An Inquiry into the Theory of Action of School Development Planning constituted within the Professional Culture of the School Development Planning Initiative 1999-2010

MARK FENNELL

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Supervisor: Dr. Anne B. Ryan

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Abstract

This study is a qualitative inquiry into the theory of action of school development planning (SDP) constituted within the professional culture of the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI).

SDP is delineated as an historically contingent term of art most influential in scholarly and policy discourse under the auspices of the Education Reform Act (1988) in the United Kingdom and the Education Act (1998) in Ireland. SDP in Ireland reflects national policy aspiration and traditional Irish cultural and educational values. SDPI, though only established for eleven years, had a crucial role as an agency of the then Department of Education and Science in promoting and supporting SDP in Irish secondary schools in fulfilment of statutory obligations and a national agenda of school improvement.

This study presents a qualitative thematic analysis of documentary material and interview data. Using qualified grounded theoretical analytic techniques, the analysis produces findings showing that the primary goal for SDPI was the development of collaborative, deliberative professional cultures among teachers as self-conscious learners, facilitated by supportive leadership, focused upon enhanced pupil learning. The findings also chart an historical pattern of shifting priorities for SDPI in building capacity for SDP until school self evaluation discursively displaced SDP, culminating in a more instrumentalist model of planning.

The study also identifies competing loci of control and power between central instrumentalist and accountability expectations on the one hand, and, on the other, the promotion of school autonomy and teacher empowerment. These competing loci of control form the pivotal historical axis of the problematisation of SDP in the study. The findings give weight to the argument that this antinomy is a core determinant of SDPI's theory of action. The relationship of SDPI to the inspectorate reflects this tension.

Conceptualising the inner culture of SDPI the thesis identifies both strong cultural cohesion and creative licence. Key features of valorised SDP derive from the internal culture of SDPI experienced as a community of practitioners. However, strategic naivity and conflicted loyalties to school communities and the Department of Education and Skills contributed to the decline both of SDP as a leading term of art in school improvement discourse in Ireland and to SDPI as a pivotal programme of support for schools. In relation to categories derived from Argyris and Schon, SDPI displays model 2 behaviours operationally, but model 1 behaviours strategically.

The thesis contributes to an understanding of an important phase of recent school improvement practice in Ireland, including the relationship of professional culture to praxis, and the need for alignment of purpose among key agencies in school improvement policy design and implementation.

Abbreviations

AFL   Assessment for Learning

C&C   Community and Comprehensive

CORI   Conference of Religious in Ireland

DES   Department of Education and Science
                                 (Department of Education and Skills from 2009)

DEIS   Delivering Equality of opportunity in Schools: an
                                 action plan for educational inclusion (2005)

ISM   In-School Management

NCCA   National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

PGDSP   Post Graduate Diploma in School Planning
                                 (Until 2007 this was the Higher Diploma in
                                 Education Studies {School Planning})

SDP   School Development Planning

SDPI   School Development Planning Initiative

SI   Subject Inspection

SSE   School Self Evaluation

VEC   Vocational Education Committee

VS   Voluntary Secondary

WSE   Whole School Evaluation

UK   United Kingdom

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Chapter One

The Nature and Focus of the inquiry

Introduction

This study is about the themes that contribute to a theory of action of SDP operative within the professional culture of the national school planning support group SDPI (1999-2010).

It has found that SDPI was actuated by a core vision of nurturing collaborative professional learning communities empowered through SDP to improve pupil learning. However, contradictions within the concept of statutorily constituted SDP fractured this vision as competing instrumentalist and capacity building expectations contended, and agencies demanding accountability (the inspectorate) and offering support (SDPI) failed to sustain a shared and coherent vision of empowerment for schools.

In this chapter, I outline briefly my research question and findings to offer a focus for the study. I explain why I believe that this is a worthwhile study. I offer a brief account of SDPI and explain my own personal investment in the inquiry as a former member of the team. I explain my use of 'theory of action' and 'culture', elaborating the latter into the heuristic 'community of practice' to help elucidate key features of that culture which are relevant to my inquiry. I indicate the importance of seeing SDP in a historical perspective, and the impact this has on the epistemological stance of the inquiry. I conclude by offering a short rationale for the structure of the thesis and the main focus of each of the chapters.

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1.1. My Research Question and Key Findings: This study seeks to determine whether there was a discernible and distinctive theory of action of SDP operative within SDPI, the support service established within the DES in order to help schools in Ireland meet their statutory obligations under the Education Act (1998). I look at SDP in Ireland through the lens of SDPI's professional culture and experience. Did SDPI mediate a particular theoretical vision of SDP to schools? If so, what are the main themes that constitute it? Whence did they arise?

To borrow a metaphor from Tuohy, the inquiry probes the 'inner world' of SDPI in order thereby to define the professional actions, values, assumptions and beliefs that constituted a signature theory of action of SDP (Tuohy, 1999). This inquiry has a double perspective. It looks through the lens of SDPI at its stewardship and theorisation of SDP, and at SDPI as a community of practice that gave rise to that theory.

I have found that SDPI did construct a theory of action of SDP which was in part indebted to a combination of traditional Irish educational values and earlier international school effectiveness / improvement scholarship and policy. Especially influential were proposals for and scholarly reflections upon SDP in the UK in the late 80's and 90's employing a cyclical planning process aimed at bringing about change in schools.

The central theme in the findings about SDPI's conceptualisation of planning was fostering deliberative professional communities within schools, conducive to a whole

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school culture premised on both teacher and pupil learning and nurtured by sensitively attuned leadership. Collaborative, reflective and deliberative commitment to professional learning and improved teaching practice through SDP was fundamental to this theory of planning.

However, the genesis of SDP as both a vehicle of a national policy for school improvement *and* for local professional empowerment proved inherently unstable, problematising SDPI's approach to SDP. This led, moreover, to a fraught and discordant relationship with the fellow agency of the DES, the national inspectorate, especially as increasingly exigent instrumentalist demands for tangible outcomes came to displace a more patient and culturally sensitive advocacy of capacity building. SDP was beset by an unresolved tension between competing loci of control at system and local levels. The cascade of new legislative and departmental policy demands upon schools after the turn of the century fuelled this tension. SDPI was caught in the middle, but strongly biased towards school empowerment nonetheless.

I have also traced important abandonments by SDPI of earlier thematic commitments to more ambitious planning programmes for iterative whole school transformation, local articulation of mission and wider partnership in SDP, as practical experience supporting schools enforced more modest and focused aims, with subject planning closely related to pupil learning attaining greater prominence.

The research shows that contingent contextual and historical circumstances have a decisive role in the formation of a theory of action of SDP, as much as avowed intention and national policy. The ever increasing importance of historical context on a theoretically complex project like SDP is a general insight that has most profoundly struck me during the course of this research.

Crucially, the study has found that SDPI's own professional culture, conceptualised as that of a community of practice, was importantly formative of its own theorisation of SDP. Thus, this theory was partly shaped by analogous deliberative practices within SDPI. However, as the shadow side of a virtue, it sowed the seeds of a strategic naivity that weakened SDPI and may have contributed to the decline of SDP as the dominant discourse for school improvement in Ireland. However, I also identify strong historic parallels for the rise and decline of SDP in the UK in the 90's and Ireland in the 21st century. In both cases, I argue, this is due to the close historical association of SDP with statutorily governed school improvement agendas premised on a flawed and compromised rhetoric of school empowerment.

1.2 The importance of this study? SDPI represented a unique experiment in Ireland's official embrace of school improvement policy. For a decade it was the main support service for schools recently required by law to undertake whole school development planning. As chapter 3 demonstrates, SDP was the foremost vehicle envisaged by policy makers prior to the passing of the Education Act (1998) for improvement in schools to be leveraged. For cultural and historical reasons the Irish educational landscape was relatively uncultivated by national policy initiatives demanding collaboration, change and improvement, in comparison with that of other developed countries in the OECD (OECD: 1991).

 Every secondary school in Ireland engaged with SDPI at one time or another, many forming a close relationship with the agency. Nearly a thousand teachers graduated from its Post-Graduate Diploma in School Planning (PGDSP). Its website still contains a large suite of guidelines and templates widely used where SDP remains active. It is of considerable importance, therefore, to identify just what SDP meant to those who mediated it to schools at this time and how a theory of action took shape.

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Such an inquiry is of intrinsic historic interest, as no such account currently exists in Ireland.

Insofar as this study finds deep-seated flaws in the logic of SDP when it is subjected to importunate expectations, it is important for both policy makers and school leaders and teachers to squarely face the implications of failing to reconcile national and local needs, instrumentalist and capacity building conceptualisations of school improvement and not to fudge rhetorically what may unravel in practice. This study reveals a strong theorisation of SDP embedded in collaborative communities of learning. It also finds formidable obstacles to its achievement. Only by reviewing our recent history of efforts in this area can we come to reconsider how best we can obtain our objectives for school improvement acceptable both in terms of the common good and healthy school cultures. This study offers a richly textured qualitative account of what one dedicated group of professionals came to value in SDP and how experience tempered their ardour.

There are also important lessons for the design of support and accountability structures for schools. Coherence and alignment of purpose among different national agencies whose work overlaps is critical. To achieve this, this study suggests, one must look internally at the culture and strategic intelligence of these agencies and externally at an attempt to surmount territoriality and achieve common purpose in the service of better schooling. This study may help those charged with this work not to take for granted the means by which they propose to support schools, and to consider how effective but open communities of practice may be created in the future. I propose that the perspective of those charged to kick-start and support radical change merits exploration. It is worth inquiring into how the inner culture of a

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group that for a time had a national profile might give shape to its theorisation of its professional mandate, revealing why it comes to envisage its task as it does.

While it is widely recognised that it is important how a 'critical friend' or support agency is viewed by its clients, it is hypothesised that the perspective of the supporting agency itself may prove instructive as well (MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001: 149-51).

Above all, it is most important that we analyse data that helps us to understand what the Irish experience of SDP, here viewed through the lens of its main proponents in the last decade, has in common with international scholarly research and where distinct national and local values and dispositions are evident.

1.3. School Development Planning Initiative: SDPI was a support service established within the DES to help give effect to the statutory requirements in the Education Act 1998 for schools to produce a school plan (Ireland: 1998). SDPI comprised seconded teachers and principals (regional coordinators), two secretarial staff and was led by a national coordinator, reaching a maximum of 15 personnel in 2007. A management committee comprising the national coordinator and representatives of DES ran the Initiative. A consultative committee with wider stakeholder representation, including from the National Parents' Council, management bodies and teacher unions, also oversaw the work of SDPI.

SDPI offered school based facilitation and consultation, organised and delivered regional seminars for principals and interested staff, convened local planning clusters and summer schools, produced planning guidelines and supporting materials, templates and worksheets and taught a post-graduate diploma in school

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planning in conjunction with the National University of Ireland, Galway.[1] SDPI also collaborated with other bodies, including school trustees, teacher unions, university education departments to mention but a few. SDPI participated in several inter-agency projects with other educational support groups, including Leadership Development in Schools.[2]

SDPI lost its independence in 2009, and was finally disbanded in 2010. Its numbers started to contract in 2008 as the dire effects of the recession took hold of the Irish economy. Later in 2009 it was subsumed into the generic Second Level Support Service[3]. Its National Coordinator became a deputy Director of this organisation and it lost a great deal of its autonomy. When the Second level Support Service for schools was itself disbanded, only two members of SDPI remained on secondment in the new, greatly reduced Professional Development Service for Teachers, offering generic support at both primary and secondary levels. SDP was linked to leadership in this new organisation but was largely redundant, apart from some work on DEIS schools.[4] As the analysis of interview data will show, SDPI's star was falling from the middle of the decade, particularly in the eyes of the inspectorate. From a position of central significance at the turn of the century in the national drive for school improvement, it had lost status and importance as a support service.

SDPI was an agency of the DES which operated within the framework of national policy under the supervision of its internal management committee.[5] There was also a consultative committee comprising representatives of key stakeholders, such as

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[1] These resources may be viewed on the SDPI website which is still live: www.sdpi.ie
[2] Leadership Development in Schools was a national programme established on 2002 to support school leaders, including newly appointed deputy principals and principals, as well as aspirant school leaders. It was absorbed into the new generic support service Professional Development Service for Teachers in 2010.
[3] The Second Level Support Service was established in 2001, offering generic pedagogic and curricular support to secondary schools.
[4] Designated disadvantaged schools
[5] The internal management committee was composed of representatives of DES and the national coordinator.

management bodies, teacher unions and the National Parents' Association. Nevertheless, under the direction of the National Coordinator team members had considerable freedom to plot their own path in interpreting this framework. Thus in considering the course taken by SDPI, though more directly influenced by extrinsic direction, particularly from the inspectorate, in later years, SDPI was coextensive with its team of coordinators. As the findings of this study will show that in itself was to prove problematic.

Early collaborative work on producing extensive guidelines for SDP (SDPI, 2000) combined with restricted access to schools because of industrial action by the Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI), enriched the theoretical and reflective resources of the team at the outset.[6] The groundwork was laid for an intensely collaborative working culture. Thereafter, ongoing co-writing of new presentations and co-design of workshops, along with the practice of sharing resources for work in individual schools, formed the creative hub of the team. More pointedly, these activities increased the internal intellectual grip of the team on its own working agenda. Far from presenting pre-packaged materials the team was constantly creating, revising and critiquing its own evolving approach to SDP as new areas of planning required new materials.

The relative intellectual and pragmatic independence of SDPI coordinators justifies the direction of this inquiry and how it is framed. It argues for the prima facie value of exploring the discourses of planning that evolved within the team. Insofar as SDPI influenced planning in Ireland, its own internal culture and original deliberations,

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[6] ASTI banned work on SDP in schools from 2000 to late 2001 as part of a dispute with the DES. ASTI teachers worked mostly in voluntary Secondary schools, representing over 60% of the schools in the secondary sector, as well as in many community schools, representing 10%.

along with its publications and developing programme of work in the field, are likely to have significantly shaped that influence.

Inevitably, the way SDPI went about its business reflected the norms, values and beliefs that came to constitute the group itself as its own identity took shape.

1.4 Why this inquiry was important to me: I was a regional coordinator on secondment with SDPI from 2002 until its disbandment in 2010. Prior to that I was principal of a Voluntary Secondary School in Dublin, to which I returned as principal in September 2010 and where I remain at present. I have been a principal of another Voluntary Secondary School, a vice-principal of a large Community College, and a teacher of English and year head for many years in a co-educational Community school.

When I enrolled in a professional doctoral programme in the National University of Ireland, Maynooth in 2008 there were already signs of impending trouble over the Irish economy. Retrenchment in national programmes like SDPI became increasingly likely. Cuts proved draconian as circumstances deteriorated. I wanted, in keeping with the spirit of professional doctoral research, to discern through rigorous inquiry what theoretical vision of SDP animated our work. It had filled the most challenging and creative phase of my own professional life.

I realised that SDPI might fade quickly from memory. Above all, I wanted to record the values and beliefs, and their historical provenance, underpinning SDPI as a professional project. This reflects a strong personal conviction, that 'why?' is the most fundamental as well as a commonly neglected question underpinning an inquiry into professional experience. Professionalism is at its roots an ethical and not merely a technical concept (Carr, 2000).

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In this inquiry, therefore I seek to honour, but by no means to idealise or misrepresent, a memorable period of my own professional biography; one marked by an energising collaborative adventure at a time of national hope, one the like of which I am unlikely to ever experience again.

I believe that my inside knowledge has powerful heuristic value, enabling me to interpret closely what is said, provided it is constrained by faithfulness to data, judiciousness in extrapolation and deference to the expressive integrity of others. The story is thus not just mine, nor theirs, but SDPI's.

1.5 Theory of action: Ryan and Walsh give a good account of what theory means, emphasising the importance of asking 'why':

> Theory provides a range of general explanations that have been found useful in providing answers to 'how' and 'why' questions…these will enable you to tease out and explore the issues that lie behind these questions. Essentially theory allows you to become an observer, to compare and contrast and to come up with differing explanations about a topic or event. It provides a structure to discuss what you observe and to speculate on its meaning. It allows you to put order on and deal with complexity. (Ryan and Walsh, 2006: 41)

Silverman defined theory as; 'a set of concepts used to define and /or explain some phenomenon' (Silverman, 2000: 77). I have sought through judicious analysis of relevant data to 'define and explain' SDPI's conceptualisation of SDP, in the context of its mandate, the complexity of actions undertaken, its own internal professional culture and the contingent historical context in which it went about its work. I have also elucidated the accrued meanings of SDP as a term of art prior to SDPI's formation which also obviously informed SDPI's approach.

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This study tried, therefore, in the first instance, to delineate those concepts and themes that might form a 'definition and explanation' of a construal of the pattern of actions of SDP within SDPI, and so compose a theoretical account that reflects those concepts and themes.

However, there is a sense in which what I offer is a kind of meta-theory. For SDPI was an agency of change energised by an already theoretically elaborate programme. It explicitly performed as advocate, persuader, guide and teacher in the field of SDP to its clients, largely school communities, teachers and school leaders principally. It was an agency saturated with intentionality, programmatically and professionally focused around its mission to seed and nurture SDP in schools. It is therefore more accurate to say that I have explicated through descriptive analysis a *theory of action* already operative within SDPI. In order to clarify the conceptual framework of the inquiry I will briefly describe the origins of this term of art in the groundbreaking work of Argyris and Schon. I will then offer a stipulative definition for its employment here. Argyris and Schon's work provides a useful heuristic for exploring professional commitment to achieve effective change.

1.6 Theory in practice – Argyris and Schon: A *theory of action*, according to Argyris and Schon, is a theory of intervention in an existing state of affairs, a 'reality' as they term it, by an agent seeking to bring about change (Argyris & Schon, 1974: 28). The domain or reality for which they expound this theory is professional practice.

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Personal and professional values, assumptions about that reality and a strategy to negotiate and improve it combine to define a theory of action (Ibid.: passim).

Though working to bring about change, a theory of action is also, paradoxically, inherently conservative, as it also requires internal consistency and stability, even to the point of interpreting reality selectively in terms that confirm its in-built assumptions (Ibid.: 20-23). A theory of action, therefore, prescribes ends and means under conservatively bounded conditions of variability in pursuit of effective implementation of change wrought by professional practice.

Argyris and Schon take for granted that professionalism is about changing states of affairs for clients where such a change is typically and to a greater or lesser extent problematic and not straightforward. Thus illustration throughout their text is confined to examples that can be regarded as dilemmas for the professional in a quasi-public rather than private decision making environment (Ibid.: 37-62). This implies what Carr was later to call the 'essential contestability of the goals most professionals conduct' and the 'context dependent' nature of expertise that goes well beyond 'the acquisition of a kind of technology' (Carr, 2000: 31). Thus Argyris and Schon have most to say for professionals, and SDPI would be a pre-eminent example of this, where the challenging, innovative nature of the task and the relational context in which it is set complicate professional judgment.

Argyris and Schon further distinguish a *'theory-in-use'*, the theory of action one actually lives by, from an '*espoused' theory*, the theory one avows, noting that they may be at variance (Ibid.6-18). Indeed, attaining congruity between them is one of the main aims of professional education for Argyris and Schon (Ibid.: 23-4). Moreover, Argyris and Schon state, professional behaviour is invariably propelled by a theory of action, though one may not know it, may be deceived about it or be unable to articulate it as one's theory-in-use (Ibid.: 15-17).

The nature and scope of a theory of action is determined by what Argyris and Schon call '*governing variables'*, which are the embedded assumptions that focus and confine variability that in turn controls the range of possible, intended actions (Ibid.: 15). Governing variables are both descriptive (they define reality) and normative (they prescribe what is valued or deprecated). In simpler terms, they map a domain or a portion of the world and of how to act within it. They are 'artificial' to the extent that they create their own 'behavioural world' and reflect deep seated values and assumptions for the professional actor (Ibid.: 17).

Argyris and Schon have argued, therefore, that a theory-in-use, the theory of action one actually operates under whether wittingly or not, serves two overriding functions. First, is effectiveness within a normative range prescribed by the governing variables of the theory-in-use. Second, is 'constancy', achieved through 'mitigating unintended consequences' and 'keeping all variables within an acceptable range', such that the maintenance of a 'person's field of constancy' is a valued aim in itself and not merely a condition of effective action towards extrinsic goals (Ibid.: 16). Thus:

Theory-in-use may be regarded as a programme of action *designed* to keep the values of certain variables within acceptable ranges (Ibid.: 22. my italics)

In sum, the normative thrust of a theory-in-use is bidirectional; it is a theory of change *and* of conservation. This will prove of great significance in evaluating the internal culture and professional practice of SDPI in Chapter 11.

The effect of these two aims together is to set a conservative threshold whereby governing variables will only change in a process of what Argyris and Schon call '*double loop learning'* (Ibid.: 19). This occurs when the serviceability of the theory-in-use as a theory of action breaks down because effective action is no longer possible while the existing governing variables of that theory remain unchanged.[7]

In a stable environment *'single loop learning',* defined as that within the competence of operative governing variables, suffices to meet the intended needs the theory serves. Argyris and Schon illustrate such single loop learning by the example, borrowed from Bateson (Bateson, 1958), of the responsive variations of a thermostat to changes in temperature (Argyris & Schon, 1974: 19).

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[7] One notes here a pattern of conservation and change driven by the interaction of conservative structure and impinging environment that was prevalent in the popular structuralist theory of the seventies. A notable example is the role of equilibrium and disequilibration in the genetic structuralist Piagetian theory of learning through competing functions of assimilation (conserving structure by bending the environment to its terms) and accommodation (adapting structure to un-assimilable environmental novelty) (Piaget, 1970).[7]

An important consequence is that there is always the risk that the price of such conservation is a resistance to deeper new learning when faced with conditions that transcend meaningful assimilation to existing governing variables. It will be shown in chapter 9, to anticipate an important example, that the findings of this inquiry suggest that SDPI's uneasy relationship with the national inspectorate and the wider political environment exemplifies this predicament. Thus there arises the potential for obscurantism or disabling intransigence in the face of a new reality, perhaps a professional crisis or unforeseen situation, especially where a current theory-in-use is invested with emotional or ethical value by the professional. Argyris and Schon refer to a self fulfilling tendency in theories of action that makes potentially disconfirming testability progressively less likely. They call this theory '*self-sealing'* (Ibid.: 27) A theory of action, as action, constructs its own reality over time and may be more, or less, susceptible of disconfirmation depending on its relative openness and the breadth of its governing variables. A key conclusion of this model is that in a

theory of action there are forces working towards efficacy (outer directed and change oriented) and towards constancy (inner directed and conserving states of being) as potentially incompatible aims.[8]

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[8] Precisely this same insight informs the burgeoning literature on communities of practice, which will be discussed shortly, where the dynamic orientation of stabilising the identity of 'community' and achieving new learning thrrogh 'practice' may be congruent or divergent in changing circumstances.

Double loop learning is assisted by a consciously open and reflective stance to the 'here and now', so that one's normative construction of reality is accessible to critique rather than merely self fulfilling, to the 'outsider' perspective (Ibid.: 28-9)[9].

In principle, a theory-in-use is not strictly confined to professional practice but applicable, as Argyris and Schon put it, to all the ways we as social beings, construct 'behavioural worlds' (Ibid.: 64)[10]   Moreover, the possible variability of theories in use is as wide as the contexts in which they may arise, a possibility that will be exploited in this thesis.

However, Argyris and Schon maintain that in fact two dominant patterns, amounting to two overarching theories in use, frame professional behaviour. They call them *model 1* and *model 2.* Both define the professional's assumptions about effectiveness and her disposition towards her clients.

A model 1 theory-in-use is characterised by the professional operating from clearly defined goals, a win/lose framing of experience, deprecation of negative feeling and hyper rationality (Ibid.: 68-9). Such a disposition by a professional towards her clients is closed, controlling, non dialogic, based on untested assumptions rather than analysis of public data and essentially self fulfilling and self-sealing (Ibid.: 63-84).

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[9] See MacBeath, 2002: 84-6 for the association of 'double loop learning' as Argyris employs the term with enhanced critical awareness in the context of school self evaluation.

[10] This idea is very much in tune with an emerging predominance of social constructionist thinking, with particular awareness of the precariousness of constructed identity and sociality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Giddens, 1991)

This means that Model 1 tends to promote single loop learning only. From such governing variables flow defensive and controlling action strategies that conduce to diminished effectiveness and restricted learning. The diminished effectiveness of the model results, largely, from the unresponsiveness of the model to its professional environment; its incapacity to access valid data and to learn from experience (Ibid.). The self-sealing nature of this disposition picks up the inherent conservatism of theories in use generally. Argyris recur frequently to the adjective 'private' to capture the sealed professional world of judgment it protects.

Model 2 behaviour, in contrast, pursues publicly valid information through collaborative openness and the ability to look at reality directly rather than through inferred categories; 'free and informed' choice that is open to inter-personal critique; and responsible commitment to decisions in a socio-cultural context that promotes 'learning oriented norms (trust, individuality, open confrontation on difficult issues)' (Ibid.: 87)

Argyris and Schon are clear that professional effectiveness depends on the move (though not in all circumstances, it is conceded) towards the adoption of model 2 theories in use (Ibid.: 96-109). At issue, is the professional's full cognitive, emotional and technical relationship with her clients. It may be remarked in anticipation, that the normative assumptions about SDP in the findings incline towards an affirmation of a culture of deliberative, collaborative inquiry that approximates to that of model 2 in Argyris and Schon's account, while SDPI's own internal dynamic betrays features

of both paradigms, with model 1 ultimately defining the limits of its capacity for learning..

They conclude by examining the genesis of ideas of professionalism in modern culture. They draw two general conclusions. First, that professionalism originates in religious ideas of 'professing' a faith (Ibid.: 146). The deepest, client related goals, ideological in a non derogatory sense, are thus rooted in foundational values like 'justice' (law) or 'health' (medicine). The second point is that the modern paradigm of professionalism is characterised by 'technique', by which is understood a disposition to control, which undermines the service of these values. Engineering and management, since the industrial revolution, provide the dominant metaphors of model I theories in use (Ibid.: 148-155). The underlying assumption of this critique is that all professional engagement is ineradicably a complex inter-personal process that is not reducible without loss to the controlled manipulation by a professional expert. It is first and foremost a complex social encounter, a key implicit belief of Argyris and Schon throughout.[11]

Of course, technique, in the narrower sense of expert knowledge appropriately deployed in professional practice, is accorded its due value. Nevertheless, Argyris and Schon define the professional-client relationship, their primary concern in this text, as properly and mutually interactive, co-constructive of professional decision making and open to amendment (Ibid.: 162-169).

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[11] Echoes of this tension between ethical and instrumentalist orientations in professional culture are found both in the history of SDP as expounded in chapter 3 and the analysis of the interview data in chapter 7.

While they mention effectiveness repeatedly, this effectiveness is determined in a profoundly ethical, interpersonal way (Ibid.: 180-196). That is, it arises from the alignment of purpose of collaboration and service between the professional and client, and, one may infer, within the professional community. This original emphasis punctuates the ethical core of what it means to be a professional, something that will tally closely with the findings of this inquiry. This conclusion anticipates a strong line of ethically based critique in the development of the concept of professionalism in modern scholarship (McIntyre: 1981; Carr: 2000). In an open interpersonal setting, through conditions of trust where information can be publicly tested without defensiveness or guile, theories in use and espoused theories will converge and effectiveness will ensue.

