possibly offers opportunities of knowledge construction and shared understandings beyond the local, the immediate and the context specific. The research aims to identify key factors that influence this form of EPD as well as building up a picture of contemporary issues for teachers in this complex and busy early career phase.

The main research question, discussed more fully in Chapter 3, is

- How have the online discussions (ODs) facilitated new teacher development within the context of the MTeach?

The remainder of this introduction sets out the context of the research, in particular the nature and structure of the MTeach.

1.2 The MTeach

The MTeach course was initially designed to focus on the development of teachers in the challenging early phase of their teaching careers (Daly, Pachler and Lambert, 2004). It aimed to provide a framework of ‘support for talented new teachers in urban schools’ (DfES, 2001) encouraging high level professional learning to take place, nurturing an enquiry approach to

‘understanding teaching’ and raising levels of ‘research literacy’. In the first year of the course (2000) all participants were newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Since 2000 the course has expanded and developed to accommodate teachers with a range of experience and in different teaching contexts. The course now has teachers at the EPD phase along with more experienced teachers moving into early leadership roles, teachers on specific and school/local authority based pathways and several international programmes. The extract below is from the 2009 MTeach course information and outlines the educational aims of the programme. These aims are for all participants¹ and illustrate a common ethos and approach that underpins the MTeach.

Educational Aims of the Programme

The broad aim of the Master of Teaching is to enable teachers to shape and evaluate their knowledge and practice in the field of teaching and education more widely. In so doing it enables participants to

- engage critically with developments in teaching and learning
- describe, analyse and reflect on their role in the process of education
- develop and refine their communication skills through discussions and different forms of writing, such as professional learning portfolios, reflective journals, critical observations of classroom talk and research proposals
- advance their professional skills in relation to teaching and receive acknowledgement for developing their pedagogy
- reflect on personal and professional targets and respond positively to change
- acquire the knowledge, understanding and aptitude for successful subject leadership, including particularly the coaching and mentoring of others
- discover intellectual challenge, stimulation and enjoyment in the context of their professional learning
- deepen their knowledge of teaching and learning, through practical student-focused enquiry
- advance their knowledge of teaching through observation, recording and analysis
- secure their knowledge through a clear understanding of recent literature and current research in the field

(http://www.ioe.ac.uk/documents/brochures/PMT9_TCG9IM.pdf 19/11/2009)

There are three key themes implicitly interlinking these aims which illustrate the thinking behind what the course is trying to achieve and the way it operates. First, there is a clear focus on the participants’ own teaching, their students,

¹ Participant is the term I will use throughout this work to describe teachers that are taking the MTeach course.

their classrooms and their schools. It is a starting point for them to engage critically with practical and theoretical educational issues by trying to make sense of their situated practice and their professional development (PD). Also this starting point allows and is inclusive of varied levels of previous knowledge, experience and understanding. Secondly, there is a less overt but important theme about participants communicating and reflecting on their own and each other's practice. It is believed that this sharing and explaining of their experiences and ideas will not only deepen understanding of the complexities at play in teaching but also encourage reflexivity and analysis. Third is the engagement of participants with relevant literature and research, and the development of a deepening understanding of the role of research in informing their practice. This is not only about exposure to wider debates about teaching and learning than they might experience in their schools, but it is also about them critically evaluating or 'researching' what is happening in their own classrooms.

The way the course is organised, designed and operates to facilitate these themes and aims is important in framing this research. The role of e-learning in this process is of particular interest. There are a number of reasons the MTeach provides a potentially rich environment for this research: the course is relatively new (2000) and has been designed to use new technologies from the outset. This means, arguably, that MTeach staff have needed to consider pedagogic issues that arise from having online elements in their design and conceptualization of the course perhaps more than if they were 'converting' an existing course. The course is 'mixed mode' in the sense that both face to face (f2f) sessions and e-learning are used. An influential factor in adopting this approach is that the participants (mostly early career teachers) are in a demanding phase of career development where the logistics of 'traditional' f2f study could be a barrier. By using the potential of learning technologies the modules can be undertaken in a more flexible way by participants who are often in contexts where they have to juggle competing professional and personal priorities. From a research perspective participants having both f2f and e-learning components within the same course allows contrasts and comparisons

to be made of their experiences. This would not be an attempt to rank or compare one with the other, rather it allows the research to isolate significant moments, identify critical incidents or particular practices that facilitate participants' EPD. The research will thus require participants to engage with and reflect on their 'meta-learning'. By this I mean thinking about and gaining an understanding of how they learn (Shulman, 1996).

we don't learn from experience; we learn by thinking about our experience
(Shulman, 1996, p. 208).

MTeach course participants are arranged in tutor groups which are dependent on the pathway² they are following. The participants work with these peers both at f2f sessions and while taking part in the ODs. A summary of MTeach pathways is provided in Appendix 1.

1.2.1 New teacher pathway

This research concerns the new teacher pathway where participants were in their first year of being a teacher. The core module taken in this year is called Understanding Teaching (UT). To illustrate the typical interplay of f2f sessions and ODs I have outlined a summary from this module in Table 1 overleaf. This is followed by a more detailed explanation of the structure, content and roles focusing on the ODs.

² The MTeach has different pathways that are designed for the different contexts (e.g. new career teachers, more experienced teachers, school /borough based programmes, international programmes).

Timing	ODs	'Understanding Teaching' (UT) Module Activity	Mode
September		Inaugural evening at IoE	f2f
October	1	Starter task	online
Autumn half term			
November		Saturday at IoE	f2f
Nov/Dec	2	Classroom interactions	online
Christmas holidays			
Jan/Feb	3	Learning, progression and achievement	online
Spring half term			
February		Saturday at IoE	f2f
March	4	Evaluating teaching	online
Easter holidays			
April/May	5	Developing pedagogy	online
Summer half term			
June		Saturday at IoE: Coursework in progress presentations	f2f
July/August		Coursework write up	email/f2f

Table 1: Structure of UT module

A typical Masters course module would be taught in one term or semester. In this case the UT module runs over the whole academic year which was a conscious decision on the part of the tutors. The rationale was that new teachers have substantial workload pressures on them; the module thus needs to be designed to be manageable as well as meaningful and relevant to their early teaching experiences. Consequently, the foci of these ODs have been planned to be relevant and pertinent to the issues recently qualified teachers encounter in their schools and classrooms. As one can see from Table 1, above the ODs are structured so that there is one OD each half term with either a f2f session or school break in between.

At the start of the course there is an inaugural evening where students are introduced to the course, as part of this evening they will meet f2f as a tutor group. They are all new teachers either primary or secondary (from a mix of subjects). This tutor group session has an icebreaker activity which allows them to find out initial professional and personal information about their peers, they are also introduced to the VLE and the online starter task.

The starter task (the first OD) is completed over the next 4/5 weeks and allows them to familiarise themselves with the VLE (setting up their profile, putting up a photo of themselves and contributing to the first OD). They are asked to post to

the tutor group forum a short piece (200-300 words) about something 'tricky' currently happening in their teaching. It is thus a mix of social (Salmon, 2000) and professional contexts but does not require wider reading. They are expected to respond to at least one of their peers in the group forum. These tutor groups have tended to be a maximum of 15 participants; with larger groups we have split them into subgroups especially for the later ODs. The rationale for this is that participants get to know each other and at the same time not be overloaded by the amount they would be required to read in the ODs. For example if there was a group of 20 or more participants all writing between 300-500 words for an initial posting it would be time consuming to read and difficult to keep track of what each other are saying and the various contexts in which they are working.

The starter task is followed by a Saturday f2f day just after the autumn half term break; participants will work in their tutor groups and in larger multi group sessions. Within this day there will be a follow up activity on the starter task as well as a focus on the next OD. This focus is important as it familiarises them with the structure and expectations of the remaining ODs. These subsequent ODs follow a common format with: a tutor written briefing paper (about two pages) that introduces the area of focus; a task which outlines the options for them (all require them to look at what is happening in their classroom); two or more digitised readings (professional and/or academic) and some examples of previous participants' postings (maximum three). Participants are encouraged to read the briefing paper before they choose the task and to engage with the digitised readings before composing their initial posting (usually 300-500 words). They then need to respond to what at least one of the other participants has outlined in their posting. This whole process happens over a 4/5 week period with a specific date for completion of the initial posting, then usually the next two weeks allocated for responses. This is to allow space to do the work but also give a structure and momentum to the process.

The second OD (Classroom interactions) and third OD (Learning, progression and achievement) both ask participants to problematise these issues in their context of their own classrooms. The fourth OD (Evaluating teaching) is slightly

different to the previous 3 in that participants are asked to think about something that interests them in their classroom for the purpose of inquiry. It is looking forward rather than reflecting, although their choice is invariably based on their reflections and experiences. The task asks them to use a framework for the posting which takes the form of a proposal about what they are interested in and how they want to experiment with and evaluate it. Responses from the group are expected to be both questioning and formative. This OD is just over halfway through the teaching year and is designed to encourage early stage thinking about module coursework in a proactive rather than in purely a reflective or reactive way. The fifth OD in the early part of the summer term reverts to a more reflective approach, asking participants to review how their pedagogy has changed and developed over the last year.

The final formal part of the module undertaken as a group is a f2f day in June. For the main part of this day they work as a sub set of the tutor group where they present their coursework in progress for questioning and formative advice from colleagues and a tutor.

The tutor role in this whole process tends to be quite front loaded with designing the actual task, selecting readings, introducing tasks and timelines. Once the postings have started the role tends to move to one of prompting, moving tasks on, summarising and closing the OD. The tasks are not formally assessed but participation is important to meet the course attendance requirements.

The ODs can feed into assessment in two main ways. First, that one component of the Professional Development Portfolio 2 (PDP2) requires a critical review of how the ODs may have moved the student forward in their understanding of an aspect of their professional practice. Secondly, as explained above one of the ODs is directly related to formal assessed work for the module, it requires the outlining of an area/topic/issue that particularly interests the teacher, thus the discussions can play a formative role.

The explanation above attempts to clearly locate where the research is taking place and also to clarify what an OD is in the context of this research. It is

important to recognise that the literature (and, indeed, different courses in different institutions) uses different terminology. Equally, the same terminology may be used, but to express different meanings, possibly because the context is different.

1.3 Professional context

This research subjects elements of the MTeach course to critical review and therefore potentially fulfils a valuable professional and course development role. As I am a member of the MTeach course team at the IoE, my professional context needs outlining at this stage.

I am module leader for Understanding Teaching (UT) which is a core module on several pathways. Investigating in more depth the participants' experiences of e-learning, the extent to which and in what ways it supports their EPD is important for my professional role. For the purposes of ongoing course development and design this research of professional practice has encouraged me to critically engage with the pedagogies at play and how these might be mediated by changing technologies.

I have a longer term interest in the use of ICTs in education. I have substantial experience of using ICTs in education in different ways, for different purposes, at a variety of levels. Despite the passage of time and the variety of my experience, common themes do seem to emerge for both staff and students that have important pedagogic implications (Unwin, 2007a).

I also work on other teacher education courses such as the PGCE where the part played by of e-learning is less well established or integrated. A critical understanding of the potential of e-learning could be important in successfully designing and developing such courses. As a teacher educator, gaining a better understanding of what teachers value as EPD and CPD, and how e-learning can contribute to this process, will be important to the success of courses I work on and others that this research might influence. There is also potential for this research to influence and encourage Higher Education (HE)

and Government to critically engage with how e-learning can be used meaningfully for both professional development and in education generally.

Chapter 2: Review of literature

2.1 Introduction

The research is concerned with a particular form of teacher Early Professional Development (EPD), during the first year of being a teacher. The teachers within this study took the MTeach during their induction phase. The course utilises e-learning as a key component of the way it operates. Consequently the selection of literature in this review is drawn broadly from two areas: teacher education and e-learning. The teachers have experiences of induction year EPD undertaken at their schools and possibly provided by their Local Authority (LA), but in undertaking the MTeach, these teachers also experience accredited EPD outside their school/LA. They do this partly through an online group with other new teachers in other schools.

Within the fields of teacher education and e-learning there are several strands and sub-strands of literature that are of particular relevance to this work. To help structure this review I have divided the literature into a number of sections whilst acknowledging there will be overlaps and synergies which may well be of particular interest to the research. The sections are as follows:

- New Teachers: training and induction;
- Teacher's professional learning;
- E-learning/online communities;

The aim is to provide a critical review of literature that identifies conceptual, professional, policy and historical insights that resonate with the research focus and context.

2.2 New Teachers: training and induction

2.2.1 Induction: changing policy and practice

Induction is an area of professional learning that has been subject to scrutiny for many years and with greater focus since 2000 (Bubb and Earley, 2006 ; Bubb, Earley and Totterdell, 2005; Bubb *et al.*, 2002; Totterdell *et al.*, 2002). Increased interest has prompted both policy change with regard to induction and concerns that despite substantial investment in initial teacher education (ITE) and teacher recruitment, the number of teachers leaving within their first five years is large.

In England , about 40 percent of those who embark on a training course (on all routes) never become teachers, and of those who do become teachers , about 40 percent are no longer teaching 5 years later.
(Kyriacou and Kunc, 2007, p. 1246)

These issues of retention can at least partially be addressed by a supportive induction period. Good quality induction is seen by some (Sachs and Wilkinson, 2002; Tickle, 2000) as important in countering the 'sink or swim' attitudes towards new teachers that have sometimes been said to prevail in schools. Such attitudes have, it has been argued, encouraged the adoption by new teachers of survivalist strategies (Tickle, 2000) which may well be a negative influence on both classroom practice and the teacher's future PD. Induction thus can be difficult to implement consistently where school cultures and contexts vary as do the needs of new teachers.

Simco (2000, p. 11) identifies key areas where historically teacher induction has been problematic. The way initial teacher education (ITE) was organised until 1999, means it is treated as a separate phase with little or no requirement for using progress in the ITE phase to inform the design of support and development during induction. If there is support or PD it is often designed around generic 'one size fits all' sessions, rather than considering the context

and needs of individuals. There is a lack of consistency of provision between and across LAs and schools.

These historic weaknesses were not helped when the statutory induction phase of teacher preparation was removed in 1992, leaving it to the 'professional integrity of heads, teachers and advisers to sustain and encourage good practice' (Bleach, 1999, p. 2). An important initiative in 1997, by the newly elected Labour government, was the reintroduction of statutory induction for NQTs. This was announced in the White Paper 'Excellence in Schools' (DfEE, 1997). The policy was that from September 1999 all NQTs in England would complete a statutory induction period of three terms. This aimed to provide a linking of ITE and induction, targeted support of classroom practice with claims this would be a 'foundation for long-term continuing professional development' and contribute to 'school improvement and to raising classroom standards' (DfEE, 2000a, para 1). This policy was translated into a specific list of requirements and opportunities that schools needed to provide for NQTs (see Appendix 2). This included a lighter teaching timetable, regular reviews of progress with a school 'induction tutor' and observations.

Following this policy implementation there have been a number of large scale research projects undertaken by or for government agencies as well as smaller scale work by academics (often teacher educators) that focus on teachers' experiences of the induction and EPD phase. (Bubb and Earley, 2006 ; Bubb, Earley and Totterdell, 2005; Bubb *et al.*, 2002; Cameron *et al.*, 2007a; Cameron *et al.*, 2007b; DfEE, 2000a; Hobson *et al.*, 2009; Hobson *et al.*, 2007; Keay, 2007; Totterdell *et al.*, 2002)

The aim in the paragraphs that follow is to provide a concise critical overview of research in this area and identify common themes or gaps that are of interest to this research.

2.2.2 Teacher induction practice after 2000

Asking a new teacher about 'support' may lack focus. For example, support with what? It implies a helping role rather than the fostering of independent professional judgement, of resourcefulness and of critical engagement. We must treat with caution the results of large scale surveys in understanding what can be complex issues.

Work by Bubb et al has critiqued in some detail the way the new induction arrangements have worked in practice. They identified a significant minority of situations where teachers felt they were not getting the support to which they were entitled. Bubb et al (2005) find the undermining of successful induction happens at three levels, that of policy, school and teacher. It is at school level where the inconsistency and lack of support seems to be felt most. There are a several issues here such as weak school management, exploitation, and entrenched 'sink or swim' attitudes to induction. The role and effectiveness of the induction tutor is crucial in directly supporting NQTs as it is their job to plan the programme, communicate with all concerned and work closely with NQTs. The importance of having a specific and well trained person for this role is well documented in the USA, but that this does not seem to be the case in England.

Yet in England the role is usually taken by another class-based teacher within the school with varying degrees of enthusiasm and success. People undertake the role for no extra remuneration, with little or no training and time to do the job properly.

(Bubb and Earley, 2006 p. 7)

They go on to cite Sachs referring to practice in Missouri, USA.

Quality mentoring does not happen serendipitously. It requires a clear focus, adequate training and supervision, and contextual support and compensation.

(Sachs and Wilkinson, 2002)

Another problem they identify is the issue of power relations that exists for NQTs, raising problems about their support during induction may be seen as criticism or exposure of incompetence by managers.

For who is going to complain about their assessor-the head and induction tutor-when these people can recommend a fail which would result in the NQT being forever barred from teaching in a school? In our national research case studies and analysis of posting on the New Teacher Forum, we found that few NQTs aired grievances officially, but moaned informally.

(Bubb, Earley and Totterdell, 2005, p. 261)

Schools where there are the sorts of practice outlined above are not supportive environments for NQTs and research shows the percentage leaving teaching or moving jobs quickly in such schools is high (Bubb and Earley, 2006 ; Bubb, Earley and Totterdell, 2005; Cameron *et al.*, 2007a; Cameron *et al.*, 2007b).

Despite many of the criticisms levelled by Bubb et al at how induction is implemented, they do acknowledge the induction policy introduced in 1999 has lead to distinct improvements. There is now a clear obligation for schools to provide induction, although in practice there continues to be a considerable variability both to the nature and quality of induction (Bubb, Earley and Totterdell, 2005).

This variability of experience is of interest to this research as the MTeach participants are located in different school settings yet experiencing the EPD via a HE course. There has been recognition that ITE (usually HE based) and induction needs better linkages (Simco, 2000). The introduction of the career

entry development portfolio (CEDP) attempts to bridge these experiences. There has more recently been the notion of teaching being a Masters level profession with the introduction of the Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL). What is less clear is the role HE can actually play in the induction phase. O'Brien and Christie (2008) discuss this particular issue via 'a Scottish case study'. They identify continuing perception problems with what schools feel HE can offer at this stage. They explain how there needs to be a better 'understanding of the possibilities that exist for learning during the first year of teaching and the complexities facing newly qualified teachers' (O'Brien and Christie, 2008, p. 150). They feel HE has a role to play in what they offer and can ensure teacher education does not 'succumb to the dominant paradigm of 'good practice' that permeates the thinking of teachers, employers and policy makers.' (O'Brien and Christie, 2008, p. 160) How such issues are addressed and 'play out' on the MTeach is of relevance to this research (see conclusion page 144).

2.2.3 What do new teachers value?

Induction arrangements are a particular aspect of a new teacher's experience. It is important for this research to go beyond a focus on induction and try to understand what NQTs value, why and how it helps their development.

The '*Becoming a Teacher Project*' (Hobson et al., 2009, pp. 129-130) identified what it called 'highs' and 'lows' in a typical induction year. The main positive experiences were 'being accepted and trusted as a teacher', the teachers influence on pupil learning and 'rewarding relationships' (with pupils and colleagues). The negative experiences were predominantly associated with excessive workload, lack of support, challenging relationships and poor pupil behaviour. Wilson and Demetriou (2007, p. 219) focused on 'what new teachers felt helped them learn'. The factors that were positive for their learning were being 'valued and supported by the school professional community', a degree of

autonomy, opportunities for reflection and 'how the new teachers felt about themselves as teachers'.

Cameron et al, a group of New Zealand teacher educators investigated EPD experiences with who they defined as 'teachers with promise'. This research looked at these teachers' professional learning during the transition from ITE to the third year of teaching (Cameron *et al.*, 2007b). The research identified the importance to these new teachers of collegiate learning culture.

Teachers were looking for collegial support and collective work, and school cultures that supported their learning and that of their students.
(Cameron *et al.*, 2007a, p. 7)

What seems to emerge from the research is: the importance of professional trust; being valued and part of a community; having positive relationships be this with colleagues or pupils. All things that might engender self esteem and confidence in NQTs. In her research with secondary school physical education (PE) NQTs, Keay (2007) identifies the important influence of what she calls the 'subject or micro community'. This is likely to be made up of the teachers they work with on a day to day basis, almost certainly their subject colleagues.

Keay critiques the role of these micro communities, identifying potential positive and negative influences. She proposes that communities which are supportive and collegiate may be valued by NQTs, these may also stifle the NQTs professional development. This is because even supportive communities have their own norms with which the NQT is expected to comply.

The strength of the community can be very positive, it can be supportive and enabling but it can also be limiting for individual professional development and indeed the development of pedagogy in general.
(Keay, 2007, p. 10)

These themes and findings are relevant to key aspects of this research. The new teacher pathway of the MTeach is very much about supporting NQTs but it cannot be a school micro or subject community. The tutor groups are made up of teachers from different schools, different subjects and often different phases (primary, secondary). It is apparent how important it is that NQTs are supported, valued and feel part of a professional school/subject community. Possibly the way the MTeach is set up and works allows deeper reflection and critiques by NQTs of their contexts. This process includes being able to raise, compare, discuss and challenge norms and practice within their school micro and subject communities, in a 'safe' environment with other teachers in similar (NQTs) but crucially different contexts. How this is facilitated via the ODs, what is achieved (the nature of the teacher learning) and why this may be of value for EPD are all important questions in this project.

The design of the MTeach is premised on using e-learning as outlined in the Introduction (Chapter 1). Certainly there seems a lack of research about NQTs experiences of e-learning within formal induction and EPD programmes. Part of this research plans to identify and critically assess the nature of the affordances e-learning might offer new teachers.

2.3 Teacher's professional learning: contexts and development

The previous section reviewed writing and research that concerned the experiences of new teachers (in particular NQTs) and the systems and contexts in which they are located. However this research is also interested in these teachers' experience of accredited EPD, of being new teachers, of being situated within a school.

Consequently there are issues of interest that go beyond a purely NQT focus. To provide a broader and deeper understanding of these experiences one needs to consider a wider literature base that includes debates on how teachers understand their development and teacher learning within contemporary

settings. This is a large field of literature, and in this section I consider a selection from this. I discuss a range of work of particular interest to my research and I signal why this might be the case.

2.3.1 Changing contexts and CPD

This research concerns the experiences of new teachers who are located in a particular phase of government policy development. They are thus subject to particular agendas and initiatives which, although mediated by schools, will have an influence on their experiences.

New Labour came to power in 1997 with a re-professionalising and modernising agenda for teachers, acknowledging that (in their opinion) there had been a decline in status and support for teachers under the previous government. (Barber, 1996) This intention to recognise, support and develop teachers was essential, they argued, if schools and the education of young people were to improve. Thus there has been substantial investment as well as a plethora of policy initiatives; some, such as the statutory induction period referred to earlier, which were specifically aimed at new teachers (DfEE, 1997). This re-professionalisation has been accompanied by what is often referred to as a standards and target setting agenda that focuses on measurement of results/progress and in turn emphasises the testing of students. Educational initiatives that more directly impact on teaching and practice, to name just a few, have included: the numeracy and literacy strategy in primary schools; the key stage 3 strategy; and assessment for learning (within an overall adherence to high stakes summative assessment system). Alongside this has been an inspection regime (run by Ofsted) which also adopts a performativity approach to both classroom practice and school management.

Within this policy context, teacher CPD is seen as a means to re-professionalise teachers. CPD adopts a top down approach to 'deliver' the latest government initiative via standard workshops that neglect local contexts, practice and indeed the 'autonomy' of teachers. This is certainly the view of Pickering (2007) who undertook research into CPD policy and practice. When referring to government CPD strategy documents including *Leading and Coordinating CPD in Secondary Schools* (DfES, 2005) he critiques the limitations of the types of CPD they propose.

These documents focus mainly on professional development, which is defined as being about 'increasing teachers' skills, knowledge and understanding' This highly technicist view of teacher development suggests that an increase is best achieved by a standardised approach to CPD, in which knowledge, skills and understanding are 'delivered' to teachers, and thereby transferred, by a combination of top-down experts and examples of best practice.

(Pickering, 2007, p. 193)

For new teachers such models may provide a limited form of EPD that misses chances for individuals to critique and make sense of their own contexts and professional practice. Utilising both his own research and drawing on that conducted by Fielding et al for the DfES (Fielding *et al.*, 2005) Pickering explains that it is apparent teachers want something different.

...the teachers most valued professional learning that was a genuine shared dialogue over time, in which teachers reflected and acted upon individual and collective experiences of teaching.

(Pickering, 2007, pp. 193-194)

This research focuses on an environment where it is very much hoped such dialogues are facilitated and in this case not only are these in traditional f2f situations but via online groups.