1.7 Stipulative definition of a theory of action in this study: Resonant with Argyris and Schon's account, the following features are found in this study:

- Distinction between an explicit professional programme, its rationale, methodology and disposition towards its professional milieu (an espoused theory of action) and a theory-in-use (the shifting assumptions and beliefs that betimes ran athwart this espoused commitment

- Normative and technical 'governing variables' or defining themes regarding SDP that construct both the espoused public theory of action and more complexly animate a theory-in-use, particularly in relation to the assumed role of the teacher in school planning.[12]

- The critical assessment of a recalcitrant and challenging school environment leading to shifting assumptions adapting in reflective practice to changed circumstances that might be characterised as a form of 'double loop' learning[13];

- Linking of professional commitment to underlying values; and the exploration of the scope and limits of radical learning in SDPI frame the idea of a theory of action in this study.

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[12] See chapter 8

[13] For the use of 'double loop learning', explicitly indebted to Chris Argyris, in relation to self-evaluation and critical self reflection, that might as aptly apply also to the second order reflections of those charged with mediating such processes to schools, consider MacBeath's formulation in a section called 'Double Loop Learning': 'The second loop interrupts the linear sequence. It involves standing back and taking a critical stance on the nature and meaning of the evidence. It entails a more holistic view of how things are interlinked within the deep structure and how they manifest themselves in the surface structure' (MacBeath, 2002: 84). The association of 'double loop learning' with potentially transformative critique is evoked in this inquiry in chapter 11. However, implicit but unstated in MacBeath's account is that 'double loop' critique is ultimately reflexive and so dismantles the assumptions that frame existing views. It will be argued there that such learning was employed operationally but not strategically within SDPI.

More diffusely, the professional values founded in ethical commitment expounded by Argyris and Schon are congruent with the findings of this inquiry.

However, though there is one important exception in relation to the inner dynamic of the team discussed in chapter 11, this study follows a less constrained understanding of a theory of action than originally presented by Argyris and Schon, though the tenor of inquiry does not stray radically from theirs.

There is warrant in peer reviewed research for using the theoretical frame of a 'theory of action' in a context of professional interventions that may go beyond the professional-client relationship posited by Argyris and Schon and the precise meaning they ascribe to a theory of action.[14]

Moreover, the necessary limits of this inquiry mean that it is not possible, following Argyris and Schon, to develop a full theory of action as they envisage, through an inquiry into data that presents the professional-client relationship in all its richness. This is an important but unavoidable limitation.

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[14] See, for example, the major recent study of Wiliam and Thompson on formative assessment. The authors define their project as follows: 'The Tight but Loose formulation combines an obsessive adherence to central design principles (the "tight" part) with accommodations to the needs, resources, constraints, and particularities that occur in any school or district (the "loose" part), *but only where these do not conflict with the theory of action of the intervention.* (Thompson & Wiliam, 2008: 35; emphasis in original). This formulation captures the central idea in this inquiry of levels of meaning, overt and implicit, publicly attested and inherently operative, essential and contingent, yet within an overarching coherent professional intervention.

I propose, therefore, to follow Hargreaves, as a stipulative definition, who describes a theory of action as:

> a set of tacit assumptions or explicit guidelines concerning the need for change, the solutions required, and the means for achieving them in terms of knowledge, attitudes, skills, learning processes, incentives, rewards, sanctions, human motivation, leadership, resources, timescales, structures, participation and stakeholder investment – to name just a few.' (Hargreaves, 2008: 19).

This definition, clearly indebted to Argyris and Schon, captures precisely the idea of an eclectic mix of elements that constitute the domain of inquiry for me in this thesis. It is a flexible conceptual frame that includes both explicit intention and reflection, and implicit encoding of values, beliefs and assumptions. It does not deny, as Argyris and Schon stipulate, that model 1 and model 2 theories are applicable to all professional behaviour, but it implies that they do not exhaust necessary explanatory prototypes of more contextually specific theories in action. It pre-defines, and so circumscribes as a focus of inquiry, SDPI as an agency professionally committed to promoting change through SDP.

A theory of action is not, following Argyris and Schon, to be confused with a systematic, explicit programme or self-sufficient quasi scientific hypothesis. Rather, it is discerned at best tentatively and in part. It is indicative. It may incorporate but is never reducible to explicit documented programmes, statements of intention or policy. Indeed, its interest is often in how these are qualified or subverted through

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experience. It comprises a cluster of fissile values, assumptions and beliefs driving a professional programme of change.

As a further limitation, while professional values are important, I do not seek to explore personal and social motivations or experiences that transcend the explicitly professional domain. One exception, however, is the discussion of the strong affective bonds found within SDPI as a social group, which proved to be of relevance to its professional outlook and so figured in the analysis.[15]

I have, however, included actions, and decisions about changing priorities for action, as an important source of data that helps to reveal the prevailing theory of action. This led me to examine reports about SDPI's pattern of activity and changing priorities. In other words, deeds and not just words express a theory of action.

Theory, it follows, is multiple. I am not positing, nor have I found, a monolithic theoretical position within SDPI. Rather, there are dominant themes, areas of remarkable consensus (several), themes that are the subject of contention and differences of emphasis and interest, especially evident within the interview data. Moreover, as will be seen, a theory of action is not a static phenomenon in time either but rather describes a meaningful trajectory of change. This is especially noticeable as SDPI embarked on an intensive programme of work with schools and teachers and encountered challenges in the broader political environment within which it worked.

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[15] This should not be taken to imply that I do not consider that these are not fitting and worthwhile areas to explore, but that simply in this inquiry they are beyond the scope of my research question. The significance of affective bonds in SDPI is taken up in sections 10.5 and 10.6.

1.8 Theory-in-use and the internal culture of SDPI: However, in one respect, with regard to the internal professional milieu of the team itself as a professional grouping, the final chapter will invoke the central problematic of Argyris and Schon's analysis of a theory-in-use as bidirectional between change and conservation. I will consider what the data reveals as operative governing variables in the broader sense applied in this study, before then posing the question of how applicable model 1 and model 2 may be towards elucidating that professionalism. This is undertaken because the analysis in Chapter 10 reveals assumptions operative within SDPI as a community of practice that may be further elucidated by employing the conceptual framework of Argyris and Schon more closely. Moreover, the dilemma of conservation and change, the applicability of model 1 and model 2 theories of action and the limitations to double loop learning prove to have powerful explicative value for the internal conditions that determined how SDPI functioned as a professional agency.

1.9 SDPI as a community of practice: Silverman goes on to argue that theories are 'self-confirming in the sense that they instruct us to look at phenomena in particular ways' (Silverman, 2000.: 78). A theory of action, committed to driving change, is almost by definition not disinterested or neutral. Mezirow has talked of 'frames of reference' and 'habits of expectation' which are 'filters or codes to shape, delimit and often distort our experience' and a 'point of view', a meaning scheme made up of 'beliefs, feelings, judgments, intuitions and attitudes that accompany and shape a specific interpretation' (Mezirow, 2007: 11). This is especially the case when a group of people work on a common project for action over an extended period of time. The result is a shared culture:

> A culture is composed of shared frames of reference and these are acquired through cultural assimilation and are often reproduced through schooling. (Ibid.)

SDPI is conceptualised in this inquiry in the first instance as a professional *culture.* A professional culture posits an alignment of interests, intentions and values, though by no means uniformity of outlook among its members. Its 'schooling', in this case, is shared professional endeavour and learning, reinforced by strong affective bonds. That is, a group of seconded principals and teachers worked together on a shared project forming a distinctive professional, cultural grouping; inevitably the group took on its own identity and interaction among its members helped to form it. An identity betokens the presence of a shared culture. 'We are (all of us) culture-producing creatures; we make and inhabit meaningful worlds' (Walzer, 1983: 314).

A stable group with an identity and ostensibly common purpose is a special form of culture that may also be called a *community.* As MacIntyre has put it:

> What is important about the identity of an important community is that it integrates ideas and dispositions, writes a shared history, creates norms and rules while it, sometimes uneasily, negotiates its relations with the world outside the community. It tells its own story. (MacIntyre, 1985: 216)

This is important to this inquiry for two reasons. First, I have found a remarkable congruence between the norms and practices within SDPI, defined as a professional cultural community, and those that figure prominently in its advocacy of SDP. Secondly, the ways in which they affected the political fate of the team in its key relationships has bearing upon a central problematic theme for SDP, its relationship to power.

In order to develop this dimension of the inquiry, a more precise conceptual perspective has been adopted appropriate to the kind of data that has emerged, though it has important resonance beyond the team as well. It is hypothesised that SDPI constituted a *community of practice* and, further, that the model of situated learning associated in the literature about communities of practice is congruent with the models of professional development and the practices of learning SDPI sought to exemplify and promote.

Wenger argued for three definitive features of a community of practice; a joint enterprise, a shared repertoire of skills and artefacts and ongoing mutual engagement among the members (Wenger 1998: 73). In addition to the idea of 'community' and 'practice', Wenger stressed practice based collaborative learning and identity formation (Ibid.: 86-102; 149-213.) Several themes further developed in the literature included the importance of belonging to a group or 'community' of co-learners, the way the community negotiated and defined its own self-referenced domain of meaning and the significance of affective and relational ties as much as cognitive factors to the health of the community as a productive matrix of useful learning (Ibid.: 98-100; Wenger, 1998: 51-55; Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002: 140-50; Billett, 2007: 57-60). The name often given such changes of shared or negotiated meaning is *learning,* a concept of pivotal importance in SDPI's mature theory of action of SDP (Wenger, 1998: 226-7). As will be shown, these features provide an apt elucidatory frame for interpreting the interview data relating SDPI to its professional programme.

While Wenger has differentiated his own account of a community of practice from culture, another term that I have used widely in this study, I argue that community of practice should be seen as an instance of cultural formation around complexly

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shared meanings and intentions, evinced by SDPI. Wenger has argued that the difference is largely one of scale:

> Practice is much more enterprise-specific and thus community-specific than is culture. If the scope of a community is too wide for mutual engagement in the pursuit of a joint enterprise, then all that is left is a repertoire created by the interaction, borrowing, imposing and brokering among its constituent communities of practice...' (Wenger, 1998: 291)

Wenger, it should be remembered, on a cautionary note, was strongly affiliated to the world of business and consultancy (Hughes, 2007: 36). However, there is remarkable similarity, at a considerable level of detail, between Schein's classic elaboration of culture and Wenger's of communities of practice derived from a shared epistemology of meaning formation in interaction within relatively stable social groups. One might look, to take but one example, at their compatible approaches to group boundary and assumptions about identity (Wenger, 1998: 103-21; Schein, 2010: 97-100). Thus reference to a community of practice, therefore, is consistent with the prominence given to theory of culture has throughout this inquiry.[16]

Supported by Schein's study of culture in organisations, it can be noted that they help to focus strengths and weaknesses that had a profound bearing on the theory of action of SDP that formed within SDPI.

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[16] More detailed application of the idea of a community of practice, as a heuristic helpful in conceptualising the inner world of SDPI as a team, is reserved for the appropriate section of the findings in Chapter 10.

1.10 An historical conception of school development planning: Relevance to SDP frames the study. SDPI was set up to foster a culture of good practice in SDP in Irish Secondary schools. The main areas examined in the literature review, including school effectiveness and improvement, the management of change, school culture, the teacher as collaborative professional, the relevant political backdrop and, most importantly, the emergent model of SDP itself all orbit this theme.

SDP, occupying a particular niche within the wider school improvement movement engendered, I have argued, a historically bounded theoretical discourse closely allied to legislative agendas. SDP flourished and declined as the main politically and academically endorsed vehicle of whole school improvement; first in Britain, and then in Ireland, not in perfect sequence but with partial overlap (Hargreaves, 1995: 215;). This inquiry has, therefore, a marked *historical* dimension. SDPI put its own stamp on SDP during its brief period of dominance in school improvement discourse in Ireland.

Important elements of this historicity are the indigenous values and assumptions embedded within the Irish educational culture, including the early attempts to introduce forms of SDP into schools in advance of statutory requirements. Identifying how the culture inflected the discourses of SDP and fed, in turn, into the thinking of SDPI is the reason for the analysis of the contribution of David Tuohy in Chapter 4.

SDPI itself is approached through a qualitative inquiry, utilising descriptive thematic analysis within a historical perspective. I seek to discern key thematic features of a theory of action of SDP from the perspective of researcher and as a former participant.[17] SDPI is no more. SDP has ceased to occupy centre stage in national

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[17] I will examine the methodological implications of this dual stance in the next chapter.

policy or current school development discourse. I hope to retrieve a brief but important slice of Irish educational history, in relation to the dominant concept that motivated it, SDP.

1.11   Rationale and Structure of the Thesis: As, therefore, this thesis inquires into the historical theorisation of SDPI within the professional culture of SDPI, it is necessary first to explore the meaning and historical evolution of SDP *prior* to the formation of SDPI. SDPI did not invent SDP but rather gave an existing theory and practice its own inflection. It is then necessary to analyse data that affords an insight into the theory of action governing SDPI's vision and mediation of SDP to schools. Reports charting the changing priorities and twists and turns of the programme that SDPI followed over the lifetime of the Initiative also make up an important data set, along with published and unpublished documents and interview data from key longstanding members of the team. Finally, it is necessary to look within the professional culture of SDPI itself, examine the lens so to speak, to discern whether and how this culture shaped the emergent theory and why.

While the presentation of the findings properly fore-ground the analysis of interview data in chapters 7 to 10, chapter 9 contains a brief introduction to the context in which SDPI and the inspectorate worked. Chapter 10, to elucidate the findings better, is prefaced by a brief account of the organisational nature of SDPI and relevant features of the theory of a community of practice the better to elucidate the findings, which, of course, remain of primary importance.

The thesis thus has four broad phases: the research procedures and rationale; the analysis of the emergence of SDP within the international and Irish scholarly literature, as well as through interview data from the foremost theorist of SDP in

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Ireland, who also has links with SDPI; data from SDPI itself as analysed through its own published and unpublished documents; and the analysis of semi-structured interviews with selected team members.

Chapter 2 will then set out the research procedures followed, explaining and justifying the broadly qualitative approach using both documentary and interview data.

Chapter 3 looks at the central part played by SDP in relation to the Education Reform Act (1988) in the light of the emergence of discourses of school effectiveness and improvement. It traces the development of the theory and practice of SDP in the nineties, until its decline as a critical term of art, as different priorities and the prominence of a discourse of school self-evaluation replaced SDP as a focus of discursive attention.

Chapter 4 considers distinctive features of a conservative Irish educational tradition before examining the formative culture in which early practices of SDP were essayed. It looks at the debate preceding major legislation in 1998, where great hopes were reposed in SDP and the genesis and terms of its final statutory basis are analysed.

Chapter 5 selectively looks at published and internal documents from SDPI. It indicates the main intentions and processes for planning SDPI promulgated. It also focuses especially on a core concern that the inquiry into the theory of SDP, the impact of SDPI's relationship to the professional environment within which it practised.

Chapter 6 examines published and unpublished progress reports to describe and analyse the main activities undertaken by SDPI over the lifetime of the Initiative. This provides the context of activity and intention in SDP in which the following interview data must be interpreted.

The next four chapters analyse the main qualitative data based on semi-structured interviews with long standing members of SDPI

Chapter 7 examines the vision for planning that emerges from the interview data. This chapter charts the aims espoused by SDPI from the outset, evolving models of planning, recognition of the pivotal impact of school leadership, reflections on the lessons of experience and the rise of subject department planning as the means to direct SDP to learning and teaching in classrooms.

Chapter 8 looks at the normative identity of the teacher as planner that this vision implies; collaborative disposition, a commitment to improvement and willingness to initiate change and self-identity as a reflective learner.

Chapter 9 looks at the central problematic of SDP conceptually and pragmatically, in terms of contested internal and external loci of power. This is reflected in the relationship between SDP and school inspection and evaluation, and SDPI and the inspectorate.

Chapter 10 turns, finally, to the team itself, conceptualised as a community of practice. This chapter delineates strengths and weakness on the particular form of community of practice SDPI became, relating it to the strong normative bonds within the team and the difficult relationships and perhaps weakened strategies that latterly formed in SDPI's navigation of more threatening policy environment.

Chapter 11 contains a discussion of findings and a consideration of their implications.

Chapter Two

Research Procedures

Introduction

My research question addresses the theory of action of SDP constituted within the professional culture of SDPI. The previous chapter outlines some of the concepts / theories I employ, which are relevant to SDP. This chapter describes the procedures employed to gather qualitative data about the theory of action of SDP

I have gathered and analysed thematically a varied range of qualitative data in order to discern concepts and themes that contribute to an emerging theory of action. This descriptive thematic analysis, while faithful to the data, is informed by my own experience of working within SDPI and by my prior analysis of selective literature on SDP, both internationally and in Ireland.

Semi structured interviews with selected long-standing regional coordinators in SDPI is the principal means of data gathering. The interviews probe individual values, aims and beliefs about SDP and the professional experience of promoting it in schools, as well as reflections upon the socio-political educational context as it impacts upon this work.

Published and unpublished documents produced by SDPI are an important subsidiary source of relevant data for this inquiry, along with analysis of selective quantitative data about the programme of work undertaken by SDPI.

In this chapter I also defend the validity and reliability of a qualitative repertoire of methods for the kind of research question I have posed, while upholding its imaginative resourcefulness, flexibility and, in this case, historical thrust.

I recount how I started out intent upon using a discourse model of data gathering through interviews but opted later for a shared understanding model, with a strong emphasis upon the integrity of respondent testimony (Franklin, 1997).[18]

As a former member of SDPI myself I explicate the importance of the integrity and scrupulousness of my own reflexive stance. I adopt and defend a qualified grounded theoretical approach both to the employment of sensitising concepts to facilitate maximal openness in the inquiry consistent with the aims of the research and to descriptive data analysis. I acknowledge the limitations associated with a qualitative inquiry. I conclude with the ethical considerations of the research.

2.1 Qualitative Inquiry: Mason defines qualitative inquiry as 'interpretivist' in the following terms. It is:

- frequently focused on 'social meanings, or interpretations, or practices'

- employs data collection methods that are 'flexible and sensitive to context'

- leads to understanding that embraces the 'particular and situational complexity'

- is 'actively reflexive';

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[18] The precise meaning of 'discourse model' and 'shared understanding model' are explicated in section 2.6.

- should lead to 'explanations and arguments' rather than mere descriptions; it should be generalisable, or at any rate, offer some 'demonstrable wider resonance';

- should be undertaken as a 'moral practice'

(Mason, 2002: 3-8).

She says it must be understood in terms of its 'discursive construction' and the discursive practices and the constitution of subject positions' (Ibid., 2002: 35, 53).

Silverman observes that qualitative research prefers data that is

- coded in language not numbers

- eschews contrived experimentation for more naturally occurring modes of data generation

- prefers meaning to behaviour, thus seeing the world from subjective points of view

- does not follow a natural scientific model

- and tends towards an inductive, hypothesis-generating rather than hypothesis testing research

(Silverman, 2000: 8).

In these terms this study is broadly qualitatively 'interpretivist' (Mason, 2002: 3). It generates theoretical meaning from analysis of data that is primarily linguistic; draws on multiple sources of data reflecting different points of view and varied individual testimony, thereby respecting subjective point of view; is reflexive, in that I am aware

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of my own presence within my research project; focuses upon a particular, historically contingent practice (the promotion and practice of SDP); is sensitive to context and so tentative in generalisation; does not test a prior hypothesis (though it has a clear theoretical focus) but essays descriptive analysis of data to produce its theoretical conclusions; and is ethically designed to respect participants and delineate a practice that has itself a strong moral purpose.

2.2 Validity and reliability of qualitative research: Validity is a particularly sensitive issue in qualitative research. *Validity* entails 'measuring or explaining what you claim to be measuring or explaining' (Mason, 2002: 188). Validity requires that 'you demonstrate that your concepts can be identified, observed or 'measured' in the way you say they can' (Ibid.: 39). Moreover, the research should have 'generalisability' or, at the least, 'theoretical resonance' (Ibid.).

 Reliability, on the other hand, requires methodological accuracy, often linked to standardisation of research instrument, though Mason argues that qualitative researchers are sceptical about standardisation but 'have to think carefully about the accuracy of their methods'. Reliability involves the 'accuracy of your research methods and techniques' (Ibid., 2002: 39). Standardisation, a key strategy in ensuring reliability, is more appropriate to quantitative rather than qualitative research (Ibid.). Rather, consistency of methodology is crucial to reliability in qualitative research (Silverman, 2002: 188).

Mays and Pope acknowledge the sensitivity of questions of validity and reliability for qualitative research. They sum up as key ways to achieve valid outcomes, *triangulation* (more than one data source or method of collection), *respondent validation* (participant reaction to researcher analysis), *clear exposition of*

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methodology, *reflexivity* (critical self vigilance and transparency of reasoning),
attention to negative cases (openness to disconfirmation or qualification) and *fair dealing* (Mays and Pope, 2000: 50-52).

Silverman argues that validity may be buttressed by constant comparison with new data to test emergent hypotheses, ensuring that the data is comprehensive, attending to deviant cases to disconfirm or qualify evolving interpretation and judicious use of tabulation or quantative data where it helps to elucidate qualitative methods (Silverman, 2000: 175-85).

Denzin and Lincoln succinctly and usefully define the key requirements:

> *Internal validity,* the degree to which findings correctly map the phenomenon in question; *external validity*, the degree to which findings can be generalised to other settings similar to the one in which the study occurred; *reliability*, the extent to which findings can be replicated, or reproduced, by another inquirer; and *objectivity*, the extent to which findings are free from bias. (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 100 quoted in Silverman, 2000: 91)

This study has taken and applied the following general principles from the foregoing:

- I ensure that the data and research procedures are appropriate to the research question and commensurate with the qualitative nature of the inquiry, which I will sketch in greater detail below

- The data is gathered transparently and recorded objectively

- I represent the data accurately. This extends to the avoidance of tendentious selectivity or misleading juxtaposition.

- Evidence is triangulated, where possible, so that one may compare and contrast, confirm or qualify, the main implications

- Disconfirming or qualifying evidence is taken into account

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- The data is theorised appropriately and authoritatively, drawing on relevant conceptual categories, dra

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- wing plausible inferences whose logic is demonstrable.

- Findings are drawn tentatively in an analysis that is grounded in data

- I am reflexively vigilant about my own potential for bias, and so studious in employing registers that make clear whether I am describing, analysing, theorising or speculating. This is all the more important in that I am a former regional coordinator of SDPI myself and have interviewed my former colleagues.

- Respondents are accorded due care and respect

These principles sketch a qualitative procedure that defines the approach taken in this inquiry. The sample reflects a comprehensive representation of the group in question. Constant comparisons governed the analytic strategy. Exceptional cases or deviant findings have been scrupulously recorded. The descriptive context, multiple data sources and reporting of data findings (including relevant quantative data) s

trengthen the validity of the inquiry. Above all, the inferential thread from data to conceptual and theoretical conclusions is transparently reasoned and evidentially rigorous.

2.3 The Art of Qualitative Research: Granted the requirements to achieve validity and reliability, Eisner has argued that qualitative inquiry has the 'artistic' virtue that it helps the researcher to 'get close to practice' (Eisner, 2001: 136). Refinements of the qualitative mode relevant to this study as expounded by Eisner include:

- Perception of the particular, implying the potential value of a study exploring significant and historically unique phenomena not seen necessarily as generalizable or as primarily of exemplary interest.

- Depth and slowness of exploration in the interest of eliciting richness of insight; attention to the emotional tone as well as the cognitive content in statements from the subjects of the inquiry;

- An attempt to defamiliarize practice and so elucidate it theoretically without preconception and with an openness to surprise;

- Recognition of pluralism, including multiple perspectives and sociological uniqueness of different times and places.

This is summed up as an 'attention to particulars, to contingencies and to moral virtues.' (Ibid.: 137) At its best the qualitative researcher may 'display the universal in the particular.' (Ibid.: 139)

Eisner's approach argues for the prioritisation of depth and analytic rigour over extensive but loosely analysed or superficially synoptic survey. Silverman concurs, proposing as good practice that 'often the best research says 'a lot about a little'; it is often 'misleading to attempt to research the whole picture' and one should 'choose simplicity and rigour rather than the often illusory search for the 'full picture'' (Silverman, 2002: P.100). This is especially apropos as this study has found, with

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Mclaughlin, that meanings constructed locally are often closer to representing a practical reality, and so affording insight into SDP, than more abstract formulations of intention (McLaughlin, 2008: 176-183).

Eisner's emphases sit well with the tenor of this study, aiming to portray SDPI's theory of action accurately and fairly in a specific historical and experiential context.

2.4 Mixed Methods: Given that I had select a qualitative research procedure the question arose of precisely what methods would best serve my interests and ensure the reliability and validity appropriate to it. I decided that to obtain a degree of triangulation of *sources* of evidence, and to do justice to the context in which SDPI coordinators worked, I would use a combination of interview, documentary analysis and analysis of statistics covering SDPI activity.

The inquiry draws, therefore, upon the following:

- Selective international scholarly literature review to determine key themes and issues

- Review of prior historical culture of planning and immediate statutory context introducing SDP to Ireland, through a selective examination of relevant official documents and publications

- Focused analysis of published work of Dr. David Tuohy an influential associate of SDPI and noted theorist of SDP in Ireland (and thus a key bridge from both history and wider policy based thinking to the team itself)

- Semi-structured interviews with 7 long standing members of SDPI

- Review of published and internal documents from SDPI in relation to key themes emergent from interviews

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- Analysis, drawing on available statistical data, of the history of the main preoccupations of SDPI's engagement with schools and presentations / workshops

One general aim, therefore, in this approach to gathering data is to achieve a modest degree of triangulation to strengthen the validity of conclusions that draw on more than one source of data, especially in comparing accounts of similar themes (Bell, 2005: 116). However, the interviews were by far the richest source of data.

2.5 Interviews in depth: I decided early on that interviewing longstanding regional coordinators in SDPI was the optimal source of useful data appropriate to my research question.[19] McCracken argues that the in-depth interview yields access to 'the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world' (McCracken, 1988: 9). In-depth qualitative interviews are intended ultimately to elicit 'thick description', information qualitatively rich with meaning about the mindset of the respondents in relation to the 'sensitizing concepts' prompted by the inquiry question (Ryle, 1968: 3; Geertz, 1973: 6). This was precisely what this study needed. Such data would enable me to both elucidate the professional culture of SDPI through its members' several perspectives, identifying common features and outlier positions, while focusing at the same time on the vision for SDP they espoused in the context of their professional experience.

However, I had to refine my approach more precisely. A difficulty I faced may be elucidated by drawing on a useful distinction in methods of data extraction.

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[19] The rationale for the sampling is given below in section 2.7

Antonesa, Fallon, Ryan, Ryan, Walsh & Borys differentiate between what they term 'information-extraction', 'shared understanding' and 'discourse' models of data collection (Antonesa, Fallon, Ryan, Ryan, Walsh & Borys, 2006: 75-78). *Information extraction* would entail an interview with standardised questions, avoidance of substantial response which might bias the respondent's answers. Interviewers do not offer their own views, even if this would lead the respondent to say more. The *shared understanding* model requires semi-structured interviews characterised by an open mindedness tempered by an awareness of and bracketing off of interviewer presuppositions. Clarifying questions, paraphrase and interpretation may be proffered during the course of the interview to elucidate the respondent's meaning. As Ryan concluded:

> The aim of the kind of interviewing (shared understanding) is to obtain rich, nuanced descriptive material that reflects the interviewer's understanding of her/his life world (or part of it) and lends itself to qualitative analysis in one or more modes, for example, the identification and categorisation of central themes or the extraction of core narratives (Ryan, 2006.: 77).

Inevitably, 'the interview is construed as an interpersonal situation and it is recognised that the interviewer's characteristics, sensitivity and other qualities are likely to affect what is said' (Ibid.)

The *discourse model* assumes that 'the interviewer and participant have active roles' (Ibid.: 78). The researcher enters a conversational mode and responds to the respondent's or group's questions, perhaps even talking about his/her own experience, exploration of new themes is welcomed, cross connections among participants may be used productively in subsequent interviews, and power relations among participants is a critical relational issue within the research.

These distinctions reflect the widely recognised problematic status of the interview in research generally, which poses a serious challenge for the researcher whatever the epistemological stance and mode of participation she adopts as interviewer. As Mason observes

> The interview method is heavily dependent on people's capacities to verbalize, interact, conceptualise and remember. It is always important not to treat understandings generated in an interview, certainly one that is not the barest exercise in information gathering, as though they are a direct reflection of understandings 'already existing' outside of the interview interaction, as though you are simply excavating facts. (Mason, 2002: 64)

Some scholars go further. Lee and Roth contend that interviewer and respondent inescapably co-construct meaning and identity discursively within an interview, as in the discourse model. They consider it a mistake to see the interview in any circumstances as a neutral data gathering tool. As the interview is an unusual and unnatural setting there is a strong tendency for participants to manage the presentation of self. Managing 'stake', simulating and dissimulating interest in the topic, and 'footing', rhetorical positioning of the speakers one to the other, are just two devices whereby the interview must be analysed with sophistication and guile as a social event itself, and not a reflection of a pre-existing reality (Lee and Roth, 2004: 5-7).

Hammersley has reviewed the radical critique of the interview as a flawed source of data. He represents the critique as seeing the interview as a 'performance' that says as much about the context of the interview itself rather than affording genuine view beyond that context. Hammersley, whose view is close to my own in this inquiry, assesses this critique as unduly sceptical about any form of representation but

concludes that a strong case for 'methodological caution' and varying the type of data used is made (Hammersley, 2003: 119-126).

I interpret the distinctions put forward by Ryan and Franklin less as discrete categories than as stages upon a continuum from purported interviewer neutrality and standardised data extraction to co-construction of meaning through conversational performance.

I have adopted the 'shared –understanding' model described above, though I regard the denomination as misleadingly activist in that it underplays the primacy of the respondent's contribution. I sought rich qualitative data but wished to subdue the overtly interpretative role of the interviewer during the interview while maximising the opportunities for the respondents to express themselves. I was putting some distance between the interview as an event and the interpretative role I played subsequently in analysing the data.

Moreover, the 'part' of the life world I was exploring was highly specialised, as it referred solely to professional experience and values.

Notwithstanding this final investigative stance, I now see that I was initially more inclined to a discourse model. I came to see greater virtue for my own research by moving much more decisively in the opposite direction along the spectrum. This development is important to the story of this research exercise. This is what happened.

As I prepared to design an interview strategy, I found myself drawn between two divergent strategies. Initially, I favoured a dialogic pattern of interaction. As I was well versed in the discourse of planning and familiar with many of the issues that would inevitably arise, I thought that together with the respondents we could develop a shared understanding through densely co-constructed argumentation and interaction. Through a conversation disciplined by apt focus on relevant professional themes, I could facilitate the elaboration of a rich seam of argument. I was well aware that interviewers inescapably contribute to the nature of the interviewee's response, not least by posing questions in the first place, and I was a colleague of the respondents as well, so I initially inclined to make a virtue of necessity. Furthermore, I planned to bring the respondents together in a focus group afterwards, having analysed the data from the individual interviews, to further elaborate the principal themes and arguments.

I decided, however, not to do this. My reasons for choosing a different approach lie in the essential tenor of my research question and the problematic implications of my own position within the research.

I concluded that there were two principal flaws in my initial strategy in relation to what I was seeking. Inevitably, my own thought would pervade and shape the data. I would not be another voice but the dominant voice. For each conversation would involve me and the other. Unless I wanted to put myself as the principal source of data, I was sceptical of whether what meaning I co-produced with the respondents in the interviews placed sufficient distance between the data and the researcher for the data to gain relative independent force. Were I to take a social constructionist epistemological stance in the inquiry the situation would be different (Charmaz,

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2006: 130-1). However, I came to realise that this was not what I was really doing, but rather I was engaged in qualitative, descriptive analysis of interview data. I did, in my subsequent analysis, draw selectively from Charmaz' repertoire of grounded theoretical analytic categories, but remained epistemologically closer to Glasser's objectivism. This entailed being vigilant not to 'elevate (my) own tacit assumptions and interpretations to 'objective' status' in the manner Charmaz attributes to Glasser's 'objectivism' (Ibid.: 132).[20] Glasser has countered, however, that Charmaz is mistaken in this suspicion, in that in self aware grounded theoretical analysis 'human biasing whatever is minimised to the point of irrelevancy' through the 'carefulness of the grounded theoretical method' and the emergence of theory is not essentially 'interactive' (Glasser, 2002: 3-4, 9). This view accords with my own decision to abjure, as far as possible, interactive theorisation during the course of the interviews.

Focus group discussion would further compound this co-construction of second order meaning. I decided not to pursue this option.

The relative nature of the distinction I am drawing is critical. I know, of course, that I could never simply assume a neutral position, but I felt could maximise the independent voice of the other in the data. The reason this was important is that I came to see that what I wanted was to be relatively closer to *testimony*, a kind of first order data expressive of individual positions, rather than *argument,* a secondary co-construction of meaning either by interviewer and respondent or collectively within a focus group. I wanted the interview to capture as closely as possible the contours of the respondent's thinking and outlook. I would avoid prompting or developing their responses beyond seeking elucidation. Thereby, though the data might be less richly

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[20] See sections 2.11 And 2.12 for the use of Charmaz's categories of analysis

elaborate it would hold a greater validity as representing individual positions, and patterns of similarity or thematic insistence would have a greater likelihood of authentically picturing the prior culture and theoretical outlook of SDPI than would otherwise be the case. The performative aspect of the interview, prioritising the interview as creative event over the insight it might yield beyond itself, which Hammersley warned about above would also be curtailed.

 As a result, I planned the interviews so as to render the questioning as open, non tendentious and hospitable to the control of the respondent of her own testimony.

With McCracken, I eschewed 'active listening' where the interviewer prompts the phrasing and develops the thought sequences of the respondent. (McCracken, 1988: P. 21).I strove for an interrogatively unobtrusive approach which respects the voice and vocabulary of the respondent (Heylink & Tymstra, 1993: 295). I was aware, moreover, that the dangers of tendentiousness or collusion in encouraging a line of thought are exacerbated by familiarity with the respondents both personally and professionally.

I did, however, occasionally frame questions that, though open, prompt concrete counter-factual reasoning to highlight alternative perspectives.[21] As Spelllman and Mandel define it, 'counterfactual thinking…is imagining alternatives to the real world and mentally playing out the consequences' (Spellman and Mandel, 1999: P. 120).

The discursive competence of the respondents in higher order and critical thinking also helped in validating the testimonies. They are less susceptible of being misled,

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[21] This was achieved particularly by focusing upon values and 'what if…?' or 'how might it have been different…?' questions

even inadvertently, by interviewer bias and more adept at maintaining a theoretical position than might usually be expected

The interviews were 'topic centred' around 'a number of topics, themes or issues' I wished to explore. (Mason, 2002: 62) I took on board Mason's characterisation of qualitative interviewing;

> (The researcher) is unlikely to have a complete and sequenced script of questions, and most qualitative interviews are designed to have a fluid and flexible structure, and to allow researcher and interviewee(s) to develop unexpected themes. (Ibid.)

The aim is to achieve a 'depth and roundedness of understanding' serving 'to identify interpretive themes' (Mason, 2002: 66).

I posed broad, opening questions, such as asking for the respondent's approach to SDP; what s/he considered most important on reflection in her/his experience on the team and of the team; and strengths and weakness of SDPI. I sought to allow the respondent to introduce what mattered most to her/him. I was at pains to allow the 'flow' be dictated by the respondent, with follow up questions clearly developing areas of importance to the respondent. In this regard I was particularly sensitive to tone and emphasis, and where appropriate these may even be commented upon in the analysis.

To the extent that I succeeded, I was enabled to go on to conduct a qualified 'grounded theoretical' analysis of the data (Glaser, 2002).

Broad thematic topics included for all in the interview schedule comprised

- Personal journey into SDPI

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- Own approach to and understanding of SDP

- reflection upon experience within SDPI

- key values associated with SDP and SDPI

- strengths and weaknesses

- changes or developments.

In some cases these were raised first by the respondent. Differences in focus were evident as a result. Thus, FM talked a great deal of empowerment and policy; WB of the primacy of the classroom teacher and learning; BR of the context in which SDPI operated and so on. However, there is a large area of common concern and remarkable consensus on important matters. These are analysed.

Nevertheless, the aim is not statistical unanimity or proportionality but broad evidence of thematic agreement, importance and dissent; that is, the terms and supporting arguments that informed a recognisable theory of action that can be inferred from an analysis of the interview data.

2.6 Interviews: Sampling: A basic criterion in selecting the sample was length of service with SDPI. The maximum size of the team at any time was 13. However, 8 members have been with SDPI for over six years. One was unavailable for interview due to ill health. It was most important that the perspective covered a sufficient period to reflect changes in the orientation, work experience and situation of the team in a wider policy context. The respondents, all seconded from their schools, are briefly as follows:

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BR: National Coordinator, who set up the team and led it for 13 years. She was a principal of a Girl's Voluntary Secondary School. Retired, she now is a part time consultant and project leader in school development initiatives.

Regional Coordinators:

GS: Principal of a large mixed Community School in the south of the country. She was formerly a deputy-principal of a small private Voluntary Secondary School. 10 years with the team, she was responsible particularly for the curricular sections of the Draft Guidelines (SDPI, 2001). Retired, she is an active facilitator for SDP in schools on a private basis and project leader in a major state sponsored school development project focused on teaching and learning.

LT: Principal of a rural Girl's Voluntary Secondary school in the south. He was formerly a teacher in a Community School. He was 8 years with the team. He qualified as a B.C.L. during his time with the team and is now a barrister.

FM: Principal of a Boys' Voluntary Secondary School in the midlands. He was 5 years with the team. He had special qualifications and led planning in the area of pastoral care and guidance. He left in 2007. He is now the Director of an Education Centre.

MH: A teacher in a large boys' Voluntary secondary school in the north east. She was a specialist in special needs, and was involved in equality projects prior to joining the team, an area in which she retained a keen interest. 8 years with SDPI. She left in 2009. She is now a deputy principal.

KL: Principal of a rural girls' Voluntary Secondary school. KL was formerly a teacher of science. He returned to his school upon leaving SDPI.

WB: Principal of a mixed Voluntary secondary school in the west midlands. WB was involved in the School Curricular Development programme with the Education Department of the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. He had a particular interest in subject planning. 5 years with the team, he left in 2007 and is now principal of a Voluntary secondary school in the east of the country.

I also chose to interview those members whose experience has not been significantly further developed by professional practice over a long time in other spheres since membership of the team, as would be the case with other former members who left much earlier.

I also interviewed Dr David Tuohy, the academic consultant to SDPI's PGDSP, about that programme, but did not choose to use this transcript for reasons of space and the focus of the inquiry. I have chosen instead to refer to his published work, as relevant, in chapter 4. I have however included one quotation of particular relevance to a central theme in chapter 9.

I considered the possibility of a personal interview myself as an additional source of data (since I would qualify for inclusion on the criteria employed). I rejected this course of action for two reasons. I concluded that it would introduce dangerous plurality of authorial voice into the data. Furthermore, opinion might become conflated with analytic interpretation and the management of this might become overly contrived.

2.7   Reflexive stance;   All of these people are well known to me. As has been suggested, my own role in the Initiative and familiarity with the respondents enables me, by adopting a 'reflexive stance', to have a firm grasp of the 'social context and situation'. This in turn allows me to be 'alert to the conditions under which such

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differences and distinctions arise and are maintained', as Charmaz has insisted is necessary for the valid construction of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006: P. 131). By the same token, it imposes a rigorous discipline both in terms of the integrity of the gathering and recording of data and the transparency of analysis grounded in the data.

As McCracken has observed in his study of the long interview, especially in the identification of 'cultural categories', familiarity with the area of inquiry carries advantages and disadvantages.

> We have noted above that deep and long-lived familiarity with the culture under study has, potentially, the grave effect of dulling the investigator's powers of observation and analysis. But is also has the advantage of giving the investigator an extraordinarily intimate acquaintance with the object of the study. The acquaintance gives the investigator a fineness of touch and delicacy of insight that few ethnographers working in other cultures hope to develop.' (McCracken, 1988: 32)

Clearly, in framing questions, following up on responses and analysing the data, I had to demonstrate a rigorous attentiveness to what is said and a critical alertness to the danger of drawing tendentious conclusions. My experience as a facilitator helped in this regard. On the other hand, I did have a useful grasp of the professional discourses operative within SDPI. I was thus able to pick up on the import of key statements. I have tried to adhere scrupulously to a policy of disciplined attentiveness.

This procedure was buttressed by a reflexive stance as it is theorised within grounded theory requiring that I maximise the transparency of the delineation of my

own preconceptions and responses to the data.[22] Following Charmez, I thus followed a thoroughgoing reflexivity so as not to achieve a spurious authority or 'elevate (my) own tacit assumptions and interpretations to 'objective' status' (Charmez, 2002: 132). I was at pains not to read my own ideas into the statements of others (Charmaz, 2002: 32).

On the other hand, as a member of the team under investigation, I may use the 'self as an instrument of inquiry'. (McCracken, 1988: 32) McCracken goes on;

> This is an exceptional analytic advantage and the long qualitative interview must be prepared to harness it as fully as possible. (McCracken 1988 Ibid.)

McCracken recognizes two difficulties with such familiarity, however. With Charmaz, he allows that investigator bias may colour the data and anticipate its meaning. Equally, familiarity may dull analytic sensibility. There is clearly a delicate balance to be struck here. This calls for an ethics of interpretative attribution, which cannot be expressed in a formula but rather in an ethically governed construction of meaning that exploits one's own prior knowledge while opening one scrupulously to heeding the voice of the other.

Methodological explicitness, valid inferential reasoning from stated premises and scrupulous attribution of conclusions to the data or to my own extrapolation upon it are the means by which I disciplined myself to ensure rigour. At the same time, I recognise my own familiarity and role as potentially powerful experiential and interpretative resources.

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[22] Though, as noted above, without a social constructionist epistemological understanding of reflexivity

In sum, I followed qualified grounded theory principles and practices to exploit to the maximum the authority of the data over that of the researcher's preconceptions, while ensuring that the richness of the data is the basis for whatever conclusions I may reach in this delicately constructed research exercise into my own professional milieu.

2.8. Analysis of selected documents: I also analysed key documents produced by SDPI, both published documents and internal reports. The main aim was to contextualise, corroborate or extrapolate upon the primary source of data in the transcripts of interview materials. These data have a powerful historical authenticity.

Maintaining focus was a key methodological requirement here. Consequently, the analysis of the published documents was carried out subsequent to the interviews and their analysis, though I was obviously already familiar with their content. The point is that the developing focus of inquiry was largely dictated by themes elicited from the interview data. However, narrative coherence dictated the order of the chapters so that discussion of the documents precedes the key chapters outlining the findings of the analysis of qualitative data.

Thus, preoccupation with the favoured and experienced models of SDP figures pre-eminently across the range of data. The tension between internal and external loci of power in a historical context, a key finding, is elucidated further by the documentary analysis. The identity of the teacher as planner is also implicated in the consideration of collaborative practice and the nature of the engagement of the team with teachers; Only the consideration of the team as a community of practice relies more or less

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entirely upon the interview data, but even here the documents provide a context in which much of what is claimed for the closeness within the team is supported.

2.9 The Process of Interviewing: I conducted one trial interview with a colleague not part of the final sample to familiarise myself with the mechanics of interviewing and get a sense of how to approach the exercise. I decided that about an hour was the optimum duration for each interview. I had two sessions interviewing the team leader, on successive days, and followed up with single interviews with the other respondents over the space of three months. Consistent with my intentions, I did not significantly vary the focus or tenor of inquiry over this period, on the basis of prior interviews.

I recorded the interviews and then transcribed them. When I proceeded to analysis I used both the recordings and the transcripts as intonation could sometimes aid comprehension.

I found the interview process rewarding in itself. In all bar one case (GK) I visited the respondents either in their homes or current place of work. The respondents were delighted to take part. They appreciated that they were memorialising a valued part of their own professional lives. The scope they had to expatiate on matters that were of interest to them, rather than being confined by highly detailed, overly prescriptive questions by me allowed them to speak freely of what mattered most to them. My own good relationship with them all was undoubtedly helpful in setting them at ease and creating a comfortable environment in which they could make their contribution.

 2.10 Analysis of data: Qualified Grounded Theory: As this study utilises several strategies associated with grounded theory in the analysis of data, it is necessary to indicate precisely the role grounded theoretical practices have and the extent to

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which the resultant theory is 'grounded' in the data derived mainly from interviews. I adopted the stance for my own research taken by Charmaz whereby one 'uses grounded theory guidelines to give *you* a handle on the material, not a machine that does the work for you (Charmaz, 2002: 115).[23] Charmaz sees grounded theory as 'a set of principles and practices, not as prescriptions or packages…flexible guidelines, not methodological rules, recipes and requirements (Ibid.: 9) The use of *sensitizing concepts* and *coding the data* to educe grounded analytic concepts are the main grounded theoretical methods deployed.

2.11 Sensitizing Concepts: The topical orientation of the interviews are guided in the first instance by what Charmaz has called 'sensitizing concepts' (Charmaz, 2002: 6-17) These are the 'background assumptions and disciplinary perspectives' defined by the focus of the inquiry upon a theory of practice of SDP constituted within the formative culture of SDPI

I have reflected inconclusively on whether these are properly classed as 'sensitising concepts', initially focusing the inquiry, or whether they are theoretical preconceptions. It is a commonplace that no research can be completely neutral at the start, and that one's shaping preconceptions start with the selection of data, the framing of questions in an interview and the line of follow up questioning. It is his working position that in qualitative research this comes down to a question of degree. I accept that my research agenda is more focused and pre-conceptually defined than would be warranted in strict formulations of grounded theory (Glaser, 1992: passim.). However, I argue that within this quite broadly drawn focus of these

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[23] Original italics

'preconceptions', essentially framing a domain of inquiry, the approach taken is a form of grounded theory, in that, as indicated above, the data is gathered with a maximum commitment to exploratory and non tendentious inquiry; is open to follow wherever the data leads and not in predetermined channels of interpretation; and does not test a prior hypothesis. Furthermore, the data is coded through a sequence of open, axial and selective coding (Corbin and Strauss, 1990: 12-14).

The process of analysis records suggestive insights emerging in process from the data analysis, conceptual categories filled with properties supported by the data and the conclusions will represent a theory that has saturated the categories to give a self-consistent and rigorous conceptual account (Charmaz, 2002) I argue that these are not preconceptions that anticipate theory inferred from the data but heuristic frames and domain boundaries that give coherence and depth to the study. This heuristic frame, adumbrated in the topics of questioning, the quest for a theory of practice and the idea of a community of practice, map out a conceptual terrain, but they do not pre-theorise it beyond the level constituted by the terms themselves.

2.12 Coding the data: Following a grounded theory methodology, the data was analysed in an iterative sequence of data collection, coding, conceptualization and theory formulation. The study aimed to achieve greater conceptual density and reach through reaching saturation by a comparative analysis of the data sets resulting from semi-structured qualitative interviews. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 62) Then focused coding abstracted 'the most significant and/or frequent' of the earlier codes (Charmaz, 2006: 57).

Axial coding filled in the properties in the major categories that result from the focused coding (Ibid.: 60). Finally, I sought to construct theory to integrate through hypothesis the categories of meaning I elicited from the prior analysis of the data. Clarke's stricture is particularly apposite;

One can avoid misrepresenting collective social actors as monolithic by examining diversity within worlds, while still tracking and tracing their overall collective perspectives, ideologies, thrusts and goals.' (Clarke 1998: 265)

Accordingly, dissentient or even apparently marginal data were incorporated in analysis at all stages where they existed.

Interviews were typed. I then identified the main meaning of each sentence or cluster of sentences, depending on the units of meaning involved, as show in the example below:

Interview text transcription	Themes / ideas / points
The main phase or the first phase would have been very much whole school review. Interestingly was not mission, because there had been a previous five years when the various Trustee Bodies had been trying to develop mission and in some schools it was a mission exhaustion because schools had had	Start with whole school review Moved from trustee work previously on mission

a very contracted experience of developing mission and as one school told me they had been developing a mission for six years, if you can imagine that but that was the reality of experience. The other side was the notion of early action planning leading to immediate gains, building credibility and trust in the process so then you could move on. Looking back I am not sure that was the best. The	Early action planning model
danger of superficiality there and I look back and say – did I help that school best by taking that approach but I suppose our learning; I consistently learn and I am consistently	Superficiality of EAPM
learning and I look back now and say – God, would I have done it like that now. A bit experimental in that way and not maybe	Learning of SDPI
enough training for us but then you see; how do you train for something like this? Do you train on the job or through the job? Also the	SDPI learnt on the job – no prior training
conception of SDPI, I know I am straying but I am coming back to your point. The conception of SDPI was that the initial service would be project based and it would serve a smaller number of schools limited to a hundred so there was an opportunity to work and develop.	Project based conception of SDPI

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But, there was a political concession to demand by a lot of schools. We all want this so we are all going to have it, why should they? I think that was a mistake. I think we needed that learning and apprenticeship thing and I think that would have been significant but this over	Political concession to extend role

Project, to enable learning, would have been better |

Table: 1 Initial Data Coding

- I analysed the summarised points and revisited the original data for confirmation and elaboration of conceptual implication. I derived seven hypothetical working categories on the basis of frequency of recurrence, congruity of data included and of analytic importance. Some data were cited in multiple categorical contexts. Further analysis reduced the main thematic areas to four. Two (PGDSP and discourse) were assimilated across the four remaining substantive categories. These categories were then analysed to reveal a series of conceptual areas within them.

The categories were as follows, and are dealt with in the findings:

- The broad approach to SDP adopted by SDPI (Chapter 7)
- Teacher professional culture (Chapter 8)
- Impact of the Environment / DES (Chapter 9)
- The SDPI team (Chapter 10)
- NUIG Post Graduate Diploma on School Planning

- Discourses in planning

- Other

These themes, which are developed from the coding, are expounded in subsequent chapters, as indicated above.

Relevant data summaries and link to main data file were collated by respondent:

Blue – DES/Environment	
LT	
16	DES/inspection as spur Pressure of WSE helpful WSE congruence with SDPI aims
17	Positive response to inspections Lack of conversation between inspectors on ground and SDPI Resultant difficulties with DES for SDPI
18	Lack of feedback on concerns DES expectation of visible improvements DES `blind'
25	DES disconnect
BR	
1	Primary – inspectors wrote guidelines / PP working party
3	Political need for DES to have acted may have been motive for abandoning pilot
4	DES pressure on schools and inspector priorities *and* individual school needs led 'developments'
8	EW Act & later legislation dampens enthusiasm + Section 29

13	'mechanism' for meeting statutory obligations
	Versus
	'genuine priorities of the school'
	May be inescapable clash
18	Inspectorate not ICDU managed SDPI & SDPS at first
	Speculates that inspectors resented planning for NUIG diploma
32	Impact of SI & WSE
	Reinforced SDPI impact
FM	
4	Policy development / compliance as early focus
	Influence of Education Act and other legislation
5	Key critique: policy driven by SDPI & law v. Collaboration and T/L
	Circulars to legislation
	SDPI reactive – Inspectorate in driving seat – WSE
	External focus – readiness for WSE

Table 2: Thematic Data Coding

2.13 Limitations of qualitative inquiry: This study contains a qualitative investigation into the culture and theory of practice of SDP in SDPI but is not a formal evaluation of its achievements or failures. It will not allow me to offer a judgment in any form on the success or otherwise of the work of SDPI with teachers or schools. Nor can it evaluate the validity of those assumptions, views and beliefs it analyses beyond the assurance of their being those that were held and importantly operative within SDPI. It is descriptive / analytic rather than evaluative, albeit at times addressing strongly normative positions.

It may be objected, further, that the inquiry, even so constricted in its claims to validity, itself offers a merely subjective account. This, however, would be to make a category mistake (Ryle, 1963: 17-8). Certainly the object of inquiry importantly incorporates registers of subjectivity in that is essays a descriptive analysis of personal professional testimony. Subjectivity, what individuals think or feel, their attitudes, valued in themselves as data, are frequently explored in qualitative inquiry (Mason 2002: 32) The concept of culture expounded here is based in part upon inter-subjective patterns of meaning. One should not, however, confuse a study of subjectivity with a subjective study. The methodological constraints which have been applied have been well established in the qualitative research domain to secure the necessary and appropriate 'objectivity' for such an inquiry.

2.14. Ethical Considerations: All interviews are carried out with informed consent. Respect for the respondents was paramount. The purposes and research procedure of the study were explained to all. It was made quite clear that the scope of the research was limited to professional experience within SDPI and relevance to the core mission of conceptualising and disseminating SDP.

Etherington, influenced by feminist research into equality and power and, albeit writing from a social constructionist position, has argued that reflexivity is essential to maintaining an ethical research relationship with respondents with whom on is familiar (Etherington 2007: 599-600). The broad scope of the inquiry is shared with the participants without going so far as to materially influence their responses. All

usage of documents not in the public domain whose authorship might be identified is with appropriate permission.

Moreover, the research was carried out with the encouragement and support of former colleagues, and all the respondents. No adverse, personal conclusions are contained in the thesis. Where there are critical implications they are addressed to systemic organisations or patterns of organisation rather than individuals.

I did not send the analysis for comment because, for, as outlined in section 2.6, I intended to differentiate the production and gathering of data from the interpretative stance in analysis which I was adopting. The responsibility I undertook for interpretation of data, and the strictures for ensuring validity and transparency already outlined in this chapter, are balanced by the tenor of interview questions which minimised interviewer intrusiveness. Moreover, as demonstrated, I analysed the data thematically rather than by individual responses. Thus I did not produce discrete individual analyses but rather an integrated thematic analysis.

However, it is important to bear in mind that this procedure was wholly in accordance with the agreement of the respondents. Moreover, no named figures are commented upon other than one reference to David Tuohy.

The identity of the respondents has been concealed by the use of fictional initials. However, anonymity is not ultimately possible for such a small group. However, this was not a concern for the respondents and the use of initials is less a rigorous attempt at anonymity than an avoidance of immediate recognisability. The analysis has been carefully scrutinised to ensure that the commentary remains at the level of professional experience.

Summary

The research procedure used in this qualitative inquiry draws on mixed methods. Data is gathered through seven semi-structured interviews of SDPI coordinators, in a manner disciplined to maximise the integrity of the respondents' positions. Selective published and unpublished documents are also analysed.

The data is thematically analyzed. I discern themes that contribute to a theory of action of SDP. The study avails of qualified grounded theoretical approaches both to the use of sensitizing concepts in focusing the study and in data analysis.

Data coding and categorisation entail a series of phased analysis of greater conceptual abstraction and generality grounded in the data.