2.3.2 The persistence of '*presentism*'

A powerful way of encapsulating the changing contexts in which these new teachers are relatively quickly immersed, is to use work by Hargreaves on the 'persistence of presentism' (Hargreaves, 2008). In this recent work Hargreaves utilises his research with the Raising Achievement/Transforming Learning (RATL) project funded by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT). He draws on the work of Dan Lortie (Lortie, 1975) which he describes as 'a classic of the field'. Central to Lortie's argument is that there are three interrelated orientations that impede school improvement; conservatism, individualism and presentism.

Conservatism is seen as the unwillingness to change, a preference to carry on as they had in the past both by teachers and schools. For example a high achieving selective school has a pedagogic culture dominated by teacher led and transmission approaches. Staff feel the results they justify their approaches and they see no reason to consider alternatives. Individualism is not the confident creative type but rather what has come out of a system where teachers are autonomous but potentially isolated. They do not really have criteria for their own success. They lack opportunities for collegiate discussion and feedback on their teaching. Presentism is about living in the present, concerned with the immediate (being there and doing what needs to be done today, tomorrow, this term) and neglecting the future.

Hargreaves explains that in the three decades since Lortie's original work, there has been much educational reform, policy and subsequent practice that in some ways have challenged conservatism and individualism. He suggests this is the legacy of Lortie's work.

Lortie's legacy has therefore been to highlight the existence of and connection between *individualism* and *conservatism* in teaching as interrelated obstacles to improvement and change, and to inspire antidotes to individualism and resistance to change in the form of teacher collaboration and collegiality, distributed teacher leadership, and strong professional (learning) communities. Eliminate individualism and you cure conservatism-this is the theory of change in action that has followed in the wake his work.

(Hargreaves, 2008, p. 4)

Hargreaves argues that this has not been the case with presentism. To explain how and why it is still a feature in schools and teaching he identifies three forms of presentism: endemic, adaptive and addictive. Endemic presentism concurs with Lortie's original focus on the way teaching is organised, which by its very nature is all about immediacy. Teachers are working with usually up to thirty children in settings which are busy, multifaceted, unpredictable and public. These complexities are likely to inhibit engagement in long term professional reflection. Hargreaves's research with the RATL project found teachers to some extent could partially move away from the immediacy of their jobs to consider strategies for improvement and raising achievement.

The overwhelming immediacy that characterises most teachers work did not prevent them from considering and connecting with improvement alternatives, including the large menu of strategies for raising achievement.

(Hargreaves, 2008, p. 12)

However, teachers and schools have preferred to concentrate on short term rather than long term strategies. The reason for this is at least partially a response to the wealth of initiatives that flowed from the marketisation and standards agendas referred to above. To meet short term targets the focus of many of these strategies (e.g. C/D border focus in year 11, top study skills tips, breakfast revision clubs), has, (Hargreaves argues) encouraged presentism. Presentism has re-appeared in adapted form to cope with new initiatives and strategies.

Short-term strategies such as these have a startling and attractive simplicity. They require only teachers' awareness and attention, not rumination or reflection, and the performance effects are often immediate in raising pupils' achievement above critical grade barriers that make a difference to them and their school.

(Hargreaves, 2008, p. 10)

The short termism is also encouraged by short policy and funding cycles, thus schools are discouraged (or not allowed) to consider longer term approaches to development. Important to this doctoral research is the concern that such strategies actually stifle teacher 'rumination or reflection' which I would argue are crucial for new teacher development.

Hargreaves discusses (citing Hopkins) that in some circumstances 'quick wins' can act as a lever of change.

Thus, Hopkins argues that 'changes to the school environment, attendance and uniform will be short term changes, but can result in tangible gains' (Hopkins, 2001, p. 222). Following a period of low morale, such visible changes will demonstrate that things are different in the school.

(Hargreaves, 2008, p. 16)

He goes on to explain that more generally though, the short term nature of these successes leads to addictive presentism. By this he means schools and teachers get used to and successful at implementing such strategies. However, this is at the cost of more sustainable thinking about school improvement.

Schools were not merely attracted but almost addicted to them, the strategies were simple to employ, widespread and available, could be used right away, and did not challenge or encourage teachers to question and revise their existing approaches to teaching and learning.

(Hargreaves, 2008, p. 18)

The potential problems of presentism are important for this study. The use of 'coping strategies' is well understood and not a new phenomenon (Woods, 1983; Woods, 1985). New teachers are understandably vulnerable, and tend to

adopt a survivalist approach (Tickle, 2000) based on day to day priorities. Indeed schools and colleagues may actively (if unwittingly) promote such a pathway into the teaching profession, thus embedding presentism at this early stage of a teaching career.

2.3.3. Perceptions of teacher development

There is a significant body of work concerned with how teachers develop in this early stage of a career. To help frame this evaluation I am going to draw on three broad views or models of teacher development. These are the competence based approach; the reflective practitioner; and the reflexive teacher. These models are not mutually exclusive and one might find elements of all three in place in a teacher education, training or induction programme. For example in ITE on a PGCE course, students need to achieve the TDA standards (derived from competence based approaches), they are encouraged to be reflective, and they may undertake research and critical evaluation. Using these models as a framework to look at how teachers view their own development, how they feel this happens and what they feel is important will allow a more meaningful evaluation of the MTeach form of EPD and an understanding of the role the ODs play in this process.

Originally competence based training systems were specifically vocational in nature, concentrating on the practical skills required to do a particular job. They were designed by breaking down jobs into small measurable parts then used a 'can do' assessment of individuals' performance. However, during the 1990s such approaches have been adopted and adapted in wider professional contexts. Moore summarises the model teacher educators will be most familiar with which are the TDA (then TTA) standards used in ITE.

According to this model, teachers are trained in acquisition of certain competences related to aspects of classroom management, long term, medium term and short term planning, developing and sharing subject knowledge, and assessing, recording and reporting students' work-leading to the achievement of prescribed assessable and (presumably) acquired-for-life 'standards'.

(Moore, 2004, pp. 3-4)

The induction standards continue this type of approach and as Tickle (2000) notes, concentrate on and are limited to 'subject knowledge and instructional know how' (Tickle, p. 34). The arguments for these models tend to be managerial and simplistic. That the requirements (or competences) for teaching effectively are well known (and agreed). They can be specified into expected attributes such as lesson clarity, structure, student management and these can be observed and measured for success. Progress can be encouraged by target setting until the teacher meets the required standard and there is proof of capability.

Moore's phrase '(presumably) acquired-for-life' in the above quote and Wilson and Demetriou in their writing about new teacher learning, signal that both are sceptical of the competency based approach.

For instance, interpreting competences as 'can do' statements leads to the belief that newly qualified teachers arrive in their first teaching posts fully equipped to take on all aspects of teaching without needing further support.

(Wilson and Demetriou, 2007, p. 218)

Indeed, judgements of 'competence' are very situation specific and informed by the often different expectations of the new teacher, their mentors, colleagues and school leaders.

(Wilson and Demetriou, 2007, p. 218)

Their view is that competence based approaches are limited (and context free) but also there is a concern that once the standards have been 'signed off' no other learning is seen to be required. A corollary of this for NQTs is that support is also not required. Interestingly there are parallels here with presentism. The

underlying rationale behind competence based approaches is that short term evidence of being able to do something is sufficient. Indeed, competence based approaches could well encourage presentism with teachers accepting as a professional norm the validity of short term strategies and achievement.

The reflective practitioner model or concept has been adopted widely in ITE, especially in HE where teachers educators utilised the ideas initiated by Schon (1983) in designing ITE courses. Although reflective practice can be seen as a counter to competence based approaches (Lucas, 2004), it is often integrated with standards models.

By the mid- to late 1990s 'initial teacher education had become an overwhelmingly practical affair' (Furlong *et al.*, 2000) , with students being urged to become reflective practitioners. In other words, students were urged not to simply focus on practical activity but to adopt a reflective and critical stance towards it.

(Lucas, 2004, p. 161)

Central to the notion of reflective practice is the focus on the teacher evaluating their own practice in their own particular context rather than the emphasis on particular skills found in competence based models. The idea is that the teacher's own evaluations consider the whole picture as to why issues are occurring within this particular situation and identify context relevant strategies. This process also aims to be part of a cycle of continuing development over time rather than a measurement at a moment in time.

Moore (2004) suggests the co-existence of the competence based and reflective practitioner models has encouraged reflective practice to be inward looking, focused only on the individual and on self improvement.

...just as success rests on the student's responsibility, with the aid of the tutors, to become 'competent' in the competences discourse, so it is incumbent on the individual student to use their own reflective, rational powers in the reflective practitioner discourse to a not dissimilar end.

(Moore, 2004, p. 104)

...it will always have this capacity for unhelpful over-personalisation as long as it is perceived and 'sold' as a private, individual practice rather than a public, collective responsibility.

(Moore, 2004, p. 104)

Consequently the benefits of the reflective practitioner model have been narrowed, shifting debate away from the complexities of teaching and the wider relevance of socio-economic and cultural factors. By becoming individualised and too context specific it can also promote a discourse of blame and feelings of guilt.

Moore argues there is a need to develop (and allow) reflexivity in teachers. He stresses that reflexive practice goes beyond 'reflection' and should be 'authentically and constructively critical...challenging rather than confirmatory' (Moore, 2004, p. 142). It is rooted in evolving teacher identities, on understanding the teacher as a person whose development is contingent on their social and intellectual history. Reflexivity requires the critical consideration of wider contexts and histories and an understanding of one's own positioning and behaviours in relation to these contexts and histories. Moore draws on Boler's (1999, p. 176) concept of a 'pedagogy of discomfort' where teachers' previously learned habits and assumptions (about education) are challenged, enabling them to start to recognize what they do not know. Reflexivity, it is argued, can be facilitated by teacher inquiry where teachers start to make sense of what is happening in their classrooms. A single classroom or local context focus maybe a starting point but in itself is not enough. The inquiry needs to include an understanding of the wider contexts at play with a critical examination of the teacher's own positioning and influence within and about these contexts. It also needs to be collective in that it is shared, that it opens up rather than closes down discussion.

Arguably, developing reflexivity in teachers will counter presentism. Reflexive teachers are likely to feel uncomfortable with the short term and narrow focus of the strategies (outlined above) that encourage presentism. Moreover, put simply

they will 'see them for what they are', be able to critically locate them within wider contexts and current agendas and open a debate (with colleagues and students) about what alternatives might be usefully considered. Similarly reflexivity is the antithesis of the competence based model, recognising the limitations of individualised 'can do' measurements of teaching that neglect considering historic and socio-economic factors of the local and wider contexts.

2.4 E-learning / online communities

A key element of this research is the examination of the role e-learning plays on the MTeach course. This is with the aim of understanding how and in what ways the online groups, the activities and discussions support these new teachers and facilitate their EPD. It is also important to recognise this is located in a technologically changing world which influences attitudes to technologies and how they are used in education.

To draw on relevant literature I have structured this review into three sections to allow a differential and progressive focusing. These are:

- the use of technologies in education;
- teachers learning with technologies/e-learning;
- e-learning in groups via online activities and discussion.

2.4.1 Technologies in education

New technologies can be seen as the solution to an educational problem without critiquing the pedagogy the technology might promote. What is often neglected in this debate is the recognition that it is not the availability of the technology which is important, but how it is used. Teacher educators from the USA, Mishra and Koehler, introduce their paper on Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge with this issue.

Part of the problem, we argue, has been a tendency to only look at the technology and not how it is used. Merely introducing technology to the educational process is not enough ... However, it is becoming increasingly clear that our primary focus should be on studying how the technology is used.

(Mishra and Koehler, 2006, p. 3)

This is a view shared by several academic learning technologists (see e.g. Goodyear, 2005; Laurillard, 2002; Oliver, 2003) along with the concern that there is a lack of research, writing and critiques of e-learning pedagogy within the community. Oliver suggests there is a consensual view about the role of technologies in learning but this is has not yet developed into a theoretical position.

Generally, learning technologists just do not believe the 'default', transmissive model of education ... They believe that learning arises from thoughtful experimentation (experimental learning), from questioning (critical thinking), from the intertwining of practice and reification, debated with peers (communities of practice). By deeming transmissive e-learning to be 'of questionable value', we have taken a theoretical stand- but are we, individually and collectively, aware of what stand we have taken?

(Oliver, 2003, p. 154)

A lack of critical engagement with theoretical and pedagogic issues will potentially result in short term surface level learning when adopting new technologies. This is particularly likely at a time when many (politicians, managers, software developers) see 'downloadable education' as cost effective (and profitable), teacher-proof (and a tool for monitoring/target setting). For instance Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) can all too easily become a content depository of files, resources and powerpoint presentation packages encouraging 'transmission' approaches and potentially reducing interactivity. Laurillard neatly summarises this as

How do we ensure that pedagogy exploits the technology, and not vice versa?

(Laurillard, 2009, p. 6)

The issues raised here are important for this research context. The thinking behind the MTeach (as discussed in Chapter 1) is to utilise the participants' own professional teaching experiences as a critical 'way in' to the topics and issues covered by the course. The challenge has been to develop appropriate

pedagogies for the online elements of the course. Rather than be constrained by the technologies and the pedagogies they might encourage, the idea is to utilise affordances the new technologies might offer. The research is examining this use of technology and the implications for teacher learning.

2.4.2 Teachers learning with technology

A report by Futurelab³ (2006) authored by Fisher, Higgins and Loveless focuses on teachers learning with digital technologies by reviewing current research and projects. They preface their report in the introduction with:

There is very little fundamental research that investigates how teachers might learn with digital technologies. Rather, there seems to be a pervasive assumption that teachers will learn with digital technologies.
(Fisher, Higgins and Loveless, 2006)

This in similar vein to the discussion in the previous section warns us about making positive assumptions about the role of technology in education. Of particular relevance is the conclusion that there is a lack of research about how technology is used or could be used for teacher learning.

Teachers' professional lives are exposed to new technologies at many levels. For example the growth of interactive white boards and internet based teaching resources. New teachers are potentially vulnerable not only to information overload but also taking short cuts which might be on offer and thus minimising the autonomous and critical thinking dimensions of their role. In short, opportunities for reflexivity decrease while presentism is facilitated.

The Futurelab report focuses on the affordances that technologies might offer to teacher learning. It does this by considering the nature of teacher knowledge and learning as well as using a number of cases to exemplify the potential affordances. Drawing on work by Banks, Leach and Moon (1999), Shulman and Shulman (2004), and Hoban (2002), it concludes that teacher learning is

³ Futurelab is an independent not-for-profit organisation that is dedicated to transforming teaching and learning, making it more relevant and engaging to 21st century learners through the use of innovative practice and technology.

complex, multifaceted and 'resistant to standardisation'(Fisher, Higgins and Loveless, 2006, p. 2).

This complexity reflects the interplay between the professional and the personal, the individual and the social, the objective and the subjective, the formal and the informal, the situated and the generalised.

(Fisher, Higgins and Loveless, 2006, p. 19)

This understanding of teaching has parallels with the concept of reflexivity and it is the background position they adopt when considering the affordances technologies might offer for teacher learning. They propose four clusters (Knowledge building, Distributed cognition, Community and communication, and Engagement) of purposeful activity as a way to describe and categorise these affordances.

This conceptual framework is helpful as it allows one to think about (and possibly evaluate) how technology is being used to enhance teacher learning. In a similar way it could play a part in a pedagogic design process for training and development courses. The authors explain that the clusters should not be seen to operate in a mutually exclusive way, 'rather, they may be seen as overlapping and interleaving aspects of activity' (Fisher, Higgins and Loveless, 2006, p. 21) and in practice more likely to be working together.

The report includes eight case studies where ICTs were a central part of a teacher learning project. The projects were very different, varying from 'Teachers' TV' (2005), the public broadcast channel, to 'Talking Heads' (NCSL, 2002), an online community to support and develop head teachers. With each project they assessed which affordance clusters were apparent and to what extent they had a role in the teacher learning. For example with the 'Talking Heads' project participants were positive about factors such as: they felt less isolated; they could share ideas and get a variety of perspectives; others' expertise was a resource; and all of this could happen relatively quickly. In this case it seems the community and communication cluster played an important role.

Work by Daly and Pachler (Daly, 2008; Daly and Pachler, 2007) is concerned with how computer mediated communication (CMC) facilitates teachers' professional learning (TPL). By analysing the actual texts and narratives in an online group they establish the core presence (if not fully recognised by participants) of both 'agency' and 'community' and acknowledge the importance of situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991), communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), the activist teacher (Sachs, 2003) and reflexivity (Moore, 2004a). The process of TPL is facilitated, it is argued, by an ethos and design of the course that foregrounds socio-constructivist perspectives on learning.

Kelly et al (2007) also draw on the work of Lave and Wenger (1991; 1998) when analysing the nature of the ODs on a Masters module for primary school teachers. They highlight the potential of asynchronous discussion to allow tentative positioning, development of professional criticality, identity and confidence within a group that has varied professional experience and academic backgrounds.

Australia, possibly because of its historic and necessary commitment to distance learning, offers some examples of how online learning has been used with teachers. Carr and Chambers (2006) conducted research with teachers who were part of a national CPD programme that aimed to establish online communities for TPL. While they found a general support for the idea of online communities, there were a number of key factors that influenced teachers valuing and participating in this form of CPD. Teachers were de-motivated if the online communities lacked 'commonality of purpose', 'a culture of shared, critical reflection about practice' (2006, p. 155) and if they struggled or were unfamiliar with the online tools. There are also two examples (Herrington *et al.*, 2006; Schuck, 2003) that report on developing online communities for new teachers. The rationale is that by developing online support networks (beyond individual schools) new teachers are less likely feel isolated and this may reduce the high attrition rates of early career teachers. These were not formal induction or EPD courses. Rather, they combined resources, discussion boards and other communication tools. Schuck (2003) found that new teachers valued the external (to school) nature of the environment and it fulfilled a positive role

for teachers less supported within their schools. The voluntary nature of the network seemed to result in mixed online activity and engagement; this appeared to be due to the pressures of being a new teacher. Because in this case discussion forums included experienced mentors and teachers, the new teachers felt slightly intimidated and insecure in raising their personal issues and problems.

This section has raised related issues that are of central interest to this research. Firstly, a pedagogic design issue, critically considering what teachers are asked to do online. Secondly, I would argue the need for this pedagogic design to consider situated learning which allows shared understanding, collegiality and encourages reflexivity.

Clearly along with the growth and development of social networking via the internet there is an increase in online learning communities included as parts of formally accredited courses. It is apparent, however, that there is a lack of research that focuses on teachers learning through ODs and research that specifically focuses on teachers who are NQTs is even more limited.

2.4.3 E-learning in groups via online activities and discussion.

There is a large and more established field of literature that looks at the potential of formal online groups and discussions. Although not specific to teacher learning aspects of this literature are of interest to this research as they provide insights and thinking about online learning from a more substantive research base. I have been selective concentrating on work with similarities to the MTeach: that it is in HE, has a professional focus, is underpinned by socio-constructivist thinking and that the use of OD is central.

Online courses allow participants to communicate with each other and thus it is argued constructivist pedagogical practice can inform the design to achieve learning. Harasim (2000) explains it this way.

...the student presents, defends, develop, and refines ideas. To articulate their ideas, students must organise their thoughts and information into knowledge structures. Active learner participation leads to multiple perspectives on issues, a divergence of ideas, and positions that students must sort through to find meaning and convergence ... Students encounter opportunities to experience and resolve academic controversies in the online discourse environment.

(Harasim, 2000, p. 53)

Garrison et al (Garrison and Anderson, 2003; Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2001) have developed concept of a 'community of inquiry' within online groups. They recognise the importance of socio-constructivism and community for learning in such groups,

...a community where individual experiences and ideas are recognised and discussed in light of societal knowledge, norms and values.

(Garrison and Anderson, 2003, p. 4)

but go on to emphasise the importance of the individual in the process.

...it is the individual learner who must grasp its meaning or offer an improved understanding.

(Garrison and Anderson, 2003, p. 13)

The discussion above on the importance in online groups of socio-constructivism, the role of inquiry, the individual as well as wider society reminds us of the concept of reflexivity (Moore, 2004) as a model for teacher development (see p. 42).

A shared and situated context for participants has been argued as a key to enhancing intellectual engagement (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Sachs, 2003). The shared context on the MTeach is potentially twofold: the participants are all new teachers, and they are also all engaged in this formal EPD. The design of the MTeach allows the focus of the ODs to emanate from the participants' own experience and professional contexts which adds a situated learning dimension.

Online learning is often compared with f2f learning. In fact the words 'discussion' and 'conferencing' are used for text based communication. This research is concerned with asynchronous text based communication with

groups of participants via a VLE. The asynchronicity and permanent nature of the ODs is important for participants' time control over thinking processes compared with f2f discussions. It is argued (Lapadat, 2002; Salmon, 2004) that it allows more opportunities to revisit what other participants are saying and thus a deeper engagement with the concepts being posed before responding.

...the time lags involved between logging on and taking part, encourages (users) to consider and think about the messages they are receiving before replying...with text-based conferencing it is possible to 'rewind' a conversation, to pick out threads and make very direct links. Therefore online discussions have a more permanent feel and are subject to reworking in a way more transient verbal conversation cannot be.

(Salmon, 2004, p. 17)

HE is seeing a proliferation of online environments. However, one needs to be cautious about making assumptions as to the benefits for participants of learning in online groups or by having ODs. Laurillard warns that evidence of interaction and community does not necessarily mean the learning gains of collaboration are achieved.

There is a structural difference between the social dimension of learning (the discussion of theory, the exchange of ideas, negotiating meaning) and the practice of discussion and argument in order to develop theory.

(Laurillard, 2009, p. 16)

This highlights the need to consider carefully what participants are required to do as part of an OD. Goodyear emphasises the importance of the design of what he calls online tasks to enable and support ODs.

Neglect of task design tends to have two consequences –either students flounder around unproductively and unhappily, not knowing what is expected of them, or tutors find themselves spending much more time than they can afford trying to animate online discussions.

(Goodyear, 2002, p. 67)

In short, pedagogic design is a crucial factor for facilitating learning in groups via online activities and discussions. This is true of the MTeach where the new teachers are busy, under considerable pressure with many competing priorities.

Unless the activities and discussions are meaningful and manageable the participants are likely to disengage or at best satisfice.

2.5 Conclusion

This research is concerned with how and in what ways the MTeach ODs have facilitated new teacher development. It is clear from the literature that there is scope for more research that focuses on the use of e-learning (and ODs in particular) to support and develop NQTs professional knowledge and understanding.

There are a number of themes and concepts in the literature which I consider are key for this research. The first of these is collegiality, it is apparent and unsurprising that new teachers want to be valued, have a voice and be part of a community. This collegiality extends beyond being part of a community of practice to allowing a critical stance; it relates to and encourages reflexivity. Reflexivity as the second key concept is concerned with the new teachers' criticality. It is about them asking questions and making meaning of their personal situation within local but crucially wider contexts, considering factors such as the historical, the social and the economic. Presentism, the third concept, is important as new teachers are susceptible to short term solutions and survivalist approaches. Presentism undermines reflexivity, but reflexivity and collegiality can challenge the negative aspects of presentism.

These concepts feature within the different strands of literature in similar and different ways. The linkages and synergies between these concepts make them interesting for both underpinning this research and informing the research questions. The combination provides multiple perspectives for thinking about these new teachers' situated experiences. Reflexivity draws on their personal factors, collegiality their communities and presentism their contexts. How these concepts appear and are played out within the MTeach ODs is the main focus of this work. I am interested in how and in what ways the ODs facilitate (or otherwise) new teacher learning.

The context is important: these new teachers are vulnerable to e-overload and tend to be time poor. They have views on pedagogy and they are situated in schools with day to day experiences and concerns which they need to draw on, share and make sense of if their development is to be meaningful. This foregrounds an overarching concept of pedagogic design that needs to be explored. How does the pedagogic design of the ODs underpin and enable new teacher development within the context of the MTeach?

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the methodology adopted to explore new teachers' experiences of participating in the MTeach online discussions (ODs). This starts with clarification of the research questions and how they fit within the overall research strategy. This is followed by an explanation of why particular theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches have been adopted. The chapter then moves onto a more detailed explanation of the research design, the sources of data, the methods used, ethical issues and the process of data collection, coding and analysis. A concluding section reviews the chapter locating it within the context of my wider doctoral studies and professional role.

3.2 The research questions

The main research question is:

- How have the online discussions (ODs) facilitated new teacher development within the context of the MTeach?

There are sub-questions implicit in this question, which are important for this research as they allow a deeper exploration of what is happening in the ODs and why.

They are:

- What is the nature of new teacher development within this setting?
- What aspects of the OD do participants see as important in enabling new teacher development?
- How does the pedagogic design of the ODs underpin and enable new teacher development?

The main sources of evidence used to address these questions are the new teachers who have undertaken the MTeach and participated in the ODs as part of this process. The aim is not to try and measure their development against some prescribed standards or competences. Rather it is to hear their opinions about how they developed in their NQT year (and beyond) and the role the ODs played in this process. My contention is that their different views and experiences will have common and interesting elements which will help answer the research questions.