Rigorous reflexive self awareness is imposed by my own involvement in SDPI and relationship with the respondents. A delicate vigilance is required to exploit the explicative advantages on the author's familiarity with the prevailing theoretical and internal discourses of SDPI without allowing pre-conceptions or tendentious inference to vitiate the quality of both the data gathering and analysis.

A selective review of scholarly literature and analysis of official national documents situates the role of SDPI in an historical context.

Limitations to the claims to validity of qualitative research are acknowledged. The description and analysis of a theory of action of SDP in SDPI is the focal point of the inquiry. Ethical considerations are stated and complied with.

I now go on to offer a selective review of literature to demonstrate the genesis of SDP as key term of art in policy driven school improvement measures, especially in

the UK. This will help show the conceptualisation of SDP that was bequeathed to policy makers and educational leaders in Ireland in the nineties, along with some of the enduring issues that experience of SDP in the UK threw up.

Chapter Three

School Effectiveness, Improvement and Planning: A selective international genealogy of the quest for planned improvement

INTRODUCTION

This chapter charts a historical narrative, mainly focused on the UK, showing how a synthesis of school effectiveness and school improvement discourses underwrote contemporary versions of SDP. It describes the attractiveness of school effectiveness research findings to policy makers along with its inherent limitations. The close affiliation of SDP to reforms inaugurated by the Education Reform Act (1988) is shown to be crucial to its subsequent authority and development as a politically sanctioned vehicle of school improvement. It notes an inherent instability between empowerment and instrumentalism and internal and external loci of control compounded within the concept of SDP that resulted from these formative influences.

I then briefly expound the SDP cyclical model, the importance of school culture and teacher mindset, and how implementation became the Achilles heel of the process.

SDP has yielded ground in the last decade in the research literature to school self-evaluation, along with more diverse and technically refined strategies for school and classroom improvement. More emphasis on stakeholder voice, a greater and more direct focus on learning and the need to attain greater rigour and specificity in

review, target setting and evaluation, all contributed to this change, not entirely consistently.

The historical currency of SDP as a widely influential term of art is thus confined to a decade or so. It is hypothesised that SDP declined as the original context of government policy and culture in which it prospered itself receded.

3.1 School Effectiveness and Improvement as basis of SDP: SDP became a favoured vehicle for planning and implementing changes in school organisation, curriculum and policy in the nineteen eighties (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1994). Two overarching aims stand out: enhancing school effectiveness, often though not exclusively gauged by whether and how comprehensively better levels of achievement in pupil learning are attained, according to measures of varying sophistication; and improving the internal functioning of the school at whole school, departmental and classroom levels, to attain this greater effectiveness (Cuckle and Broadhead, 2003: 229-231). Thus product and process, effectiveness as an outcome of planning and internal strategies for improvement frame the distinctive concept of SDP.

A consistent subsidiary aim has been countering the negative impact of social disadvantage on school attendance and student learning, including devising strategies appropriate for schools serving highly disadvantaged communities (Harris and Chapman, 2004: 419-421).[24]

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[24] In Ireland, for example, progressively achieving equality of access, participation and outcome has provided a significant strand in the statutory and policy background of much development of SDP in the country. This sequence, in the political drive for greater social equity, is officially marked in recent Irish educational policy and legislation and most explicitly in the concentration upon participation and not just access in the Education

Consequently, the rationale for school development planning is historically associated with school effectiveness and school improvement research as these related but distinct bodies of research gained momentum internationally from the late seventies on. Hargreaves and Hopkins observed:

> The two areas of research that relate in particular to development planning are: the research on school effectiveness, the' what'; and the research on school improvement, the 'how' (Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991: 109).

As O'Dalaigh noted in introducing SDP as a key innovation in Irish post-primary education:

> There is a widespread acceptance among educators and researchers that collaborative SDP is a powerful means of promoting the trinitarian concepts of school effectiveness /improvement/development (O'Dalaigh, 2000: 145).

Therefore, the conceptual rationale and the evidential justification for school planning are, to a considerable degree, found in the closely related scholarly literature concerning school effectiveness and improvement.[25] The history of SDP cannot be properly understood apart from them.

3.2 School Improvement as a Complex, Historical Concept: The notion that schooling might be more or less 'effective' or that schools might 'improve' or 'develop' as a result of public policy, school planning or innovative practices derived from research findings, is itself a relatively modern one (Smyth, 1999: 4, Stoll and

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(Welfare) Act 2000 and the increasing concern with outcomes in documentation outlining DEIS planning, a significant contribution having been made in this regard by SDPI.

[25] While there is some overlap and an absence of definite boundaries between differently termed categories of literature referred to here, there is nevertheless a sufficiently consistent if imprecise distinction in their usage, as will be apparent in the course of the review.

Fink, 1996: 42-3). Indeed, the very idea of social progress is itself a legacy of Enlightenment thought:

> It is the distinctive achievement of the Enlightenment to weld classical moral categories to a secularised vision of human improvement: in a well ordered society, men would not just live well but strive to live better than in the past. The idea of progress entered the ethical lexicon and dominated it for much of the ensuing two centuries (Judt, 2010: 182).

The quest for improvement is, thus, an historical not a natural phenomenon. Schools are also historically constructed institutions and the level of invasive scrutiny they now receive is a recent development. This fact may be ideologically masked, history rendered 'falsely obvious' as Barthes observed, by discourses that assume school improvement is a foundational value for schools, without history and needing no justification (Barthes, 1957, 1993: 11).

This insight is an important corrective to dogmatism, self-righteousness and simple misunderstanding of the forces at play when discussing the generative principles underlying school improvement policy or SDP. Nor is this merely an abstract scruple. This can be illustrated in relation to a highly pertinent issue in SDP and this inquiry, teacher attitude and commitment.

A historical interpretation supports the nuanced view that frequent resistance to change among some teachers derives in part from inherited cultural dispositions alien to an ethic of improvement but not devoid of its own moral sources of responsibility and care. Such resistance is often inimical to the kind of 'technicist' intrusion upon classroom relationships that SDP may be perceived to encourage (Carr, 2000: 82-5). Rather than mere cussedness, it may simply not endorse, though

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it may not actively contest, assumptions embedded in disruptive discourses of school improvement.

More generally, failure to grasp this point curtails an understanding of the depth and psychological range of the changes, particularly in teacher professional self-concept, that school improvement activism entailed (Evans, 2008: 31-34). Fullan has reasonably pointed out that 'resisters' to change should be respected since they may have 'some good ideas' (Fullan, 2001: 99). However, the term 'resister' does not do justice to the possibility of implicitly dissenting educational values among teachers when faced with the consequences of reform minded initiatives.[26] Prior to the sixties, at any rate, there was comparatively little debate about differential quality in schools, though there was, in public policy, a great deal of concern in some countries about equity of access to education.[27]

Teacher identity, a complex and highly contextualised construct, is not necessarily informed by the same discursive assumptions as interventionist public policy (Helsby, 1995: 319, 324-5).

Nevertheless recent public discourse, as perennial newsworthiness about examination league tables attests, *is* wedded to often populist notions of effectiveness and even performativity.[28] Increasing volumes of published research and diverse political interventions today underscore the widely canvassed view regarding the competitive importance of schooling for a knowledge economy (Sachs,

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[26] This is true a fortiori of the conservative Irish culture of schooling

[27] In Britain the 'Butler' Education Act of 1944 is a prime example of this. In Ireland the provision of free secondary education in 1967, following upon the important report 'Investment in Education' which began to put the spotlight on the importance of education to economic growth and prosperity, marked a similar if belated development (OECD, 1965).

[28] Published league tables of results are illegal in Ireland. University entrance statistics tracked to schools are published. The concept of value added interpretation is largely alien to debate in this country when popular conclusions are drawn about schools from such limited data.

2008: 191-203; European Council Report, 2000; Smyth and McCoy, 2011:2)). The concepts of school effectiveness and cognate concepts of school improvement and SDP became firmly established in public, scholarly and political discourse. However, ubiquity of reference may mask unresolved complexity and ambiguity.

3.3. The Ambiguity of School Effectiveness: There has not been an unambiguous and authoritative account of what constitutes school effectiveness. The scholarly literature, rather, raises a variety of sceptical concerns equally applicable to SDP. A few examples might elucidate but will certainly not exhaust them. What values underpin different conceptualisations of effectiveness? (Eliot, 1996: 211) Is school improvement more to do with qualitative processes and changing mind-sets or instrumentally achieving quantifiable outcomes? (Callan, 2006: 8) Can policy mandate real change or are policy makers engaged in 'the symbolism of initiation and enactment of reform, not in its implementation?' (Elmore, 2000: 19) Should we be talking about schools at all, or should the unit of analysis be teachers, or students, or classrooms or society at large? (Kyriakides et al 2002: 291-2) Does the concept itself tendentiously reflect the prejudices of the questioner? (Goldstein and Woodhouse, 2000: 360)

Popular clamour for good schools and academic inquiry into the protean complexity of the concept speak uneasily at either ear of the policy maker. Nevertheless, notwithstanding such inherent ambiguities and complexities, public and academic contention about the quality of schooling is an undeniable feature of cultural modernity and a foundational premise of SDP. SDP is thus built upon a drive for school improvement that is historically contingent and inherently problematic.

3.4   Origins of School Effectiveness Research: Coleman et al's massive research project, commissioned on the wave of the anti-poverty activism of President Lyndon Johnson's administration in the USA, found, to the surprise of many and the consternation of some, that backgrounds of fellow students, the school's own socio-economic composition, rather than input measures or qualitative interventions, correlated positively with measures of student achievement (Coleman, Campbell et al, 1966). Jencks et al also researching inequality and schooling concurred in downplaying the contribution of school process to pupil outcome (Jencks et al, 1972).

Provoked by these pessimistic findings a burgeoning volume of research projects sought to inquire further into schools' contributions to student achievement. These studies were largely though not exclusively based on correlations of school features or practices with examination results, albeit with a progressively greater sophistication of outcome measures that have more recently been invoked (Smyth, 1999: 3-5). Many of these studies contested or qualified the findings of the earlier American studies. School effectiveness research, an abiding endeavour to this day but also the precursor of school improvement and SDP was born (Rutter, Maugham, Mortimore and Ousten, with Smith, 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Purkey and Smith, 1983; Reynolds, 1994).

Two points of particular relevance to SDP merit comment. The original studies addressed the relative weight of socio-economic background versus schooling. A complex relationship obtains here, particularly in that these are not the simply differentiated independent variables a superficial reading of this debate in the research literature might assume. Teaching often responds to teachers' own assumptions about pupils' social background, for example (Lyons et al, 2003: 271-

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275). Thus the effects to be compared actually interact. However, a substantial impact upon pupil outcomes of socio-economic educational disadvantage has remained a stable finding of educational research internationally and in Ireland (Kellaghan et al, 1995: 8-9; Smyth et al, 2006: 199-200, Smyth et al, 2007: 263-4).

In Ireland, nevertheless, an explicit commitment to the quest for equity in education, progressively of access, participation and outcome, was the most explicit stated aim for SDP. Much of SDPI's work was to this end.[29] The precedents were not wholly encouraging (Kellaghan, Weir, O'Huallachain and Morgan, 1995: 66-7; Ireland, 1998).

 Secondly, the original study by Coleman et al was decisive also in its novel focus on student *output.* As Coleman himself subsequently noted:

> This had the effect of directing attention to the output definition, for most earlier research had limited itself to inputs as measures of inequality of educational opportunity (Coleman, 1978: 300).

Output, specifically student learning outcomes however they may be conceived and determined, became the benchmark of school effectiveness research which helped define the purpose of some significant conceptualisations of SDP (Mortimore,1998).

Focus on output is importantly problematic for SDP. Thus, for instance, where SDP specifies an output the question may always arise of how appropriate the means chosen are to the different types of ends specified. A rhetoric of SMART goals jostles uneasily with broader strategies of capacity building and the aim of holistic enhancement of student experience may jar with strictly defined measures of

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[29] Work on DEIS planning for disadvantaged schools in the final years was the culmination of this important branch of SDPI's work.

achievement (SDPI, 1999: 14-15.; SDPI, 2009: 1-7). Thus simplicity of goal may prove incommensurable with a necessary complexity of means, and vice-versa. This disconnection, furthermore, may dismay an impatient evaluator or observer looking for quick results or 'value for money' in measurable currency.

Moreover, it is worth noting here in relation to school effectiveness research internationally that contention between narrower, usually quantifiable outcomes such as test results and broader, more inclusive and humanistic educational goals, has been present in the debate from the earliest days (Cuban, 1983: 695-6). The clash of educational philosophy this contention prefigures is a leitmotif in the entire school improvement literature, SDP being no exception, ever since and it surfaces throughout this inquiry as well.

3.5 Characteristics of Effective Schools: A defining product of the literature on school effectiveness in the eighties and nineties was the identification of characteristics of school life that allegedly correlated with 'effective' schools. Most of these studies have looked at outlier schools, drawing inferences about structural, cultural and organisational conditions of effectiveness where exemplary outcomes are achieved for students. These lists were to have a profound impact on how schooling was conceptualised subsequently. Competing normative rubrics, purporting to distil empirical findings, abounded (Rutter, Maugham, Mortimore, & Ousten with Smith, 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Purkey and Smith 1983; Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis & Ecob, 1988; Reynolds 1994; Sammons, Hillman & Mortimore, 1995). Eliot noted that such studies highlighted certain recurrent, common themes:

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> Firm or strong leadership, setting clear and explicit learning goals, high teacher expectations of pupils in relation to these goals, a primary focus on the activities of teaching and learning and the maintenance of a pupil control system based on positive reinforcement (Eliot, 1996: 202).

One particularly celebrated list, culled from a meta-analysis of the research literature at the time, which sums up best the themes dominant in this phase of the research, was that offered by Sammon et al:

> Professional leadership; Shared vision and goals; A learning environment; Concentration on teaching and learning; Purposeful teaching; High expectation; Positive reinforcement; Monitoring progress; Pupil rights and responsibilities; Home-school partnership; A learning organisation (Sammons et al, 1995: 8).

Such characteristics resolved into a normative conceptual picture of school life. They defined elements of school experience that were worth aspiring to, while their opposites, 'antithetical characteristics' were alleged to be decisive in schools that were outliers in terms of poor performance (Myers, 1994). They therefore helped school planners to begin to consider the criteria that might enable them to approach an initial school review.[30]

Hopkins and Hargreaves, whose work has been widely influential in the design and dissemination of models of SDP, found 'a great deal of similarity between the characteristics of the 'effective school, and our description of the management arrangements appropriate for sustaining school development planning.' (Hopkins and Hargreaves (1991:110).

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[30] The Sammons et al list was included in the SDPI draft guidelines for school planning and was widely used in the early years of the initiative as an instrument for initial teacher reflection during SDP sessions for staffs. This use was itself recommended by Hargreaves and Hopkins (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991: 116)

Indeed, recasting these themes slightly shows a strong alignment with the language and conceptual architecture of SDP; they include leadership and participative decision making; shared vision and mission; nurturing appropriate culture and climate; a focus on learning for all; teaching and professional development; systemic process, including explicit aims, monitoring and evaluation and partnership and collaboration. These are the staple of development planning processes (SDPI, 1999: passim). I stress the conceptual continuity between these research and school improvement traditions as the pragmatic, often instrumental nature of much of the SDP literature, long on resources and guidance but short on empirical validation of its efficacy or theoretical justification, may occlude the evidence base upon which it rests.[31]

The 'school effect', that is the level of impact attributable to the school, cited as a result of these variables has been variously assessed as contributing between 5% and 15% difference in pupil outcomes.[32] The impact upon disadvantaged students was estimated as being greater than for pupils in other socio-economic groups (MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001: 6). School effectiveness research in the secondary sector found that there were distinct teacher, subject department and whole school effects, a very important finding for SDP, which was increasingly to target subject departments as the best locus of collaborative planning for curricular and pedagogical development (SDPI, 2001: Unit 9). However, as MacBeath and Mortimore point out, the interrelationship of these factors is itself a critical finding, though detailed patterns of causation are also highly elusive to analysis. The result, nevertheless, is that a culturally complex synergy may be the ideal planner's goal:

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[31] Saying this, however, in no way validates that evidence base.
[32] There is, however, no stable consensus on this point.

> Once classroom and departmental effects have been taken into account, most studies tend to show a relatively small school effect. However, the more we move towards a learning organisation, the less easy it will become to separate out specific school effects from departmental and classroom effects, In a highly collaborative school in which people teach together and learn together, the differentiation of specific influences will be more difficult to locate. (MacBeath and Mortimore,2001.: 11)

The concept of a 'learning community', embracing teacher learning and collaboration as well as student learning at its heart, was to become a staple of school effectiveness discourse in the 21st century (Watkins, 2004; McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006). More immediately, it set the stage for the possibility that holistic conceptualisations, such as that of school culture, for example, might prove to be particularly relevant towards defining effectiveness in diverse school settings.

3.6 The Political Dimension of school effectiveness research: External v Internal Loci of Control: These asserted categories of effectiveness also, however, became powerful levers in the hands of policy makers. In this development a key tension emerges that virtually defines SDP as problematic and is also at the epicentre of this inquiry; initially between policy and research, and then more importantly between external and internal loci of control.

As a rule, researchers were scrupulously wary of drawing causative inferences from correlative data that inevitably simplify processes in highly complex organisations like schools (Reynolds, 1994: 23-24). Policy makers were less judicious (Powell and Edwards, 2005: 104). It was a short step from research to advocacy. Linking research to policy is, of course, important but always fraught with difficulty on both sides. It is a fact of life that legitimate democratic – political constraints will distort the conclusions of scrupulous researchers in virtually any circumstance (Levin, 2008: 43-

4). In this case, crucially, the findings of school effectiveness research seemed to locate the key determinants of success or failure within the school itself, an irresistibly seductive conclusion for policy makers. As Goldstein and Woodhouse bluntly stated:

> These arguments can be summarised by saying that government has taken up school effectiveness because it emphasises the responsibility that schools have for 'standards' rather than government itself. (Goldstein and Woodhouse, 2000: 354).

This questionable inference, apart from offering an alibi for the policy maker as Goldstein and Woodhouse seem to imply, was less a valid finding than a structural feature of the way the research was framed. That is, seeking patterns in matching school features to measures of successful outcome carries the assumption of causal relationship governed by school based features. Otherwise, why bother?

In any case, the temptation to devolve responsibility and accountability to schools and to mandate change by diktat was powerful (Goldstein and Woodhouse, 2000: Ibid.) This was the case, most significantly, in the UK with the 1988 Education Reform Act, which controversially sought to enshrine school autonomy and accountability in the form of the 'Local Management of Schools' at the heart of the system, counterbalanced by the formation of the Office of Standards in Education to police it (DES, 1988). SDP was ultimately the main means in the UK by which policy makers envisaged an application of school effectiveness findings to national policy (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991: 12-13).

However, in the first instance, paradoxically, these developments both devolved responsibility to schools, away from Local Education Authorities particularly, and

greatly increased centralised political, administrative and inspectorial functions (Giles, 2006: 223-4). Thus a tension between external, rationalised policy direction and guidance and internal autonomy and contingently complex school planning arose (Ibid.: 232-3). As a result, friction between external and internal loci of control is scripted into the discourse of SDP insofar as it cleaves to its original purpose as a vehicle of government sponsored policy for leveraging enhanced school effectiveness.

Moreover the context was one of radical marketisation, hostile to liberal-humanist values, with SDP emerging as the engine of school response:

> With the increased devolution of responsibility for resource management to schools and the attempts to create an educational marketplace based on competition for pupil numbers came the need to encourage schools to employ and embrace strategy through the School Development Plan (Bell, 1998: 451).

Dempster et al observe that the UK, while not requiring school planning de jure (as was to be the case in Ireland) nevertheless are more assertive than other countries in their de facto requirement of schools to plan, setting up a 'centre-periphery process for conformity' (Dempster et al, 1994: 30). They succinctly describe this public policy context:

> Some of the keynotes of public sector change we referred to in our introduction have been increased market and consumer control, decentralization, reorientation of management from a regulations-based to a goal and structure based strategy, and increased competition between public institutions and between public and private institutions' (Ibid.)

This was to cast a long shadow upon subsequent developments, instigating contentious scholarly debate targeting such use of school effectiveness research to

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buttress neo-liberal policy (Wrigley, 2003: 89-112). The purported rationality of the initial politically inspired model of SDP that was to emerge in the late eighties can be characterised as highly instrumentalist. By this is meant the relative simplification of complex processes and outcomes in terms of discourses of 'service delivery', a 'rational approach to policy formulation, initiation and implementation that tends to mask ambiguity within the policy cycle' and 'site based management' (Giles, 2006: 220, 223). Giles argued that schools were unfairly blamed for an 'implementation deficit', whereas the evidence points rather to the speciousness of rationalist models of planning in the face of the irreducible ambiguity and fragmentation of ostensibly developmental but actually external accountability driven models of school planning. Bell also notes that 'the use of strategy is predicated on the capacity of the school to achieve organisational goals through a rational process which begins with analysis and finishes with implementation' (Bell, 1998: 454).

As will be shown, overly rational sequential understandings of SDP may do less than justice to the nuanced approach of its main proponents, attentive to contingency, unpredictability and the need for flexible adaptability in process. However, it is in the somewhat detached and schematic context of policy that the danger of envisaging SDP as 'inflexible, impersonal, heavily bureaucratic and subject to the constraints of rules and contract' arises (Ibid.: 456).

At any rate, there was not at this stage a stable and durable alignment of intentionality ranging from policy makers to school communities, subsequently recognised as a fatal flaw in quests of systemic reform (Ibid., 232-3; Fullan & Barber, 2005). Consequently, there has been a widespread criticism in the academy of the alleged shortcomings and machinations of legislators and officials.

However, one should be wary of insufficiently nuanced outright denunciations of the policy makers, emanating from a wider disenchantment with a highly controversial period of neo-liberal governance. Some of the denunciation comes a little too smoothly along well grooved tracks of academic displeasure with political decisions, sometimes underestimating through ignorance the tortuousness of policy formulation (Levin, 2008: 44). Nevertheless, a significant portion of the critique of the 1988 Education Reform Act was animated by a widespread suspicion that market and consumer rights trumped humanist philosophies of education (Day and Gu, 2010: 9-13). Some even saw this as ushering in Foucouldian discourses of surveillance into school governance (Powell and Edwards, 2005: 98-9). This critique captures a generic fault line separating deeper if often unstated holistic and instrumentalist philosophies of education that also runs through SDP in terms of contested purpose, authority and agency.

There were, however, other, less starkly dichotomised narratives available. In Scotland, for example, capacity building, organic growth through development planning and a more reputable engagement with the latest precepts from research without distorting mediation by populist policy making were espoused (MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001,: 31-2). In general, too, and certainly initially, the Irish experience probably leaned more to the Scottish model. Furthermore, the move to school based self-evaluation was officially supported earlier in Scotland (MacBeath, 1999: 96).

Nevertheless, this linkage of school effectiveness research to policy, issuing in ambiguous loci of control, defines much of the conceptual and political tension inherent in SDP ever since.

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3.7 Critique of School Effectiveness research: Given the foundational importance for SDP of the findings of this pioneering research, providing as it does much of its ostensible empirical rationale, it is necessary to be both cautious and critical about the research itself. Several critiques of the methodology and assumptions of this research greatly qualified the prestige of their findings within the scholarly community. These critiques may also, by implication, temper claims for the efficacy of SDP.

Scheerens, following an extensive literature review noted that proximity to classroom experience increases the value of indices of effectiveness but the distal, indirect effects should not be discounted (Scheerens, 2000: 120). However, he cautioned that school effectiveness research does not provide a 'complete coverage of all relevant goals and criteria of organisational effectiveness' and that 'there is considerable uncertainty about the generalisability and the effect sizes of the factors that are considered to work' (Ibid.).

Drawing on this literature, Lam noted that intra-school variation, at classroom and teacher level, accounted for:

> ...most of the relevant variability; socio-economic factors still had the greatest impact on student performance; effectiveness varied over time and was rarely sustained at peak levels; and effectiveness rarely covered both cognitive and affective favourable outcomes. (Lam, 1999).

Goldstein and Woodhouse, pre-eminent in the field of methodological analysis of school effectiveness research, averred that while this research has flourished and has provided fodder for policy makers' perhaps convenient beliefs that schools can

be made largely responsible their own successes or failures according to various outcome measures, it is often based on poor research methodology.

They argue that there are four main failings in much of this school effectiveness research: it may be abused by government, which may entail tendentious, simplistic or selective reading, which, however, is hardly a failure in the research itself. More specifically, they note that tendentious commissioning may set the terms of the expectations of the research in advance, which assuredly is a fault in the research process, leading to 'oversimplification of the complex causalities associated with schooling and sidetracking into focusing on league tables'; thirdly, that theory reifies empirical relationships, which I interpret as showing a lack of analytic depth in probing correlations and questioning definitions, along with an attempt to freeze, as it were, in standardized replicable formulations what are in reality highly unstable and complex processes; Finally, more sweepingly, that much of the research is simply of a poor quality, presumably in terms of observing basic research discipline and evidential analysis (Goldstein and Woodhouse: 2000: 354). They insist that there is little evidential support for the kinds of lists so prevalent in reports on school effectiveness research since they are derived from a desire by researchers to 'get close to government'. (Ibid.: 355) Inevitably, if this critique stands up, it poses a question about the efficacy and even rationality of any attempt to intervene on the basis of current knowledge at the level of whole school organisation. That is, it questions SDP.

Two further related and particularly telling methodological flaws are advanced in support of this critique that pose challenges for SDP. One is the assumption in school effectiveness research of the period that schools as units act as 'discrete non-interacting entities', that is, that schools are in a social and educational vacuum. The

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other is that key variables *within* schools are studied as though they were not interacting one upon the other (Ibid: 356). In simpler terms, schools are complex and dynamic organisations that defy the procrustean exercise of chopping them conceptually into stable and universal normative categories. This is a variant of the tension noted above, now between systematisation and conceptual clarity, on the one hand, and complex and unique organisational behaviour, on the other. Managing this tension also became an important consideration for SDP in Ireland, especially since much of the work was with individual schools on locally educed agendas.

It should be noted, also, that there is a strong support for emphasising complex processes, the centrality of unfolding personal inter-relationships, that is, human process variables, and the poverty of rational design and control models in the literature on complexity theory in recent years (Stacey and Griffin, 2006: 9).

One of the most crucial points, however, concerned the concept of effectiveness in relation to assumptions and values of the researcher, or the commissioned agenda of the research project, whether it be from national policy, management or representing a bottom up exercise.

> The choice of framework will itself determine the nature of any inferences which are drawn, and different frameworks can lead to real or apparent conflicts. It is important to appreciate this, since there is a notable lack in the current school effectiveness literature of serious attempts to expose the underlying assumptions that the research is making (Goldstein and Woodhouse, 2000: 360).

Such assumptions must advert to the philosophy of schooling that underpins not just research, but policy making, advocacy and support for schools and teachers. It is a

basic contention of this inquiry that without looking at this level of meaning it is simply not possible to conduct rigorous analysis or draw valid conclusions.

Goldstein, in an earlier critique of school effectiveness research, focused on the need for multi level modelling, allowing a greater statistical and analytical sophistication to govern the analysis of the complexity of variables and range of levels, systemic, classroom based and so on, absent from earlier research designs and operative in all schools (Goldstein, 1997: 378).