3.3 Theoretical and methodological perspectives

With the aim of finding out about the views and experiences of new teachers, the theoretical perspective being adopted for this research is interpretive with a methodological approach that uses qualitative data. From a theoretical perspective the interpretive researcher begins with individuals and their subjective experiences and aims to comprehend their actions and perceptions. My approach is therefore based on the view that participants are the most important sources of data in investigating the role and impact of the ODs. Consequently, the best way to obtain meaningful information about these phenomena is to ask a range of the course participants. As a tutor on the course I have access to the ODs, I am involved in setting them up and moving them along. I observe how they develop or not. However, I did not want to

analyse and make judgements about participants' exchanges in a participant-observer role; rather I wanted to find out what participants' experiences and feelings were about the ODs.

Echoing Mason (1996), my ontological position is that people's knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences and interactions are meaningful properties in relation to my research questions. In turn my epistemological position suggests that a legitimate way to generate data on these ontological properties is to interact with people, to talk to them, to listen to them, and to gain access to their views and ideas. The two research methods achieve this by firstly using specific accounts participants have written about the role of the ODs and then by interviewing them about their experiences.

I am approaching this research with a 'hunch' that the MTeach ODs provides a certain kind of experience that broadens and deepens participants' understanding of their work. However, I want to remain open minded during the research process, both building up and refining a picture of what is happening in relation to the research questions.

In this case the MTeach cohort of new teachers is not claimed to be typical, not least because they have chosen to embark on Masters level accredited EPD. With a qualitative approach the initial coding of data is likely to produce large numbers of categories which are refined with the ongoing analysis as patterns and themes emerge. Strauss and Corbin (1990) highlight four features within the data collection and analysis process. That it is cumulative, enabling an increasing focus on the emerging themes and patterns, yet stays flexible. The flexibility they refer to means designing research that allows 'the ability to move around and pursue the areas of investigation that might not have been foreseen' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 178).

There are a number of reasons why qualitative approaches are helpful for this project. It is situated, small scale and exploratory. This research is looking at practical activities and routine situations. This project is concerned with the MTeach participants' experiences within the ODs and their opinions about these experiences, which include interaction with their course colleagues within an online group. The research design section which follows explains the significance of the approaches adopted in more detail.

3.4 Research design

This section provides a rationale to the way this research was conducted. It explains the sources of data and the research process, which includes decisions about the sample, data collection and ethical issues. It then goes on to explain the coding and analysis process.

3.4.1 The data

The research uses two sets of data: firstly, written work that participants completed as part of the course; secondly, interviews with a selection of these participants. I am calling these two sets of different data, Data Stage 1 (DS1) and Data Stage 2 (DS2). This is to illustrate the chronological nature of this data. Participants produced DS1 towards the end of their NQT year, DS2 (the interviews) took place at least 2 years later.

Data stage 1: MTeach written work

In the time frame of this research project all MTeach students undertook a module called Professional Development Portfolio 2 (PDP2). One element (1500 words) of PDP2 requires participants to critically reflect on how their participation in the ODs in a particular module (depending on their pathway) has contributed to their professional development. For new teachers this concerns their participation in the Understanding Teaching (UT) module which is outlined

in detail in Chapter 1 (see p. 20). There are a number of reasons that I feel these 1500 word elements are a rich source of qualitative data. The first is that they are something that participants have undertaken as part of the course rather than an additional (research) activity such as a questionnaire, focus group or interview. My experience in earlier EdD research work (Unwin, 2005; Unwin, 2007b) with MTeach participants is that they are time poor and it was difficult to facilitate data collection that went beyond rather superficial or rushed responses. This work had required participants to spend time reflecting specifically on the ODs, making connections with their professional contexts and development, selecting significant aspects and interactions, then structuring this into a critical summary, almost a meta-learning commentary about their development and the role of the ODs. The second reason is that the work has guidelines (i.e. it is about the OD in a particular module and they should exemplify the work with extracts from three of the discussions) but it is not prescriptive, thus participants could focus on elements that resonate with their personal professional situation. Using this data enables me 'to gain access to their accounts and articulations ' (Mason, 1996, pp. 39-40).

Because it is part of submitted coursework there are considerations that enhance and limit the data. PDP2 sessions at various stages throughout the year will encourage participants to start thinking and collecting evidence for this work so it is built up and developed over some time rather than being a relatively immediate response to a researcher's questions. Although participants are encouraged to be critical and analytical about their experiences, the focus on contributing to professional development means the work may be dominated by positive rather than negative reflections. Because it is MTeach coursework participants may adopt a formulaic approach which they feel fits with what the MTeach demands. They also might be wary of being specifically critical of the way the ODs operate as they know postings will be read by course tutors. Another potential weakness that could be leveled at this data is that these teachers are still relatively new to their profession and their views about

professional development maybe naive and may lack the experience required to understand the issues involved.

To address these concerns and provide a degree of triangulation, and to have opportunities to delve into participants' longer term reflections and alternative views, semi structured interviews were conducted with a range of participants.

Data Stage 2: Interviews

The second stage of data gathering was via semi-structured interviews with current and former course participants. The aim was to provide a second, complementary source of qualitative data and have the flexibility to probe into areas that help answer the research questions. Such an approach allows individuals an opportunity to voice their personal interpretations of events and issues. Cohen et al (2004) suggest these as potential advantages.

The qualitative interview tends to move away from the pre-structured, standardized form and toward the open-ended or semi-structured interview, as this enables respondents to project their own ways of defining the world.

(Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2004, p. 30)

It is important for this research that the participants were able to express their own views and opinions on the trajectory of their career. How the EPD phase influenced this progression and the part played by the MTeach with its ODs in this process. These are areas of interest to this research that can be investigated more readily in a semi-structured interview than in a questionnaire or a very structured interview.

A key issue in conducting these semi structured interviews is that the researcher is also an MTeach tutor. This means even before the interview begins there are shared and situated understandings about the course, the language used, the modules, the online components and so on. I wanted this 'insider' role (Mercer, 2007, p. 146) to be an advantage to the research so that we could have a loosely structured, relevant and fruitful discussion without having to 'worry' about clarifying course specific issues and jargon. However, I needed to be mindful that because the participants know me (possibly as their ex-tutor and certainly as part of the MTeach course team) it might influence their responses: they might see this as a friendly post-MTeach chat about their progress. With this in mind the sample selected was split approximately 50/50 between participants who were/were not my tutees. Also, when contacting potential interviewees the focus and nature of the research and the ethical stance being followed were emphasised.

3.4.2 The research process

Selecting the sample (Table 2 below provides a summary of the data sources)

The MTeach was launched in 2001. I decided to use data from participants that had started the course as NQTs in the years 2003-2007 (only the pilot interviewee was earlier). The rationale for this was that the course had moved into a period of relative stability after a phase of new course development that involved various changes. One important change, for example, concerns DS1. In the first 2 years of the course the PDP2 element relating to involvement in the ODs was relatively vague, asking participants to illustrate their interactions in the ODs with OD extracts. By 2003 this element had become more fine-tuned as described above in 3.4.1. It asked them to be critical and analytical about the ODs and their professional development.

Using this time span meant that at the time of the interview for DS2 (2009) participants were at variable distances (2-6 years including the pilot interviewee)

from finishing their NQT years. My thinking was that this time variability of early career experience would make the data more robust. The research was about the NQT year and the formative experiences connected with the ODs. Variable distances from that NQT year might illustrate how valuable or not those formative experiences have been as time moves on and possibly capture how participants' perspectives have changed. One issue is about what they would remember which I have attempted to address via the data collection techniques used for DS2.

	Gender	Teacher Phase/Subject (S=Secondary)	Adam Tutor	Year Start	Data Stage 1 -PDP2 Extracts	Data Stage 2 -Interviews (2009)
					Referencing system used in text	
1	F	S-Business-ICT	YY	2002		Pilot
2	F	S-Drama		2003	A1	
3	M	S-Maths		2004	B1	
4	M	S-Drama/English		2004	C1	
5	F	Primary		2004	D1	D2
6	F	Primary		2004	E1	E2
7	F	Primary		2004	F1	
8	F	S-History		2004	G1	G2
9	F	S- English	Y	2004	H1	
10	M	S-MFL	Y	2004	J1	
11	F	S-MFL	Y	2004	K1	
12	M	S-Business	YY	2005	L1	L2
13	F	S-Geography	YY	2005	M1	M2
14	M	S-English	YY	2005	N1	N2
15	M	S-English	YY	2005	P1	P2
16	F	S-History/Citizenship	YY	2005	Q1	
17	F	Primary	YY	2005	R1	
18	M	S-Science		2006	S1	
19	M	S-Science		2006	T1	T2
20	F	S-Geography		2006	U1	
21	F	S-English		2006	V1	V2
22	M	S-Citizenship	YY	2007	W1	
23	F	S-Business	YY	2007	X1	

Y -personal tutor NQT year only

YY -personal tutor whole course

Table 2: Data sources

The MTeach includes teachers from primary and various secondary school subjects. I wanted to represent this range in my research as I knew from my role on the course this was a special feature of the course compared with most teacher education which is phase and/or subject specific.

I selected a spread of genders (DS1-12 female, 10 male, DS2-6 female, 4 male) that broadly represented typical MTeach new teacher cohorts. The size of the sample was to enable the spread and range described above but to also keep the data manageable. DS1 was made up of 22 separate accounts from participants each of approximately 1500 words. DS2 was 10 interviews each of approximately 6000 words each.

As a tutor on the course who worked mainly with the new teacher pathway, I knew some of the participants in a personal tutor capacity. This usually meant continuing to supervise them beyond the NQT year. Table 2 shows where I was in a tutor role. The aim was to make sure that the sample was not dominated by ex-tutees of mine since my concern was that this relationship might influence their responses. Two of the interviewees (T2, V2) were still completing the course.

Data collection and coding

Data Stage 1(DS1)

DS1 was already held at my workplace, either in electronic or hard copy format. I wrote to potential participants, outlining the focus and purpose of this research, assuring them of confidentiality and asking permission to use this past element of their MTeach coursework. I was explicit that I was working to British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines and that they were under no obligation to be involved and could withdraw at any time. I also asked them in this letter if they would be willing to take part in an interview at a later stage of the research (see Appendix 3). Although the research was carried out in stages the intention was not to use data and outcomes of coding in DS1 to inform the choice of who was approached for interview in DS2. The idea was to

try and keep the sample balanced in of participant phase, subject specialism, gender and number of years in teaching.

The rationale for using the PDP2 data came out of my professional context. In my role as a course tutor I have been responsible for setting up and monitoring the ODs. I also worked with participants on the PDP2 including reading the section of the portfolio that makes up DS1. This was in a tutorial context rather than as a researcher. This process made me realise the 1500 word extracts from PDP2 shed light on aspects of participants' experiences with the ODs. I was thus familiar with the typical format and structure of these texts and the DS1 sample included work (approximately 30%) I had read before in this tutor role.

Once the sample was selected I read all the pieces, making notes to get a feel for the data in relation to the research focus rather than as a piece of coursework. I then used QSR NVivo 8 (NVivo) to facilitate a more systematic recording and organisation of the data and start formal coding. As discussed earlier I have adopted a relatively open approach to seeing what emerges from the data. Furthermore, with DS1 the data had not come from a series of direct questions asked of the participants where I might use a specific list of codes to categorise the responses. My approach was to look for data that I felt resonated with the areas of research interest. The initial stage of this process produced many examples, often with overlaps and with a multiplicity of interest and significance. As I started to work with the data within NVivo I used broad codes to try to select, categorise and organise the data. This allowed me to multiple code, achieve some data reduction and organise the data more coherently.

The initial process of coding DS1 helped shaped the next stage of data collection. It had provided some sense of the nature of the ODs and what participants valued and why. As discussed earlier I realised that there were

limitations to DS1. It was written at the end of the participant's first year of teaching and for a piece of coursework. By interviewing participants, albeit only a few years later (2, 3, 4, or 6), they may well have more or different insights about what happened in their NQT year and the role of the MTeach and the ODs during that phase.

Data Stage 2 (DS2)

All DS1 participants were asked if they were willing to be interviewed (Appendix 2). From those who offered I selected nine with a representative mix of gender, phase, subject and length of teaching experience to provide the sample for DS2. This was relatively straightforward as DS1 had a good range and several participants offered to do interviews. I did have more offers to be interviewed from ex-tutees and specific years but selected to keep the sample balanced and representative.

My earlier doctoral research (Unwin, 2007b) had used semi-structured interviews with MTeach staff about issues that are their day to day work concerns and thus were relatively easy to talk about. I recognised that for these participants their professional lives would have moved on and developed since their NQT year so it might be difficult for them to recollect what happened and how the ODs worked. I did not want the interview to be dominated by me having to remind them of nature and structure of the online activities. To help facilitate the interview process I designed an interview framework (Appendix 4). Fitting on one page, it introduced the research focus, had some broad interview questions with prompt/expansion areas, and a reminder of the topics/make-up/format of the ODs. Interviewees would also receive an unedited copy of the work they had submitted as part of PDP2 about the ODs (DS1). The idea was to allow them time to read the supporting documentation and think through the issues in advance and understand there was a clear purpose and direction to the interview process.

The pilot interview

I decided it would be valuable to conduct a pilot interview to test out this interview strategy. I approached an MTeach graduate who started the course earlier than the main sample. I chose her for several reasons: she was now an MTeach associate⁴ so she was familiar with how the course worked; I knew her well as she had been a tutee of mine on the PGCE and MTeach courses; finally, she was also a mentor at one of the PGCE placement schools. I felt she was a very reflective person, with an ability to be critical and analytical. She would probably have clear opinions and be confident enough to be forthright about voicing these. I also considered she would be relaxed enough with me to be honest about the interview process, and 'minimizing the distance between the researcher and informant' (Creswell, 1994, p. 158) was important at this formative stage. The pilot explained how reading the copy of DS1 was crucial in advance of the interview as it allowed her to remember much more clearly what her feelings were about the ODs back in her NQT year. There were several suggestions from her about how to make the interview framework clearer (e.g. OD content and timings) as well as ideas for prompts that could be used during the interview, an adjusted framework was developed (Appendix 5). As well as serving the role of a pilot interview, this also provided data for DS2, in its own right.

The interviews

The 9 participants who were chosen to be interviewed were sent a letter (Appendix 6) which concentrated on practicalities including location, timing, contact details, the process. They were also sent the interview framework (Appendix 5) and their DS1 in advance. The aim was to get them thinking about the research areas but also let them choose what would be a suitable time and place for the interview. The letter was clear that we would need approximately 40 minutes; it needed to be relatively quiet, not interrupted and suggested either their workplace or mine. I felt they would be best positioned to judge how this

⁴ MTeach graduates, who work with current cohorts in various ways such as running specific sessions or giving individual advice.

interview could fit into their lives and that if external pressures were minimized the interviews would be more productive as they would be more relaxed. Most interviewees opted for after the school day either at their school or at my workplace.

It was planned for this to be a semi structured interview situation. Mason (1996) makes the point that interviews are social interactions that have to be carefully managed 'to orchestrate an interaction which moves easily and painlessly between topics and questions' (Mason, 1996, p. 45). This will allow the free flow of ideas between interviewer and interviewee that is more likely to enable relevant rich data to be collected. The intention was that the interview framework would assist this process; interviewees could see the structure and direction of the interview in advance so there would not really be surprises. Providing the interview framework and copy of their DS1 in advance did seem to help preparation. Most interviewees had made notes and said it was interesting to read back over what they had written during their NQT year.

The first question was a settling type question not directly related to their participation in the ODs. It took the interviewee back to the starting point of the MTeach when they had just completed their ITE and had decided to continue studying. It allowed a broadly chronological approach to be established in the interview which was useful as essentially I was interested in how they saw their development. The second question concerned the challenges of their NQT year, which was important to find out about the school and teaching context in which they were operating at the time of undertaking this first stage of the MTeach and the ODs. Subsequent questions and prompts delved more into the specifics of the ODs: how they approached it, what they felt was difficult and what they felt they got out of the participation. Although the interview was recorded I did take some notes about issues of interest as they arose which I might want to ask more about later rather than interrupt the flow of the interview.

As part of my ethical stance of openness and obtaining consent, once the recordings were transcribed copies were sent to the participants for approval.

Coding and analysis

At each stage of the process described above there was a level of coding and/or analysis taking place. I listened to the interview recordings relatively soon after the interview, jotting down areas of interest. Once transcribed, I read the interviews and built up a large conceptual 'map' on an A3 sheet (Appendix 7). Then in a similar way to DS1 the transcripts were transferred to NVivo for more systematic coding.

In Chapter 4 (Data presentation and analysis) I explain the codes that emerged from the data and how I moved to establishing themes to assist data presentation and analysis (see 4.2.1 Route to analysis, p. 73). My approach to both DS1 and DS2 can be represented well by drawing on work by Miles and Huberman (1994) who illustrate the process of data collection and analysis in the model shown in figure 1 below.

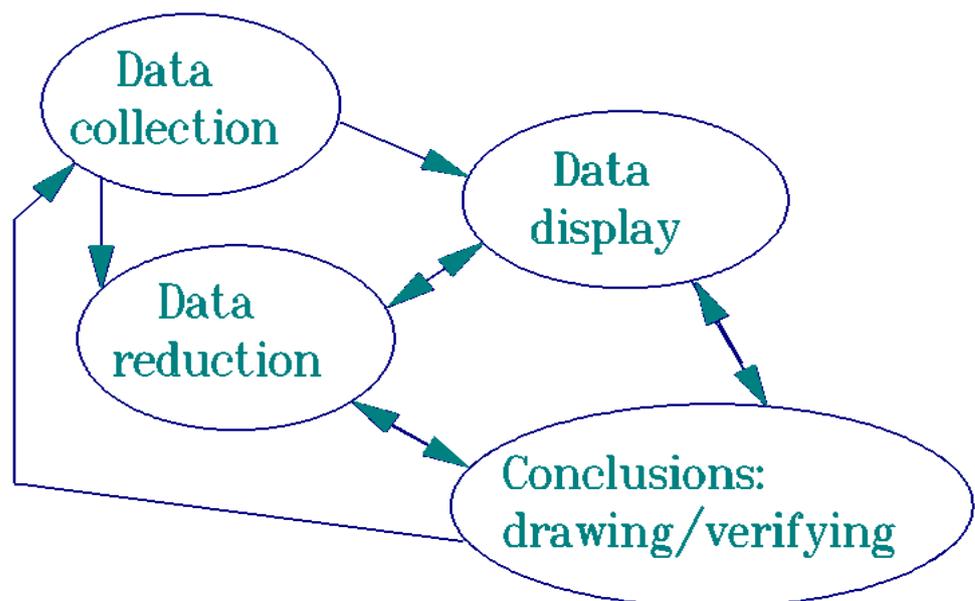


Figure 1: Components of Data Analysis: Interactive Model (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 12)

Themes and patterns within the data started to become established at the early stages of the data display, for example when I was making early notes on what was in DS1 and when I developed a conceptual 'map' (Appendix 7) on first reading DS2. Underlying this process was my continual consideration of 'what am I interested in?', 'how does it help me answer my research questions?', 'what seems to be coming out strongly?' and 'how can I categorise and organise what interests me?'. The coding in NVivo systemized the whole process, providing a range of codes from the two sets of data. This coding and early analysis process enabled a degree of triangulation; I was interested in a range of issues but from two sources of data.

As a validity procedure, triangulation is a step taken by researchers employing only the researcher's lens, and it is a systematic process of sorting through the data to find common themes or categories by eliminating overlapping areas. A popular practice is for qualitative inquirers to provide corroborating evidence collected through multiple methods, such as observations, interviews, and documents to locate major and minor themes.

(Creswell and Miller, 2000, p. 127)

I established there were four distinct (if often inter-related) themes of Community, Practitioner focus, Criticality and Writing (see Table 5, p. 77) which reflected what was happening in the ODs. These themes provided a framework to structure the analysis and discussion. I describe this approach as 'thematic analysis', being careful to acknowledge the interplay between what was happening within and between themes. The analysis uses thick descriptions; the intention of this was to make sense of what is happening in the ODs and to understand the views and experiences of participants in relation to the ODs.

Creswell and Miller (2000) explain how the process of using thick description helps analyse what is happening in a specific context.

The process of writing using thick description is to provide as much detail as possible. It may involve describing a small slice of interaction, experience, or action; locating individuals in specific situations; bringing a relationship or an interaction alive between two or more persons; or providing a detailed rendering of how people feel...

(Creswell and Miller, 2000, p. 129)

This is important for this research as it is concerned with understanding participants' views about a specific experience- what they gained or not in ODs with other new teachers. Creswell and Miller go on to argue that this approach can establish a form of validity.

The purpose of a thick description is that it creates verisimilitude, statements that produce for the readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in a study. Thus, credibility is established through the lens of readers who read a narrative account and are transported into a setting or situation.

(Creswell and Miller, 2000, p. 129)

This was a main aim behind the analytical approach I adopted. I wanted the data to tell the story and illustrate the series of events with examples in the form of narratives of the participants' experiences and feelings. I felt this would give a rationale to my findings and interpretations as to what was happening in the ODs. I was aware that I was still making decisions and judgments about what data to select and use as exemplification throughout the analysis. Thus I would be influencing the findings by my insider role and my motivation to find data that helped answer the research questions.

3.5 Methodology review and conclusions

It is important to recognise there are limitations to the scope of this project. The study is clearly limited in size for practical reasons and uses a relatively small sample of participants compared to the overall number that have taken the MTeach. Moreover this is also not a typical group of new teachers, undertaking

Masters level study in your NQT year is rare and often actively discouraged (by schools and others). One must thus be careful in making assumptions or grand claims about the findings. Cronbach (1975) suggests qualitative research should aim to achieve a 'working hypothesis'. More recently Bassey (1999) writes of 'fuzzy generalisations' by which he means if one carried out similar research in similar contexts one could expect similar findings. This research is situated in a particular context (the MTeach course) and is looking at specific aspects of that course (what happened in the ODs). I feel this focus reduces the potential for generalisability across the teaching profession at large or across Masters courses with an online component. However, 'fuzzy generalisations' might apply in other situations and contexts: I hope I have created 'verisimilitude' (Creswell and Miller, 2000) for the reader working in their particular contexts, thus assisting them when thinking about how they might design online activities.

This project is firmly located within my day to day professional work. It has also been informed methodologically by my earlier doctorate research. The IFS (Unwin, 2007b) investigated online task design using the context of the MTeach. It did this in a generic way using questionnaires and a focus group with a large range of students on different pathways. It also interviewed 3 module leaders about task design. The literature base was focused on e-learning rather than teachers' professional learning. The staff interviews were rich and informative, the data from participants was limited by the research design which led to a weaker and restricted analysis. This experience has informed my research design for this project.

In this chapter I have outlined and rationalised the methodological approaches and theoretical perspectives central to the work. I then explained the research design including discussion about the sources of data, the methods used, ethical issues and the process of data collection, coding and analysis. The next chapter is concerned with data presentation and analysis.

Chapter 4: Data presentation and analysis

4.1 Introduction

This research is interested in how and in what ways the MTeach ODs have facilitated new teacher development. This chapter is concerned with making sense of two sources of data. I have merged data presentation and analysis to help represent, explain and clarify what was happening in the ODs. The chapter is structured as follows.

There is a section on data description, organisation and coding which revisits the methodology from an organisational and operational perspective. This section will summarise the main characteristics of the data, where it was located and how it was coded. It explains how this coding led to decisions concerning the organisation and analysis via themes.

The subsequent sections are structured by the selected themes and use a series of narratives to explore how participation in the ODs worked in practice and the relevance of the themes to this process. The narrative discussions and analysis will be exemplified by extracts from the data, with the purpose of gaining a real understanding of the views of the participants regarding their participation and how this influenced their development as new teachers.

The final part of this chapter uses examples from the data to exemplify some difficulties participants had with the ODs. These are not directly related to the themes but are important both in terms of future pedagogic design and course development as well as acknowledging some of the typical problems that have occurred with the ODs.

4.2 Data description, organisation and coding

4.2.1 Route to analysis

There are 2 sets of data gathered from participants for this research: these are referred to as DS1 and DS2. DS1 are extracts produced as part of the PDP2 module towards the end of participants NQT year. DS2 are interviews with participants a few years on from this NQT year.

Below in Table 3 I have listed the initial codes from DS1 with a brief explanation of what each represented in the context of participating in the ODs. This list of codes is in order of magnitude (i.e. number of occurrences) so for example the 'Community' code featured more than 'Nervous' code. This rank order has no significance as a scale of importance regarding the research. DS1 was work that participants had completed as part of the course and required them to reflect on their development in relation to their participation in the ODs. A main function of the ODs was for groups of teachers to share experiences about their practice. Thus these reflections are likely to be geared to how they worked as a group (Community) and how their practice developed (Practice) more than specific aspects of how the ODs were designed or structured. What was important for me in this coding process was to select and categorise examples that related to my research questions. These research questions are linked to aspects of my professional work and one aim of the research is to develop professional practice. For example I am responsible for designing how ODs are introduced and structured, in effect the pedagogic and practical design of these elements of a particular module. Therefore data that touches on participants' ideas and experiences and relates to the pedagogic design of the ODs are important both from a research and professional / course development perspective.

1. Community: what participants said indicated elements of a community e.g. sharing, supporting, trusting, empathy, belonging, confidence.
2. Practice: relating to the ODs influencing day to day practice as teachers.
3. Readings: where professional / academic readings in or emanating from the ODs were seen as influential.
4. Teacher learning: how the ODs influenced participant learning beyond day to day practical strategies.
5. Criticality: where participants questioned their own approaches and the way things seemed to happen in their schools.
6. Reflection: where the ODs had encouraged participants to reflect more deeply on their teaching.
7. Design: where participants refer to the design or structure of the ODs.
8. Wider Criticality: where participants' criticality extended beyond local and immediate contexts.
9. Writing: How the process of writing for the ODs influenced participant development / thinking.
10. Nervous: what made participants nervous about participating in the ODs.

Table 3: Codes from Data Stage 1

Aspects within these codes certainly overlapped. For example, one could quite easily see participant reflection featuring in Practice, Readings, Teacher learning, Criticality and Reflection. This exemplifies how sometimes the multifaceted nature of the data makes coding and analysis difficult. My decision to separate out or de-construct was an attempt to systematise the complexity of the data yet understand and acknowledge its variety.

In a similar process with DS2, after initial reading and early analysis I transferred the texts to NVivo and attempted a more systematic coding. As one would expect some of the codes were the same, similar or overlapped with those from DS1. Because the interviews were longer (5000 words+), had specific areas for focus and allowed further probing, new codes emerged and

some existing codes were extended or developed. Table 4 below lists the initial codes from DS2 with a brief explanation of what each represented.

1. Reflexivity: the development of reflexivity (rather than reflection) is apparent.
2. Sharing Ideas: participants talk about the value of sharing ideas and experiences.
3. Pedagogic design: where participants refer to the design or structure of the ODs.
4. Similar: where participants refer to going through similar experiences (e.g. being new teachers) as an aspect of community.
5. Empowering: that the ODs made participants feel empowered and more confident in school situations.
6. Writing-thinking: how the process of writing for the ODs influenced participant development and thinking.
7. Theoretical base: the way the ODs facilitated engagement with theory and wider viewpoints.
8. Criticality: how participants feel they have developed a questioning approach to what is happening in their classroom/schools and more widely.
9. Presentism: where participants identified examples of presentism and their views on this.
10. Flexibility-mode: how the overall OD-f2f interface and MTeach worked for participants in terms of flexibility within the first year of teaching.
11. Wider influence: how activities on the MTeach had a wider longer lasting impact in their schools.
12. Momentum-learning: how participants were motivated to keep learning / developing.
13. Face-to-face: comments on the role f2f meetings played in relation to the ODs.
14. Non-school aspect: how the ODs were separate from school and allowed trust and freedom to discuss difficult aspects of the job.

Table 4: Codes from Data Stage 2

The coding of both data stages led to 24 different codes. There were similarities and overlaps in the codes both within and between the stages; there was also a degree of ‘messiness’ in the data. This did not detract from the usefulness of the process though, as one would expect participants’ views and experiences to differ and the coding enabled me to gain an understanding of the nature and variety of what was happening in the ODs. However, 24 categories is still a

complex representation of the ODs and it became clear that further data reduction was required. I decided that the codes could be broadly (but not exclusively or neatly) grouped into a number of themes. The next section explains the rationale behind this analytical move and introduces the themes.

4.2.2 Using themes

From my work with the original and coded data from both DS1 and DS2 I established four overarching themes, which I have named:

- Community;
- Practitioner focus;
- Criticality;
- Writing (and reading).

The purpose of establishing these themes is threefold. Firstly, it serves as a way of grouping the codes more coherently, so in one sense it is a data reduction and focusing exercise. Secondly, this progressive focussing is in itself a form of analysis in that it is a way of helping understand what the ODs were facilitating and how this was happening. Thirdly, the combination of these two purposes provides a meaningful and structured system to present the data. Creswell explains it this way 'The researcher takes a voluminous amount of information and reduces it to certain patterns, categories, or themes and then interprets this information by using some schema' (Creswell, 1994, p. 154). Table 5 overleaf is a summary of the four themes.

<p>Community</p> <p>It was apparent that participants felt that elements of community developed during the MTeach and that the ODs helped facilitate and sustain this community. This is something that sometimes contrasted with their experiences in school or was an additional support network for them. The value of these communities manifested itself in participants feeling less isolated, feeling safe, being able to honestly share and compare experiences in a non-judgmental way, feeling trust and being empowered and more confident about their teaching strategies.</p>
<p>Practitioner focus</p> <p>The ODs enabled a practitioner focus where participants could share information and experiences and seek advice. This centred on what was happening at school, in their department, in their classroom, with groups and with individual students. Often this involved discussing relatively short term issues and ideas but there was clear evidence of longer term strategies starting to develop and be considered important. These practical issues were not only about their classes and teaching but also about wider EPD matters such as support and power relations.</p>
<p>Criticality</p> <p>It was apparent that participants developed their skill of criticality. They were aware of this during their participation in the ODs, on reflection at the end of their NQT year and later when interviewed. This criticality took a number of forms. It was about: questioning the status quo and practice; self criticism / reflection; thinking deeply about what was happening and why; recognising the complexities involved; seeing links between theory and practice; questioning theory and seeing a bigger picture (beyond school).</p>
<p>Writing (and reading)</p> <p>Because the ODs are conducted as asynchronous text based exchanges it is unsurprising that participants found the integral reading and writing important aspects of the ODs. This theme considers these aspects but also looks at what participants felt the writing enabled or restricted within the ODs as well their wider thinking. For instance how did the need to be succinct and present personal contexts and thoughts clearly to others help participants?</p>

Table 5: Theme summaries

4.2.3 The lens of pedagogic design

The themes can be considered outcomes of the ODs whereas I am using the term pedagogic design to refer to the strategies and processes that facilitate the ODs. It is about what participants were asked to do as part of the OD and how this was structured, set up and worked. For example one design decision is that the ODs require participants to use examples of their own and others' practice to explore issues. Another is that the UT module is over a whole year. There are also timing expectations and word limitations regarding participants' postings. These design issues all have implications for flexibility and engagement and possibly the value participants place on the course experience.

As discussed in Chapter 1 the ODs are part of an overall pedagogic approach that the MTeach uses to achieve course aims by focusing on both the participants' own teaching and experiences and that of their peers. The idea is to enable them to engage critically with practical and theoretical educational issues that are pertinent to them.

The pedagogic design that sets up the ODs is thus very important for this research and is intrinsic in facilitating what is happening with regard to the themes. For the purposes of the thematic analysis, I will use the lens of pedagogic design to assist the discussion, drawing out examples of where pedagogic design features significantly in an enabling capacity.

In Chapter 5 a diagram is introduced to help overview and illustrate the relationships between pedagogic design, the themes outlined above and the concepts of collegiality, reflexivity and presentism discussed in the literature review (see Figure 2, p. 128).

4.3 Thematic analysis

The following sections use the themes outlined in 4.2.2 as a means to focus analysis and discussion. The intention of these 'thick descriptions' is to make

sense of what is happening in the ODs and to understand the views and experiences of participants in relation to the ODs. Chapter 1 includes a detailed outline of how the ODs are set up and work on the UT module, which is core to the new teacher pathway (see 1.2.1, p. 20). The referencing system used with the extracts of data below is outlined in the methodology chapter (see Table 2: Data sources, p. 61). This thematic analysis will not make specific reference to literature; it will concentrate on the data and my interpretations of it. Chapter 5 focuses on discussion of the findings in relation to wider literature.

4.3.1 Community

The Community theme utilises several of the codes drawn from the data such as: Community; Sharing ideas; Similar contexts; Empowering; and Non-school aspect (see Tables 3 and 4, p. 73 and p. 74). Essentially it is about being part of something or belonging, having a shared interest and a concern for what others in the group are doing, thinking and feeling.

Although it is not explicitly stated in the course aims that such features are part of the way the course works, there is an implicit understanding that teachers' communication with each other about their different experiences is a key factor in facilitating learning. For example, one of the early promotional flyers for the MTeach had the heading 'talking teaching'. The thinking behind such an approach is that it combines an individual situated element (about personal teaching experiences) with a social interaction that is necessary to share and explore these situations. For NQTs feeling part of a community is arguably more important than for more experienced teachers who may already have established school support networks and a degree of confidence. To understand how and what senses of community seem to be fostered in the ODs, I will initially utilise DS1. This is where the NQTs are just finishing their first year of teaching and reflecting back on how the ODs contributed to their EPD.

This participant explains how she has valued the ODs in several ways.

Reading the submissions of others was both interesting and refreshing. Teaching can feel isolating when you are stressed, and it can really help to hear how others are doing and that some of the issues you face are also faced by others. I believe the value of teachers sharing their experiences from different subjects and schools is an area of underestimated worth. It has been useful to read about activities or research that other teachers are doing with their students.

(A1)

There is a clear sense that she looks forward to hearing about her colleagues experiences: it is 'refreshing' and the process counters feelings of isolation. It is also about sharing and having a broader interest than one's own particular context. There are things to be learnt from other subjects and schools.

Support will mean different things to different people and consequently can be difficult to provide, and indeed measure effectively. Even if support systems in schools are deemed effective the ODs potentially provide different types of support, a space where participants interact about issues and problems and not feel judged.

The fact that all participants were responding to my discussion made me feel I was a part of a supportive and compassionate group who could relate to my current situation far better than other support that was in place in school.

(S1)

The really positive aspect of the online discussion was having a confidential and supportive environment, with which to discuss problems or issues being faced at school. In addition I welcomed the opportunity to work collaboratively, as the discussions enabled reflection on classroom practice.

(Q1)

S1 acknowledges there was school based support but it was different or limited. One has a sense that in the ODs he feels listened to, that there was time for him and what he is grappling with at this stage of his development, and that because the group were all new teachers they could understand his situation and feelings. NQTs can often feel vulnerable, powerless and reluctant to ask questions, either because these might make them look weak, or because they do not want to bother other busy teachers. The ODs allow a space for this

questioning and the raising of problems which Q1 implies includes trust (it was confidential). This development of trust is important as mutual trust should lead to more openness and honesty within a group, allowing interactions to go beyond the superficial. I explained earlier that the MTeach team tried to keep online tutor groups relatively small (e.g. less than 15). This was to keep discussions manageable; a smaller group could also contribute to a feeling of trust.

Other participants develop these support and trust aspects of the ODs and point to the value of sharing ideas and interacting with one another about views and opinions.

The discussions allow one to voice concerns in an environment where no one will judge, as they are all going through the same difficulties. When things are going right, it is helpful to share your views with other people, as they can tell you their views and, in helping them, one feels more confident in themselves.

(U1)

Linda's comments made me feel part of the online community and it felt good being able to share my ideas and that other people having success with the same techniques I had used, even though we teach completely different age ranges.

(T1)

Both U1 and T1 emphasise sharing as important because it includes empathy. There is an implication that even though they are in different contexts (schools and / or phases) they are experiencing common problems. What is seen as commonality is the fact they are NQTs. As explained earlier the MTeach team consciously decided in this case to group new teachers together and the pedagogic design reflects such a grouping. It appears that the sharing of ideas and views is part of an empathetic process made more likely by this commonality.

Another participant specifically refers to the online group helping her understanding of the relationship between theory and practice.

...this module helped me identify ideas that I embraced in theory, but hadn't put into practice. The online support of the cluster, sympathising with the gap between theory and reality, coupled with practical tips for

bridging the gap, made this a positive rather than demoralising experience.

(D1)

She mentions specific elements one would expect in a community: support, sympathy, practical advice, a positive experience. Below she takes this further when referring to a specific activity (task) where participants are required to propose an area of their teaching to become a coursework focus, by classifying the MTeach course a community of practice.

During our online discussion..... the task demonstrated powerfully the benefits of the MTeach "community of practice" (Banks, Leach & Moon, 1999), which not only gives participants access to a wide range of theoretical and intellectual experience, but also to real practical support.

(D1)

...many of the proposals covered areas I feel could benefit my professional development- and formative in the sense that I learnt more about to how evaluate my teaching from other participants.

(H1)

This community D1 suggests allows both theoretical debate as well as practical support. Similarly, another participant (H1) referring to the same coursework focus acknowledges learning from others in general and specific ways. These participants are referring to the OD 'Evaluating teaching'; this activity moves the ODs in a slightly different direction than the previous 3 ODs. Rather than using recent or past classroom events to focus the discussion it asks them to propose an issue in their teaching they would be interested in taking forward to evaluate as part of their coursework. The design of the online activity is to encourage a sharing of future ideas for enquiry. The concept of a community of enquiry is interesting and links to the theme of criticality. This will be explored in more detail later in this chapter.

One important aspect of the ODs is how the community helped these new teachers become more confident in their teaching, their understanding of theoretical issues and the relation of these issues to practice. One participant explains how an OD about the practicalities of and reasons for using group work in the class was very useful and gave her practical and theoretical confidence.

This conversation gave me the confidence to include group work (rather than pair work) in my observed lesson... I found this discussion extremely rewarding. As we were building on understandings of meta-cognition and collaborative learning constructed in previous conversations, I think that the interrelation of such concepts became clearer. I certainly feel more confident in my understanding of these issues than at the beginning of the year.

(E1)

I gained confidence from postings by other MTeach colleagues and realised that many of us were experiencing similar concerns (Anne and Marta). I know that as an inexperienced teacher my 'pedagogical knowledge' is constantly developing.

(M1)

Confidence is not an attribute that can be acquired in a formulaic way. These extracts point to the fact that these ODs, although distinct, are not short one-off separate activities. Rather they are something more cumulative, more developmental, that allows rumination and revisiting of issues. The nature and structure of the module with its 'half term long' ODs over the school year facilitate such processes. The participants seem to recognise and value that their development is beyond the immediate and present.

The analysis of DS1 above illustrates that the Community aspect of the ODs was important to these new teachers in different ways. This data concerned their views and perceptions towards the end of their NQT year. I was interested to see if their thinking and views had changed or developed in the light of more experience.

DS2 is the data collected via interviews with 10 MTeach course participants. They had now all been teaching at least 2 more years. All were still teaching, 8 had completed the MTeach and 2 were at the final stage of the course.

The interviews reinforced many aspects of the Community theme that were apparent from DS1. They allowed more personal and contextual factors to be recounted, with clarification sought by the interviewer as appropriate, and they

tended to be based on holistic reflections rather than specific incidents within the ODs. This means the data was rich and often illustrated the interconnectedness of different aspects of the participant's NQT experiences in relation to the ODs. This section of the analysis chapter continues to focus on the Community theme but it is apparent from the data that the themes cannot be treated in isolation.

Participants talked about how the MTeach community and support was different from their experiences in schools. NQTs are meant to have an induction programme (Bubb *et al.*, 2002) which includes having a mentor, being observed and often generic training sessions with other NQTs. Participants include reference to these types of school support systems as well as other informal networks.

... it was really good to have that contact with other NQTs, who would have these discussions about what the research says, and then there would always be – but don't you find that actually in the classroom this happens, and this happens? And that readymade community was really good, because in my school there were a couple of other NQTs, but you didn't actually have that forum, have that structured place to kind of discuss things.

(D2)

... getting support and feeling like you are not alone, or you are not a burden on your mentor, because mentors are full-time teachers, they can't spend every second of their life mopping you up. So it's having somebody else there to talk to, having somebody else to get ideas from, and I was just looking back in my contributions, getting ideas from different subject areas is a really good thing.

(Pilot)

D2 explicitly refers to the set up of ODs as creating a 'readymade community' and it was something she valued compared with the limited opportunities with peers at school. Similarly the pilot interviewee refers to the ODs providing support, countering isolation and as a source of ideas. She recognises the limitations of school based mentors and goes on to be more explicit about how different the school NQT support programme (referred to as 'those meetings' below) was from the ODs.

Because you are not encouraged to talk about your problems in those meetings, or certainly not in my school. You are encouraged to learn about child protection, or learn about AFL. There's not really the forum for saying let's discuss the issues that you've had and let's look at ways to challenge it. So for me it was really helpful, because that was my biggest problem, was just feeling that I didn't know how to manage situations. And then I would get all of this input from people who were like me but in other schools, getting different types of support, so then it was like I had five or six mentors. Because in my school my mentor was feeding me the party line. So even if I did ask a different teacher I was still going to get – This is the Hillview way.

(Pilot)

It is apparent the ODs allowed this participant to raise and get support about issues that concerned her at that time. Interestingly, this allowed her a better focus and understanding of her specific school-based situation via the ODs than the school-based support. There is a clear identification with her MTeach colleagues-‘people who were like me’,- and they provided her a variety of ideas rather than the one size fits all advice at school. She goes on to explain how the ODs helped her when she was grappling with classroom problems and how this was different from talking with the NQTs at her school.

I used to get so cross, I used to storm into the office and kick tables and just think – what on earth am I doing? And the MTeach was a way of rationalising that. And yes, you have other NQTs in the school that you can speak to, but it's not the same, because you don't really have a formal time to meet up, except when you are in meetings and you are being taught.

(Pilot)

The online group support becomes more than getting advice, it extends to ‘rationalising’ what is happening. The writing about and sharing of problems becomes what appears to be a cathartic process. The limitations for her of the way school based support are run is referred to in both quotes. She describes how the NQT sessions are a series of specific issues that you are ‘taught’ and supposed to ‘learn’, and there was a ‘school way’ of doing things. Wording that implies delivery type pedagogy and an inward looking approach. This contrasts with the pedagogic design that underpins the way the ODs work. The starting point for the ODs is the participants’ current experience; the problems they

might be having with this, their questions, thoughts and ideas are all legitimate contributions.

The fact that the ODs were separate from the participants' schools allowed a sense of trust, empathy and belonging.

I think the way that it helped was it gave you reassurance that experiences that you were encountering were in other schools. And within the school environment you can feel quite isolated, in a small department of perhaps two or three other members of staff, and it's not always possible to have continuous conversations on a particular topic.

(L2)

For L2 the ODs meant he did not feel alone, others were having similar experiences. Importantly he raises the notion of 'continuous conversations', this is similar to the point raised with DS1 above about the ongoing and developmental nature of the ODs. The pedagogic design of the ODs enables participants to revisit issues either within the timeframe of one OD or in later ODs. This could be at the behest of the participant who chooses to report on progress with a particular issue or might come from the group who find they are following some sort of theme within and between ODs. The fact that L2 valued 'continuous conversations' on particular areas to help his understanding is in part a recognition by him that quick solutions are unlikely to work for him.

There could be a development of trust within the community. One level referred to in DS1 is about the ODs being separate and confidential from personal school situations, and participants not feeling judged. Another level is perhaps deeper and is about an internal trust within the group.

I think we were all acknowledging that we were struggling. The Brown group were a very strong group of teachers, I think, but in that, within that, we were all acknowledging that we were finding it hard. And there was always that honesty there. And I really felt like I could say anything, and one of them would come up with a really good suggestion, or a probing question that would help me sort of unpick the situation I was in.

(V2)

So it didn't matter if you were discussing something that you found difficult, where in the school surroundings I felt that I was being judged and I shouldn't really show that I had weaknesses.

(M2)

For V2 and M2 this internal trust was about honesty, particularly honesty about how difficult they were finding many aspects of the NQT year. V2 felt that she had a place where she could ‘say anything’ and she would get help. Importantly, though, this help was not about solving the problem for her, rather it facilitated and enabled her to ‘unpick’ her particular situation. This process indicates elements of the cathartic potential of the ODs referred to above as well as empowerment for the individual. The honesty and unpicking described reminds us of aspects of reflexivity discussed within the literature review.

The MTeach is different from typical education masters courses: one key difference is that is not phase or subject specific. This is important when thinking about community as often teachers identify with their phase and subject. How this mix would work particularly in having ODs is an interesting part of this research.

...so at first I thought it was great, all the English teachers, but then I kind of really liked the fact that there were more people there, doing different things, and doing different subjects, which I thought really kind of enriched your own experience,

(N2)

I think I might have, before the course, said it would be much better to be all primary, because teaching techniques and styles are quite different. However, one of the biggest things that stayed with me is the assessment for learning and formative assessment, and that’s relevant across the board, and some of the best input was from secondary people on that.

(D2)

N2 (an English teacher) and D2 (a primary teacher) explain how they changed their initial views about phase and subject. The group N2 was in had more English teachers than any other subject; he implies it was the cross phase-subject mix that gave him an exposure to different ideas and methods that enriched the ODs. D2 points to the specific example of how her understanding of formative assessment was developed by working with teachers in the secondary phase. The following teachers take this a stage further, linking it to the narrowness of their school experiences.

...being part of the MTeach I was getting ideas about what was going on within other schools, and I’ve always thought that’s been very important, to

have that sort of cross fertilisation between different stages and across different subjects. And I wasn't getting that at school so much, so I was getting that from the MTeach.

(G2)

She goes on to say

...I think that has helped me to have a better perspective of whole school issues, and how different subjects work, and that's helped me being the Gifted and Talented coordinator.

(G2)

... actually, I preferred it being from different subjects, because thinking about how it benefited me further on, working with other people from different departments, I think in my NQT year my day to day was focused on geography and geography teachers, so having interaction with people that were in a similar situation, but in different subjects, really benefited me, because it gave me sort of the opportunity to learn about what was going on in different departments,

(M2)

The multi-school, multi-phase and multi-subject make up of the groups and subsequent ODs also worked well for G2 and M2. It was about not being constrained to your department or phase, allowing access to wider perspectives. This was something that as NQTs seemed lacking in their schools. Both point to how they feel this has helped them later on in their teaching careers, how they now understand better what happens in other departments and are more at ease with other subject teachers, more willing to work in a cross school way.

V2 takes the same issue in a slightly different direction when referring to the 3 Science teachers in her group.

But then they couldn't just sit there and talk about Science lessons because Linda was on the primary school, Lakshmi was Geography, I was English, so it made you move away from your classroom, your experience and your teaching of a certain syllabus to the bigger picture and the bigger questions. And I am seeing sort of patterns that we were picking up on as part of bigger issues in teaching, I think. And I think that was really important.

(V2)

The mix within the group, she explains, almost forced participants away from focusing on their local or subject concerns. It was this movement that made the

group start to think and talk about bigger educational debates, which was something she really valued. Possibly this is a pedagogic side effect of the mixed subject and phase groups: by not being able to indulge in specific subject or phase based issues and anecdotes the participants more readily moved to problematise wider teaching issues. This 'wider thinking' would also have been encouraged by the digitised readings that were an intrinsic part of the online activities. These had been selected to be relevant and accessible to a range of teachers.

Summary

Community was an important aspect of participating in the ODs. The group valued the mutual support, the sharing and the trust which developed. This contrasted in several ways with support at their schools as they felt more equal and able to raise professional practice issues of concern to them personally. It provided opportunities that are difficult to provide in a school setting. The community also encouraged enquiry and critical thinking about theory and practice. It is apparent that the mixed nature the community was seen as strength, allowing engagement with wider issues both in the school and across education.

4.3.2 Practitioner focus

The Practitioner focus theme utilises several of the codes drawn from the data such as: Practice; Teacher learning; Sharing ideas; and Empowering (see Tables 3 and 4, p. 73 and p. 74). It is closely aligned and overlaps with aspects of the Community theme. For example it is seen in the analysis above how the ODs can help with very practical issues such as building an individual's confidence. Also, without the development of the community (e.g. trust, empathy, belonging) the Practitioner focus within the ODs might be limited. Essentially, Practitioner focus is about how and in what ways the ODs supported participants with practical classroom or school based issues. Following the approach I used above I will initially utilise DS1 then move on to DS2.

How participants use and value what is shared and discussed in the ODs is an interesting issue. In contrast to the ITE these teachers recently completed, they are now in a group with teachers who are working in different subject and phase contexts. Thus the exchange of ideas or resources is not perhaps as straightforward as it might have been in their ITE, where their tutors and fellow students might focus on how to teach a specific topic or skill.

The data had numerous examples of how participants felt the ODs had given them practical ideas and developed their understanding of particular educational issues. I believe the analysis will benefit by selecting some typical areas of Practitioner focus. For DS1 these are: Classroom management; Development of group work; Confidence; and Changing classroom focus. For DS2 these are: 'Busy-ness' of the NQT year; Sharing ideas; and Changing view of the classroom.

4.3.2.1 Classroom management

Classroom management and pupil behaviour are often areas of focus for NQTs. This is the first time they teach classes on their own from day one of the school term; as new teachers there may be some 'testing' going on by their pupils. NQTs have to understand school policies and how these are interpreted and implemented in their classrooms. It is no surprise that the ODs included much debate on this area. Early in the year L1 was concerned about the behaviour in one class in particular, which he raised in one OD.

The issue of establishing rules and procedures to maintain behaviour did prompt an online discussion and Stephen's response was helpful because it argued for "standardised responses" to pupils' behaviour. I implemented his suggestion of creating a poster with the classroom behaviour policy.

(L1)

What proved most beneficial from this discussion was the change of focus it gave me when considering classroom management. Before the discussion I was constantly looking for sanctions and to punish bad behaviour. After the discussion I realized that I had a large majority of well behaved and motivated students and that I needed to reward them.

(L1)

It is apparent that this was an area he was concerned with and it was discussed within the group. He also took forward some suggestions and implemented them within his own classroom. Perhaps of more lasting practical use was the way the OD changed the way he looked at his class. He goes on to say:

I also noticed that my relationship with my students changed from constantly focusing on their negative behaviour to a more positive relationship where I was praising them more regularly. I had also become more proactive and began to anticipate difficult behaviour and have systems in place to prevent misbehaviour from occurring.