There is evidence that these strictures have been taken on board in recent years, particularly in attempting to avoid simplistic causative inferences and the adoption of mixed methodological approaches to respond to complex interacting processes in schooling (Hernandez: 2008: 37). There is also evidence that modern commissioned studies, explicitly aware of earlier critiques, adopt a more nuanced, complex and circumspect conceptualisation of effectiveness (Sammons, 2007: 5). Goldstein and Woodhouse conclude:

> In response to these deficiencies, they propose greater independence from political agendas, a rebranding of the project as educational effectiveness, thereby qualifying the focus on the school per se as the unit of inquiry, a closer linkage with process study traditions, such as the school improvement literature explores and a better use of data. (Goldstein & Woodhouse, 2000: 361)

This linkage of school effectiveness and school improvement was to prove of great historical importance in setting the backdrop against which SDP was to develop from its initial emergence in the early nineties as a prevalent movement for school reform and a common term of art.

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Finally, while taking these strictures on board, there nevertheless remains a remarkable consistency in the findings of this research. It is proposed here that the value for SDP was, in essence, twofold.

School effectiveness research gave planners a discourse and conceptual framework for normative discussions about schools. Particularly, it provided at least the basis for considering the connections between curricular and organisational features of school life in relation to pupil outcomes. Part of the success of the pioneering stage of school effectiveness is manifest in how obvious and taken for granted many of its precepts, concerning leadership, expectations and relationships have subsequently become. The second value is that the characteristics provided a workable set of tools for initiating a school review that had an admittedly highly generalised basis in conceptions of good practice. Schools could start to benchmark their own most dominant characteristics in relation to them.

3.8   From School effectiveness to School Improvement: Crudely, perhaps, one response for school development to the lists favoured by school effectiveness research was the simple injunction – be like this! Early instrumentalist applications amounted to little more. However, a more helpful and intelligent response was to consider how the task of improving schools, granted its legitimacy, might be achieved through careful attention to the *processes* in schools that might deliver such an improvement rather than just the outcomes in terms of static descriptors of desired characteristics (Stoll, 1994: 131). The School Improvement Project (ISIP), involving 14 countries, had established the concept of 'school improvement' as a distinct term of art in the educational discourse of the eighties. Improvement was

defined as 'a systematic, sustained effort at change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions in one or more schools, with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively' (Van Velzen et al, 1985: 48 quoted in Stoll and Fink, 1996: 42). The key words here are 'change' and 'internal'.

Hargreaves and Hopkins, whose work was especially important in laying the conceptual groundwork for SDP to become the primary vehicle of school improvement efforts in the nineties, noted how school improvement studies 'tend to be more action-oriented than effective schools research' (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991: 117). School effectiveness research on its own had had too narrow a focus for a practical strategy; standardization of criteria led to simplistic nostrums for complex problems; they tended to overlook differential effectiveness within schools; and, above all, they did not identify those processes within schools that deliver effectiveness, however it may be characterised. (Ibid.: 110). In short, they did not explore how individual schools, in circumstances of the relative if ambivalent autonomy accorded them by the Educational Reform Act, might plot their own journey to greater effectiveness. This meant knowing where they were and managing the changes that might take them to where they wanted to be. Such a contingent idea of the school is not a new idea. It defies 'standardisation' and may see 'power and control begin to move back from the bureaucracy to the (teaching) profession' as Hargreaves observed happening in more recent times (Hargreaves, 2008: 18).

3.9 Change as Process: Fullan had already sensitized the research community to the key drivers of effective *change* process. These highlighted the necessity for adroit rather than simply directive leadership; shared values; pervasive and enduring

communication; and collaborative planning (Fullan, 1985; 400). Fullan's contribution is manifold. Four points are particularly relevant to SDP.

First, Fullan offered a comprehensive model of a change process from initiation, through implementation to embedding. Much that is taken for granted in discourses about school improvement in education is indebted to Fullan's prolific if repetitive iteration of the language of change as a systematic, staged process. Moreover, he also had a lively sense of the human factor and the unevenness and even messiness of this process, coining the term 'implementation dip' for the widely observed reverses and disappointments that attend all significant change processes (Fullan, 1995: 19-23).

Second, Fullan repudiated the 'hyper-rational' model of change, insisting always on the need to avoid notions of change process as a mechanically neat sequence of planned events. He also rejected what he called 'false certainty', echoing Stacey approvingly in his strictures on the quest for facile consensus and certainty as being ultimately self-defeating (Fullan, 2001,: 96, 100: Stacey, 1996: 7-9).

Third, he developed this insight by giving due weight to local context and culture (Fullan, 2001: 99).

Finally, however, and of great significance for the way SDP was conceptualised in Ireland, he insisted that change is about changing *meaning*, and that meaning is bound up with the existential situatedness of the individual in relationships, and above all in a culture. For teachers, the key stakeholders in planning and change, the task was explicitly one of 'reculturing' (Ibid.: 136).

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These ideas have been recently synthesised in the concept of 'motion leadership', which powerfully combines a model of highly purposed community, capacity building rather than judgmentalism, learning as the work of everybody and a strong moral culture of trust and even love (Fullan, 2009: passim).

Hargreaves and Hopkins concur in depicting school improvement as a highly complex and particularized evolutionary change process for schools. What they each acknowledge is the role of *meaning* as the driver of change, a leitmotif of Fullan's lifetime work, of the 'shared images of what a school should become.' (Hargreaves and Hopkins,1991: 121; Fullan, 2001).

These researchers shifted the focus from external descriptors of universal characteristics towards a more finely grained account of what happens inside schools envisaged as dynamic cultural milieux rather than fixed institutions. Researchers and practitioners who are close to school community empowerment in SDP emphatically endorse this view (Stoll and Fink, 1996; Watkins, 2004).

3.10 The Inward turn: Change as Culture : It is important to stress the conceptual shift that is occurring here as school improvement comes into its own as a discrete body of research literature. It may be described as the inward turn. Crudely, the point of view of school improvement is from *within* the school; of school effectiveness looking *at* the school. School improvement, among the key advocates in the academy, often working closely with schools themselves in the course of their research, from the start has been conceptualised as a process of *change*, driven from within individual schools, that is rooted in the efforts of stakeholders acting with relative autonomy in the light of their own visions of what their school ought to be like

(Stoll and Fink, 1996: 63-80). Just how well this sits with officially endorsed SDP as a lever of national policy is, of course, an important consideration.

Achieving a shared vision lies as the heart of this endeavour.[33] While shared vision was a commonplace of effectiveness characteristics, the dynamic of achieving it through discussion, collaboration, over protracted periods of time and in the light of socio-political realities of dissent and disaffection, was to become a central concern of school improvement and SDP (Stoll and Fink, 1996: Fullan, 2001). Furthermore, the emergent linkage of shared culture with teacher learning became an increasingly insistent note in texts aimed at promoting good practice in SDP and professional development (West-Burnham- and Sullivan, 1998: 45.) It became axiomatic for these research movements that culture was fundamental *Culture* is the complex concept at the heart of this project.

Rutter et al had famously concluded that school climate, or ethos, was the pivotal variable in achieving effectiveness (Rutter et al, 1979). Terms such as climate and culture are notoriously diffuse. Van Houtte has helpfully distinguished school climate, reflecting how an organisation is experienced by its members, their attitude to it, embracing its normative and affective dimensions, from culture, which are the beliefs and assumptions that individuals have themselves.

> Culture concerns values, meanings and beliefs, while climate concerns the perception of those values meanings and beliefs. Thus culture measures are (or should be) based on what individuals members of the organisation believe or assume themselves, while climate measures are based on what individual members perceive their colleagues to believe or assume (Van Houtte, 2005: 75)

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[33] I argue in the conclusion to this thesis that 'alignment' is a better term than 'shared vision' for what is envisaged here in that it accommodates more explicitly benign diversity in achieving common or compatible ends.

This distinction is useful but novel. It does serve to link both culture and climate to patterns of meaning and value. The term 'perception', however, is imprecise. What is intended, one would gather from the context, is that perception connotes both what is thought and what is felt. It is implicitly evaluative. There is strong normative undertow. Nevertheless, bearing in mind that cognitive and affective, relational and normative, individualistic and holistic aspects are in play in the concept, culture as it figures in the literature of school improvement and SDP comprises both climatic and cultural dimensions as above defined.

Hargreaves and Hopkins noted that only when improvement efforts impinge on school culture will there be real change. They go on to argue that

> …where a school lacks the appropriate culture, development planning is a means of achieving it. The recognition by schools of this fact is the real and important condition of development planning. This is the key insight. (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991: 122-3).

Stoll sums up the emerging consensus on the direction school improvement takes, thereby sketching important and durable features of a richer, emerging theoretical account of SDP, with the added authority of drawing on one of the most extensive empirical studies of the time, the analysis of the Halton Effective schools project in Ontario, to pinpoint the main distinguishing features;

- focus on process;

- orientation toward action and development over an extended period of time;

- primacy of the school community as the chooser of priorities;

- importance of school culture;

- increasing importance of teaching and learning and the school as a centre of change that must take account of the wider social and political environment in which it operates   (Stoll, 1994: 131-2).

One should note how this development enriches and legitimises agency at the level of the school, while rendering more complex the notion of school process. This works against peremptory or externally intrusive instrumentalist interventions.

3.11 Stoll and Fink: From school improvement to School Development Planning: Stoll and Fink defined culturally sensitive SDP in relation to complementary school effectiveness *and* improvement research, in the most compelling synthesis available in the scholarly literature.[34] They defined the 'concurrent and recurring' processes of school improvement as follows:

- Enhances pupil outcomes

- Focuses on teaching and learning

- Builds capacity to take charge of change regardless of its source

- Defines its own direction

- Assesses its current culture and works to develop positive cultural norms

- Has strategies to achieve its goals

- Addresses the internal conditions that enhance change

- Maintains momentum during periods of turbulence

- Monitors and evaluates its process, progress, achievement and development

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[34] The work of Stoll and Fink has the added interest that it directly influenced the discourse of SDP within SDPI. The text had been widely read among SDPI coordinators.

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They added that 'School improvement is unique to each school because each school's context is unique' (Ibid,). The conceptual normative building blocks of SDP are provided here.

Four closely inter-related ideas reverberate throughout the Stoll and Fink interpretation of SDP, which is heavily informed by the Halton school improvement project in Canada that provides its empirical grounding. Interestingly, their conclusions express both Canadian and British collaborative insights into the process:

The understanding and management of change; Echoing Fullan and Miles, change is governed by meaning frames among the change agents and resistors, through phases of initiation, implementation and institutionalisation (Ibid.: 45-46). They advocate a pressure and support approach; persistence; selectivity of engagement rather than involving everybody at the same time; a focus on the classroom as offering greatest leverage for whole school development; the need to work with rather than against dissenting voices as well as the danger of consensus degenerating into groupthink; and the fundamental understanding that changing the culture is the main task (Ibid.: 42-8).

A phenomenological rather than behaviourist approach to change is adopted, notwithstanding the use of various practical strategies to facilitate such change. Change in the context of SDP is above all about nurturing beliefs and attitudes that go with the grain of intended school improvement initiatives.

The importance of culture: Culture is favourably constructed through shared vision for improvement and strong motivation among stakeholders, teachers especially, to

realise it. Noting the power, for good and ill, of school culture, also seen as typically reflecting phases in the life span of a school, they distil certain 'cultural norms' that are critical to school improvement:

- Shared goals – 'we know where we are going'

- Responsibility for success – 'we must succeed'

- Continuous improvement 'we can get better'

- Lifelong learning – 'learning is for everyone'

- Risk taking – 'we learn by trying something new'

- Support – 'there's always someone there to help'

- Mutual respect – 'everyone has something to offer'

- Openness – 'we can discuss our differences'

- Celebration and humour – 'we feel good about ourselves'.

(Ibid.: 92-8).

One should note the first person plural voice here. Culture is constituted from within, albeit in part as a response to the wider environment.

However, there is an insufficiently examined and potentially divisive tension here of great relevance to SDP[35]. Stoll and Fink assume that by getting to know one's culture one comes to discuss and re-examine values, thereby ensuring that people 'were forced to confront their own values and assumptions about school and teaching processes and relationships' (Ibid. :100). However, it is by no means assured that the expression and articulation of values entails critique. Indeed, the

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[35] This critique is implicit in the growing dismay felt by inspectors and voiced at SDPI team meetings they attended, at the alleged deference of SDPI coordinators to self-serving and conservative school cultures that were slow to deliver significant change despite substantial supportive input. See findings regarding 'Internal and external loci of control' in chapter 9.

very emphasis laid upon a shared vision, collegiality and a facilitative exploration runs the risk of stifling initiative and creative individuality and serving to reinforce implicit values and beliefs without their exposure to challenge. This raises the possibility of interest group retrenchment and, more broadly, of the nature of accountability in SDP. To whom is one accountable? How can 'lateral accountability' (Fullan, 2001: 02) and legitimate external expectation, as well as the interests of frequently silent 'beneficiaries' of school improvement, the students, be protected?

Invitational leadership: Consistent with the phenomenological-cultural approach Stoll and Fink insist that 'human behaviour is the product of how individuals view the world' (Ibid. :108) Supportive, facilitative and trusting invitational leadership eschews the more directive and assertive modes of influencing colleagues in favour of a situationally sensitive invitation to share a mission. Citing Covey, they propose that leaders 'seek first to understand and then to be understood' (Ibid. 110). The desired outcome is a highly motivated team or teams of colleagues harnessed to a vision for improvement that is owned and not imposed.

This model of leadership is arguably one sided. It imposes enormous weight on the integrity of a heroic or charismatic model of individual leadership. Distributed leadership, managed but not monopolised by the positional leader who places great weight on staff development and empowerment, are key themes in the management of SDP. Nevertheless, Stoll and Fink clearly identify leadership as a crucial variable in the success or failure of school development planning.

Collaborative, inquiry based teacher learning: Stoll and Fink commend teacher learning rooted in teacher's 'priorities and lives' (Ibid.: 153). Teacher learning, a key dynamic for their conceptualisation of SDP, is experiential, reflective, critical,

collaborative, personal and values driven (Ibid.: 154-160). Creating a mutually respectful collaborative teacher culture inspired by a belief in improvement:

> Commit to continuous improvement and perpetual learning – to repeat two cultural norms, the best teachers never stop learning and they are always looking to improve their practice (Ibid.: 161)

In sum, Stoll and Fink propose that SDP is the 'mechanism by which both bodies of knowledge', that is, school effectiveness and school improvement, 'can be interwoven to help produce successful change and enhanced outcomes for all pupils' (Ibid.: 63). Furthermore, they argue that the accountability agenda, responding to environmental and governance expectations, and the development agenda, driven from within the school community, can both be honoured, albeit with some tension, through SDP (Ibid.: 64).

The process they commend, following the Halton experience, is explicitly based on the British process of school development planning. This has been most clearly and authoritatively elaborated by Hargreaves and Hopkins in their publication 'The Empowered School', which was written as a result of their work with the Department of Education and Science from April 1989 to 1990.

3.12 The Classic Model of SDP: Hargreaves and Hopkins: Two basic principles of Hargreaves and Hopkins hugely influential approach need to be clearly stated.

Firstly, Hargreaves and Hopkins, unlike the Halton team, from the outset distinguish between *maintenance* and *development* functions in planning. The former manage and energise existing policies and procedures within the school; the latter address those priorities for development and innovation that are undertaken for the current phase of planning. The aim is progressively to convert desirable developments into

routine practices that are then maintained by ongoing SDP (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991: 17-20). This conceptualisation, which extends the reach of SDP and potentially places it at the heart of school organisation, was adopted in both Britain and Ireland while SDP was advanced as the main vehicle for ongoing school improvement.

Secondly, planning for development is, above all, collaborative and teacher driven. This point may be lost in focusing upon the structural features of their model. SDP repudiates individualistic or restricted notions of teacher professionalism (Hoyle, 1975: 318). Staff development is therefore an important pre-condition for successful planning (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991: 25-6). Hargreaves and Hopkins are acutely aware of the tension between traditions of teacher autonomy within the classroom, often coupled with a repudiation of wider responsibilities for the running of the school, with a model of development planning which requires school level decisions that impact on the classroom to be informed by practitioner insight. This requires, what is often not the case, the teacher to have a wider identification with the whole school culture and institutional life, along the lines of Hoyle's extended professionalism, upon which the classroom is in fact quite dependent, since much of that wider culture and institutional policy impinges on it both directly and indirectly (Ibid.: 15)

Underpinning effective staff engagement, which is critical to success, Hargreaves and Hopkins later outline the refinement of professional judgement, moving from intuition through reflection to evidence based evaluation, as a process that puts the enhancement of teacher's skills and professionalism as both a pre-requisite and itself a consequence of the school development planning process properly engaged (Ibid.: 73-77). Leadership commitment, therefore, must ensure that the planning is

not 'bolt on' but becomes 'a management of change (that) can become *integral* to the way the school conducts its affairs' (Ibid: 14, original italics).

The development planning cycle has four main phases. Getting started requires an *audit* (in other versions, this becomes a review or a self-evaluation). The audit addresses key areas of school life. It might, for example, look at the curriculum or school management and organisation or partnership with the local community. A balance of the curricular and organisational is desirable. The school may use the audit to identify strengths and weaknesses, typically drawing on a mix of quantitative evidence (facts, figures, such as, for example, results, attendance records or pupil referrals) and qualitative data (the views of key stakeholders). This initial audit may reveal an area needing a 'specific audit' (Ibid.: 38).

This specific, or focused audit is a more detailed and rigorous probe of a prioritised area of concern. The product of the audit is an evidence based list of priorities that form the content of this cycle of development. These are the areas where improvements will be sought. These priorities, ideally, are reflective of both internal and external requirements (Ibid.: 48).

The second phase is construction or *action planning.* This specifies the priority chosen, targets for improvement, success criteria by which they may be evaluated as successful or not, precise tasks to be performed, allocation of responsibility for those tasks, arrangements for monitoring the implementation (e.g. meeting dates) and resources that may be required (Ibid.: 51).

Hargreaves and Hopkins concede that things may not go according to plan. Adjustments may be necessary throughout the planning process (Ibid.: 69). It is noteworthy, in the light of critique from contingency theorists, that one of the illusions

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that Hargreaves and Hopkins set out to dispel from the start is the notion that schools are ultra-rational organisations. Rather they conceive of schools as culturally complex, contingently varied and subtly interactive institutions. However, they do not, for this reason, forego systematisation. Rather, they see such systemic management of change as an organic and perpetual process entailing frequent adjustment (Ibid.: 8-9).

The third phase is *implementation.* It is harder to implement than design a plan. Efforts to sustain commitment, check progress, make the necessary adjustments and report to key stakeholders are essential to success (Ibid.: 67). It may be asked, indeed, whether they are not perceived as counterintuitive tasks for teachers who identify their work so closely with the classroom. This is where a great challenge resides for the management of the planning process (Ibid.: 65-70).

Finally, the plan must be *evaluated.* Successful initiatives need to be embedded in routine; necessary changes made where required and unrewarding practices stopped. Evaluation must look at both the success of the implementation (did it happen?) and of the plan in relation to its success criteria (did it deliver desired outcomes?) (Ibid. 70-72).

While there are to be important refinements in later stages, the rough outline of the school development planning cycle remained as Hargreaves and Hopkins outlined it. This cycle remains the inner logic of SDP that was later adopted and modified in Ireland.

3.13 The challenges of SDP – David Hargreaves and implementation: David

Hargreaves, a proponent of SDP, nevertheless conceded that rational and linear-

sequential presumptions attributed to planning models were frequently challenged in

the name of complexity and contingency, as discussed above. However, he rebutted

some of the arguments formulated by analogy with business models, the primary

reference points for this body of critique, by contending that schools were in general

more stable organisationally, with similarly stable expectations from their adult

clients, parents (Hargreaves, 1995: 217-8). Moreover, much of the change required

was shaped and imposed from outside the school. In other words, schools can

manage a change process because, pace the chaos and complexity theorists,

schools are actually remarkably stable and enduring in their organisational

functioning. It is easier to isolate change when it is directed within a wider contextual

stability. However, he granted that planning must remain flexible (Ibid.).

The test of flexibility is implementation, the fundamental challenge of SDP.

Implementation strategy raised questions about how to sustain commitment and

motivation; how to monitor and adjust the plan in response to changing

circumstances; the structures and reporting protocols that must be in place to ensure

that this happens; how to evaluate whether the plan is being implemented as

intended and whether it is delivering outcomes that accord with the success criteria

of the plan. Hargreaves recognised that technically and attitudinally implementation

was the greatest challenge (Ibid.: 223-4).

Many of the other difficulties he identified converge on this propensity for schools to

fail at the implementation phase. Weak leadership commitment, superficial audit

leading to overly ambitious or too numerous priorities and vague, insufficiently

detailed action plans lacking success criteria all set up the failure of the implementation.

Hargreaves' proposal for a closed loop feedback system is a rather ponderous recognition that the SDP process is both simultaneous *and* sequential (Hargreaves, 1995: 219-226). The aims, actions and consequences must be critically assessed and amended at every stage of the process. The result is that SDP requires high level input at *all* stages and not just at the review and design stage. The cultural challenge of achieving this is enormous. How can it be made credible for a staff with other things to do? Was this a fatal weakness in the planning model?

3.14 From SDP to school self-evaluation; prioritising pupil learning: Another important development in the late nineties was the felt need to put pupil learning more decisively as the goal of SDP. Simultaneously, subtly less emphasis was placed on the use of SDP as a change management strategy. Hopkins and MacGilchrist, while noting that SDP was the most widely used strategy for school improvement in England and Wales, saw this turn towards classrooms and individual students as marking a change both at the level of policy and of school practice (Hopkins and MacGilchrist, 1998: 410-411). Discourses of *learning* progressively displaced *managerialist, processual* and *organisational* discourses in scholarly discussion. This is a decisive shift in emphasis.[36]

The six lessons Hopkins and MacGilchrist glean from a review of the research towards the end of the century are revealing. The messages from research are to

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[36] A good, if somewhat daunting example of this managerialist discourse of school organisation can be found in the major international, 'Effective School Improvement Model' trialled in eight countries. An elaborate multi-level conceptualisation of school improvement processes including 'control theories and principles of effective school improvement' comprising 'synoptic planning, market mechanisms, cybernetics and autopoeisis', translated as goal setting. pressure to improve, cyclical improvement processes and autonomy. (Scheerens and Demeuse, 2005: 383)

'keep the focus on student learning', 'clarify the link between effective teaching and student learning outcomes', 'Ensure that development planning is based on evidence', 'make certain that school's management arrangements support the plan and keep the focus on learning', and 'employ differential school improvement strategies'[37] (Ibid.: 412-414)

Three implications are significant for this inquiry. First, this development is mirrored in the historical trajectory SDP followed in Ireland in the following decade from SDP to learning focused self-evaluation[38].

Second, the subordination of management and organisational factors in planning directly to criteria derived directly from classroom teaching and learning reinforced the pivotal mediating role of the subject department, which operates at both levels. The subject department is a forum for teachers to share and collaborate in relation to classroom practice while also being also a significant organisational mechanism[39]. In Britain, it is *the* most significant middle leadership structure.

Thirdly, The growing insistence on baseline evidence, target setting and evaluation of learning outcomes, was to ensure that planning did not dwell upon staff activity that was not linked to explicit measurable improvements in learning activity and outcomes (DEIS, 2009). Paradoxically, this opened the possibility for a reassertion of instrumentalist expectations.

The explicit focus on pupil learning and the immediate conditions that support it in the classroom is closely aligned to two key developments. One is the increasing use

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[37] This last exhortation refers to adapting school planning to whether a school is classified as low performing, moderately effective or highly effective but potentially cruising. This type of classification, often buttressed by robustly worded inspection reporting, has been widely used in Britain.

[38] See Chapters 6 and 7.
[39] See 7.5 1-5

in the 21st Century of discourses of *school self-evaluation* (MacBeath, 1999, 2002, 2006). The other is the pedagogical move towards active learning methodologies associated especially with assessment for learning (AFL).

AFL has become the dominant knowledge base for much contemporary pedagogical innovation (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Hattie, 2008). The impact of internationally respected research and policy developments in Scotland was a major source of this movement (MacBeath, 1999: 21). The combination of self-evaluation and AFL was also to mark a decisive maturation of the school development project in Ireland.

National policy formation, particularly in OECD countries, including newly devised models of inspection, have turned more to the language of school self-evaluation, even though these self-evaluation models preserve much of the development planning framework devised in the earlier period (MacBeath 2006: 29-37; DES, 2003: 11-14) .

School self evaluation came to displace SDP in scholarly discourse, though in fact it incorporates much of the SDP framework. What is different? Simply, self-evaluation accentuated three characteristics that were already inherent in the SDP model.

Firstly, it radicalised the autonomous *voice* of the school, summed up in the title of one of the most influential texts that manifested the change – 'Schools must speak for themselves: the case for school self-evaluation' (MacBeath, 1999). It is politically significant that it was the National Union of Teachers who commissioned the study upon which it is based. Finding ways of eliciting and synthesising the voices of the constituent partners or stakeholders in a constructive and creative way became a high priority in the self-evaluation process. Macbeath argued that there was a world-wide movement away from external accountability models to school improvement

that genuinely balances accountability and capacity building (Ibid.: 95; MacBeath, 2002: 20-23). As this chapter has suggested, this has always been a debate around SDP, but the balance is certainly now tilted towards creating the *internal* conditions necessary to move schools along. When the model of OFSTED inspection adopted a meta-evaluative methodology, evaluating self-evaluation in schools, MacBeath saw a great but by no means assured opportunity for a true synergy of external and internal evaluations. (MacBeath, 2006: 24-28). The voice of the school must ring out in this process (Ibid.: 70-79). This inflection towards partnership in evaluation, as an aspiration fraught with difficulties, must be borne in mind as the, as yet unrealised, policy intention is similar if less developed in Ireland (DES, 2003: viii).

Consistent with culture and change theory, however, this contingency approach, wary of prefabricated effectiveness lists, is premised on the school as 'invested with meaning from people's own individual experiences' (Ibid.: 17). The primacy of culture remains[40]. However, the evaluative edge to those voices was sharpened.

Second, as has been suggested, overt and unrelenting focus on *learning* was paramount. Moreover, learning was increasingly seen as a qualitative process of incremental student empowerment as a self-conscious and collaborative learner, in line with a burgeoning literature on learning theory (Watkins, 2004:1-7) A clear distinction here lies between prior attention to performance, in the form of test results, and a reflection upon the social and psychological dynamics of learning itself, a variant of the product/process dichotomy (Watkins, 2001: 2). Teaching was increasingly subordinated to learning. MacBeath was to direct self-evaluation firmly

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[40] In fact, Macbeath proposes that 'climate is all' (Macbeath, 1999, 108). However, climate as here used denotes 'trust and an openly agreed agenda' and 'a clear and unambiguous agreement about purposes and agendas', involving the collaboration of as many people as possible. (Ibid.) Thus, as indicated above, the terms 'climate' and 'culture' were often used interchangeably in the literature. MacBeath's 'climate' is clearly identifiable as culture as it has been discussed in this review. He spoke of culture and ethos in later texts.

on teaching, learning, culture/ethos and leadership, rather than on organisational or management functions within the school, except where these impact on the former (MacBeath, 2002: 32-87). Hopkins declared that:

> If I have learned nothing else over the past two decades it is that creating powerful and effective learning experiences for students is the heartland of school improvement' (Hopkins, 2001: 11)

The crucial word here is 'powerful'. Hopkins was to distinguish 'outcomes that can be related to student learning' from a laudable but vague commitment to improve results. Along with the work of commentators like John West-Burnham, Hopkins delineated a deep learning that was more than attainment but evinced critical meta-cognitive skills, akin to Macbeath's depiction of the learner as self-evaluator (Hopkins, 2000: 139-40; Bowring-Carr and West-Burnham, 1997: 76-81).