(L1)

The change in his practice is multi-faceted (poster, praise, focus, being proactive) and developmental in that it happened over time; it was not a quick fix solution. There was recognition that the building of relationships was important in this class. The ODs as explained earlier are framed by tasks and readings. The main autumn term OD is about classroom interactions with one of the readings critiquing approaches to pupil behaviour. Part of the thinking behind this OD is that it helps participants engage with the complexity of their classrooms; that by reading about other participants' experiences, by explaining their own experiences and by reading carefully selected literature they start to critique issues in their own and others' classrooms. Importantly it is about moving them away from self blame and short term strategies to more thoughtful and longer term approaches.

P1 also explains how he was struggling with behaviour management and how the OD worked in this case.

This was the opposition on which my reflective practice fixated: between my struggle to manage behaviour, and my determination to put all my thought into devising collaborative tasks and resources that connected students with their curriculum. Carl's writing suggested a similar tension; his initial task, however, focused entirely on responses to bad behaviour. His phrasing cast a happier light on my behaviour-learning dilemma: my concentration on planning rather than behaviour wasn't a cop out; it was 'proactive'.

(P1)

Seeing others in similar situations allowed him to compare and contrast approaches and problems but gave him confidence that the direction and focus

of his planning was the right thing to do. This illustrates that the practice gains are not only about getting ideas and attempting to use them in another situation. It is more subtle and nuanced than that: the participants are in similar but different contexts, and by sharing their thoughts and experiences this helps them reflect more deeply on their own ideas and practice.

4.3.2.2 Development of group work

Another practical example of where participants seemed to benefit from ODs was their development of use of group work in the classroom.

Since this first online discussion, I have developed my use of group work and now incorporate role play into lessons; this is a direct result of this first discussion and the background readings.

(V1)

V1 claims a direct link between the first OD and classroom practice with an implication that OD was a developmental process that facilitated use of a more complex type of group work (role-play). The following data includes quotes from the actual ODs in italics. F1 refers to other participants and how the ideas and interactions in the group were important to her in thinking about and utilising group work.

However Chloe, who had also followed this course of action with poor results, encouraged me to question my assumptions: *'I wonder if by pairing the bright with the less bright, talkative with less talkative, energetic with less energetic, etc., we create a class of averages, where everyone is evened out and no one really takes off.'* I defended my original judgement: *'I think variety is the key ... the teacher needs to use their professional judgement to decide which types of pairings will be suitable for each task.'* This sparked an extended debate on the website which moved on to cover the type of tasks we needed to set to generate effective paired or group talk. Esme's posting on teaching children the skills of working with talk partners helped me develop my practice.

(F1)

... I decided to use the group settings as they had been designed for genuinely collaborative work. *'As Chloe mentioned, the suitability and set up of the task is a huge factor in the success of any such interaction.'* I have spent much of this year developing effective group tasks and reviewing them online with my peers.

(F1)

It is important to remember the participants begin each OD by outlining to the group something that is happening in their teaching. This means it is by definition already practice focused. In the extracts above it is apparent that different opinions and strategies are shared, considered and experimented with within the participants' own contexts. It is clear that this is an ongoing process and not restricted to one particular OD. There was an 'extended debate' which allowed a reviewing of progress. The first quote illustrates that F1 recognises the need for teacher professional judgement rather than a one solution approach, the second that 'genuinely collaborative work' requires careful planning. So although participants do gain from what might be called 'practical tips', the ODs seem to support a deeper, more meaningful understanding of and a developmental approach to their practice.

4.3.2.3 Confidence

A third example of how the ODs have assisted a Practitioner focus is the way they seem to have developed participant confidence in these new work contexts. The following quote from W1 encapsulates this mix of practical ideas, experimentation and confidence developed over time.

Overall, the online discussions have been a valuable tool. They have directly aided my teaching, thanks to a lengthy series of original and insightful ideas that are specifically tailored to the classroom. More importantly, though, in the long term they have made me confident about seeking advice, about trying new things, about believing that there is never any need to abandon attempts to teach higher order skills.

(W1)

He emphasises a lasting quality to the way the ODs have helped him. As well as encouraging him to experiment and not give up on high expectations, they appear to have given him confidence to seek help and advice at school. Confidence can be an issue for NQTs as discussed previously. It seems the ODs with other teachers in other subjects in other schools provide experience of

discussing practical and professional issues that can encourage professional conversations in participants' own schools. Confident NQTs will get more from school-based support which is the main day to day influence on any NQT. Where the ODs increase confidence they will thus improve the quality of experience for the NQT. There are a number of interesting examples of the links between the ODs and participants working collaboratively with schools colleagues.

I also began to consider that these students might benefit from group work as a result of the online postings discussing Vygotsky's "Zone of Proximal Development" (A Moore, 2000). I discussed this with an experienced teacher at school and modified my lessons to include group and pair work. As a result of the discussion I modified the activities to include a wider range of outcomes to allow for greater differentiation. Overall I found this task useful because it made me consider my students as individuals and appreciate that they may differ from each other.

(M1)

For M1 this OD has allowed a theory / practice connection that opened up a discussion with an experienced school colleague to help her experiment more confidently. This is interesting in that a theory / practice issue developed in the ODs is supported and mediated by a school based colleague whose understanding and experience of the context will be very valuable for developing practice.

Below is another example of how a participant's professional confidence and collaboration has emanated from an OD (Developing Pedagogy) and her UT coursework.

As a result of the literature and discussions for 'Developing Pedagogy', I ended up working in collaboration with my head of department to develop 'active learning' strategies for her 'disruptive' Year 9 class. We used the work I was doing for the Understanding Teaching coursework as a basis to improve learning with her class.

(Q1)

One could assume the head of department respected this NQT's practice, and to a certain extent attributed it to her MTeach work. It illustrates how ideas and strategies that are the result of the participant's work on the MTeach become genuinely integrated into school practice. M1 similarly illustrates the link

between the ODs, her personal development and work within her school with another teacher.

The main conclusion I learnt from colleagues (especially Anne and Marta) was the benefits of creating a collaborative and active learning environment in year 7. This helps the student to develop 'independent learning skills' at a young age. I have discussed the ideas from this online task with my Head of Department at school and we have decided to introduce more peer self assessments in our Key Stage 3 schemes of work.

(M1)

These examples illustrate that the NQTs are being recognised as professionals, their ideas and opinions sought and valued: one could describe this as a developing collegiality. For new teachers this is important, to feel that they are making progress and can work positively and productively with school colleagues will help their esteem and confidence. They will feel they are a contributor within a school community rather than just a new teacher that needs help.

4.3.2.4 Changing classroom focus

A final example of Practitioner focus that I will use from DS1 is how participants develop their view of what is happening in the classroom. T1 and X1 explain in different ways how the ODs changed the way they think about their classrooms and students.

The last online discussion improved my understanding of pedagogy and the key factors that should be considered. My focus at the beginning of the year was on what and how I was teaching. I believe my focus has changed during the course of these online discussions. My focus is generally upon the learning taking place rather than my teaching. I have become aware of the different variables as described by Kyriacou. I now consider these variables when planning, teaching and evaluating lessons.

(T1)

The online community has developed my understanding of the key considerations of effective teaching and learning and has offered different practical strategies to improve my pupils' development as thinkers and learners.

(T1)

What other things could I bring into my BTEC lessons to make them interesting and make sure learning is happening? The responses I received to this post were fantastic and it was really nice to know that other teachers felt exactly the same as me.

(X1)

In the year preceding the MTeach participants completed their ITE, usually via a PGCE course. ITE requires student teachers to demonstrate evidence of meeting standards set by the TDA. Inevitably there is a focus on assessing the student teacher, their attributes, their planning, their interactions with classes and so on. Student teachers may well foreground their performance on these factors rather than focus on the learning that is happening in their classes. T1 explains how he feels he has changed from a focus on himself and lesson content to a focus on learning and pupil development. X1 also foregrounds learning and they both credit the ODs in assisting them in this process. As explained earlier OD are set up aims to encourage participants to try to understand the complexities of their schools and classrooms. The Kyriacou (2001) reading that T1 refers to proposes a framework of context, process and product variables as one way of evaluating what is happening in the classroom. It is apparent that there is a move in participants' focus from their teaching to student learning and that a wider range of factors are given consideration in their thinking about practice.

Within DS2 practitioner focus tended to have more generic examples of the ways the ODs influenced practice rather than specific incidents. This is understandable given the interviews were occurring some time on from the NQT year and participants were looking back on their experiences more holistically. To illustrate the nature of this practitioner focus I have identified 3 strands. These are: 'Busy-ness' of the NQT year; Sharing ideas; and Changing view of the classroom.

4.3.2.5 'Busy-ness' of the NQT year

I have used the term 'busy-ness' to capture the newness, the pressures and the multi-faceted nature of the NQTs' work. This strand concerns how participants

felt the MTeach and ODs influenced their practice while immersed in this busyness.

D2 describes how the focus on teaching was a central and an all encompassing part of her work.

Because in your NQT year your teaching is everything, and you are so engrossed and immersed in it that doing the MTeach just added to that, and added to the richness of it.

(D2)

She sees the intense experience as positive: 'engrossed and immersed' suggest high levels of engagement and commitment. This positivity is enhanced further by simultaneously undertaking the MTeach. She goes on to explain what she felt was happening.

And actually this is what I always used to say to people, it's so, so easy in teaching to survive from day to day and never to think about actually what is going on, and actually what am I doing, why am I doing it, how am I doing it? Because you get in at eight o'clock and photocopy some sheets, and you survive from day to day, and it's so easy not to look at the big picture.

(D2)

She is saying that despite the pressure of work the ODs made her think more about what was happening and why in her classroom. This links very much to criticality, which is the focus of the next theme. Similarly V2 talks about survival.

...you know, NQT is sink or swim, and it is survival of the fittest. And then having this opportunity to really reflect and theorise and think deeply about what's going on, rather than just react to it, like the opportunity to be proactive was something that most NQTs aren't encouraged to do, because it's about survival. So I think that's where it was so helpful.

(V2)

The MTeach is seen as an opportunity to think carefully about what is happening, which V2 feels in turn is what made her pro-active; she feels empowered in comparison to other NQTs.

The design of the MTeach had such support and development gains in mind. There was recognition that new teachers can adopt survivalist approaches at the early point in their careers. There was also recognition that the NQT year is

also a very formative time where teachers could benefit from inputs and interactions which make them think critically about what is happening in their schools and classrooms. The pedagogic design underlying the ODs seeks to enable the use of teachers' practice as a way into understanding and engaging with their own and others' professional learning.

4.3.2.6 Sharing ideas

This strand concerns how participants shared and used the practical strategies that were part of the ODs.

In terms of the online discussions, sharing different strategies that I had used and found successful, or not, as the case may be, and people pitching in with their own ideas, and then tweaking it, so you end up with something that works for you, and it also works for your pupils, and I found that massively helpful, and knowing that there were other people, who were all in the same boat, as it were, so all NQTs, trying to make sense of what we were meant to be doing.

(T2)

And I think having the opportunity to gather different strategies and to sound some out before trying them and then to share successes, and then to reflect on failures, and think is the idea flawed or is it the execution that didn't go according to plan?

(L2)

They both value having access to a range of strategies. It seems this is viewed as an ongoing process, 'sound out ideas' and 'tweaking it', imply experimentation within their own context rather than a model to be implemented. The pilot interviewee takes this further.

... and it wasn't even just people's responses to me that would help. I read X's responses to Y, and I'd sit there thinking – oh brilliant. I could use that. Yeah, it was really nice actually. It's a bit like a focus group, you sit and watch everybody interact, and you pick up something from everybody. So yeah, I think people took...it's that same thing, people took care because they knew that we were relying on each other for help. Because it's a real problem and it's real students' lives and real teachers' classroom time, you don't suggest something that's pointless, and if you are going to think about it and suggest something then you try and frame it in a way that makes it easy to use, and helpful.

(Pilot)

She explains how being part of a group and reading each other's interactions gave her practical ideas even though these were not specifically addressed to her situation. The idea behind the design of the groups' online activities is that all participants can keep track of what is happening and benefit from this, rather than it become a series of isolated discussions. In part this is the reasoning behind the group size and the focus of each OD. She also rationalises a practical community issue; how participants 'rely' on each other and that because the contexts discussed are real, the suggestions made are carefully thought out and presented. This exemplifies how the use of real contexts is a pedagogic strength of the way the ODs are designed. Another perceptive comment by the pilot interviewee points to a feeling of freedom and honesty that is encouraged with how the ODs are set up.

It's a very pure sort of learning, it's just asking you why you are doing it, because there's nothing riding on the outcome, no employers are saying – tell me why because we've got to justify this to Ofsted, we've got to do the SEF [*self evaluation framework*] whatever, it's a really nice way of just thinking about what you do.

(Pilot)

NQTs are on an induction year which is aimed at supporting their transition from ITE to their first teaching post. It includes various assessments such as observation of their teaching. The fact the ODs are not part of an assessment of the teacher allows a more open and thoughtful contributions and sharing of what is happening in the participants' classrooms. This was an early decision on the MTeach to avoid ODs being formally assessed apart from being the equivalent of an attendance requirement. This is not to say the ODs are separate from the assessed coursework; often the ODs includes models, readings and ways of looking at classrooms that become part of subsequent coursework.

4.3.2.7 Changing view of the classroom

This strand of the Practitioner focus in DS2 is similar to what emerged from DS1 about participants changing their ways of looking at their classrooms. In this

case they now have more years of experience but remember the lasting impact of what came out of the ODs.

... and realising that there are so many different variables, and it wasn't always my fault when something went wrong. That was interesting. (M2)

... things like no hands up, I had sort of forgotten about that discussion, but I still use no hands up, and that's quite unusual in primary. (E2)

... it was one that really stuck with me, it really helped me, because it was the first time that, people had given me advice about this year ten class, do this, do that, and little things to keep them on task, but it was the first time that something had really worked, and worked to the level that I wanted it to work, it wasn't just a trick that meant they were silent for ten minutes. I could actually see that things were changing and moving on. (V2)

M2 recalls how the discussions empowered her just to realise things were beyond her control. That there were many variables at play which influenced what was happening and she should not blame herself. E2 remembers a specific strategy about which participants had an extended discussion (not letting students put their hands up) which she still uses, acknowledging it is uncommon in primary and something adapted from a secondary colleague. V2 explains how advice and practical strategies that came from the OD 'really stuck with me': what was important for her was that it was not a 'trick' or a short term solution but something that she built on and developed, which moved things on in a way she felt was genuine.

Summary

Practitioner focus was a key aspect of participating in the ODs. It was important that participants could raise and discuss practical teaching strategies and problems in an open and honest way. The combination of the use of their own experiences along with readings made them think about their situations in a less restricted way. The multiplicity of practical suggestions and ideas allowed participants to experiment within their own context on their own terms and move

from reactive to proactive strategies. As with the development of community this centrality of thinking about practice incubated aspects of confidence building and empowerment.

4.3.3 Criticality

The Criticality theme was drawn from a range of the codes in both sets of data including: Readings, Criticality, Reflection, Wider Criticality, Reflexivity, Theoretical base and Presentism (see Tables 3 and 4, p. 73 and p. 74).

Criticality took a number of forms: questioning the status quo; policy and practice; self criticism/reflection; thinking deeply about what was happening and why; recognising the complexities involved; seeing links between theory and practice; questioning theory; and seeing a bigger picture (beyond school).

The participants had chosen to undertake the MTeach as part of their EPD. Masters level courses generally aim to develop critical and analytical approaches in their students, thus one would expect this to be a strong theme within the data. What is interesting for this research is how the ODs facilitated this process. Following the approach I used with the two previous themes above I will initially utilise DS1 then move on to DS2. I will also use typical examples from the data that illustrate the form and nature of the criticality.

4.3.3.1 The 'learning styles' debate

The MTeach ODs would often develop what are called 'threads' of interaction. These were usually centred on an aspect of teaching that participants were experimenting with, such as the example of group work that was discussed in the practitioner focus theme earlier. Usually for the ODs to 'take off' in this way the area of debate would be something that was pertinent to a majority of the group. The first example below is such a case; the focus was the use of learning styles sparked off by experience of school in-service education and training (INSET).

Following an INSET on learning styles I had been overwhelmed by the benefits that went with accommodating different learning styles and my posting reflected this. I was surprised by Linda's negative reply in which

she referred to learning styles first as '*contentious*' and later as '*in vogue*'. One of the great benefits about being a part of an online, collaborative network is the way our peers introduce us to other relevant journals and articles. Linda quoted work by Coffield (2004) which critiqued learning styles. Coffield's work led me to question my original posting. Who were the people who gave the INSET? What were their claims based on? Were learning styles really a great tool for boosting achievement or (as Linda had suggested) the current "in thing"?

(S1)

He later adds

Looking back at the INSET there was no further reading suggested, information supplied or indication of where learning styles had come from. In future I will greet new initiatives with reflective scepticism...

(S1)

For S1 the OD challenged his thinking and his acceptance of what the INSET was suggesting. The group and the OD gave him access to wider viewpoints that were based on research. He acknowledges a change to a more critical stance as a 'reflective scepticism', a phrase this group had adopted from a reading. V1, reflecting on the same OD, similarly recognises a change in the way she uses and thinks about learning styles.

I think about and use learning styles in a much more subtle manner now, and this online discussion was the catalyst for my current way of thinking.

(V1)

I found Lakshmi's response particularly enlightening because prior to this discussion learning styles had been presented to me as an imperative component of a successful lesson. The Brown group were giving each other the confidence to question theories together.

(V1)

In a similar way to S1, learning styles seem to have been presented to V1 as a standard (and integral) approach required in teaching. The debate which took place in the OD nurtured an empowerment and confidence in the group to question the theory. It acted as a 'catalyst' that changed their practice, their thinking and also their implicit acceptance of what they are presented in school or other INSETs. A more detailed quote from V1 points to what it was about part of this OD that facilitated her change in thinking and practice.

Linda agreed with Lakshmi's comments and presented literature from Frank Coffield to support her assertions, *'learning styles can lead to "labelling and the implicit belief that traits cannot be altered... [it] could be limiting rather than liberating"'*. What I found most useful from Linda's response was her good idea to *'make learning the object of attention... and conversation'*. After reading this, I began to, as Watkins et al (2001, p. 2) suggest, supplement the word *'work'* for *'learning'* in the classroom, thus making learning an *'object of conversation'* and was amazed by the difference in attitude of some of the pupils over a short period of time.

(V1)

This illustrates how the participants are sharing and explaining literature to each other, but also how they are linking and seeing the connections between different literatures. This is in turn experimented with and evaluated in their classrooms. The thread that focused on learning styles is interesting in that learning styles as a concept or practical strategy were not presented or critiqued in the set up of any of the ODs. The thread has grown out of something that was being promoted at school or in an INSET session. The debate has included reference to wider literature (the Coffield mentioned above) which has been linked to literature (Watkins) that is part of the MTeach work. It is powerful in that it illustrates participants are developing their thoughts, ideas and practice by having discussions with each other. This process is giving them the confidence to take on and question theory and to critique simplistic short term strategies.

4.3.3.2 Teaching to the test

New teachers are working in a school system which is increasingly results orientated. It is difficult for them to see beyond their classrooms and the internal requirements and expectations of their school. One example of how the ODs countered this situation was a focus on how assessment issues were played out in their teaching. The following quotes are from participants in different MTeach groups who all recount how aspects of assessment became a theme within the ODs.

Regarding feedback through formative and summative assessment procedures, I found it interesting that several of us were questioning the effectiveness of summative tests but were nevertheless constrained by

them, *'I am loath to teach to the test but.....it seems inevitable'* (Daisy's posting).

(K1)

K1 identifies how the group were developing a shared criticality of the dominance of summative assessment and uses a quote from another participant that illustrates this as well as the tension and 'inevitability' that is felt about this issue. C1 takes this a stage further in recounting the commonality of experience with a fellow participant.

This led us both to question how our teaching at times has been all about the summative assessment - either SATs or GCSEs - and we both were aware *'that you can teach just to pass tests - learning enough by rote, in the format that the children will experience it in the tests, but not really developing real understanding and problem solving skills.'* Much of the discussion then focused on how this might be overcome.

(C1)

C1 is a secondary teacher of Drama and English, the colleague he refers to is a primary school teacher hence the reference to 'SATs or GCSEs'. As raised earlier the cross phase nature of the MTeach is something special. In this case participants are making linkages about practice and policy both outside their school and also across phase. This shows a critical engagement with bigger questions about education. He uses a quote of his own from the OD to illustrate the nature of this wider debate and goes on to say how this moved on to further discussion about practical strategies to challenge the types of teaching that summative tests encourage. This quote from V1 similarly acknowledges her disquiet about summative teaching techniques and the tensions involved.

Linda's difficult questions made me realise that even though good GCSE grades are imperative for a pupil, a balance between *'whizzing through the curriculum'* and active, collaborative learning in my classroom can be found whilst still enabling pupils to achieve good grades,

(V1)

The OD and questions from colleagues led her to realise she needed to try and develop a strategy that reduced the tensions, that created a 'balance', rather than accept the inevitability of the system, it spurred her on to find positive ways forward. She believes in active and collaborative approaches to teaching and

she is going to use these and get the required results. There is an implication that she wants to challenge 'teaching to the test' approaches.

4.3.3.3 Encouraging critical reflection

The reflective practitioner (as discussed in Chapter 2) is a concept that is often used in ITE. However, there is a danger it is used in an individual and narrow way, possibly leading to self blame. This section uses examples of how reflection was encouraged or facilitated via participation in the OD. This supplements parts of the analysis of the Practitioner focus theme which included examples of how the OD enhanced thinking about practice.

This participant explains the OD provided a reflective space at a time when her teacher role was very difficult.

Having to think about effective teaching was challenging at this point in the year as I was mentally and physically drained. This online posting and the readings encouraged me to take a step back and assess my teaching strategies. I found this posting very helpful in terms of making me think about the type of teacher I was becoming.

(X1)

One has a sense that X1 was surviving day to day and struggling to think about the actual effectiveness of her teaching. The OD by the way it was set up required her to 'step back' and think about what she was doing and why, then share this with others as a posting. This was very much the initial thinking behind the way the MTeach would work for NQTs: it would provide a forum for reflection at this early and formative stage of a teaching career.

B1 explains how classroom practice is in his opinion key to learning how to teach. His reference to the OD is that they provide something over and above this which he feels is valuable to his learning.

...my belief that there is no substitution for classroom practice. If this classroom practice is backed up by a regular reflection and discussion, the learning taking place will be very effective indeed. Partly because of the amount of reflection I am engaging in, I have realised that the way I teach my lessons vary according to the students.

(B1)

For him the ODs have provided 'regular' opportunities for reflection and discussion which are perhaps less available in his school context. He goes on to give an example of how he has a better understanding that 'the way' he teaches is informed by the learners. T1 takes this level of reflection and influence on his teaching in a different direction.

I do not believe that I would have been so adventurous with my teaching and the subsequent learning without the reading, the building up of ideas through the on-line discussion. I feel that I have also gained a wider perspective of some of the issues and conflicts involved with teaching and learning in terms of cross curricular teaching and teaching nationally.

(T1)

Participation in the OD has helped him experiment and develop ideas for his classroom practice. It has engaged him with issues beyond his own teaching. He has gained a 'wider perspective' and an understanding of the 'conflicts' that can exist. The nature of reflection he is undertaking is holistic and gradual, via a 'building up of ideas', rather than individual evaluations with a short term focus.

In a similar way M1 recounts how the OD developed her reflections.

Overall, this task helped me to analyse my 'complex classroom' (Quarshie, 2005) I also gained some very useful practical strategies from colleagues.

(M1)

She goes on to say.

On a number of occasions I have used the model of effective teaching developed by Kyriacou (2001) to reflect on classes. Knowledge of 'context variables' has helped me to identify why strategies have worked with one class and not been successful with another.

(M1)

She refers to one of the background papers (Quarshie) which combined with a model from a digitised reading (Kyriacou) and 'practical' ideas from other participants have assisted her reflections. M1 is engaging with the 'complexity' of her classroom and considering and comparing 'context variables', clear signs of the development of deeper criticality. It is important to recognise that three elements of the OD (the background paper, the reading and the peer

discussions) have been used in an integrated way by the participant to contribute to this reflective process. This integration was the intention behind the design of the on-line part of the course: for the experience to be holistic and to avoid elements being engaged with but treated separately.

One danger is that reflection becomes a purely looking back evaluative process rather than a looking forward developmental process. J1 has ideas for the future which resonate with a fellow participant.

I comment on how Aretha's efforts to provide a form of assessment with genuine *consequential validity* and which impacts on learner confidence and self-awareness. Like Aretha, at this point I am starting to search for a new classroom approach, like that described by Watkins where pupils are not afraid to make mistakes, but rather appreciate the value of monitoring and reviewing their progress and *have a learning orientation rather than a performance orientation*. (Watkins *et al.*, 2001)

(J1)

In thinking about the impact of his approaches to assessment in his class, he draws on his experience, his peer's ideas and readings to look forward. The nature of this reflection is not about minor tweaking or a short term fix, it is about trying to achieve substantial and long term changes. He recognises this is likely to be a gradual shift as he is 'starting to search' for approaches that can change not just his teaching but the students' orientation.