Thirdly, as was already apparent in the school planning model of the mid to late nineties, rigorous use of quantitative and qualitative data, benchmarking and target setting became indispensable. Much work was to be put into finding flexible tools for gathering and utilising data, benchmarking and setting targets.

There is still however, an unstable set of aspirations. Stakeholder empowerment and meta-cognitive learning sit uneasily with a mentality wedded to target setting and benchmarking. Nor does it resolve the inevitably diverging perspectives from within schools and among policy makers and wider interests.

3.15 The fading of SDP? All of these practices are, assuredly, referenced in the discourse of SDP. Yet it is remarkable that MacBeath's three texts cited here, which were signal contributions in the popularisation and promotion of self evaluation both in Britain and internationally, contain not a single reference to planning, let alone

SDP. It is plausible it is submitted, to see this omission, as a marginalisation of SDP in recent years that has four main causes.

Firstly, one notes that less attention is paid to outlining, defending or exemplifying a sequential developmental process in the scholarly literature by the late nineties and afterwards. Given the confidence with which Hopkins and MacGilchrist could state in 1998 that school development planning was the main vehicle of school improvement, one can safely infer that the relative invisibility of the concept relates to its normalisation as standard practice in schools. Cuckle and Broadhead, in their evaluation of school planning at primary level from 1994-2001 found that school development planning had indeed become widely routinised in schools both to respond to government initiatives and to plan developmentally on a school based agenda. Head teachers, in particular, valued the opportunities school planning gave to involve stakeholders (Cuckle & Broadhead, 2003: 238)[41].

There is more to it than that, however. The historical association of school development planning with the 1988 Reform Act in Britain, itself a focus of scholarly contention, may have left it less favoured as thinking moved away from the organisational change agenda associated with that Act. The tight-loose, accountability-autonomy, highly politicised tension of the time was pervasive. Schools were situated explicitly in the marketplace (Grace, 1994). Given the drift away from the managerialist discourses of that period in the research literature, it seems reasonable to infer that some of the stigma stuck to SDP as the child of its age. Most of the conceptual heavy lifting in forming the classic model of school development planning was done in Britain at around this time. The association of

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[41] It is noteworthy that there is more evaluation of SDP encompassing a wide number of schools at primary level than secondary. What evaluations there are at secondary are largely case studies.

planning and external accountability seems to have been indelibly cast (Stoll and Fink, 1996: 63). This came about notwithstanding the early refinement of school planning in the light of school improvement and school effectiveness research towards an increasingly nuanced and school friendly understanding of how school culture works.

Thirdly, with the changes in thinking about external evaluation frameworks, in tandem with a more confident knowledge based account of learning in classrooms, the language of self evaluation straddled these developments more aptly. The whole school became a school of learning related parts and less a corporate entity such as is implied in the notion of a strategic plan (Watkins, 2004: 1-7). Yet, as has been shown, the pivotal role of school culture endured notwithstanding these shifts in fashion and developmental discourse.

Fourthly, self-evaluation picked up on two key weaknesses in SDP; the sometimes arbitrariness and looseness of its review and evaluation processes and chronic problems of implementation of school wide action plans (Hargreaves, 1995; MacBeath and McGlynn, 2002; Tuohy, 2008: 98-119)[42].

All of these factors resonate, sometimes positively and at others negatively, with the Irish experience of SDP.

Summary

This chapter set the wider context for this study. A theory of action of SDP in Ireland is rooted in the recent socio-political history of school reform, particularly in its

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[42] These weaknesses are supported in the findings in Chapter 7.

nearest neighbour Britain. SDP in Ireland, and within SDPI especially, must be seen through the lens of the prior emergence of the concept in scholarly and policy discourse, notwithstanding the distinct inflections it subsequently received and which this study will focus upon.

Internationally, discourse about effectiveness and improvement is a relatively recent historical phenomenon. School effectiveness and improvement research, positing a conceptual picture of the 'effective school' and processes to bring it about, gave rise to SDP. Notwithstanding limitations in the effectiveness research policy makers sought to fix accountability for improvement at the level of the whole school as an organisational unit. SDP is thus closely and indelibly associated with this agenda, especially the landmark Education Reform Act (1988). Impulses towards accountability and autonomy remained conceptually combustible within the concept and practice of SDP. Instrumentalism and empowerment are uneasily juxtaposed, nodding to competing loci of power outside and within the school.

At the same time, as SDP grew in popularity, researchers offered an ever more rich account of the internal cultural conditions upon which SDP actually needed to flourish. Change theory expounded the psychological and social construction of meaning as a key variable. Teacher learning and developing professional disposition to collaborate and innovate became indispensable. The quality of school leadership was also decisive.

The core process of SDP remained cyclical, moving from audit, through action planning and implementation to evaluation.

Implementation proved the greatest challenge. Rationalist rigidity was deprecated in favour of vigilant and flexibly responsive monitoring throughout the SDP process.

Soon, a more overt and exclusive focus upon pupil learning rather than organisational change came to the fore. School self-evaluation, incorporating distinct emphases on learning, the collective 'voice' of the school, a focus upon active learning strategies and greater rigour in use of data displaced SDP though none of these was strictly absent from it. SDP also simply became part of routine school organisation and fell below the radar of interesting debate. However, it is hypothesised, due to its identification with a historically receding phase of national policy, SDP faded rapidly from the scholarly and policy discourses of school improvement.

At precisely this time, SDP became the primary vehicle for school improvement in Ireland. It is necessary now to see how, against this theoretical and political backdrop, Ireland embraced the school effectiveness and improvement agenda by embracing SDP.

Chapter Four

SDP in Ireland in the Nineties: Church, Culture and Law

Introduction

This chapter charts the Irish experience of SDP prior to the Education Act (1998) leading up to the formation of SDPI.

It depicts a conservative and stable mono-culture which delayed Ireland's espousal of a national policy of school improvement. Religious trustees and associates pioneered SDP in the early to mid nineties, having imported the discourse of cyclical developmental planning based on UK precedents. A marked commitment to the exploration and articulation of mission, vision and aims at the heart of SDP by the school community gave a particular Irish inflection to the model of SDP promulgated at this time.

Consideration is then given to the mounting importance attached to school planning as the vehicle of school improvement in national educational discourse from the Green paper (1992) to the Education Act (1998). Of special significance is the National Education Convention held in 1993 (Coolahan, 1994), a landmark consultative forum that sought consensus among diverse stakeholders for a new vision for education. SDP was the linchpin of school improvement. A new language of change process, school development, social equity and support came to permeate national educational discourse as major legislation was in the offing. The central, multi-faceted role of SDP in this agenda is examined.

The education forum brought elements of traditionalist and scholarly thinking together. Heady idealism masked latent tensions between discourses of instrumentalism / managerialism and empowerment / communalism, a defining polarity reflected throughout this inquiry. The debate culminated in a statutory basis for the drafting of school plans.

4.1 History – the mono-cultural legacy: There is cause for caution in moving from an international or even British perspective about school improvement to that of Irish post-primary education. A strong Catholic monoculture held sway in most schools in Ireland for a long time[43]. The internal management of schools (other than Vocational schools) remained largely untouched by statute or Departmental circular. The Voluntary Secondary sector run by Catholic trustees was traditionally dominant (Mulcahy & O'Sullivan, 1989: 78). State governance impacted mainly through a nationally prescribed curriculum and a system of public examinations at junior and senior levels. Even here there were sharp limitations. As Callan observed, drawing on the work of Gleeson and Crooks, little attention was traditionally directed at 'curriculum analyses and educational discourse' at system and school levels in Ireland (Callan, 2006: 27-8).

The upshot of de facto Catholic hegemony was a culture inherently conservative and inimical to change (Garvin 2004: 129, Mulcahy & O'Sullivan 1989: 79-82). The past casts a long shadow upon the present. As the OECD observed:

> To understand contemporary Ireland, it is necessary to recognise how much its remote as well as more recent history still affects public values and

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[43] There were of course a small minority of Protestant schools but their influence on national policy and educational discourse was minimal.

attitudes and offers a key to understanding its institutions, not least its system of education (OECD, 1991: 11 quoted in Sugrue, 2006: 182)

In Ireland, as a consequence, the goal of public policy to improve schools is comparatively recent by Western standards. It was as late as 1998 that it became a statutory obligation for schools to produce school plans (Ireland, 1998 S. 21.2; DES, 1995: 157).

The obstacles to policy led change are formidable in the best of circumstances, but are especially taxing in the Irish context. The ways in which all parties to national change agendas in education, institutionally a notoriously 'loosely coupled' milieu, play conflicting and often obstructive roles is well attested in the international literature, as has been forcefully argued by Elmore (Elmore, 2000: 6). The absence of coherence or alignment in complex policy is a perennial complaint (Cuban, 2008: 79-80). Fullan's rationale for repeatedly exploring change dynamics in educational reform starts with this reality. As he observed, 'at a time of burgeoning of effort and resources (and imposition) of large scale reform' there remain 'policies and programs (which) are often imposed on schools in multiple disconnected ways' (Fullan, 2001: 25-7).

In Ireland the stakes were even higher. Schools operated largely through 'long-established structures and patterns of procedure and an accretion of old rules' (Coolahan, 1993: 223). They lacked organisational know-how and an experientially accrued familiarity with change process. A mature national educational discourse, informed by the debates that exercised the international research community, was relatively undeveloped because the problematisation of schooling that is the spur to such discourse has come late in Ireland (Callan 2006: 46-48, 208-211).

One further, pertinent manifestation of this inherited organisational impoverishment was the strongly directive, non-collaborative and undistributed leadership and management cultures of the Voluntary Secondary School sector, which constitutes a majority of second level schools.[44] Religious orders as trustees and clerical school managers did not historically nurture effective middle management structures or collaborative decision making in their schools. As a result both the necessary skill sets and a more open disposition through familiarity with SDP among teachers lacked an opportunity to flourish (McNamara et al, 2002: 202).

Moreover, since there was a mutual convenience in this existing arrangement, which circumscribed teacher responsibility as well as authority largely within the classroom, teacher resistance to change on a broader scale was an inevitable legacy. The critical diagnosis in the OECD review, therefore, of the need for teachers to become learners themselves and for schools' planning structures to adapt accordingly was indeed an ambitious challenge for Irish schools (OECD, 1991: 102-3 quoted in Callan, 2006: 14). The OECD saw that while there had been a great deal of demographic pressure on the Irish system, it shared with many other systems a 'nature conservative and slow to change; it behaved reactively rather than pro-actively' (OECD, 1991: 36).

4.2 Proto-SDP prior to 1998:   However, it would be an exaggeration to claim that Ireland was a tabula rasa in relation to SDP prior to 1998. Earlier in the decade, for instance, Aenghus Kavanagh F.S.P. applied the main principles of the international

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[44] There was an earlier adoption of more inclusive middle management structures in differently governed Vocational Education Committee and Community and Comprehensive schools. These, however, were the exception.

school improvement and effectiveness literature to the Irish context (Kavanagh, 1993: 2-8). He saw the impending legislation and the timely resonance of the OECD reports ushering in widespread and likely disruptive innovation across the secondary school system. He offered guidance on school improvement, in terms that would soon become familiar, through improved and devolved school leadership, staff development, pastoral care, curriculum reform, religious education (a local emphasis) and home-school partnership (Ibid.: passim). However, in what would become a characteristic construal of SDP in Ireland, he emphatically put exploration of mission, vision and values at the heart of the exercise (Ibid: 8-9, 26-32).

At the same time, several primers on school planning had been written by pioneering facilitators in the Voluntary Secondary sector, mainly in the early to mid nineties. Thus the Dublin based Teachers' Centres produced a user-friendly guide to SDP (first edition in 1993) setting the aims for planning as, inter alia, 'to introduce teachers to research on school effectiveness' (Drumcondra: 1996)[45]. This early foray into SDP draws explicitly on the experience of Northern Ireland, thereby importing the discourse of school effectiveness as its main rationale (Ibid.:1, 19-24)

Significantly, if paradoxically, given the conservative drag exercised by traditional forms of clerical school governance upon teacher empowerment, religious communities and affiliates responded with alacrity to the option of participative SDP in the mid nineties, offering important leadership in the field. The Conference of Religious Superiors in Ireland (CORI), a body that was socially progressive in its thinking, was a notable contributor to the theory and practice of SDP in Ireland at this time. CORI's guidelines for religious trustees of schools strongly endorsed SDP as

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[45] Teachers' Centres, later Education Centres, were regionally located resources largely, though not exclusively, for teacher in-service and access to support and networking.

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an opportunity to nurture a programme for whole school action in line with the educational and religious philosophy of Catholic education (CORI, 1996).

Other contributors of note are Sr. Una Collins' attractive but deceptively elaborate guide to planning and the simpler primer on SDP produced in the Drumcondra Teachers' Association with greater attention to problem solving and teacher resistance (Collins, 1996; Diggins, Doyle and Herron, 1996).

Three aspects are worth commenting upon in these early texts. Firstly, British precedent impacted upon Irish planning models. Invariably, as presented, planning comprised successive phases, more or less corresponding to a cycle of review, action planning, implementation and evaluation, in systematic succession. There was also a grounded awareness of planning as a difficult socio-cultural process heavily dependent upon favourable attitudes and enlightened leadership, conditions that have been seen well flagged in the earlier models of SDP in the UK. Efficacy in planning, therefore, necessitated rethinking how schools were managed (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991: 14-16)[46]. The debt to UK models is unsurprising as there was little competing native precedent.

However, on the other hand, mirroring Kavanagh's approach, these writers gave much greater prominence to mission, vision and ethos as the drivers of SDP (CORI, 1996-8; Diggins, Doyle and Herron, 1996: 6-8; Collins, 1996: 53-61). CORI stressed the need 'to give concrete expression to the basic principles and core values on which the school is founded' (CORI, 1996: 8). Diggins, Doyle and Herron laid out a chronological sequence that went through vision, mission, ethos, purpose and goals before arriving at strategy (Diggins, Doyle and Herron, 1996: 7). Collins outlines a

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[46] This point is developed further below.

similarly elaborate sequence of steps towards the drafting of a mission statement rooted in values. Collins stated that she had learnt:

> That developing the Mission and Values Statement can be, on the one hand, one of the most challenging and difficult phases of the planning process, while on the other, the most energising. The longer it takes to develop and own the Statement, the more involved staff become in the process, the more members dig deeply into their values centre, then the more likely are the statement's ideals and values to be remembered and to influence practice and the life of the school. (Collins, 1996: 56)

Thus the language of values saturates this early philosophy of planning in Ireland. Ambitious designs for identifying values and drafting a mission statement were proposed though, in practice, they were rarely fulfilled in anything like the thoroughness that their proponents imagined. These Catholic pioneers shared a concern about safeguarding a Catholic ethos in secular times. There was a growing awareness within this constituency of opinion of the need to evangelise an increasingly indifferent and purportedly theologically illiterate cohort of teachers (Feheney, 1998: 211-2; Tuohy, 2001: 385-6). Thus the religious philosophy of the trustees needed to be effectively mediated to school communities no longer amenable to direct managerial control.

This conviction likely contributed to a third aspect. Notwithstanding the inherited organisational culture and habits of command in traditional school management there was widespread agreement now that ownership of school ethos and active participation in development, especially by teachers, was indispensable. Indeed, for Diggins, Doyle and Herron, the main challenge for SDP just is about 'taking ownership of the process' (Diggins, Doyle and Herron, 1996: 1). For Collins the watchword is 'engage all members' (Collins, 1996: 8).

Taking these last two points together, there appears a possibility of latent tension between compliance with externally sourced religious values enshrined in trustee educational philosophies that were mediated to schools by external facilitators around this period and an agenda that might arise solely from the internal perspective of the school. It illustrates how SDP is structurally susceptible to competing internal and external interests, as noted in the previous chapter and this may take many forms.[47] SDP is both highly deliberative, even democratic in orientation and at the same time, historically, typically mediated externally sourced expectations.[48]

However, on the whole, by the nineties, Irish Catholic educational discourse tended, rhetorically at least, towards empowering school communities. SDP in this spirit buttressed the legitimacy of internally formulated school vision. It sponsored systematic, internal deliberation, ideally framed by core values, thereby situating responsible agency at the level of the school: As Coolahan noted when discussing church, state and education in Ireland:

> A bottom-up approach to internal planning operates in schools which emphasises the importance of collaboration and collegiality between all the involved parties. This allows schools to mark out their own vision, to put their individual stamp on their endeavours and to prioritise issues suited to their needs and environments. School ethos is promoted as dynamic, organic development, not as something which is handed down (Coolahan, 2006: 104)

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[47] This was seen in Chapter 3 in relation to the friction in SDP in the early nineties and figures prominently in the findings here as well.
[48] SDP's democratic force lies in the power it gives to equitable deliberation by participants and the authority that attaches to reasoned agreement and decision making within the process itself. It is obviously not absolute and is subject to the terms and content of type of SDP being undertaken.

This chimes with a strategy that saw the future of denominational schools as increasingly dependent upon the creation of lay Christian community. Above all, for progressive protagonists of Catholic education, it was the quality of relationships that mediated gospel values as direct clerical management and leadership receded (McCormack, 2000: 156-8). Importance attached to how people lived and deliberated together in a gospel spirit rather than just creedal orthodoxy.

Insofar as this situation bequeathed a lasting strain in SDP in Ireland, and the work of David Tuohy strongly suggests that it did, a corollary of great importance in interpreting the findings of this inquiry follows. Capacity building, conducive to forming skilled and empowered deliberative and decision making communities in schools, becomes an end in itself of SDP. It is not just a means of instrumentally attaining pre-specified goals. This, it is submitted, is a secular equivalent to the empowered lay Christian community envisaged by the early pioneers of SDP in Ireland. That is, there is a qualitative dividend to participation in SDP, in promoting relationship, dialogue and collaboration within the professional culture of the school that holds great intrinsic value. Influenced by Tuohy's explicit advocacy of capacity building as a rationale for SDP, this idea gained great normative authority within SDPI.[49]

More combatively, the school may, as a consequence, become the site of an important contestation of values as new forces, apart from trustee philosophy, impact upon schools under the aegis of a national drive for school improvement. The external challenge to internal value sets is now a more formidably intrusive government agenda. Dunne argues that increasingly powerful external demands threatened the integrity of school life. He saw 'dispositions to competitiveness,

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[49] This point will be developed and supported in the next chapter

individualism and instrumental achievement'; a deference to 'external criteria', with schools 'tailoring their efforts for the sake of rewards that lie beyond '(Dunne, 2005: 207). Associated with this threat is a type of lifeless proceduralism inimical to the formation of vital relationships. Barr summed this position up well in a paper he delivered to a major conference on Catholic schooling at the turn of the century.

> What is inimical to positive school ethos is managerialism; a preoccupation on the part of senior staff with procedures, structures, bureaucracy and bean counting. Whatever else, planning a positive and appropriate ethos is about seeing a school as a social organism made up of human relationships (Barr 2000: 137)

This is an Irish expression of the structural propensity of SDP to unleash such opposing forces, discussed in chapter 3. SDP in Ireland (as earlier in the UK) is now at the nexus of potentially conflicting sources of expectation, external and internal, as of competing visions of the purposes of education.

SDP is the child, so to speak, of a mixed marriage between the state and the school. School effectiveness and improvement may thus take many forms according to the relative weight of these two domains. Compared to school improvement policy in other jurisdictions the contrarian impulse, reinforced by the resistance of doctrinally charged inherited values to purely utilitarian models of planning and school effectiveness, probably made schools less tractable to official agendas of 'improvement' in Ireland. There was, that is, a religiously inspired discourse available upon which to mount such a resistance.

However, this tension is noticeable even within some of the extracts already quoted by Catholic educators and facilitators. That is, it complexly permeates rather than clearly divides stated positions.

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For there is an uneasy cohabitation of discourses in these early texts on school planning as in the qualitative findings to come. Thus, in Collins, the language of mission jostles with that of the audit, year and five year plans with a dauntingly wide structure of consultation (Collins, 1996: 3-5, 65-7, 70-1). However, a focus on mission, vision and value, inspired if not necessarily explicitly committed to religious values and a strong sensitivity to culture were to remain prominent in the Irish discourse of SDP and so for SDPI. This is most evident in the theorisation of SDP by David Tuohy, a Jesuit priest and academic, in the late nineties.

4.3 David Tuohy- Building Capacity: The fullest exposition of what might be termed a native theoretical variant embracing traditional Irish educational values and international school improvement discourse was offered by David Tuohy in his widely read text 'School Leadership and Strategic planning' (1997). This text was extensively rewritten to take account of subsequent planning experience in Irish schools for a second edition published in 2008. However, the underlying principles of SDP remain constant in both publications, with more discussion of self evaluation being the most notable change in the later edition.

Tuohy was also an academic consultant to SDPI who designed the original PGDSP offered in partnership by SDPI and the National University of Ireland, Galway, to up-skill teachers in the theory and practice of SDP. Over a thousand students graduated from the programme before it ceased in 2011, one year after SDPI itself was finally

disbanded. SDPI coordinators taught the course and wrote most of the teaching materials.[50]

Tuohy stresses the efficacy of articulated vision as the foundation of SDP, the indispensability of transformational leadership, the importance of conceiving school as a cultural phenomenon and the need to build capacity in schools for and through SDP. He thus restates themes already prominent in both the international literature and developing Irish theorisation of SDP.

Tuohy early on defined the purpose of strategic planning[51] thus:

> Strategic planning obviously is more than just a logical set of procedures. It has the power to create dissonance in people – make them uneasy about WHAT and HOW WELL they are doing. It is likely to upset old views and to raise new possibilities, and pose new questions. It also has the possibility of capturing the imagination and enthusiasm of participants. The strategic plan therefore aims to capture the mind and the heart of the organisation, giving direction, meaning and motivation to those involved in the school (Tuohy, 1997: 8)

Many of the enduring features of Tuohy's synthesis of planning are to be found here. Strategic planning incorporates rationality ('logical set of procedures') and values ('direction, meaning and motivation'); it is enacted in and through human culture as a site of hope and contestation ('dissonance', 'uneasy', 'new possibilities', 'imagination' and 'enthusiasm'); and its focal point is the school community ('mind and heart of the organisation').

Building vision is consonant with some early models of planning in the UK (Hillman and Stoll, 1994). Tuohy later devised a more elaborate conceptual architectonic of

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[50]Former SDPI coordinators taught the course in its final year.

[51] Tuohy often speaks of strategic planning. However, the processes he outlines and the purposes they serve are compatible with SDP as here expounded. There is no substantive difference that the different terms could give arise to in different contexts or used by authors drawing on different discourses.

SDP, but the 'core vision' remained as the engine of values based planning (Tuohy, 2008: 22-39). Informed by an awareness of national and international policy, 'the school community's central belief system about what constitutes good education and good schooling' remains at the generative heart of SDP (Ibid.: 22). This of course implies, what is indeed most problematic, that the school community actually has control over the 'education' and 'schooling' it delivers.

However, Tuohy adheres to the idea that schools can indeed chart their own destiny to the extent that strategic planning fulfils a conscious mission (Tuohy, 1997: 10). However, he eschews insularity or a merely conservative stand upon traditional ways. He explicitly rejects more modest piecemeal planning as inherently conservative. Punctuating the need for a critical consciousness through a disciplined scrutiny of current internal reality informed by a broader and less parochial educational understanding, he dismisses less systematic ventures in planning:

> The focus of this type of planning is mainly internal, accepting the status quo as a solid basis for development (Tuohy, 1997: 9)

Agency does not entail insularity. Tuohy argued that 'being aware of the environment' and bringing that awareness to 'the consciousness of participants' is essential to the formation of a mature and serviceable vision for SDP (Tuohy, 2008: 38).

What is important here is the insistence on accessing domains of policy and knowledge that transcend the school, a requirement which complements a gathering consensus on the ethical agency of the internal school community as a driver of school development, as noted by Coolahan:

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> The production of the school plan, now required by legislation, provides a particularly focused context for all members of the school community to articulate their values, priorities and development plans covering the whole spectrum of school life (Coolahan, 2000: 117).

One can see clearly in the theorisation of vision and school identity, by Tuohy and Coolahan particularly, the attempt to bridge the past to the future, traditional values and management of change towards some conception of school improvement.

Nor was Tuohy naive about the disposition towards SDP within schools. Tuohy was acutely aware of the challenge of teacher motivation and 'readiness' (Tuohy, 1997: 19-23). As the title of his text suggests, SDP for Tuohy is bound up with enlightened and expansive conceptions of leadership. He argued, following Schein, that SDP calls for 're-culturing'. As cultural and change theorists have long understood, re-culturing is multi-dimensional, complex and slow (Furlong, 2000: 64-8). It requires patient nurturing and respect. More pointedly 're-culturing' as opposed to just 'restructuring' focuses firmly on teachers, their beliefs and habits (Fullan, 2001: 34)

This amounted to nothing less than:

> ...a Copernican revolution in management thinking. It forces leaders to think differently about the content of their work, about the people they work with and the processes which make creative links between individuals and their work (Ibid.: 13)

Elsewhere, in his work on school leadershhip, Tuohy has consistently emphasised the relationship of leadership to an authentic and inspiring school vision (Tuohy, 1999: 181). He quotes Block approvingly in defining a paradigm shift in leadership from ownership and authority to stewardship and service (Ibid.: 182). In lauding the

'transformational leader' as a favoured conceptualisation of leader, he eschews

'debate', a competitive exchange, for 'dialogue', on the

> Assumption and a belief that the common ground to be discovered is more substantial, and more inspiring than any differences that exist...A prerequisite for dialogue is the desire to hear what others are thinking and feeling, a belief that what they say is important And central to the development of the school, and a willingness to be influenced by them...The commitment to dialogue is a celebration of the interconnectedness of people in the school, and builds a sense of shared leadership and teamwork (Ibid.)

This paints a picture close to the normative ideal of SDP found in the interview data; a culture that engages affective and cognitive mutuality ('the desire to hear what others think and feel', 'interconnectedness') that issues in collaborative decision making ('shared vision and teamwork'). Elsewhere, Tuohy rejects the figure of 'destination-journey' as the epitome of leadership in planning since it gives rise to transactional relationships of power and reward. He favours images that stress logic and artistry (Bohman & Deal,1991) and meaning and moral purpose (Sergiovanni, 1992). Tuohy proposes the metaphor of leadership in planning as dramatic performance:

> When school planning is conceptualised as a drama, then the process requires a writer, a producer, a director, actors and an audience. Each of these roles is part of the leadership dimension of the school (Tuohy, 2008: 13).

This prefigures two further emphases evident in the findings. Leadership is a critical variable for effective SDP. A function of this effectiveness is the dispersal of influence and initiative in SDP across the school community, or 'distributed leadership' (Tuohy, 2008: 12). Herein lies the seed of a powerful motif of SDP as collaborative, teacher empowerment in and through SDP.