These examples of how the OD facilitates reflection point to a developing criticality beyond simplistic short term evaluations and reactive strategies. The reflection involves sharing ideas, understanding the complexities of participants' classrooms as well as thinking about wider educational issues and tensions within the education system. This reflection has a sense of continuity, is forward thinking, and is looking for ways to create real change.

4.3.3.4 Challenging orthodoxies

New teachers' thoughts are dominated by their day to day practice, and yet these new teachers, undertaking a Masters course, are required to engage critically with a wide range of literature. Indeed, this is a crucial dimension of a

practice led Masters course, which is by definition is controversial or at least unusual. For the MTeach it was essential that the ODs facilitated this process. A neat summary of the desired potential is encapsulated by V1 when referring to an OD.

... it encouraged me to question where educational and pedagogical theories come from, why certain initiatives hold prominence over others and how we decide whether they are of value.

(V1)

V1 attributes her developing criticality to the OD which made her question not only theory but 'initiatives'. Teachers are often expected to accept and implement the directives without any questioning or debate about how this might work or be of value in their local context. W1 explains what it was about the OD that encouraged more of a critical stance by both the group and himself towards literature.

... as a group we felt confident enough to let our own experiences overrule the theory. Wahid summed this up nicely with his defiant '*I don't care what Watkins and Mortimore say*' in response to my post. To me, this felt like a turning point in the MTeach; a point where I was to go from accepting as gospel the vast majority of the literature I read, to engaging more critically with that literature and comparing it to my own experiences of the classroom.

(W1)

The OD seemed to allow a confidence to challenge theory, this confidence emanated from their use of their 'own experiences'. As explained earlier the focus on their classrooms was the starting point for each OD, participants provide real scenarios to evaluate, compare and contrast their ideas with concepts and views from the literature. The design of the online activity is important as it fore-grounds their practice, asking them to suggest theoretical linkages. This structure means the literature is not looked at in isolation, the engagement with it requires foremost a consideration of their professional contexts and then a sharing of views.

One OD focused on assessment. P1 had related how a school INSET on assessment for learning and his own practice were at odds with one another.

He had been frustrated and confused by this in the OD and here explained how he had now moved on.

As I re-read the AfL literature, it occurred to me that our teaching had embodied AfL practice, but without the trappings of success criteria and traffic lights that had characterised the INSET. It reminded me of something I'd said in my interview ten months earlier: that when I first heard the phrase 'formative assessment' I'd found it daunting, but I'd come to realise that it represented only everything I thought of as teaching.

(P1)

In a similar way to the debate on learning styles there is sense that the INSET was part of an initiative the school needed to deliver. The OD and the readings P1 refers to enabled him to think about formative assessment more deeply. It was not something he felt that could be achieved with short term strategies (e.g. the traffic lights) rather it was an approach that was implicit in the way one taught. In a similar way E1 explains her realisation of the importance and role of pedagogy in her teaching.

As I tried to make links between posts and the readings I came to the conclusion that, far from being abstract, pedagogy was: ... the sort of nitty gritty stuff that makes a lesson work or not work... and began to consider the kind of knowledge that teachers needed in addition to subject knowledge.

(E1)

For her the concept of pedagogy had moved from being 'abstract' to 'nitty gritty' and it has been the combination of other participants' 'posts', the literature as well as her own experience that has taken her thinking in this direction.

A specific example of how an OD led to new ways of seeing theoretical concepts is recounted by N1 he is referring to a colleague's posting and his engagement with it.

...it was his discussion of his dissatisfaction with the term *knowledge* that inspired me further. Here, he quite clearly focuses on the shortcomings of such a restrictive term, highlighting how other participants are misled by it. He responds to my ideas, not dismissively, but rather, as I with the original source, in an effort to develop and expand the theory. I was immediately smitten with Namah's idea, believing that *understanding* is, indeed, a far more useful and far-reaching term than *knowledge*. With this in mind, I

have tried to implement this in the classroom and have found that thinking of a pupil's *understanding* is a much better way of accessing their needs in terms of where they are now and what they need to do next to further that, than reducing it to what they know, which to me now, seems somewhat restrictive.

(N1)

I have included this relatively lengthy quote as it illustrates how the participants (in this case) have not only questioned theory, but also questioned each other's interpretations of it. This process has enabled them to come up with their own ideas and language to describe how they feel the (mediated) theory can be related and relevant to their practice.

The recounting by these NQTs of their thoughts, experiences and reflections on their recent participation in the ODs has a freshness and specificity to the examples. The interviews that made up DS2 added and built on examples within the Criticality theme. They tended to have more generalised and longer term examples of how participants had developed due to their participation in the MTeach. I am going to use four broad areas to illustrate the cause and nature of their developing criticality.

4.3.3.5 Problematising their classrooms

Participants clearly remember that the ODs facilitated deeper thinking about what was happening in their classrooms.

So my school planning would always have to come first, because I had to stand up the next day and teach. But I found that the MTeach discussions forced me to consider issues in much more depth about learning, which then helped me to think that through in the classroom, and I wouldn't have looked at those things had I not had to do them.

(G2)

G2 recalls needing to prioritise her planning and if she had not been taking the MTeach she feels would have not have had such a focus on student learning. The required participation in the ODs 'forced' her to think about her practice more critically. The course has this in mind, it understands that NQTS will be very busy, but with careful design (e.g. their own practice being central, one OD

per half term) this critical engagement can be fostered. The pilot interviewee similarly acknowledges how her development would not have happened 'on my own'.

I don't think I would have come to that point on my own, so quickly, and I think that's one of the products of being asked to reflect on what you do, thinking about the outcomes. Because if there's ten of you doing it and you all think about something slightly different, then you end up with ten different perspectives instead of one. So...understanding develops quickly, and I think the speed of it was due to the participation.

(Pilot)

She feels the participation in the ODs speeded up her professional development and this was enhanced by it being a group process. The way the ODs are designed means there is a common focus (e.g. classroom interactions) which all participants relate to in the context of their own classrooms and share with the group. This then provides 'different perspectives' which the pilot found helped her understand what was happening more quickly. In e-learning terminology the forum and ODs would be described as asynchronous. In practice, at this stage postings are not responses to one another which is what allowed the richness of the 'different perspectives' referred to by the pilot interviewee. D2 gives a specific example of how a part of the OD helped her thinking develop.

Simon's response about talking to his class and being really explicit about meta learning and things, I think that was something that I then wouldn't have taken my thinking on to that next stage of – actually maybe I should be doing this – if he hadn't responded. I'd kind of identified it in my reading and thinking, but he then took it on to the next...

(D2)

It was a colleague from the group responding to her posting with an example which helped her. It was something she was aware of in her 'reading and thinking' but it was the response that facilitated a movement beyond this 'to that next stage'. These examples show there were different ways the ODs encouraged deeper thinking and reflection, particularly about what was perceived to be happening in practice.

4.3.3.6 Wider perspectives

There are examples of how the ODs developed an awareness and engagement with issues beyond their classrooms and schools. T2 explains how associated readings required for the ODs changed the way he viewed things.

... my focus definitely was changed from reading those bits and pieces. And I became far more aware of the outside influences, rather than feeling quite so insular, set in your classroom, I became far more aware that, you know, that my classroom was a microcosm of a much bigger thing.

(T2)

He felt his evaluation and reflection moved from an 'insular' approach to a greater awareness of 'outside influences'. The ODs are designed so that they use participants' own experiences as a starting point, but without this initial personal focus stifling or narrowing thinking. The readings and the exposure to others' experiences allows participants to compare and contrast, and perhaps realise more quickly how their classroom experiences are informed by factors beyond the immediate and local. New teachers under much pressure have limited opportunities for such thinking; they may be in schools and departments which have particular expectations, which may not be about critically engaging with the bigger picture. V2 explains how the multi phase and multi subject nature of the group encouraged her wider thinking.

... so it made you move away from your classroom, your experience and your teaching of a certain syllabus to the bigger picture and the bigger questions. And I am seeing sort of patterns that we were picking up on as part of bigger issues in teaching, I think. And I think that was really important. It's good to...you know, it's really interesting talking to people. And as a secondary teacher you don't...primary schools are like an alien world, and speaking to people who are primary school teachers is really interesting for transition, and just understanding where the pupils are coming from, you know. And also talking to geography teachers and science teachers, it just gives you a different perspective that you wouldn't get if you were just in your school.

(V2)

Being part of a mixed group of new teachers 'made' her think beyond her own classroom and subject. The 'patterns' and commonalities that emerged are what she describes as 'bigger' issues, which she valued engaging with as they

were different perspectives which she couldn't gain in her school environment. Here we have a participant who experiences a wider perspective and so is exposed to other ideas and other practice; it has encouraged her to question practice and policy that seems problematic for her.

4.3.3.7 Questioning

There is a sense that the MTeach encouraged a questioning of what was happening in participants' schools, classrooms and in this case at LA level about a primary marking policy.

I remember they introduced a new marking policy when I was there, and it was – we have to do this, this, and this. But there was very little why? It was just – this is what we expect you to do. Yes, the MTeach was more about why, and the borough was more about how or what?

(E2)

E2 felt there was a potential narrowness of just being expected to implement policy without understanding more deeply the purpose behind such changes. She goes on to explain how she had discussions about the policy with the Head teacher.

I remember her seeing me reading Shirley Clark and saying – oh, you are reading...where does that come from? And talking about it with her. So I think, yeah, I think maybe that gave me more understanding to...But probably it made me be more the kind of person that I could think for myself, rather than just follow.

(E2)

E2 recalls tentatively a confidence to talk about such a policy with her Head teacher and try to understand it more deeply. It is her view that it has made her 'the kind of person' that thinks about policy, initiatives and change rather than accepting them unquestioningly. Similarly P2 explains how he has developed a critical approach to new initiatives that he feels often simplify what is happening. He was,

...suspicious of any approach which is a technician approach, so any time I get Inset...we had, last Tuesday, AD brought Geoff Petty in [*well known active learning guru/consultant*], and all the other teachers were very positive about what he was doing. And while I couldn't disagree with all

the pedagogies at the basis of what he was saying, my kind of immediate response to the session was that of a petulant child. You know, I am just not really interested in any of this, the study buddies, whatever. Once you put a label on it you close down an opportunity to enquire into it.

(P2)

This over simplification annoys P2 because he feels it detracts from what really needs to happen, which is a deeper thinking or ‘an opportunity to enquire’ about the issue.

4.3.3.8 Literature

The analysis of DS1 above illustrated an unpicking and questioning of literature and initiatives that emanated via the ODs. The multiplicity of views and contexts helped facilitate this process. A few years on it is apparent that the critical discourses within the ODs had played a formative role. N2, when recounting his experience on the MTeach, explains how he became more critical.

Certainly made me more critical of my thinking, because, like I say, I used to read the theory, take it in, but now I am not afraid to take it on, engage. I do still read it. And I think without the MTeach then I’d never have done that.

(N2)

His criticality is not reserved purely for literature; it is also about his own thinking. Teachers will come to the profession and their first job with their own ideas about teaching, influenced by their initial training and their own experiences of what worked for them personally. Often teachers work in very different socio-cultural contexts than their own educational experiences, so to be able to question their own assumptions and views is an important developmental step. N2 feels he is able engage better with the literature and ‘take it on’, and he continues to take such an approach which he attributes to the MTeach. V2 similarly recalls a formative role in developing her criticality.

I think firstly it taught me to criticise, like I will read things in the TES now and think – oh yeah. Just because you are encouraged to think like that when you are not...as I said to you, with other NQTs it is fight or flight, whereas the MTeach gave you a different perspective and a different view

and a different opportunity to think about things....and I think that, in your NQT year, is so important.

(V2)

She gives an example of how this developed criticality is still with her. Her ability to read the educational media with a critical stance emanated from this period as an NQT. V2 compares herself with other NQTs who were not undertaking the MTeach. Her explanation is that being part of the MTeach exposed her to different views and perspectives that facilitated a 'different opportunity to think about things'. This was important for her as it countered the 'fight or flight' she saw happening with other new teachers. Interestingly, a key aim behind the MTeach was that by working with NQTs in a particular way one could reduce survivalist strategies (Tickle, 2000) which NQTs may adopt. For V2 it was having the opportunity to think about things in different ways and see different perspectives that empowered her.

Summary

Criticality is clearly something that the ODs and the wider involvement in the MTeach fostered. It allowed the participants a space separate from their school where they could reflect honestly and critically on their practice and other school experiences. The starting point of their own context compared with others' contexts, then the literature introduced when they felt it was relevant and pertinent gives them ownership of the OD and the nature of the debate. Participants felt empowered to take on and question literature and policy initiatives. There seemed to be the adoption of a questioning approach and a desire to engage with longer term complexities and wider perspectives, to problematise their classrooms rather than adopt short term, simplistic 'solutions' and strategies. The development of this form of criticality did not happen in isolation; it required a sense of community and the practitioner focus discussed in the previous themes.

4.3.4 Writing (and reading)

The fourth theme concerns participants' views about the writing involved in the OD (see Tables 3 and 4, p. 73 and p. 74). This is an important aspect of participating in the ODs as writing for the whole group or writing specific responses to individuals (which the whole group can see) is integral to the way the ODs work.

It is worth recapping how the structure, timing and requirements of a typical OD involve writing. The first stage requires participants to read the various components that set up the OD (briefing paper, tasks, exemplars, readings), think about their own classrooms and teaching then compile an initial posting. The online forum the MTeach uses (Moodle) allows asynchronous text based exchanges in the ODs. The way the online elements are structured means this initial posting is usually not connected to other participants' postings. Initial postings have a word count requirement (300-500 words) and a clear deadline (usually a Sunday). The majority are posted very close to that deadline. This timing and structure means the initial posting is very much the participant's own response to the requirements of the OD, clearly focused on their own practice, context, thoughts and ideas. In contrast, the subsequent stages are responses to other participants and thus are mediated by the posting they are replying to as well as other postings whether directly or indirectly related.

I use an initial extract from DS2 to introduce the analysis of the Writing theme as I feel it captures well the feelings of participants to the stages outlined above. T2 sums up how participation changed over the course of an OD.

... the online posting, the initial one, was a fairly solitary task in terms of, you know, what are we trying to do, what are we trying to understand, what was the purpose of that paper? We all took different takes on it, and that's where the great discussion comes from, so it's kind of – oh it's interesting, I hadn't thought about that, I hadn't thought about that.

(T2)

He explains how the initial posting was very much something individuals were working on using their own contexts and interpretations of the readings. The

similarities (the focus, being NQTs) and the differences (teaching contexts) allowed the sharing of multiple and alternative views. It was these 'different takes' that enabled a 'great discussion' at the subsequent stage.

Following the same pattern as in the previous themes I will initially utilise DS1 then move on to DS2. As explained earlier DS1 comes from an element of portfolio coursework which required participants to evidence how and in what ways the OD had contributed to their EPD. The work did not suggest a focus on thinking about or analysing the writing aspect of the OD, consequently it did not emerge at this stage as strongly as other themes. The process of writing was referred to specifically by some participants and seen as important as it helped them develop a deeper reflection on and analysis of classroom practice.

I found taking the time to form my submissions to the online discussions the most beneficial part to my development. Consolidating my thoughts into writing to share with others helped me to analyse my teaching more carefully.

(A1)

A1 finds the time she spent preparing the postings very valuable, it is the process of writing for this audience and purpose that helped her think about what is happening in her classroom.

K1 refers to a contribution she made to an OD towards the end of the NQT year.

Writing this piece made me realise how my organisational skills and day-to-day classroom practice had developed since starting as an NQT and furthermore how I was beginning to analyse my learners and their behaviour in relation to the activities that I prepared for them.

(K1)

She explains how the writing process made her realise how she had developed as a teacher. In addition she was beginning to be more analytical about what was happening and her role in this process. The writing process seems to have enabled a deeper reflection than would have happened otherwise.

P1 recounts how the combination of other participants' postings, his own experience, his interpretation of literature and the structure of the online group informed and influenced what he gained through writing for the ODs.

... my peers' contributions had become integral to my thinking

(P1)

He goes on to say

...the accounts of classrooms came to me through my understanding of the literature, grounding the theory in diverse practice. Above all, my peers provided my sense of audience - the form and purpose that enabled me to work things out in writing.

(P1)

This illustrates how the multi faceted nature of the ODs is used by P1. What he was reading in the ODs was 'integral' to his thinking: he explains how the variety of practice allowed him to make more sense of the literature, and he describes it as 'grounding the theory'. This is important as there is a danger that academic and professional readings in isolation might appear too abstract. In this case, because the design of the OD requires a sharing of practical experiences framed by readings, the literature becomes more relevant and accessible. He emphasises two key aspects; firstly that the ODs provide a 'sense of audience' and secondly that they enabled him 'work things out in writing'. He is writing for a group (of peers) which means he has to consider them, their contexts and their contributions as well as his own and the literature. These multiple considerations enhance the writing process, making it something which underpins his development.

Within their design some of the ODs utilise frameworks to help participants think about and explain what is happening in their classrooms. Some participants use these in their postings: F1 refers to such a framework.

This final online task taught me how to reflect on teaching and learning in a professional manner by writing a 'case in point'. The 'case in point' was a valuable exercise as it allowed us to share a common framework and language and therefore bridge the gap between theory and practice which always troubles us when talking about teaching...

(F1)

In a similar way to P1 the writing provides a way of making connections between theory and practice. Her example is less personal; it explains how the 'case in point' framework enabled the whole group to write in ways everyone could understand and also facilitated a theory practice debate. This illustrates how the design of the online tasks worked at different levels. They required participants to think about and recount what was happening in their classrooms and the frameworks encouraged participants to adopt ways of writing that had a structure and form that others could access and understand.

The interviews that make up DS2 focused more on the part writing played in the ODs. The interview framework (Appendix 5) included prompts/expansion areas that facilitated participants talking about how they approached the ODs. Writing is integral to participation in the ODs as they were taking place within a text based forum. It was apparent that the writing was more than merely a method of communication within the group. As was seen within DS1 the process of writing influenced in different and sometimes powerful ways what participants got out of participating in the ODs.

An area that was seen as positive was the way the structure and requirements of the ODs gave participants time to think about the issues.

...because they were online and you could do them at a time which suited you, it meant that you had time to think over what other people had written, you had time to think about what you were writing yourself. And you could then make your posting at a time which suited you...

(G2)

For G2 it is control over how she uses her time which is important. For busy NQTs this is important as much of their professional life is in a school environment where the time constraints are rigid and set by others. This time allowed her to think about what others had written and what she was writing. She compares this to another course which is run face to face.

I did one course which was face to face, and we had to meet every week, and I think I found that hard in terms of time and being tired.

(G2)

She goes on to say

I preferred doing the online discussions... because I had more time to think through issues and process them.

(G2)

The ODs are designed with a 2/3 week period within which the initial posting is required then a 2/3 week period for responses to each other and interaction about the topic. These time frames allow the participants some degree of control over when they choose to focus on the MTeach work. D2 has similar feelings to G2 about the flexibility and timing.

... being able to do it at home when you are at your best is so much better. And also, I guess, I am very much someone who needs some warning and needs to kind of mull things over before I discuss it.

(D2)

Both participants refer to choosing when to focus on the work as important. It meant they would get more out of it and be ready for reflective thinking 'when you are at your best' rather than when they were tired or lacked time. D2 goes on to explain more about how she approached preparing her contributions to the OD and how she felt this compared to face to face discussions.

... being able to work through it logically before I come up with my idea, worked really, really well for me, whereas face to face and saying – right now I am going to discuss this, what do you think? – I would be able to contribute much less.

(D2)

I remember having my notes on the article and then a separate piece of paper for, as I read it – oh that's a bit like my, you know, when this happens, this is a bit where – so I'd have those two things and then there would be a kind of synthesis. Which is the bit I liked best actually, about the writing tasks, how did it all fit together?

(D2)

She explains how having notes from a reading helped when thinking about what was happening in her teaching, enabling her to identify what was relevant. This in turn became part of the writing process. She enjoyed the 'synthesis' nature of

the activity, making sense of how various parts were connected. N2 also felt he benefitted from the timing and structure to formulate his thoughts.

...it worked really well for me, because I never write things spontaneously, I never write something, think yeah, boom, send it off. I think about it for a week before I even start to put ideas together.

(N2)

He goes on to say.

I liked that structure; I think it's quite a good one. What I don't think would work is if you do ask people to do things spontaneously, I mean, if you say to them – this is a task, you've got to have it in three days.

(N2)

L2 has similar views and explains more how the timing and written nature of the OD helped him.

...at least it gave the opportunity to sort of lay out all the sort of issues within the problem.

(L2)

He goes on to compare it with face to face type discussions.

... you don't have the opportunity when you are speaking, to re-look over and think – well, actually, that's not fully – and sort of develop it, make clearer what all the issues were. And also just having to type it in, think about it, and look at it, your mind is thinking of potential solutions as well.

(L2)

What is apparent from these interviews is that the design gives participants space to prepare mentally and make connections between what is happening in their classrooms and the focus of the OD. Also what is implicit in what several of them are saying is that the writing process allows a more developed and reflective consideration and re-consideration of the issues at play. It promoted the identification of different ideas and issues then a bringing together of these to try and make more sense of the whole. L2 refers to the need to 'make it clearer what all the issues were'; this is clarity not just for him but for others in his group. The word count of between 300-500 words for the initial posting means participants needed to be succinct yet clear in their scene setting and explanations, a writing skill in itself. When referring to the word limits says, E2 says.

...I think also maybe it had a different advantage as well, in that you had to really focus your thoughts and decide which thing you were going to concentrate on.

(E2)

What the ODs are encouraging is an analytical rather than a descriptive approach by participants. The pilot interviewee explains how this writing for an audience facilitates criticality.

So if you have to frame that issue to someone else you can't just go – they are a bunch of arseholes. You've got to actually stop and try and pick out, specifically, what causes the difficulties and what their good points are. So it's a nice way of making you re-frame what you do and stop focusing just on the negatives.

(Pilot)

The process of writing for others has made her analyse what is happening in her classroom more thoughtfully. In addition she feels this analysis moves her away from an over focus on the negative, the view of what is happening becomes more realistic and perhaps more empowering. P2 felt the writing also had a role for helping his engagement with the readings that were part of the ODs.

... the way to make the reading that we had to do meaningful was to have to write something about it, and a really good way to have to write something about it was to have to write for each other, and to comment on each other's writing. So I think that fabric it provided for the reading and the writing was essential, and was really productive for me. I never did the thinking about the classroom until I did the writing.

(P2)

He explains how he feels the readings were made 'meaningful' by writing. Importantly, this was for others in the group, either about his own context or responding to their contexts. He also claims it was this writing process that made him think about the classroom. This resonates with the views expressed above that being required to write to share in a group made one think about one's situation more analytically.

Summary

Participant writing is intrinsic to the ODs as it is the way participants communicate with each other. The structure, timing and requirements of the

ODs influence the process of writing, allowing participants space and time for reflection. This reflection appears to be deeper and more analytical because it requires writing for an audience. Because there needs to be a clarity and focus to the initial posting it facilitates participants personally de-constructing what is happening in their classrooms and making connections with literature. The range of similar but different interpretations enriches the later stages of the ODs. The writing theme has synergies and overlaps with the theme of criticality, as the process of writing enabled the consideration of a multiplicity of issues drawn from readings, participants' own and others' classroom experiences.

4.3.5 Difficulties with online discussions

It is important to acknowledge that using ODs as a central element of a course will not be without its difficulties. Despite the increased use of ICTs in education and in many aspects of life over the last decade, it was apparent participants did not have much previous experience of formalised online courses, much less using asynchronous discussion groups. Since these students are new teachers, focussed on f2f learning as practitioners themselves as well as in their studies to date, it is unsurprising that their views on the ODs include comparisons with f2f study. This section uses examples from the data to identify and discuss the main issues that arose and the implications of these for this research and course development.

4.3.5.1 Settling in / Induction stage issues

Most courses have an early phase where students settle in, get to know each other, get a sense of the way the course runs and start to understand what is expected of them. This phase is perhaps more difficult where f2f contact is limited, as Salmon (2000) highlights in her stages of e-learning model. It is also something identified as an issue in the IFS stage of this doctorate (Unwin, 2007b): below is an extract from the findings section of this work.

... the students' feelings of anxiety and under confidence especially with the early tasks and early postings. The part of this which seemed the most

problematic was about their writing: was it the required level? Would it be understood? The frustration when they felt it was not understood or not really understanding what others were trying to say. These problems appeared to be more of an issue early on in the course or module,
(Unwin, 2007b, pp. 54-55)

The IFS work concerned online task design and used data from staff as well as mainly more experienced teachers. In relation to the data collected for the thesis a number of issues arose in this early phase but these became less important as the course progressed.

N2 explains how he felt there was limited criticality at this early phase.

And, you know, I think that sometimes in the very early stages we all paid a lot of lip service to each other, we were all being very nice to each other, and we were complimenting each other. And towards the end it became far more interesting, because we did actually feel we had the right to disagree with each other.