The focus on leadership and informed, skilled teacher empowerment within SDP provides the rationale for the mission to build capacity, which left a profound impression upon SDPI (Tuohy, 1997: 12) Capacity building became the ultimate aim and justification of PGDSP. Capacity building commits not just the success but the very purposes of SDP to the skills and dispositions of the teachers who will inevitably lead it. It implies a very close relationship between professional development and culture and the wider aims of SDP to transform the service the school offers its pupils through SDP. The PGDSP course, attuned closely to experience on the ground in schools and the work of SDPI, was an attempt to equip teachers with the suite of planning and reflective skills commensurate with the responsibility to play a leading role in SDP in their own schools (Tuohy, 2008: 53). A model for learning to support this building of capacity was summed up in a graphic illustration that was used to explain to students the aims for the course and the type of learning it involved.[52]

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[52] I designed this graphic around 2006 to help students to gain a sense of the range of learning we were aspiring to on the PGDSP course. It was agreed to be consistent with the aims of the course by SDPI and David Tuohy.
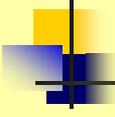
Learning about Planning

✓ **Planning Process – aims, procedures & Structures……………….......…What?**

✓ **Social Context – school reality, relationships, external pressures…....................Who?**

✓ **Skills – presentation, facilitation & observations……………………..How?**

✓ **Critical Reflection – reflection, values & responsibility……………………Why?**

SDPI, with David Tuohy, had come to project a vision of SDP that synthesised strong nativist concern with mission, vision and aims, put simply the 'why' of planning, firmly located within the authority of the school community. School planners also required a broader theoretical knowledge, practical skills to promote and lead SDP and inter-personal /contextual awareness, cultural nous ('what', 'how' and 'who'). What was sought was a suite of skills that would help to integrate what an emerging national agenda for SDP as a vehicle of policy driven school improvement demanded with the preservation of a strong communal agency directing SDP within schools.

Whether these aims were ultimately compatible is a key question that arises from the analysis of interview data. The question of whether power resided within schools at all is a critical question. It is necessary, however, first to explicate the newly prominent place SDP was to assume in Irish public policy discourse through the nineties, before going on to explore the way SDPI itself took up the mantle of its ambiguous professional mission.

4.4 A New National Agenda: Education for a Changing World (1992): Official recognition of the desirability of SDP is first found in 'Education for a Changing World' (1992), the Green Paper which was the first draft of what would eventually become the Education Act of 1998. The Green Paper is premised upon 'the challenge of change', recognition of 'shortcomings in the way of change', and a way of 'responding to change' (DES: 1992: 3-5). Six key aims are stated: equity; breadth of education, including preparation for an 'enterprise culture'; effective use of resources; teacher training and development; quality assurance; and openness and accountability (Ibid.: 5). These aims inform the emergent official discourse of school improvement in Ireland thereafter. An important theme is the place of Ireland within the European Community which signals an abandonment of insularity in policy making, first mooted by the OECD in the sixties (Ibid.: 73-83).

There are strong echoes of the British Education Reform Act 1988 in the central objective of 'radically devolving administration from the centre', thereby shifting greater decision making and responsibility to schools (Ibid.:139). The school plan was explicitly proposed as the means for schools to set out their goals and policies in relation to curriculum, teaching and learning, assessment, home-school community liaison and enrolment (Ibid.: 146-7).

Accountability was built in through a proposed requirement for accessible annual report to parents and the local community on performance and achievement in relation to the school plan. The documentation of statistical data, 'outcomes of assessment' in relation to the plan and its policies, and 'follow up action' where appropriate, contained the seeds of the cyclical planning process that would

subsequently take shape (Ibid.). The plan would be available for review as part of a whole school inspection (Ibid.).

4.5   National Education Convention (1993):   The report of the National Education Convention, which took place in Dublin Castle in October 1993 commended the proposal to put the school plan at the centre of the change agenda for school improvement. The Convention or 'Forum' report, as it came to be known, averred that 'in relation to school improvement and quality enhancement' it is 'potentially the most important proposal in the Green Paper (Coolahan, 1994: 56). The report went on:

> Around it (the school plan) a practical model for conducting in-school evaluation can be constructed. Important outcomes of school effectiveness research can be incorporated into policies at individual school level by means of the plan, and implemented in such a manner that they penetrate right down into the deep culture of the individual classroom. This has been the central aim of schools' plans developed elsewhere (Ibid).'

This account unambiguously derives the rationale for a school plan, including in-school evaluation, from international school effectiveness research. The report notes, however, the vagueness of the Green paper proposals. It seeks greater emphasis on the link between planning, development and improvement (Ibid.). Specifically what is missing is the *development* section, which through action plans dealing with areas of concern may achieve incremental improvements (Ibid: 59).

The report affirms that the proposals had been generally well received by the education partners, a matter of great significance in the Irish policy context of the time where a strong if tortuous commitment to achieving consensus among

stakeholders was imperative.[53] Most saw the formation of an empowered and collaborative culture in schools as desirable and achievable through the process of planning (Ibid: 58-9). However, there was unease about the publication of the plan and the 'rigid accountability mechanism' it might serve (Ibid: 57).

Nevertheless, it was noted that there was little clear understanding among participants of just what the planning process actually meant for schools. The Forum report does, nonetheless, see many benefits for schools if the planning is done right. Stress falls on systematic evaluation of school practices, formal change management, collaboration that counteracts a culture of isolation, a balance of national, local and school priorities, concurrent staff development plans and a movement towards empowering teachers to take 'greater ownership of the central issues that influence their work' (Ibid.: 59).

It is clear from the group discussions that teachers ('the professionals' as they are called in the report) might take the lead in planning, albeit in consultation with parents and management. However, this may reflect the dominant presence of teachers in the Forum's own discussion panels. It is worth noting in passing that the move to empower and engage teachers outside the classroom in this report is also evident in the strongly worded proposal to reconstitute in-school management and the unsatisfactory historical system of posts of responsibility that currently obtained (Ibid,: 47-54).[54]

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[53] Irish social policy from the late nineties until the current recession was predicated upon successive multi lateral national agreements by the social partners. Compliance with SDP was written into the education section of these agreements and the National Development Plan that provided an overall framework subsequently for national development planning.

[54] This would also be attempted in DES Circular 98/02, changing 'A' and 'B' posts to Assistant Principal and Special Duties Teacher posts, with increased remuneration, an expectation of a greater input by the teacher outside of classroom duties and participation in an in-school management team. Prior to this, in Voluntary Secondary schools especially, the posts were often regarded as little more than long service increments.

The report leans towards the SDP model already devised in Britain of having 'relatively permanent' and 'development' sections (Ibid.: 59). The latter may encompass curricular and non-curricular areas which have been identified by staff in the course of a systematic review, a conceptual distinction that SDPI took up in the early days. Grandiose long term plans are eschewed in favour of one or two year programmes. The question of whether the planning report is to be published by schools is unresolved in the Forum's deliberations most likely because of teacher sensitivity. While the plan would not need to be published 'on a wider basis than for management and staff of the school, progress reports could be incorporated into the annual report' is the emollient if equivocal conclusion (Ibid.: 60).

Finally, foreshadowing the formation of SDPI, support for schools in planning is mooted. Guidelines, but not sample plans that usurp the contextually specific self-evaluation by the individual school, should be published to help schools. Training for staff in the skills that school planning requires should be externally provided where necessary. Support for leadership, and principals in particular, to help them to nurture a collegial climate is deemed critical to the success of the proposals. Time for planning must be made available as international evidence clearly confirms that this is a critical variable in determining success or failure of planning. 'Advisory services' would be 'helpful to schools when they are beginning this process (Ibid.: 61). School development planning should be introduced on a gradual basis (Ibid.).

One, more general, point of dissent from the Green Paper offers an insight into the durability of the Christian educational heritage and its relevance as a corrective to overly economic and managerialist tendencies:

> Most commentators referred to its (Green Paper) over-emphasis on utilitarian and individualist values, over stress on enterprise, technology and economic

concerns and an under-emphasis on cultural, moral, artistic and civil elements... It would seem that perceived imbalances of outlook in the Green Paper have been addressed in favour of a restatement of a view of education emphasising the moral, spiritual, intellectual, aesthetic, social and physical education of people in a harmonious and balanced way (Ibid.: 150)

It is hard to overstate the importance of the Forum report for understanding the formative thinking behind Ireland's embrace of SDP, and also potential tensions that were to inform its progress. The influence of the British model and current international discourse on school planning for improvement and effectiveness are obvious. There is a clear attempt to mould the shape of Irish schooling for the first time through national policy in the light of international 'best practice' insofar as it could be discerned. The audacity and scope of the proposals, given how little had been done earlier, is remarkable. Perhaps inevitably, assumptions about SDP benefiting the pupil in the classroom and achieving collaborative cultures in schools are long on commendable aspiration but short on reckoning with the problems that international experience would show beset SDP (Hargreaves, 1995: McGilchrist and Mortimore, 1995: 207 ;Hopkins and McGilchrist, 1998: 409-10). The need for intensive support and dedicated time for planning are authoritatively stated, again buttressed by international experience (Coolahan, 1994: 61). However, the policy implications of providing such time are not explored. As it turns out the lack of dedicated planning time was to be the bane of school planning in Ireland throughout, the lack of such a provision being in marked contrast to established practice in Britain and Northern Ireland.

There may have been a degree of consensus about planning being a good thing but beneath the surface industrial relations, and the inherited teaching contract in particular, were to prove stumbling blocks to the kind of structural reform that would have made schools more capable of achieving the kind of development planning envisaged.

What is not acknowledged, also, (and important for this inquiry) is the empirical evidence of potential conflict between external and internal loci of control, though there is strong support for school based decision making. Nevertheless, there is also a strong demand for evaluation and accountability. This mirrors the British fault line and exposes a vulnerability that was to surface later.

The proposal for publication of a report about progress in relation to the plan but not the plan itself is an inherently incoherent compromise. How can a report of progress have meaning for those who do not have access to the planning that is being reported upon? What is evident here is the vigilance of formidable teacher unions, particularly alert for the threat of a more intrusive accountability culture. Winning support for change, officially and on the ground, in the face of a suspicious and hitherto largely uninspected teaching force was to be a delicate challenge, to say the least. Wary tentativeness may have contributed to a model of inspection in the early days much closer to Scottish rather than English and Welsh precedent than might have been expected (McBeath and Dobie, 1995).

4.6 White Paper (1995) and Education Act (1998): The National Forum's deliberations strongly influenced the White Paper that soon followed, as is clear from the extensive quotation and précis of the main relevant reports in the section dealing with school planning (DES, 1995: 157-9).

The Assistant-Secretary General of the DES identified four defining intentions in the White Paper: build on existing strengths; model a richly consultative policy formation process; take account of social and economic context; and respond to the impact of membership of the European Union (Cussen, 1995: 45-6). Together they 'help create a climate supportive of change and development' (Ibid: 46).

Managing change, improving quality, enlisting collaborative partnership, defining core mission and teacher empowerment are variously cited as benefits derived from formal school planning. The White paper goes on to commit to providing guidelines on the preparation of school plans. School boards of management will be responsible for drawing up the plans and will publish the policy section. Every secondary school will prepare a plan. The board of management will report annually on progress in relation to the plan (Ibid,).

One should note here an important latent tension coded in the language that anticipates differing views of the value and purpose of documentation in SDP. The White Paper talks of the 'school plan' not of 'school development planning' per se. Between a noun and a verb, not to mention the qualifier 'development' there lies a potential divergence of purpose. The school plan, which arose first in the Green paper, was conceived in part in the light of the strongly business ethos and economic discourses subtly shaping that document. While this economic discourse was mitigated by the Forum whose findings were largely if summarily endorsed in the White Paper, the managerial requirement to publish policies, produce a school plan and report annually on progress still carries echoes of a business model. Less managerialist development models, such as were now being developed in Scotland the auspices of school self evaluation, potentially though not necessarily could be in conflict with this approach.

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With the publication of the Education Act 1998, the mooted mandatory requirement for schools to produce a school plan became law. Perhaps the most notable feature of the Education Act regarding planning is its strong focus on equity, disadvantage and special educational needs. This marks a decisive shift in social policy towards the needs of the marginalised, which found its way into the otherwise minimalist text:

> The school plan shall state the objectives of the school relating to equality of access to and participation in the school and the measures which the school proposes to take to achieve those objectives including equality of access to and participation in the school by students with disabilities or who have other special educational needs. (Ireland: 1998: S. 21.2)

The Act calls for consultation with stakeholders and requires the Board of Management, which has overall responsibility for the school plan to report to the stakeholders. With the commencement of the Act, schools now faced a statutory requirement to produce a school plan with very little indication of what it was meant to contain or the processes it should follow. A few had a prior history of informal planning. SDPI was established to provide the assistance schools were felt to need if SDP was to have a chance of fulfilling the expectations that were pinned upon it in the discussions of the previous six years. It was left to SDPI, following a statute with minimal prescription, to decide what this should entail.

Summary

National culture and history left their distinctive mark on the conceptualisation of SDP in Ireland, even though the broad thrust was defined from earlier British

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example. SDPI thus drew on these two important precursors and sources of influence when it came to conceptualise and promulgate an approach to SDP.

Ireland came late to a national policy of school improvement. Catholic mono-culture supported a conservative, stable and hierarchically managed model of schooling. However, by the nineties, paradoxically, the Catholic trustees led the way in promoting an empowerment model of SDP emphasising core values and school vision. The seeds of a capacity building orientation came from these early efforts to use SDP to create active lay Christian communities in schools. Nevertheless, a tension between autonomy at school level and external authority and expectations is, as noted in the last chapter, inscribed within the emergent Irish theory of action of SDP, first in relation to trustee educational philosophy but subsequently to national policy, even though the latter also endorsed strong devolution of decision making.

National policy advanced school planning as the primary institutional vehicle for school development and improvement. Embracing change, engaging stakeholders, promoting equity, the school plan became a statutory requirement in 1998. Many of the assumptions and features of SDP in the UK were imported into the national discourse of school improvement. Debate at this stage, though sensitive to sectional interests, is marked by optimism, even idealism, about what might be achieved. There is also evidence of tension between instrumentalist and managerialist discourses, influenced by a new international awareness challenging humanist and holistic discourses, reinforced by native Christian culture and educational values.

As a model of SDP starts to take shape in Ireland, one noted Irish theorist of planning offered a more explicitly theoretical account which, by virtue of his consultative role with SDPI, served to strongly influence the theory of action of SDP

within SDPI. Dr. David Tuohy's work attempts to do justice to indigenous cultural values and a newly internationalised educational perspective in Ireland from the nineties on. Building school vision through empowered and skilled teacher collaboration, guided by enlightened leadership, bequeathed to SDPI a strong disposition towards conceiving its role as assisting in building capacity for the type of SDP that gave effect to these aims. It remains to be seen how this would sit with its positioning with DES and its mediating of mounting national policy expectations to schools.

Now I will proceed to look at SDPI. First I will explore some of the literature SDPI produced to see how SDPI took to its professional task of promoting SDP in the context both of the wider conceptual model elaborated abroad and the specific emphases just discussed as defining the educational culture in Ireland.

Chapter Five

Theory: Selected SDPI Literature in its Historical and Political context

Introduction

This chapter examines the stated aims and objectives of SDPI through a selective critical review of key documents.[55] The review looks at the process model and the normative discourse of mission, vision and aims in SDPI's conceptualisation of SDP.

It situates these materials in a historical and intellectual context. Specific trends in the Irish educational milieu identified in the previous two chapters powerfully influenced SDPI. Prominent are the centrality of consciously expressed values; flexibility in planning, mitigating over-rationalist approaches; capacity building for and through SDP; and respect for the uniqueness of school identity.

Two determinative contextual influences, it is argued, are

- The received school culture, where the values inherent in the dominant Catholic philosophy of education are salient.

- A policy driven agenda of school improvement by the DES, which defined SDP in relation to the statutory ambitions of the Education Act (1998) and relates it, problematically, to the reconstituted inspectorate.

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[55] These will include Power-point presentations. Whatever its limitations as a presentation aid Power-point was an important discursive medium in SDPI. Much of the thinking and discussion within the team was carried out though collaborative work with this tool. Provisional or temporary positions on a range of issues can be inferred from Power-point 'presentations'.

SDPI attempted to articulate a stable and serviceable model of planning while responding to rapidly changing educational and political expectations. Positions evolved. Priorities changed. Nevertheless, a commitment to school empowerment and a morally inspired rather than just procedurally efficient model of development planning endured as its avowed objective (Lyons, 2010: 12-13). There is, however, evidence of a more performance minded approach in the last years.

Thus in addition to showing what SDPI was declaredly about, the documents in part evince tensions between capacity building and instrumentalism already conspicuous in this inquiry. [56]

5.1. A systematic model of school development planning: SDPI produced its first publication, 'School Development Planning: An Introduction for Second level Schools' in 1999. The then Minister for Education and Science, Mr. Michael Martin TD, in a brief introduction, announced that it offered a 'concise outline of school development planning, process and product' (SDPI, 1999: 5). This publication remained a popular and accessible summary of the aims and practices of SDP in Ireland immediately following upon the passing of the Education Act (1998).

The SDP process is presented in relation to five themes (SDPI, 1999: 13), which can be glossed as follows ;

- '**systematic**': integrating piecemeal existing planning into a coordinated, whole school plan

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[56] SDPI also produced detailed materials in support of planning focused on learning and teaching. These will be considered more helpfully, however, in relation to specific findings in the analysis of the interview data.

- '**collaborative**': engaging the whole community while acknowledging that most of the work will be done by principal and staff

- '**ongoing**': integral to school life {i.e. not 'bolted on' (Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991: 12)} and in harmony with core aims elicited through review

- '**progressive**': cyclical and iterative, with each cycle ushering in a subsequent cycle

- '**enhancing**': a means and not an end in itself, whereby the management of change yields a higher quality of educational experience for students and a concomitant professional development and empowerment of teachers.

SDP is explicitly rooted in the discourse of 'school effectiveness' and 'school improvement' (Ibid.: 7, 14).

Planning is conceived as a cyclical process, moving through four phases, inspired throughout by the 'mission, vision and aims' of the school.

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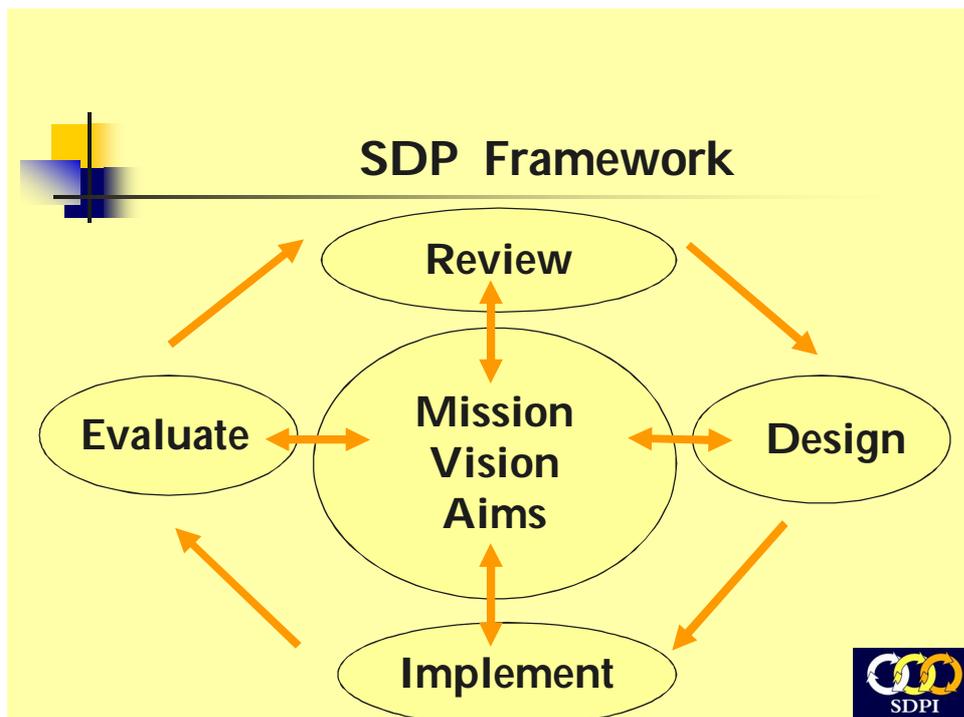
Review: comprising an elucidatory, data based description of the school's current state of affairs and analysis of needs, contextual factors and priorities for development (Ibid.: 18). Areas for review incorporate 'mission, vision and aims'; 'context factors'; 'curriculum'; care and management of pupils'; 'Staff organisation and development'; school-home community links' and 'school management and administration' (Ibid.: 19).

These headings constitute a revealing conceptual map of school life. Noticeably, in the earliest days, the focus upon student learning as the sole concern is missing and the organisational dimension stands out.

Design: action planning with targets, roles, time-lines, and monitoring and evaluation procedures (Ibid.: 21-22)

 Implementation: instancing the structures and supports, organisational and social, that help to ensure the action plan is carried out (Ibid.: 23)

Evaluation: determining what objectives have been attained; which 'projects' may be 'integrated into school life', continued and amended or discarded because they have failed to deliver (Ibid.: 24)

It is asserted, more generally, that 'self-evaluation is the key to school improvement' (Ibid.). At this stage 'self-evaluation' denotes a phase within the action planning cycle rather than, as later, an inflection of the entire process towards more rigorous use of data, summative judgement and evidence based criteria to determine the impact of SDP (SDPI, RS: 07-8).

This cycle described the inner logic the SDP process. Subsequent publications either reiterated or assumed it. It was amplified and facilitated with a wide range of supporting templates and worksheets, in the Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools (SDPI: 2001). The language and scope of this model is largely derivative from the classic assumptions of SDP, in the UK especially (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991). It framed the PGDSP course structure.

5.2 Critique of core SDPI model - the rationalist paradigm:

The most fundamental assumption about the school implied by the logic of this model is that it can credibly be characterised as a goal directed organisation, capable of institutional agency (distinct from that of the individuals it comprises) and amenable to rational governance and change[57]. This, moreover, is to hold in a national context that has been shown to produce school cultures that are conservative and developmentally comparatively inert to date.

Any such staged, sequential model is potentially vulnerable to a conceptual as much as an empirical challenge; namely the charge of excessive rationalism yielding overconfidence in the power to achieve systematic improvement through planning.[58]

At a macro-level the assault on meliorative systematic social planning has strong historical precedents (Hayek, 1944). In management literature overtly non-rational paradigms gained respectability in the 1980's, just at the time when the education world was adopting development planning (Simon, 1956; Weick, 1978: Bell, 1987). The literature on complexity theory took up this repudiation of systematic and

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[57] As was pointed out in chapter 3, a fundamental conceptual assumption within the school effectiveness / improvement literature is the unit of analysis chosen. Is the national or local system, the school, or the subject department, or the teacher, or the classroom, or the pupil, the appropriate conceptual variable?
[58] See Chapter 3

cognitive models of change (Stacey and Griffin: 2006). Bell, it has been noted, generalised a common concern about such planning models that:

> The world view on which these organisations (governed by strategic planning models) are predicated is one of order, simplicity and conformity where everything operates according to specific, knowable and predetermined rules. This, in turn, means that all activities should be rational, predictable and controllable. (Bell, 1998: 456)

Such thinking is indeed alien to the worldview of many teachers. Carr has pointed out that teachers are more likely, albeit implicitly and pre-theoretically, to conceptualise their practice as ethical relationship rather than goal directed strategy (Carr, 2000: 101-2; 2005:).

In Ireland, as analysis of the motivations of entrants to the teaching profession attests, a pastoral and ethical rather than an instrumentalist self-identity of teaching is closer to the norm (Drudy, 2001).[59] Moreover, Sexton's study of Irish teacher self-identity explicitly links a characteristic anti-intellectualism with an attachment to strong moral intuition of their profession:

> Most importantly of all, the Council must recognise that Irish second-level teachers are, for the most part, unable or unwilling to view their professionalism in terms of wider educational or philosophical issues. This deficiency must be addressed by the Council. In particular, any conceptualisation of teacher professionalism that fails to recognise the moral basis of teaching is surely inadequate and is, in the author's view, unlikely to promote the process of teacher professionalization. (Sexton, 2007: 96)

Thus, it is argued, scepticism about SDP as a systematic instrumentally explicit process is abetted by pastoral, anti-intellectual self-identity among Irish teachers.

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[59] One important sign of this is the formation of in- school management structures in Ireland around head of year positions rather than, as in the UK, around subject department heads.

How did SDPI respond to this in its initially ambitious published agenda for systematic whole school development planning?

5.3 SDPI Response: From the outset SDPI mitigated a potentially overly rationalist understanding of SDP by encouraging flexibility and situational sensitivity. SDPI deprecated procedural rigidity:

> Finally, as every school is unique, the operation of the planning process will vary considerably from school to school. The School Development Planning process is flexible. It is not a set of rules to be followed blindly but a framework for collaborative creativity. Each school must adapt the framework to suit its own particular circumstances (SDPI, 1999: 13).

This is shown in four ways that share a measure of concern for SDP as lived process *within* schools as much a means to achieve results *for* schools; the early action strategic model that found most favour in practice; respect for the contextual specificity and unpredictability of individual schools; a view of SDP that valued error as a spur to learning; and a focus on capacity building. However, there are signs that SDPI buckled to institutional pressure for greater instrumental efficacy in the final phases of its existence.

Interestingly, three strategic scenarios were proposed in the draft Guidelines of 2001:

- **The Foundational Model**: a highly linear model proceeding in a concurrently rational and chronological sequence from setting up structures, identifying mission, addressing policies and procedures at all levels of the school through to a comprehensively activated and evaluation development planning model;

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- **The early action model:** an approach building capacity and credibility through 'early identification of a small number of immediate priorities and the initiation of an action planning to address them';

- **Three strand concurrent model** an approach comprising futures thinking, strategic thinking, planning and intent and operational planning.

(SDPI, 2001: 2.9-12).

In the event, overwhelmingly it was the simpler and more intuitive 'early action' model that was invoked. Little was heard thereafter of the other two.

Moreover, the draft Guidelines (SDPI, 2001), while predicated on the classic model set out in the earlier publication (SDPI, 1999) in its detail displays a much more nuanced sensitivity to process and context. The school's mission statement, therefore, signalled a school's willingness to shape its own unique destiny:

> In this era of change, the development of a school's mission statement represents the school's readiness and willingness to take charge of its own affairs and manage change positively in the light of its vision. The school's mission statement is the basis of a school's policies and practices (SDPI, 2001: 6.3)

SDPI publications respect the contingency of school identity thus avoiding overly generalised blueprints in favour of detailed guidance on reflective processes.

Thus, in a later formulation that expressed long standing belief, error was viewed as inevitable and creative:

> Not everything works as planned. Circumstances change. Good ideas may prove unmanageable in practice. Participants should be encouraged to think imaginatively as well as realistically about how to improve the culture of teaching and learning in their school...school development planning is also a process of learning for all those involved (SDPI, 2010: 11)

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The notion that planning itself was a process of learning, a function of the idea taken over from Tuohy that capacity building both prepared the ground for planning and was itself the product of good planning, was a particularly significant valorisation of organic process over mechanistic rationality. Thus, the early action model that was favoured:

> ...is based on the premise that the best way of promoting the acceptance and embedding of School Development Planning is to ensure plenty of early action and achievement as positive reinforcement for the participants in the process. The early experience of success offers confirmation of the benefits of school development planning. Thus, it serves to counteract any tendency to complain that 'we talk the talk, but nothing ever happens and nothing ever changes'. It strengthens commitment to the process and provides an incentive for involvement in more complex planning procedures (SDPI, 2001: 2.11).

The tone and argument here is highly representative. Hearts and minds are to the fore. Instrumental achievement is important but ultimately subordinated to the patient creation of a culture hospitable to the complex processes involved in SDP. Resistance is presumed and attitudinal acceptance must be earned through evident short term success as participants become acclimatised to new ways of working. There is, therefore, an avowal of instrumental purpose, but within a larger programme of cultural transformation, echoing Stoll's affirmation of collaborative, risk-taking culture built on mutual trust (Stoll, 1994: 131).