(N2)

V1 recognises a development overtime in the use of literature, theory and a consideration of wider perspectives.

I am surprised by the lack of literature in our responses to each other's initial postings; theorising our practice now seems second nature at this stage in the MTeach. The lack of literature resulted in our discussions focusing solely on our individual classrooms, which shows how far we have come as a collaborative community.

(V1)

W1 saw the growth of confidence as an important enabling factor in the ODs, making them more worthwhile in different ways.

...everybody felt more confident and the cohort was working effectively as a team. As a result of this, online discussions were both more informal and friendly in tone, and simultaneously more academic and productive.

(W1)

These examples illustrate how some of the limitations of the early phase of using ODs can be overcome to an extent by the development of a community. This links with the community theme analysed in detail earlier but it also points to a community that allows both practitioner focus and criticality.

4.3.5.2 Communicating online

In the writing theme above (4.3.4), participants gave examples of how communicating online was more effective than and different from f2f, that it had allowed them to be clearer, succinct, more thoughtful and analytical. There were some views which contrasted with these examples or raised potential weaknesses of only being able to communicate in text.

L2 compared participating in the OD with f2f sessions.

...that's a potential drawback in terms of it not being face to face and you don't see people's reactions, and you were sort of not picking up on the extra communication signals, in terms of how things were meant to be, would have been said, and words being in black and white can be misinterpreted and come across harder than they were intended.

(L2)

R1 had similar worries.

...at this early stage in the course I was aware of the fact that e-correspondence can be misinterpreted and that it is difficult to convey tone. I was worried that I would offend if I posted these musings, which was not my intention...

(R1)

They both identify the potential for postings to be 'misinterpreted' and worry that this could upset other participants. The 'extra communication signals' missing in an OD include body language and tone. P2 takes this communication issue in a slightly different direction, acknowledging the difficulty of really understanding each other's situations.

I suppose I did find the lack of shared context with the other teachers in the group, in the community, difficult to bridge, because ultimately we use much the same language to describe our classrooms, and they could be such different classrooms.

(P2)

This would be a problem whether in an OD or f2f, but perhaps more so in an OD where typical conversational interaction to clarify issues and explain context is difficult. He adds an example that illustrates how different ODs and f2f can be.

Whatever the advantages of a face to face would have been, it may be that, you know, a big difference is that you don't get as many laughs. Shared laughter is a measure of shared context isn't it?

(P2)

He is highlighting the fact that you cannot really have that communal laughter online, it is one of those 'extra communication signals' where members of a group simultaneously have a shared understanding about a particular issue or context.

R1 explains feeling isolated in one of the ODs (which focused on assessment) and similarly to P2 picks up on the potential difficulty of a lack of shared context.

With this task in particular I felt the isolation of being the only primary teacher. As I felt I had little that would be considered to be in common with the stress of A Level and GCSE targets... It has been difficult to work collaboratively with others who work in a very different environment, the differences between schools is usually a divide to cross; here I was the only one crossing a divide of Key Stages.

(R1)

This particular cohort only had one primary school teacher (R1). This meant her engagement within the OD on this activity was limited by perceived differences between the key stages. This is a course development and design issue: to avoid such isolation, groups and sub groups need to include colleagues in the same phase and activities must be framed to avoid such 'divides'.

Summary

Participating in an online group is not without its problems. It is clear that the early stage is crucial for community formation, gaining an understanding of what is required and developing confidence and criticality. Written communication has limitations, with reduced opportunities to unpick, clarify and understand the nuances of different contexts in comparison to some f2f activities.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented and analysed the data using thick descriptions and a theme based approach. This has enabled a discussion about what appears to be happening for participants in the ODs. The next chapter revisits the research questions and wider literature to discuss the relevance of these findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter used data derived from MTeach participants to analyse the ODs. The themes of Community, Practitioner focus, Criticality and Writing (see Table 5, p. 76) were developed from the coding process which provided a framework for this analysis. This framing assisted the presentation of data and enabled a preliminary discussion. This chapter develops the discussion by considering the significance and implications of these findings for my own professional understanding and the related contexts that concern this research. These contexts are new teacher development and the design and use of online discussions to contribute to this form of professional learning. The discussion will draw on literature as well as current policy and practice debates. This chapter starts with the introduction of figure 2 overleaf. This diagram provides an overview of how key aspects of this research are connected and influence each other. This is followed by a review of the research questions with a summary of the main findings in relation to these questions. It then goes on to discuss in detail the relevance of the research to the contexts outlined above.

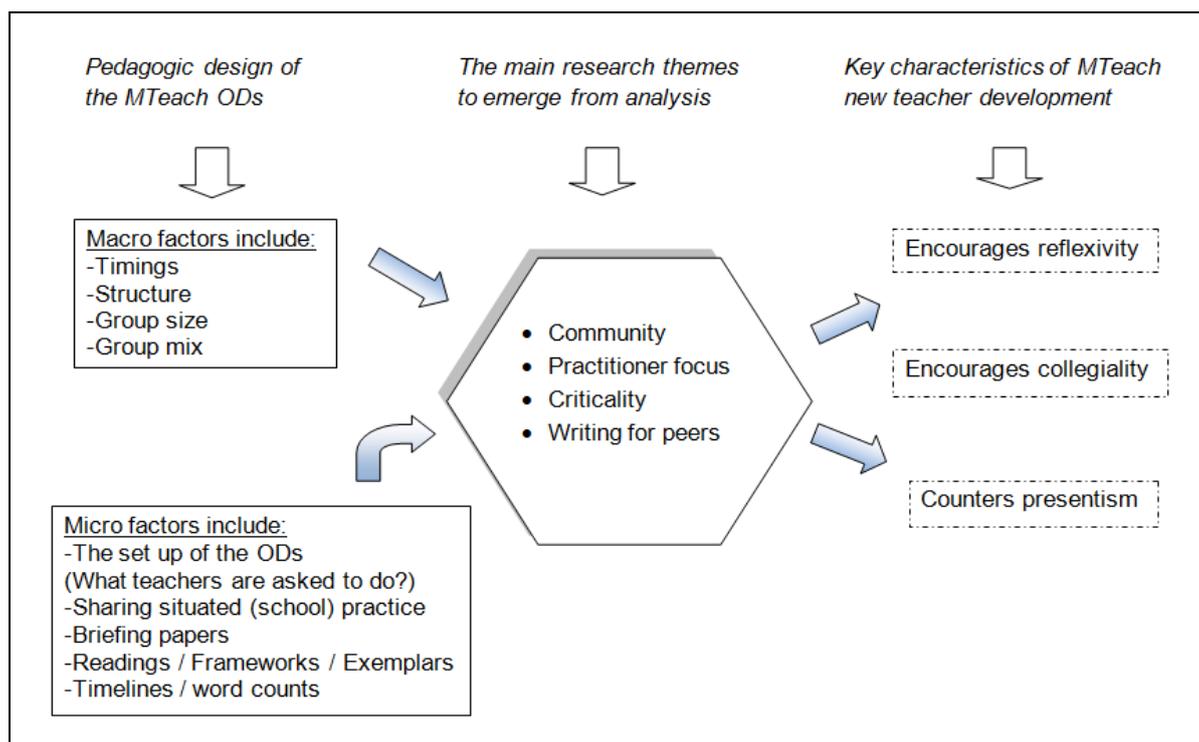


Figure 2: Thesis Overview An overview of the relationship between the pedagogic design of the ODs in the MTeach, the emergent themes from the data and the key characteristics of new teacher development. In effect the diagram is a synthesis of the thesis as a whole, showing its key findings.

Figure 2 brings together the main concepts that are integral to this research. This is presented in a flowchart format to illustrate how pedagogic design influenced how participants experienced the ODs. Within the ODs the themes of Community, Practitioner focus, Criticality and Writing (see Table 5, p. 76) were seen to develop and were valued by participants. The research shows that these ODs enable a particular form of new teacher development that encourages reflexivity and collegiality while recognising and resisting presentism. The danger of a flowchart or diagram is that it over simplifies the relationship between the concepts with implications of narrow or 'one-way' relationships. This is not the intention. Rather, the diagram provides an overview of how the three main components of the research are linked: that is, the pedagogic design of the MTeach ODs, the themes to emerge from analysis and the main concepts derived from the literature review. The aim is to provide an overarching framework in order to assist and give clarity to the discussions in the remainder of this chapter.

5.2 Summary of research questions and research findings

The overarching research question is *'How have the ODs facilitated new teacher development within the context of the MTeach?'* The findings suggest that the ODs provided an environment and activities where participants developed a sense of community. This community allowed a safe space for them to share their practical experiences and concerns about their teaching and school lives. This participation with other new teachers provided support and development different from that in their school settings. The use of the ODs encouraged a deeper, wider and more critical understanding of participants' classrooms. This is because the ODs were designed to make use of literature, have tasks that require reflection, and to frame discussions around participants' own classroom experiences and responses to peer experiences.

'What is the nature of new teacher development within this setting?' was one of the sub questions. Analysis suggests that there was development within the groups and as individuals of what I have called 'criticality'. This was a gradual development over time as participants used the ODs to look at their classrooms and situated experiences in different ways. Their participation included questioning literature, practice and policy and the adoption of an inquiry approach to situations and issues. This development was not phase or subject specific but seemed to foster transferability and adaption of ideas to participants' professional practice as well as consideration of wider perspectives. This criticality included recognition of the complexity of factors at play in education and the limitations of short term and 'quick fix' solutions or strategies.

'What aspects of the OD do participants see as important in enabling new teacher development?' was the second sub question. It was clear that participants valued the community made up of similar (all new) but different

(schools, phases and subjects) teachers, where they felt they could be honest and open. The practitioner focus was important with the starting point for the ODs being their own classrooms and issues of concern and interest to them. This practitioner focus along with the structure and timing of the ODs made it manageable in the very busy first year of teaching. The requirement to write succinctly and for an audience of peers was both difficult and beneficial. It was difficult to convey contexts as clearly as f2f discussions where an explanatory and clarifying dialogue can occur. The process of writing for the ODs made participants think carefully about their contexts and made them analytical about their practice and situation.

'How does the pedagogic design of the ODs underpin and enable new teacher development?' was the final sub question. It is clear from the analysis that the pedagogic design of the ODs was key in facilitating the way they worked. This could be described as happening at both a macro level (course / module) and at a micro level (OD specific). For example, macro factors would include the length of the module over a whole NQT year, with a mix of half-termly ODs and termly f2f meetings. Also, that online tutor groups were small (no more than 15) and made up of a mix of phase and subjects teachers. Whereas micro factors concern how the specific half-termly activities were designed: that literature was introduced with a concise briefing paper that set out the required focus in an accessible way; that ODs used frameworks, models and tasks to help participants think about issues in their own classrooms; that ODs required the starting point to be something that was part of each participant's situated experience; and that there were clear, manageable timelines and word limits.

5.3 Personal and professional perspectives

As explained in the Introduction (Chapter 1) this research critically reviews elements of the MTeach course on which I am a longstanding tutor and the

module leader for Understanding Teaching (UT). The work thus fulfils a course evaluation process beyond typical end of module surveys. It allows me a deeper and more meaningful understanding of participation on the course and in particular the role the ODs play in participants' progress and development. Burgess et al (2006) talk about this potential in their work on professional doctorates in education.

...will allow you the opportunity to reflect upon your role in your workplace and may well bring to surface issues that you were only vaguely aware of in your daily routine.

(Burgess, Sieminski and Arthur, 2006, p. 5)

They refer to the reflection involved.

...is not necessarily about improving practice...but rather it is about gaining a deeper and more profound understanding of the practice setting.

(Burgess, Sieminski and Arthur, 2006 p6)

Before undertaking this research I was aware that the participants valued aspects of the ODs that contributed to the themes of 'Practitioner focus' and 'Criticality'. These were very apparent in ODs: often they were overt parts of the way the ODs were designed and the way they required the participants to engage with issues.

I was less aware of how much the participants valued the 'Community' and 'Writing' aspects that developed in the ODs. What contributes to a formation of a community, e.g. feeling supported, being open and feeling safe, are phenomena that are hard to assess. They are about individuals' feelings and are less tangible in the ODs than dialogue about practical issues. It is clear from the research that participants valued the mutual support, the sharing and the trust which developed. This contrasted with support at their schools as they felt more equal and able to raise professional practice issues of personal concern to them (see 4.3.1 Community, p. 78). Understanding the importance and nature

of this 'Community' for participants has helped me foreground aspects of the course that foster community development.

The 'Writing' theme identified in this research was also less overt when reading the ODs. The participant's initial posting in any OD is very much the finished product, often the result of much drafting and thinking. The research has highlighted how the individual process (of writing) is valuable, facilitating a deeper and more analytical thinking about one's context. This is not something that can be done quickly, especially for new teachers. Findings in this theme have made me more aware of the importance of suitable structures and timings for the ODs as it was apparent that these enabled the writing process to be more meaningful (see 4.3.4 Writing, p. 115).

Different stages and aspects of this doctorate have helped me understand the importance of pedagogic design and how this design needs to foreground the needs and situations of the participants. What we ask the participants to do as part of the ODs needs to be manageable and relevant for them at this early stage of their teaching career. If it is not manageable they are likely to disengage and struggle to keep up. If it is not relevant to their day to day concerns it is less likely that they will consider it meaningful or useful, and again they may disengage. This design has many facets; it needs to consider the rhythm of the NQT year and also allow differentiation, for instance making some of the more academic readings available (but not mandatory) early on. Refining of the design has perhaps led to a changing role for the tutors. For example, whereas in the early years of the MTeach tutors often summarised issues at the end of each OD, now such tutor OD summaries and interventions are seen as less important. This changing role was acknowledged in MTeach staff interviews that formed part of an earlier stage of this doctorate (Unwin, 2007b). The role has moved more to the setting up of the ODs, facilitating them, clarifying issues, ensuring all are involved, closing and moving things on to the next stage. It is recognised that if one can get the design to work and foster the development of a community the participants' contexts, ideas and interactions

become central to the learning within the ODs. Tutor intervention might even disrupt this process.

There are a number of ways technology assists what happens on the MTeach. For example, participants have flexibility to access materials and work on activities from a distance when it suits them (within certain structures and timelines). The technologies we use influence the pedagogic design, for instance we decided to use an asynchronous discussion forum for the ODs. These asynchronous discussions work within the overall aims of what we want the ODs to achieve: allowing participants to utilise their own and each other's professional teaching experiences as a critical 'way in' to the topics and issues covered by the course. It is the course team that makes decisions as to how to use them (timings, structures, requirements) and these are pedagogic decisions. This research has confirmed to me the importance of not being constrained or pushed in a particular direction by the technologies. Rather, there is a need to develop approaches that utilise the affordances technology offers to achieve the desired pedagogy. As previously referenced in Chapter 2, Laurillard's question still stands.

How do we ensure that pedagogy exploits the technology, and not vice versa?

(Laurillard, 2009, p. 6)

The research illustrates to me how important the issues of pedagogic design are on both the micro and macro levels referred to above. This design process requires an understanding of the options and potential of the technology so that the course can use these in a way that contributes to rather than undermines its pedagogic aims.

5.4 New teacher development

The central concern of this work is new teacher development, which is examined within a specific context (the MTeach) and the influences of a particular aspect of that course (the ODs). The analysis established the importance of broad and interrelated themes that appear critical to this form of teacher development. This section looks at the significance of these findings in relation to wider debates including the perceptions of new teacher development discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2).

There is broad recognition that new teacher development is important to ensure an effective and sustainable workforce (Sachs and Wilkinson, 2002; Simco, 2000; Smithers and Robinson, 2003; Tickle, 2000). The implementation of statutory induction for new teachers from 1999 and strategies to make teaching a Masters level profession are attempts to address this concern, but there is less agreement on what this development should look like and how it should happen. What is significant about this research is that it illustrates that a particular form of new teacher development is possible by utilising ODs. Careful course design overcomes some of the limitations and barriers new teachers face in their professional development. This is not to say that it replaces what is happening in schools, rather it supplements this and allows these teachers to critically engage with issues of personal professional interest and concern to them (see 4.3.3 Criticality, p. 100).

In the literature review I identified three concepts that I felt were important in exploring new teacher development: they were reflexivity, collegiality and presentism. These concepts encompass what is happening with individuals, groups and contexts; they are often interrelated and can impact on each other in different ways. To assist the structure of this discussion I will use these concepts as broad headings. The aim is not to repeat the arguments from the literature, rather to identify the significance of this research in addressing the issues these concepts raised for new teacher development.

5.4.1 Reflexivity

There are a number of factors that impact on how NQTs develop in their induction year, which were discussed in Chapter 2. NQTs are very busy having to teach new classes, familiarise themselves with new curriculum subjects and work schemes, carry out formal assessments, take on pastoral responsibilities and so on. The induction standards (as with the ITE QTS standards) that NQTs are expected to achieve use a competence based model with elements of reflective practice. They will be working in an environment where there are expectations to 'fit in' and 'perform' from school communities (e.g. subject) and management. Haggarty *et al.* (2011) find that NQTs are expected to 'master behaviour management' and work to the norms of the school, which stymies any real development of pedagogical thinking and practice.

We argue that thinking and practice is restricted by the concern to 'fit in', by the belief that behaviour management should be addressed before teaching can be developed and by a lack of attention to the development of pedagogical thinking.

(Haggarty *et al.*, 2011, p. 935)

These factors are barriers to the development of reflexivity. What is significant about the MTeach ODs is that, despite the presence of such pressures and barriers, they allow and encourage reflexivity. The online tasks and activities ask participants to reflect on their practice, but not in a narrow, prescribed or formulaic way. The ODs require participants to explain and share their teaching contexts. By doing this these experiences are moved into a more public realm encouraging collective reaction and responsibility. So rather than being inward looking with a danger of self blame, the complexity of the classroom and the need to consider wider perspectives is foregrounded as valid and important. These teachers are at the very beginning of their teaching career with pressure to 'get things right' quickly (control behaviour, meet induction standards). In contrast to this the ODs provide a more gradual approach and encourage longer term thinking to help them understand what is happening in their classrooms. Participants adopted a sustained evaluation of practice, revising

their views and ideas as the year progressed. This was facilitated by being part of a community that exposed them to different practice and different ways of looking at practice, and the enquiry approach that was required within ODs and module coursework. This inquiry approach encouraged deeper, wider and forward thinking about practice rather than narrow, individualistic reflections about what has happened. These new teachers were starting to make what Moore called the 'reflexive turn' (2004b, p. 141) becoming 'authentically and constructively critical...challenging rather than confirmatory' (Moore, 2004b, p. 142). They were experiencing a 'pedagogy of discomfort' (Boler, 1999, p. 176) where their educational assumptions were challenged by themselves and each other. There is a sense that their evolving identities as teachers were linked and shaped by the MTeach and the ODs. It is the shared critical discourses, particularly within the ODs, that influence their thinking and practice at this early stage of their teaching career. Reflexivity recognises the importance of community, collaboration and collegiality which is discussed in more detail below.

5.4.2 Collegiality

It is clear that new teachers need to feel supported, feel valued, have a voice and be part of a community. Having positive relationships with colleagues (and pupils) helps engender self esteem and confidence. A collegiate and supportive work environment means new teachers are better able to cope with the workload pressures and pupil behaviour issues that are often cited as a reason for poor teacher retention (Cockburn and Haydn, 2004; Smithers and Robinson, 2003; Spear, Gould and Lee, 2000). Certainly, part of the aim of the induction year is to incubate such an environment in schools.

There are, however, problems with the variability of induction practice (Bubb and Earley, 2006 ; Bubb, Earley and Totterdell, 2005), with the intrinsic power relations involved and the influence of existing communities of practice with explicit and implicit expectations (Haggarty *et al.*, 2011; Keay, 2007). Such

issues are not easily resolved; they are in varying degrees going to be part of the working context for all new teachers.

According to my findings, what is special for NQTs on the MTeach is that they have a space separate from work where they can raise issues of concern and interest and this is in a community of equals or peers (see 4.3.1 Community, p. 78). For example they can question school policy or micro-community practice without feeling vulnerable, judged and compromised. They can also be honest and explicit about their progress, what they fear, what has gone wrong, what has gone well, what they find frustrating and other challenges. In the ODs they are 'listened to' and receive feedback about issues specific to them and their context which provides a supportive community with a semi-cathartic role. This collegiate process is underpinned by the way the ODs are designed, where participants initially present to the whole group issues (albeit framed within an area of focus) that are of contemporary interest to them. They subsequently receive feedback from others with threads of discussion often developing. What makes this process more empowering (and perhaps less threatening) is that the online group has the added dimension of an inter-subject and inter-phase collegiality, with participants benefiting from understanding beyond their school or subject micro-community. In the ODs teacher professional judgement is allowed and valued; by developing their criticality in this way at this early stage of a teaching career attributes of reflexivity are nurtured (see 4.3.3 Criticality, p. 100).

What is important is that the collegiality that the ODs facilitate is not confined to the MTeach group; if it were it would be limited in terms of teacher development. What happens is participants' critical engagement with practice becomes integrated into their school contexts and communities. Participants explained how the development they gained via the MTeach was different from their experiences at school. They were often complimentary about aspects of school support, feeling that the MTeach supplemented this and gave them

wider perspectives: neatly summarised by one participant as the ‘why’ not the ‘how’ (E2) (see 4.3.3.7 Questioning, p. 112).

Yandell (2010) when discussing student teachers’ school experiences draws on Lave and Wenger’s (1991) work explaining how peripheral participation and overlapping communities of practice can be difficult but provide a ‘privileged vantage point’.

These are not necessarily comfortable relations, and there are frequently tensions and contradictions both within and between intersecting communities of practice.

(Yandell, 2010, p. 27)

he goes on to say

...peripheral participation can also be a privileged vantage point, a position from which to make sense of the hurly-burly...

(Yandell, 2010, p. 27)

This resonates with what is happening for the MTeach participants, they are new teachers and they are subject to competing pressures and expectations within their school communities (where they are novices). They also are undertaking the MTeach and becoming part of that community which is facilitated by the ODs (between peers). The participation within this overlapping community of practice gives them both support and the confidence to look at what is happening in their schools and classes in alternative and critical ways. Their participation in the MTeach strengthens their school roles, giving them the self-assurance to suggest and introduce new ideas; contributions which were often recognised as valuable and acted upon. Thus the practitioner focus and criticality that are intrinsic parts (and are outcomes) of the MTeach ODs gives credibility to the participants in their school communities.

Aspects of this collegiality concur with my earlier doctorate work (Unwin, 2007b) which drew on communities of practice theory (Wenger, 1998). Wenger

explains how his use of the term reification is more than the dictionary definition of making something real or concrete. It has a relationship with participation that includes a range of processes (e.g. representing, describing, using, reusing, perceiving, interpreting) which become central to the community of practice. My work recognised 'that the situating of the online tasks in professional practice leads to reification' (Unwin, 2007b, p. 62) and that the participation required and reification that developed were intrinsically linked. This project has built on those findings by considering in more detail the pedagogic design and role of the ODs in allowing a particular form of new teacher learning. Collegiality and community play important roles in enabling this process and function at various levels in what are overlapping communities of practice. The participants' experiences in these multiple communities of practice are shared and feed off each other to enrich their critical understanding of educational issues at this early career stage.

5.4.3 Presentism

The concept of presentism was discussed in Chapter 2 using Hargreaves' work on 'the persistence of presentism' (2008). He identifies an over reliance on short term strategies which is in part due to a constant flow of policy initiatives and pressure for results. There is a concern that new teachers will adopt a survivalist approach (Tickle, 2000) and concentrate on the immediate, especially if such short term strategies are part of school ethos and practice. In a similar way to utilising competence based standards this short term focus will limit the development of reflexivity, of thinking more deeply about the complexities and longer term issues at play. There is the danger the strategies provided are 'one size fits all' and that new teachers are expected to implement these in a prescribed way, rather than the teacher experimenting with strategies that 'encourage teachers to question and revise their existing approaches to teaching and learning' (Hargreaves, 2008, p. 18).

Hargreaves (2008) suggests that presentism can be addictive and become endemic, whereas in the case of the new teachers on the MTeach the ODs are

a crucial factor in reducing such tendencies. The criticality and practitioner focus central to the ODs counter and challenge presentism. The way the ODs are structured and evolve allows these teachers a longer time frame to engage in a more nuanced consideration about their teaching. The situated nature of the initial stage of the ODs foregrounds and requires thinking about context appropriate rather than standardised 'quick fix' strategies. The process of writing for an audience of peers provides a source of Hargreaves' deeper 'rumination or reflection' (2008, p. 10) where participants need to think analytically about what is happening in their teaching and then present this in a meaningful and succinct way to peers (see 4.3.4 Writing, p. 115). The community and situated aspects of the ODs exposes these new teachers to different ideas and accounts of practice which by design often become focussed on particular learners. This challenges the assumption there is one way or a best way of doing something when it is apparent that contexts and learners can be so diverse.

What is important in the way the ODs operate is that they endorse an engagement with the 'complexity of the classroom' (Quarshie, 2005) and in doing so question simplistic solutions or strategies. They foster an enquiry approach, which by its nature is forward thinking and moves away from the immediacy of presentism. This future orientation means strategies become longer term, more holistic and grounded in why things happen as opposed to adopting approaches which are judgmental, formulaic and over focussed on the negative. This forward thinking and enquiry although concerned with participants' own contexts, are assisted by the community and by the artefacts that make up the online activities. These have an important formative role and demand engagement with theoretical concepts and wider perspectives that go beyond their subject, phase or school context.

I feel NQTs are vulnerable to presentism; it can become part of a survivalist strategy especially if promoted within the school ethos and practice. The way

the ODs are designed, the way they operate, the multi-faceted contexts of participants and the actual outcomes (the discussions) are all important in making them work in a way that counters the beguiling attraction of presentism. This combination of factors encourage a questioning a 'reflective scepticism' (S1) (see 4.3.3.1 The 'learning styles' debate, p. 100) towards new initiatives, policy and best practice models rather than a passive acceptance.

5.5 Online discussions in HE / professional learning

The discussion above illustrates the special way the ODs contribute to new teacher development. What are of further interest in this research are the findings beyond the new teacher focus. Are there aspects of this work that have resonance and relevance for teacher and professional learning more generally? And what role do new technologies play in this process?

The literature review included reference to work by Fisher, Higgins and Loveless (2006). They explain how teacher learning is complex, multifaceted and 'resistant to standardisation' (2006, p. 2) but there are 'affordances' (2006, p. 3) digital technologies can offer to enhance teacher learning. They provide a framework for categorising and describing these concepts and activities (see Table 1 from their report overleaf).

Knowledge building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adapting and developing ideas • modelling • representing understanding in multimodal and dynamic ways
Distributed cognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accessing resources • finding things out • writing, composing and presenting with mediating artefacts and tools
Community and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exchanging and sharing communication • extending the context of activity • extending the participating community at local and global levels
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exploring and playing • acknowledging risk and uncertainty • working with different dimensions of interactivity • responding to immediacy

(Fisher, Higgins and Loveless, 2006, p. 20)

Table 6: Clusters of purposeful activity with digital technologies

The MTeach uses technology to facilitate the ODs by providing a forum (the online tutor group) and various digital artefacts and resources. What is evident from my research is that the ODs achieve to varying degrees purposeful activities from all clusters. It is the community and communication cluster that features strongly and I would argue that this facilitates the development of activities in the other clusters. For example, the way the ODs are set up requires teachers to participate within a community, to share and exchange information, which in turn leads to activities such as ‘adapting and developing ideas’ and ‘writing, composing and presenting’ from the other clusters.

Fisher et al (2006) suggest that professional development will benefit by ‘designing in’ (my words) community and communication.

The community and communication affordances can be exploited as teachers reflect upon their practice within a wider community. They can use communication tools to engage in reflective analysis of materials and experiences with colleagues and mentors, and such opportunities for reflection, both on general practice and the use of ICT in their teaching, need to be built into and prioritised in the design of professional development schemes and innovations.

(Fisher, Higgins and Loveless, 2006, p. 25)

This concurs with what this research has found on the MTeach. The ODs use the technology to allow participants to share their reflections and experiences (see 4.3.2.6 Sharing ideas, p. 97). The pedagogic design behind the OD considers carefully where these teachers are situated and the pressures they are under. Providing communication tools in itself is not enough; the communication expectations need to be realistic. Earlier in their paper Fisher et al encapsulate what they feel is needed for teacher learning to be successful.

Teachers learn and develop their professional knowledge best when the aims and purpose of activities are relevant and authentic to their own lives; when they can use a variety of tools to help them realise and express their goals; and when they are in relationship with others in the wider community which shares rules and ways of working.

(Fisher, Higgins and Loveless, 2006, p. 14)

The central debate in their work concerns how ICTs can assist this process. The ODs are a particular use of technology, but what is clear from my research is that they achieve these broad aims. The way the ODs are designed requires engagement with participants' situated experiences and encourages a 'problematizing' of the complexities involved which is shared beyond their working contexts (see 4.3.3.5 Problematizing their classrooms, p. 109). The 'ways of working' are well structured and clearly signalled (via exemplars) which makes for manageable and productive online exchanges. The ODs facilitate a sharing of goals and discussion of how these might be achieved, but I feel this is taken further in the direction discussed earlier under the concepts of reflexivity, collegiality and presentism. The ODs encourage a longer term, more analytical approach that considers wider perspectives of policy and theory. One would expect these attributes to develop with students on a Masters course; what is significant in this case is how this is achieved. The critical understanding of practice and theory is not solely the result of readings but rather it is fostered by discussions with peers and exposure to different contexts and ways of working: as one participant stated, 'grounding the theory in diverse practice' (P1) (see 4.3.4 Writing, p. 115). What is apparent is that the pedagogic design

that underpins the ODs enables 'purposeful activities' with positive implications for teacher learning.

How far what happens in the ODs represents collaborative knowledge construction is more difficult to assess. To gain a sense of what is happening it is useful to revisit ideas and concepts from literature that concern learning within online forums and are not specifically about teacher learning. The community aspect of the ODs certainly facilitates 'the social dimension of learning (the discussion of theory, the exchange of ideas, negotiating meaning)' (Laurillard, 2009, p. 16) and there is evidence of 'the practice of discussion and argument in order to develop theory.' (Laurillard, 2009, p. 16). It is important to note that theory development is not a specific aim of the ODs as they are about gaining a critical understanding of practice, seeing the connections between knowledge, understanding, theory and practice. Rather than participants trying to achieve a collaborative outcome the ODs are designed to be a collaborative process where 'learner participation leads to multiple perspectives on issues, a divergence of ideas, and positions that students must sort through to find meaning' (Harasim, 2000, p. 53). The nature of this joint process reminds us that what is happening within the ODs is akin with the concept of a 'community of inquiry' (Garrison and Anderson, 2003; Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2001). This enquiry is encouraged by each OD having an overall focus to which participants bring their own views and situated accounts of professional practice. The ODs could be described as having a formative role in knowledge construction where participants are in 'a community where individual experiences and ideas are recognised and discussed' (Garrison and Anderson, 2003, p. 4). This formative role appears to offer support and direction for participants to follow both in developing their practice and their understanding (theoretical or otherwise) of what is happening within their own and wider contexts. Thus ODs construct a collaborative process but 'it is the individual learner who must grasp its meaning or offer an improved understanding.' (Garrison and Anderson, 2003, p. 13)

In a similar way to the development of community attributes discussed above, the way the ODs achieve this formative collaborative knowledge construction is

the due to the pedagogic design underpinning the online activities. The design allows participants to be tentative in making sense of their and others' classrooms and wider educational issues. There are models and readings they can draw on, but there is not an expectation of a 'right' answer or quick solution. There is a gradual development of criticality and enquiry within the ODs that attempts to fit in with the rhythm of the teaching year and be relevant to issues often experienced by NQTs. For example the starter task (October) is concerned with something participants are struggling with, whereas by mid-way through the module (March) participants are proposing areas of their professional practice to evaluate, that they want to understand better and develop their practice in.

5.6 Implications and final reflections

This research should be of interest to schools, teacher educators and professional networks interested in designing and or participating in teacher EPD and CPD. The research shows that it is possible to create productive and sustained EPD opportunities for new teachers that do not have to be phase or subject specific or located in a specific school or LA context. While not dismissing the importance of subject and phase based development, the form of teacher learning developed in a multi-phase and multi subject community enriches learning by exposure to wider and differing perspectives.

What is of particular significance is how online technologies are used to enable this professional learning, which in this case capitalises on the potential of community and shared communication and is less constrained by both location and time. HE practitioners, professional bodies and policy makers may also be interested in the implications of this research for e-learning design and practice more widely.

As discussed in Chapter 2 there is a tendency to assume educational benefits when introducing technology to the learning process without taking a critical and analytical perspective to what is actually happening and why this might improve (or not) the learning process (Laurillard, 2002; Mishra and Koehler, 2006;

Oliver, 2003). What underpins this work and makes it distinctive is that it foregrounds the importance of what I have called pedagogic design. To achieve the professional learning gains required careful thinking about what participants are asked to do in the online elements of a course. This design included the use of situated experiences as a central and overarching dimension, the use of models, frameworks, readings and exemplars, having manageable timelines and clear structures, and a shared and formative enquiry element. Thus the design is itself an analytical process that starts with the learner. By considering learners, the contexts they are working in, the pressures they are under and their learning needs, the ODs can achieve engagement and community that enhance professional learning.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a final review of this research and discusses its significance. To achieve this, the chapter includes a reminder of the research context and its intentions. Aspects of this chapter are speculative; they are based on the research, analysis and discussions in the preceding chapters but go further to consider, albeit tentatively, wider consequences and issues that relate to this work.

6.2 Context and intentions

This research focused on the OD element of the MTeach course. It was concerned specifically with the experiences of teachers who started on the course as NQTs in the years 2002-2007. The intention was to explore how and in what ways the ODs contributed to these teachers' professional development in their first year of teaching. There are a number of factors that make the timing of this project interesting. Firstly, the MTeach was a relatively new course (first cohort 2000) which used new technologies and ODs to support distance learning from the outset. The participants involved in this research experienced the course at what could be described as a developmental and early consolidation phase. Secondly, in their school contexts the statutory induction requirements for NQTs (introduced 1999) although still variable in practice, had now become more established. Finally these individual, school and course contexts were located within a particular phase of technological change. This phase is often referred to as Web 2.0 (Wikipedia, 2012) and in short indicates the increased use of web applications to facilitate information sharing via social media, often with users controlling design and content. The ubiquity of YouTube and Facebook are popular examples of this phenomenon. These contextual factors help situate the research and the findings rather than being areas of focus or investigation.

6.3 The significance of online discussions

This research has found that the 'community' aspect certainly played a significant role in the ODs. What I feel is important is that this is a community of peers. Whilst all participants were new teachers in different schools they found themselves grappling with similar issues and questions. This gave the community a degree of commonality. Undoubtedly judgements about each other were being made and there were differing opinions. These were occurring in atmosphere of trust and equality rather than within the power relationships of participants' schools.

Participants had control over the timing of their involvement. The online, distance and asynchronous nature of the activities gave them thinking time and focus time, by which I mean they approached the work and contributed when they were ready at a time that worked for them. The technologies used on the MTeach have become more user-friendly; internet access has become prolific and participants' familiarity with Web 2.0 technologies increased substantially. This means technological barriers to the online aspects of the course have become less of an impediment to meaningful engagement.

However, what really enabled the online community to develop was the pedagogic design that underpinned it: in short, what we asked participants to do. The analysis and discussion chapters in this research raised the importance of numerous macro and micro factors of design. It is difficult for new teachers to get exposure to what other new teachers are doing, how they are feeling and making sense of their professional role. This is because new teachers are busy, peer observations raise issues of logistics and sensitivity, school based support and PD are influenced by power relations and the ethos and cultures of micro communities. The online group and their discussions appear to circumnavigate many such difficulties and provided both distance (they do not work with each other) and closeness (they are all new teachers embarking on the MTeach).

The ODs achieved this through a number of specific attributes. Participants provided each other with narratives of real events, and my research has shown that they looked forward to the ongoing 'stories'. These were context and complexity rich. Teachers became interested in each other's experiences, seeing how specific situations developed. They did not respond to each other lightly, but appeared to empathise and realise quick-fix non contextualised solutions may not be helpful. In contrast to their ITE, they also gained exposure to different phases and subjects. This means they were less able to make assumptions about each other's classrooms. What appeared to result was that individuals thought carefully (and more analytically) about how they explain their own experiences and ideas to each other. This allowed these NQTs wider insights and an early understanding of how commonplace issues and situations might play out in different contexts. The ODs thus allowed a practitioner community to develop that fostered criticality and reflexivity.

6.4 Revisiting relevance

New teacher learning can be susceptible to narrow conceptions of what is 'relevant' to an individual's professional development. For example the competence framework that underpins current ITE standards might encourage an overly technical attitude to professional learning. The induction practice in many schools appears to emphasise behaviour management and lesson structures and therefore underplay deeper, perhaps less clear cut, matters such as curriculum development. One can imagine the rhetoric of 'time is precious, do not waste time concerning yourself with things that are not immediately relevant'. For new teachers under considerable pressure this can seem logical and sound advice. Relevance thus becomes part of the 'presentism' agenda explored in this research, concentrating on the immediate, the local and on short term gains. By doing this, it closes down criticality of and engagement with wider issues and long term perspectives.

I have argued that the MTeach ODs create space and activities that actually broaden and deepen teachers' understanding of what is relevant. The MTeach is not just about practical solutions and short term strategies (important though these are) but about participants making sense of and developing meaning from their practice. Participation in the OD extends notions of what is relevant in several ways: participants are exposed to wider issues and problems beyond their own concerns; they are encouraged to use frameworks and models to think about the complexities of their teaching; they are required to be forward thinking and adopt an enquiry approach rather than a purely reflective one; finally, there is a sense of continuity and linkages between ODs that acknowledges the need to think beyond the immediate and the local.

What the ODs manage to do is break down what can be barriers between different facets of teachers' learning. They emphasise and utilise the richness of teachers' individual situations and contexts. The immediate and local (i.e. the immediately 'relevant') are not dismissed, rather they are 'ways in' to the wider debates, issues and theory that underpin the design of the ODs.

6.5 The role of the MTeach course team

This research concludes clearly that the pedagogic design of the MTeach enabled a particular form of the teacher learning to develop within the ODs. This design was the result of ongoing work by a course team of experienced teacher educators.

These teacher educators understood the pressures NQTs were under but importantly they themselves were located in HE not schools. By not being school teachers they did not need to respond to the latest initiative or local agenda in conceptualising the course design. This autonomy, along with experience and scholarship, gave the team with a particular type of capacity and ethos. The aim was to develop a course which encouraged critical and longer term engagement with the complexities of teaching and learning. The

team's pedagogic approach to achieve this was to value and utilise participants' situated experiences and find ways of enabling them to share this meaningfully with each other.

What grew from this was a culture of course team centred research activity. This was a new course using new technologies in an interesting way and staff wanted to understand how this worked for participants. It appears this team made up of different subject and phase specialists developed 'a sense of shared pedagogic values and course ownership' (Unwin, 2010a, p. 10).

These course team attributes all contributed to developing a pedagogy underpinning the ODs which understood and worked for participants from a diverse range of educational settings.

6.6 Conclusion summary

This project has attempted to understand specific online activities that were part of a Masters course for new teachers from different subjects and phases. The detailed findings are in Chapter 5. It illustrates there is considerable potential to develop an online community that critically engages with day to day educational practice as well as issues beyond the immediate and local. To achieve this form of teacher learning course planners will need to recognise the importance of several factors. Firstly, that there is a need for careful pedagogic design at many levels. Secondly, that this design makes the situated professional experiences of participants a central feature of the online community. Finally, this design is best achieved with a team of experienced teacher educators.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: MTeach modules and pathways

Table A and B below summarise the modules and the pathways that existed during the time of this research (2002-2009).

Module	Focus/content
Professional Development Portfolio 1 (PDP1)	Completed at entry stage to the course. It enables teachers to showcase a range of their practice and provide evidence of reflection and evaluation. It is made up of specific requirements, e.g. a philosophical statement and a critique of an article. This work is assessed and accredited at Honours (H) level.
Professional Development Portfolio 2 (PDP2)	Builds on PDP1 and is similar in format. It is completed later during the course. It is assessed and accredited at Masters (M) level.
Understanding Teaching (UT)	Undertaken by new teachers, focuses on teaching and classroom issues such as management, communication, assessment and pedagogy.
Leading Learning (LL)	Focuses on issues of early middle management in schools such as subject/pastoral leadership. Undertaken by teachers in 3 rd year of teaching onwards.
Teaching and Learning in Urban Settings (TALUS)	Focuses on the specific issues faced in urban classrooms such as: second languages, ethnic and cultural diversity, transient populations and refugees.
Research and Professional Practice (RPP)	Critical reading of educational research, planning small scale research projects, research methods.
Practice Based Enquiry (PBE)	The research project module, which can be either a 10,000 word report or 20,000 word dissertation.
Option	Could be an MTeach module not already taken or a module from outside the programme area.

Table A: MTeach Modules

	New teachers	More experienced teachers	Outreach	International
Entry/Year 1	PDP1	PDP1	PDP1	PDP1
Year 1	UT PDP2	LL/TALUS RPP	These pathways are designed specifically to suit the requirements of the institutions involved.	
Year 2/3	RPP PBE Option	PDP2 PBE Option		

Table B: MTeach Pathways

Appendix 2: NQT Induction aims and entitlements

Statutory induction for NQTs was announced in the White Paper 'Excellence in Schools' (DfEE, 1997). The policy was that from September 1999 all NQTs in England would complete a statutory induction period of three terms, which aimed to provide:

- all newly qualified teachers with a bridge from initial teacher education to effective professional practice
- a foundation for long-term continuing professional development
- well-targeted support... which in turn helps them to... make a real and sustained contribution to school improvement and to raising classroom standards

(DfEE, 2000a, para 1)

This policy was translated into a specific list of requirements and opportunities that schools needed to provide for NQTs.

1. a 10% lighter teaching timetable than other teachers in the school;
2. a job description that doesn't make unreasonable demands;
3. meetings with the school 'induction tutor' (mentor), including half termly reviews of progress;
4. an individualised programme of support, monitoring and assessment;
5. objectives, informed by strengths and areas for development identified in the career entry profile, to help them meet the induction standards;
6. at least one observation of their teaching each half term with oral and written feedback;
7. an assessment meeting and report at the end of each term;
8. procedures to air grievances at school and local education authority level.

(Bubb *et al.*, 2002, p. 2)

Appendix 3: Letter for Data Stage 1

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Director Professor Geoff Whitty

3rd April 2009

Dear MTeach student or graduate,

I am a member of the MTeach team at the Institute of Education and I might well have worked with you on modules during your studies. I am currently undertaking research as part of a Doctorate in Education (EdD) programme. This work aims to identify key factors that influence the success or otherwise of the form of early professional development (EPD) that the MTeach offers. In particular it focuses on the way new technologies (the online tutor groups) facilitate this process.

I am contacting you as part of a relatively large sample (circa 50) that undertook the MTeach early on in their teaching career.

Data collection

1. One source of data I am using is the reflective work about your 'participation in online discussions' that was submitted as part of PDP2. I would like you to contact me if you have any problems with me using this source of data (see ethical statement below).
2. During May, June or July this year I will be conducting interviews with a selection of current and former MTeach students. This would be at a time and location that is suitable for participants and any travel expenses would be paid. Please let me know if you would rather not be approached to be interviewed.

Ethical position

Throughout the research project I will be following the British Education Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines in my research <http://www.bera.ac.uk/files/2008/09/ethica1.pdf>

Points to note:

- Your participation in this research is not connected in any way to your progress or the ongoing assessment of you on the course (if you are still studying the MTeach).
- All your comments will be treated with strictest confidence, no individuals or schools will be named.
- If you participate in this research I will share the findings with you in the form of a summary report.
- There is no obligation for you to take part in this research. If you do take part you may withdraw from participating at any point.

I would like to thank you in anticipation of your help. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or would like to talk to me about any aspect of this research. I hope work is going well and that you have a good Easter Break.

Regards
Adam Unwin

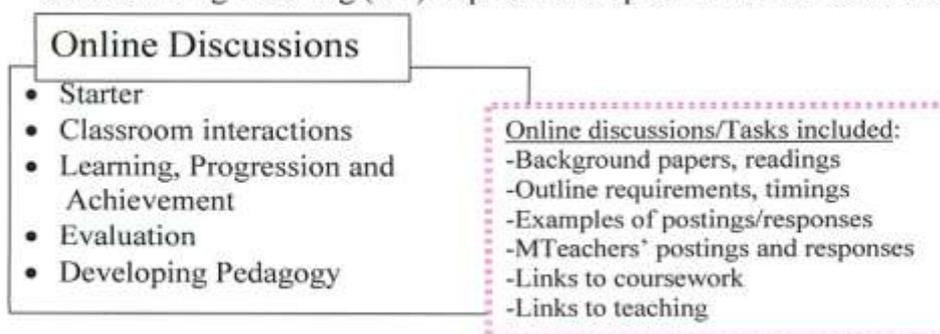
Appendix 4: Interview framework 1

This research aims to identify key factors that influence the success or otherwise of the form of early professional development (EPD) that the MTeach offers. In particular it focuses on the way new technologies (the online tutor groups) facilitate this process.

Interview Questions

<p><u>Question 1</u> What motivated you to undertake the MTeach / what attracted/interested you about it?</p>	<p><u>Prompts/expansion:</u> NQT going to be tough enough?</p>
<p><u>Question 2</u> Thinking back to your NQT year, tell me what you feel were the most challenging aspects of that early phase of a teaching career?</p>	<p>Refer back to their ideas at that time (PDP2 extracts).</p>
<p><u>Question 3</u> In what ways did participating in the online discussions help you in this early phase of a teaching career?</p>	<p>How did the MTeach differ from school based or other professional development you had at that time?</p>
<p><u>Question 4</u> Thinking about the way the online discussions were set up e.g. background papers, tasks, postings, responses etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What seemed to work well and why do you think this was? • What seemed to work less well and why do you think this was? 	<p>Reminders about structure and elements of different online discussions within UT (see below).</p> <p>Can you give specific examples of how your understanding developed at this stage? How much was this due to MTeach participation? and the online discussions?</p>

Understanding Teaching (UT): topics/make-up/format of the online discussions



Adam Unwin, EdD Interview framework

Appendix 5: Interview framework 2

This research aims to identify factors that influence the success or otherwise of the form of early professional development (EPD) that the MTeach offers. In particular it focuses on the way new technologies (the online tutor groups) facilitates this process.

Interview Questions

<p>Question 1 What motivated you to undertake the MTeach / what attracted/interested you about it?</p>	<p>Prompts/expansion areas: NQT going to be tough enough?</p>
<p>Question 2 Thinking back to your NQT year, tell me what you feel were the most challenging aspects of that early phase of a teaching career?</p>	<p>How did the MTeach differ from school based or other professional development you had at that time?</p> <p>How did you approach undertaking the tasks/online discussions?</p>
<p>Question 3 In what ways did participating in the online discussions help you in this early phase of a teaching career?</p>	<p>How did you find participating online for these activities say compared with face to face (f2f) type sessions?</p>
<p>Question 4 Thinking about the way the online discussions were set up e.g. background papers, tasks, postings, responses etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What seemed to work well and why do you think this was? • What seemed to work less well and why do you think this was? 	<p>Refer back to your ideas at that time (see PDP2 extracts).</p> <p>Group made up of teachers from different subjects/phases?</p> <p>Can you give specific examples of how you think your understanding developed at this stage? How much was this due to MTeach participation? and the online discussions?</p>

REMINDER: Understanding Teaching (UT): topics/make-up/format of the online discussions

- Starter task (Sept/Oct -after starting -sharing a current challenge)
- Classroom interactions (Nov/Dec after first Saturday f2f)
- Learning, Progression and Achievement (during Jan/Feb)
- Evaluation (Feb/March initial coursework ideas after f2f)
- Developing Pedagogy (Summer term before June f2f)

Online discussions/Tasks included:

- Background papers, readings
- Outline requirements, timings
- Examples of postings/responses
- MTeachers' postings and responses
- Links to coursework
- Links to teaching

Appendix 6: Letter for interviews

Department of Geography, Enterprise, Mathematics and Science (GEMS)

Head of Department Dr Shirley Simon

Business and Economics Education

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Director Professor Geoff Whitty

June 2009

Dear

Thank you very much for agreeing to be part of this research. I know how difficult it is to find space to participate in these types of activities. I am quite happy to visit you to conduct the interview if this helps, but if you would rather visit the IoE this is fine (and I will reimburse your travel) the main thing is we need space which is relatively quiet and would be uninterrupted for 40 minutes or so.

Below I have outlined sections of time on various dates that I am available to meet with you,

- Morning- meaning broadly between 9.00-1.00 pm
- Afternoon- meaning broadly between 1.00-6.00 pm

Outside these times it might well be possible to meet, but perhaps best to arrange specifically.

I think the best way to do this is for you to look through the list of times available and choose some times that work for you (your best three if possible) and let me know these along with your mobile/contact telephone number and postcode (if I am visiting you). Once I have this I will confirm as well as send you an interview framework (one page) that summarises the focus of the research and interview questions, along with a copy of the MTeach PDP2 work you produced about the online discussions.

Hope this all makes sense, do contact me by email or phone if you have any queries, and thanks again.

All the best
Adam

Day /Date	Time	Specify time and choice (e.g. 1/2/3)
Frid 26 th June	Morning and Afternoon	
Thur 2 nd July	After noon	
Frid 3 rd July	Afternoon	
Mon 6 th July	Morning and Afternoon	
Wed 8 th July	Morning and Afternoon	
Thur 9 th July	Morning and Afternoon	
Mon 13 th July	Morning and Afternoon	
Tues 14 th July	Morning and Afternoon	
Wed 15 th July	Morning and Afternoon	
Thur 16 th July	Morning and Afternoon	
Mon 20 th July	Morning and Afternoon	
Tues 21 st July	Morning and Afternoon	
Tues 22 nd July	Morning and early Afternoon	
22 nd July onwards	Still possible to meet but best to make direct contact to arrange	