Furthermore, even in the earlier phase of planning, in stressing capacity building SDPI paid much attention to the creation of supportive structures and staff capability in the support materials it offered schools embarking on planning (SDPI, 2001: units 7 and 8). The image of development planning leaned more to the organic than the

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mechanistic. Thus, there is now considerable attention upon stakeholder plurality (Ibid: 7.8 -14); school collaborative culture (Ibid: 7.15-16); the complexity of communication systems (Ibid: 7.16-19); the pivotal challenge of forming working teams (Ibid: 7.20-26); and, perhaps most critically, the reality of conflict (7.27-29).

By 2010, with the publication of the DEIS Resource Materials for Planning (SDPI: 2009), while there is prompted a much more precise, data rich analysis of the school's position, the inherent logic of planning from a baseline representing the unique, contingent set of circumstances applicable to the individual school is preserved.

Nevertheless, it is the case that the SDPI model always had the potential for an implicit tension between focus on process or on product, or between discourses of growth (organic) or delivery (instrumentalist), participative capacity and quantifiable outcomes, in the implicit theory shaping the cyclical approach to planning (Tuohy, 2008: 50-1). Significantly, the rational bias surfaced in metaphors of delivery and outcome that became more evident in the closing years.

At times the former tempered the latter, with emphasis falling on capacity building in complex school cultures, reflecting a holistic understanding of the purposes of school life (SDPI, 2009 7-9).

By 2009 SDPI, however, though still adhering to the independent agency of the individual school, had re-asserted strongly the discourse of targeted delivery of specified outcomes:

> So, when *setting targets* in a prioritised DEIS area, start from the school's
> *baseline data* in that area and consider the degree of improvement in
> *performance* or what the *outcome* should the school strive for within the
> period of the DEIS plan. The targets should be realistic, taking into account

the baselines and the context of the school, but challenging enough to give impetus to improvement. They should also be *specific and measurable*, so that progress toward achieving them can be gauged (SDPI, 2009: 5). *Italics added*

The vocabulary of peformativity runs through such an extract which is representative of the document as a whole, punctuating a marked deflection towards an instrumentalist agenda towards the end of SDPI's existence. This may indicate impatience with process which drove a more instrumentalist demand for school improvement among the inspectorate who, referring specifically to SDP, were ever more insistent at this time upon 'asking the right questions about outcomes' and setting 'clear targets for change and improvement' (Hislop, 2009: 33, 36).[60] Specific evaluations of DEIS planning were indeed to follow.

It is submitted that the seeds of such divergence are intrinsic to a planning model that is peculiarly sensitive both to goal directed sequence and the cultural dimensions of planning. The latter is more attuned to the importance of avowed values and the efficacy of patient capacity building.[61] It can be amplified if SDPI's published acknowledgement of its official mandate is considered.

5.4   A National Policy of SDP: In respect of the expectations of the inspectorate, it must be recalled that 'School Development Planning: An Introduction for Second level Schools' (SDPI: 1999) was an official government publication, explicitly anchoring the rationale for school development planning in recent landmark

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[60] Dr Harold Hislop is National Chief Inspector.
[61] This development is fundamental to key concerns raised in the interview data.

legislation. The introduction drives this point home by tracing its legislative lineage (Ibid. 10-11)

> The Education Act 1998 is the culmination of almost ten years of policy development in relation to the school plan. The Act specifies that it is the responsibility of the Board of management to arrange for the preparation of the school plan, and to ensure that it is regularly reviewed and updated (Ibid.: 8).

Lest there might be any doubt, Appendix 1 presented a more detailed account of the implications for SDP in a summary of relevant provisions of the Education Act (1998) (Ibid.: 40-45). SDPI was managed by and reported to members of DES at all times.

The draft Guidelines (SDPI: 2001) were overseen by a consultative group chaired by a deputy Chief inspector of the Department of Education and Science, and guided by a working party composed largely of Department inspectors. All subsequent publications required the imprimatur of the DES and were frequently modified before publication was approved. DEIS planning, for example, is shaped by national educational priorities and designed directly to meet specific policy criteria, in relation to self-evaluation targeting retention, attendance and performance for disadvantaged schools (SDPI: 2009).

As has already been demonstrated, SDP was the primary intended means by which the Education Act (1998) would shape the practice of schooling in the dynamic future it purported to inaugurate. SDP, thus, was officially endorsed as the means to mediate and accomplish the aims and priorities of the national education system to schools at this time (Ibid.: 15).

In consequence, the fate of SDP and SDPI were never to stray too far from this legislative sponsorship, though the extent and means of control by the DES as the responsible directing agency of government was to become a vexed issue for members of the team.

A complex relationship with schools emerges. In line with contemporary social policy in Ireland the Introduction proposes that SDP was to be a vehicle for negotiated developmental change through partnership at school level rather than merely an instrument of Departmental diktat. O'Dalaigh, representing the DES, was unambiguous when he was delivering the official rationale for embracing school planning at the turn of the century:

> SDP recognises the uniqueness of each school and its circumstances and the significance of its characteristic spirit and pupil intake factors such as socio-economic backgrounds...SDP facilitates the empowerment of staff through collective contribution to the development of the whole school (team players rather than solo performers) and opportunities to contribute to decision making and participate in shared leadership and management...SDP involves key stakeholders – pupils, parents, management authorities working together in collaborative dialogue which is responsive to emerging and changing needs of pupils (O'Dalaigh, 2000: 145-6)

In an internal report from the team to the Management Committee in 2004, this respect of DES for the uniqueness of the school was restated.

> The Department of Education and Science (DES) has always taken cognisance of the following in relation to SDP: Whereas all schools may have much in common, every school is unique because of its unique combination of context factors. While every school engages in planning, schools are at varying stages of development in relation to systematic whole-school planning
>
> It has accepted that both the **operation** of the SDP process and the **issues** prioritised by means of the process will vary considerably from school to school (SDPI, 2004: 1 emphasis in original text)

Thus, for SDPI, in attempting to account for how well SDP was working in schools, this variation was critical.

> Therefore, expectations of what 'working well' might mean in relation to SDP should be related to school context, and any specification of 'visible signs' must be regarded as a non-exhaustive menu of possibilities rather than as a definitive universally-applicable list. (Ibid.: 2)

Indeed, the insistence upon the uniqueness of the school remained an article of faith to the end:

> ...schools are unique. Each school operates in its own unique context and so has particular requirements. School plans should reflect this. Each school should plan to meet its own needs and the needs of its students in accordance with its own values (SDPI, 2010: 3)'

Viewed from a public policy remit, a potential conflict of loyalty for SDPI, mirroring that between organicism and instrumentalism, is again thrown into relief. On the one hand, there is respect for school diversity and uniqueness, on the other the felt need to demonstrate verifiable improvements in terms of general rather than particular validity. That is, SDP must deliver on its public policy remit to secure school improvement whose credibility requires the application of criteria that cannot be produced in or sanctioned solely by the school itself.

O'Dalaigh was, therefore, equally forthright in setting such school empowerment within the context of statutory responsibility and the framework of the new Whole School Evaluation expanded beyond the original pilot model to capture the 'uniqueness' of each school in the inspection perspective (Ibid.: 148). SDPI's report also acknowledges criteria, across a range of areas of school experience, where

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outcomes can be assessed in terms compatible with those employed by the inspectorate (SDPI, 2004: 5; DES: 2003). However, it is notable that it ends on a note of pessimism. A long list of largely cultural and organisational challenges enumerated by one regional coordinator militate against positive outcomes and, by implication, justify the overwhelming focus in the report on *structure* and *process,* or the slower business of capacity building rather than readily deliverable outcomes (SDPI, 2004: 2-5).

There are signs, therefore, subtle rather than overt, of further potential for role conflict for SDPI in serving state and schools; and for divergence from an inspectorate that may grow less patient with protracted capacity building that fails to issue in improvements, however evaluated, commensurate with the investment of time, resources and support SDPI represents.[62] Nevertheless, strong traditional currents flowed in the direction of SDPI's commitment to values based community focused planning.

5.5 The Catholic tradition and SDPI publications: The premium placed upon SDP guided by a vision richly expressive of shared and negotiated values at school level has already been discussed. School ethos was created from the bottom up (Coolahan, 2000: 117; Williams, 2000: 81.).

 A working party and consultative group widely representative of the educational partners in Ireland wrote 'School Development Planning: An Introduction for Second Level Schools' (1999). The much more detailed guidelines, 'School Development Planning: Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools' 2001', were in great part written by early members of the SDPI team, whose own background was in the Catholic

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[62] This is amplified in detail in Chapter 9

Voluntary Secondary School sector. The bibliography testifies to the enduring relevance of earlier Catholic exponents of school planning. Unsurprisingly, the signature of those already skilfully engaged in school planning, especially of contributors representing Catholic religious trustees, was strongly evident and pervasive.[63]

Two emphases may bear this hypothesis out, though it must be allowed that other factors may also be in play. First, great significance attaches to the 'core', the 'mission, vision and fundamental aims' of school planning what may be summed up as ethical discourse addressing the purpose of schooling at its most fundamental level (SDPI, 1999: 17). Second, there is a strong advocacy of stakeholder partnership.[64]

It is important not to claim too much here, however. Neither of these features contradicts principles of developmental planning in the international literature (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991: 32, 53-9; Stoll, 1994: 133; Stoll & Fink, 1995: 15-6, 51-2, 134-6; Reeves et al, 2001: 130; McCall et al, 2001: 74-101). However, stress and tone do vary. Thus, for example, whereas the process model of SDPI has mission, vision and aims at its centre, the equivalent used by Hargreaves and Hopkins does not (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991: 5). School aims are baldly linked to learning and achievement, with overtones of performativity (Ibid.: 6); are largely assumed *prior to* the planning cycle (Ibid.: 11); and there is no sense that they need to be elicited through a process that problematises them. The use of the term 'audit' by Hargreaves and Hopkins, and 'review' by SDPI also underscores the more

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[63] Una Collins, Pat Diggins and Aengus Kavanagh, all associated to some degree with Voluntary Secondary schools or their trustees, were members of the working party.

[64] Both, as the next chapter and the findings will show, failed to make the journey from published, rhetorical commitment to successful practice in schools; this is an important finding of this inquiry.

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exploratory tenor of the latter's approach. Involvement of pupils and parents is minimal.[65] 'Partnership' denotes, rather the relationship with the education authority (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1994: 116-129).

Causal inference from the Irish tradition to the SDPI model is weakened by developments that took place subsequent to the development and publication of the early British models and contemporaneous with the launch of SDPI. This is so particularly in relation to partnership, in the displacement of SDP in the international discourse on school improvement by that of school self-evaluation (SSE) in the late nineties (MacBeath, 1999). SSE, on the Scottish model at any rate, was predicated upon the efficacy of inviting multiple stakeholder voices in planning and evaluation. Contemporary research reinforced the importance of student voice in change processes as well (Ruddick et al, 2000).

However, at the very least it can be said that focus on mission, vision and aims and stakeholder partnership go with the grain of the Catholic philosophy of schooling that evolved at this time. As this inquiry focuses on normative discourse within SDPI, this legacy of concern for mission, underscored by Tuohy's conceptualisation of school and planning, is important.

5.6   Mission Vision and Aims – SDP at the core: SDPI from the outset linked SDP to mission, vision and aims, a fact of immense importance to an inquiry into normative culture. Ostensibly, this grounds the normative trajectory of SDP in values derived from a school's articulation of its own unique identity. Such a view is

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[65] There is one example of more extensive parental involvement in action planning but there is little development of this elsewhere beyond a general sense that it is a good idea to consult parents (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991: 53-59)

consonant with the strong validation of the relative independence of schools in planning already discussed.

- The *mission* represents the 'overall raison d'Etre of the school' often expressed in a mission statement (SDPI, 2000: 6.2).
- A school's *vision* 'represents the desired future. It outlines general principles and is aspirational in nature' (Ibid.).
- The *aims* are 'broad statements of educational goals' (Ibid.).

It is a moot point as to how *individual* a school's mission, vision and aims can be. Possible themes, however, could include relationship to trustee educational and religious philosophy, denominational affiliation, enrolment criteria, commitment to equity and diversity, operative concept of school improvement and academic success, developmental theory of the person, theory / practices of learning and pedagogy, modes of decision making, devolved responsibility and leadership, attitude to the arts, the sciences, curricular diversity and extra-curricular activity, relationship to the local community, discipline policy, social-relational values, including protocols of etiquette, mutual care and home-school policy, staff development and so on.

There is an emphasis on consensus and articulation of core values but also an acknowledgement that a 'discussion of values (be) in the light of the educational philosophy and values expressed by the Trustees', an important qualification of

school independence (Ibid.: 6.4). This concession is also enshrined in law by the Education Act (DES, 1998).[66]

Such normative terms as 'mission' and 'vision' along with 'characteristic spirit' (as used in the Education Act) and 'ethos' are notoriously elastic and vague. It is now widely accepted that setting values, or 'purposing', to use Sergiovanni's term, is a fundamental responsibility of effective school leadership (Sergiovanni, 2001: 24-8). While the discourse of ethos, incorporating mission, vision and aims may be functionally descriptive rather than normative, distinguishing what is from what ought to be, its evocation is more commonly a call to ethical first principles of one form or another.

When pejorative, or more challenging accounts of 'ethos' are discussed they most commonly refer to 'school culture' or remedially to 're-culturing'(Hogan et al.: 2007: 76; Callan, 2006: 6, 132-7).Mortimore et al have proposed that one should reserve ethos for what is in effect 'espoused theory' and culture for potentially subversive 'theories- in-use'. As Mortimore et al put it, 'If we accept the notion of *ethos* as the outward and public expression of a school's norms and values, we may also find matching or contradictory cultures and sub-cultures' (Mortimore et al, 2001: 105).

In Ireland, accordingly, ethical discourse in the literature of SDPI (talk about ethos in planning) punctuates a stand on the moral purposes of schooling:

> The mission represents the overall raison d'etre of the school. The mission statement comprises a core message:

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[66] Dedicated sessions on mission in planning were also written into the programme of the PGDSP, with 3 hour sessions delivered regionally to each group. Occasional partnership with religious trustees by the Initiative confirmed the openness of SDP to what Keating termed 'inspired planning' at an SDPI summer school session he facilitated. This was species of SDP overtly committed to planning beyond mere compliance with external diktat but in tune with philosophical or even religious first principles. He elsewhere called this 'mission faithfulness' (Keating: 1996).

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- School's original purpose
- The values the school stand for
- The reason for the school continued existence

(SDPI, 2001: 6.2).

The excavation of the values that inform the mission statement SDPI originates in personal reflection among the staff. The first three key steps in drawing up the mission statement are:

- Identification of personal values with the staff
- Discussion of values in the light of the educational philospophy and values expressed by the trustees
- Consensus on staff's core values

(Ibid.: 6.4)

Subsequently wider consultation and review with the school partners leads to a draft statement. The purpose of the statement is 'ensuring that the mission is delivered in action' (Ibid.). It is reviewed after a period of time.

Worksheets are provided to assist reflection and discussion. For instance, in identifying core values teachers are asked questions including:

- What motivated you to become a teacher?
- What are the key qualities you wish to encourage in your students?
- Why do you think the school exists?
- What are the educational principles that guide the daily life of the school? (Ibid.: 6.11)

Further worksheets explore school purpose, relationships, 'mission in action', management, curriculum and home-school links.

They are certainly ambitious. As the interview data in chapter 7 will attest, this aspiration to put explicit exploration and articulation of mission at the heart of planning largely fell victim to teacher mission exhaustion, due to earlier work in like

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vein by trustees and resistance to the highly abstract and generalised idiom that was felt to have little bearing on practical school affairs and problems.

However, it is worth adding that in the view of one highly experienced facilitator and theorist of SDP in the Irish scene, who was also an associate of SDPI, there *was* real value on such discursive work on mission done as part of SDP:

> At its best, the establishment of mission, vision, aims provided new clarity, energy, togetherness and a sense of belonging for all. It further provided the basis for the formation of a development plan to ensure the actuality of mission, vision and agreed aims   (Lyons, 2010: 14)

This is making very large claims indeed. The interview evidence from this study suggests that Lyons statement is infused with more optimism about both the occurrence and efficacy of such an approach than may be warranted. However, Lyons may be on less rhetorically ambitious ground when he identifies primary purposes (aims and values) as an important contextual requirement in the adaptation of generalised rubrics from the school improvement and effectiveness research to individual Irish schools.

> SDP is a continuous process which provides the school with opportunities to review its aims and values, its existing achievements and its development needs. Through developing our awareness of school effectiveness characteristics and school improvement strategies, the school can be enabled to strengthen its organisational arrangements and curricular provision (Ibid.: 12)

Assuredly, 'aims and values' here have an explicitly secular and pedagogical bias, as they also have in the cited work of Mortimore et al on improving school effectiveness in the UK. However, at the same time, they keep a purely technicist conception of planning at arm's length; planning is the work of mindful people not

programmed machines, and, it follows, each community of planners must find their own authentic pathway to improvement however much they draw on generic guidance. Thus, the moral agency of communities of freely engaged professionals is central in the dominant discourse of planning in Ireland mediated by SDPI documents. Teacher renewal is less a technical sophistication but rather a ''regaining of a sense of purpose' (Walsh, 2002: 118). A tacit acknowledgement of the lineage of this aspiration to older values lies in its being presented as 'regaining' rather than creating. This much is a strongly rooted if rarely articulated belief in the model of SDP that was nourished by prior ethical discourses in Irish education. Moreover, as Lyons concluded, in referring to the process of articulating mission 'the most important effect of the process was brought about by the collaborative, all-inclusive ethos of school development planning' (Ibid.: 14).

In sum, an important finding is reinforced here which will be amplified further in subsequent chapters. The Irish tradition gave its own inflection, mediated through discourses on values- based communal planning, originating probably in earlier religious trustee approaches to school planning as mission formation, to the tension between national policy driven planning and the resistance of school communities to externally sourced agendas.

5.7 Partnership and mission;   SDPI documents also support complementary discourse of partnership as custodianship of ethos, another possible legacy of contemporary Catholic educational philosophy. McCormack, speaking for the Catholic tradition, put it thus, as a ' dialogue involving all the school partners between the original core values of the school...and the daily practice which endeavours to embody those values' then strongly influencing the approach to denominational schools in a period of rapid laicisation (McCormack, 2000: 155).

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Collaboration and partnership, ostensibly embracing trustees, Board of Management, the principal, the teaching staff, support staff, parents, students and the local community, was at the heart of the model here presented (Ibid.: 26-9).

This level of partnership engagement, though rarely fulfilled in practice, nevertheless placed a further premium on the *process* of planning as much, or indeed more, than the *product* of planning; just doing the planning entailed an enlightenment and engagement with core educational purpose, apart altogether from the specific outcomes that were or were not thereby achieved. Commendation of partnership is thus ubiquitous in SDPI publications (SDPI, 1999: 26-30; SDPI, 2000, passim; SDPI, 2002; 42, 52; SDPI, 2010: 6)

The rhetorical focus on partnership is reinforced by a powerful and increasing international advocacy promoting the parent and student voice as a key agent of school improvement (Macbeath, 1999, Flutter and Rudduck, 2004).

Despite, its avowal of stakeholder involvement, SDPI recognised quite early on that active partnership of parents, for example, was thin on the ground (SDPI, 2002: 42). Moreover, 'consultation has sometimes been perfunctory, giving partners other than the teaching staff little meaningful input into decisions about priorities' (Ibid.: 52). Moreover, students simply did not figure in any significant way in mainstream planning, that is, outside of such dedicated areas of pupil engagement as the formation of Student Councils. Indeed, at the end, there was a clear concession that teaching staff were the driving force of any meaningful planning process. As it was bluntly stated then:

> ...the greater part of the work, however, is usually done by the principal and teaching staff. Partnership is a new experience in many schools. As it is an

important dimension of school planning it is best nurtured sensitively' (SDPI, 2010, 6).

The coyness of the final sentence can be taken as a tacit concession that important as partnership may be to the conception of planning they advanced the cultural impediments proved fatally formidable in Irish schools.

5.8 Learning and Teaching: From the outset SDPI offered guidance on curricular planning, largely focused on forming active subject departments (SDPI, 2001: Unit 9). Popular review instruments encouraged a balance of curricular and non-curricular priorities in the earlier whole school review (Ibid.: 3.40-41). Worksheets to aid exploration of 'active teaching methodologies' were available but were rarely used.(Ibid.: 9.33-39). SDPI collaborated with the NCCA to produce detailed guidelines and worksheets to enable a review of junior cycle (SDPI/NCCA, 2002).

However, concern with classroom teaching took off with the transition to subject planning around 2004. SDPI subsequently produced worksheets and presentations that increasingly sought to integrate current evidence based pedagogical thinking, self-evaluative planning techniques and insights about effective professional development. Such developments evince greater confidence that research and evidence point to 'what works' in the classroom (Levin, 2008: 41)

The focus on learning receives more detailed examination in the next chapter and the findings from the interviews.

Summary

SDPI documents disclose, explicitly and implicitly, a conceptualisation of SDP for Irish secondary schools. Both the purpose and practice of SDP are delineated. Strands from the preceding accounts of SDP in the UK and Ireland can be seen to be woven into the theory of SDP that was expounded.

SDPI adapted the classic model of cyclical SDP, and provided extensive supporting materials to assist schools in undertaking it. In doing so, mechanistic approaches are deprecated in favour of flexibility, learning in process, capacity building and school independence. Inspired by inherited cultural values and the values- based theory of planning propounded by Tuohy, SDPI's published guidelines strongly endorsed the authority of articulated mission, vision and aims for any authentic planning process. Stakeholder partnership is also strongly promoted.

At the same time, SDPI documents reveal the potent national policy mandate that governed their work. These documents clearly rationalise SDP in relation to discourses of school effectiveness and improvement. The link to statutory aims and requirements runs deep. While these aims, as envisaged by the inspectorate, are themselves pragmatically committed to school based decision making there is a shift later to a push for more tangible results and a discourse of accountable performativity is becoming ascendant at the end.

A basic if largely implicit tension thus runs through these documents. I argue that this reflects a polarity already evident in earlier chapters and inherent in an ambivalence inscribed within the concept of SDP itself. On the one hand, SDP supports school autonomy, patient capacity building, a focus on authentic process and living values partly realised by the mere experience of SDP; on the other an inflection towards instrumentalism, the delivery of demonstrable outcomes and an impact in terms of pre-specified goals. SDPI documents work in both directions but, it is argued, evidencing the power of indigenous values, a propensity to nurture process patiently at first outweighed instrumentalist intentions. Latterly, perhaps in response to external expectations, a focus upon deliverables tends to predominate. Thus a theory of action of SDP must be interpreted in the context of these shifting expectations and concessions.

This becomes even clearer, as the trajectory of changing circumstances can be traced in the records of activity undertaken by SDPI are reviewed in the next chapter. What does the experience on the ground reveal about how SDPI came to reflect upon and re-conceive the main thrust of SDP in Irish Secondary Schools.

Chapter Six

Action: SDPI Progress Reports

Introduction

SDPI published only one progress report in 2002. However, detailed annual reports based on weekly feedback from regional coordinators and the programme of work undertaken in the year show what SDPI was actually doing. These reports include the level of school engagement with SDPI, the activities undertaken and the new material introduced at regional seminars, summer schools and other events. They also chart inter-disciplinary and inter-agency work.

The reports show the trajectory of dominant activities and preoccupations. In succession, these include whole school planning, policy formulation, subject department planning, planning for teaching and learning, classroom focused self-evaluation and planning for disadvantaged schools (DEIS). SDPI is buffeted throughout by sometimes divergent expectations from schools, national policy makers and inspectors. Capacity building, incorporating teacher professional development, with increasingly overt attention to pupil learning, is a central commitment.

Mission formation and partnership, however, fail to gain the traction their prominence in published documents might have led one to expect.

6.1 School Development Planning Initiative: National progress Report 2002:

The report published in 2002 affords an insight into on how the work of SDPI was deemed to be progressing to date. Many significant themes in the interview data are prefigured by the report.[67]

The report reiterates SDPI's commitment to 'school improvement and effectiveness'; promotion of 'collaborative school development planning' as a means to address student needs and ' the aim 'to build the capacity of schools to implement development planning as a means of quality enhancement' (SDPI, 2002: 7). This suggests that the ultimate goal is a planning self-sufficiency in schools. The prioritisation of social inclusion and recognition of the need to redress the impact of social disadvantage are abiding concerns (Ibid.).

The report outlines the structure of the team and services it offered, comprising advice, seminars and workshops, facilitation services, facilitation training, support and resource materials and grant aid for schools (Ibid.: 8-9).

The Report is most interesting, however, as an evaluation of progress so far. Several achievements and 'issues' were identified.[68]

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[67] It was only at the time of publication that widespread access to Voluntary Secondary Schools was enabled by the resolution of the recent industrial dispute. The report does however address issues that emerge from experiences in schools, especially in the Vocational and Community and Comprehensive sector, along with the results of a programme of profiling schools' planning history, usually in an interview with the school principal.

[68] Some caution is advised here. A significant section of the report recounts the results of school profiles conducted by regional coordinators using a standardised template. These present a quite favourable account of the level of SDP organisation and activity in schools. However, these are largely Phase 1 schools (those who had received grant aid and SDPI support already). Non Phase 1 schools that were included (17) were selected because they had nevertheless availed of SDPI support. The sample is unrepresentative of secondary schools as a whole.

Aspect of SDP engaged in since 1999	% of 209 profiled
School review conducted	78%
Priorities for development agreed	76%
Planning structures established	65%
Action Plans drawn up	49%
Action Plans implemented	44%
Policies formulated	87%
Mission/Vision/Aims statement drafted	75%
School plan completed	5%
Arrangements made for monitoring and implementation	3%
Arrangements made for evaluating outcomes	3%
Arrangements made for reporting	3%

Table 3: SDPI Activity 2002 *(SDPI, 2002: Table 5.1.)*

Two important inferences can be drawn from these figures. First, whole school development planning is the main activity, starting either with review or with mission formulation. Understandably, schools are more likely to have completed the earlier phases (review, design – action planning and implementation) than the last phase (evaluation). However, the drop off is precipitous, with only 3% making arrangements for evaluation. In fact, evaluation was to prove a bridge too far for the SDP whole school planning model and was only rarely satisfactorily accomplished.

The relatively high implementation figure (44%) is suspicious, when arrangements for monitoring implementation languish at (3%). This suggests that the quality and

sustainability of implementation are questionable, a well established black spot in the SDP literature (Hargreaves, 1995: 223). Supporting this interpretation, regional coordinators commented that implementation was vulnerable to loss of motivation and the failure to call upon support for ongoing facilitation through the phases (SDPI, 2002.: 41).

Secondly, policy formulation (87%) has already begun to occupy a significant portion of planning activity. Demands for school policies would continue to grow. The main policies written so far reflect either teacher concern and basic needs for order (discipline/code of behaviour 77%; anti-bullying 55%) or external requirements (health and safety 67%; admissions/enrolment 44%). Ominously, it is reported that schools were looking for 'legally proofed sample policies' (Ibid.: 42). This expresses a growing unease about external expectations and the fear of litigation.[69] The impact of compliance anxiety is a major theme in the interview data.

The report also identifies the priorities for development chosen:

Priorities for Development	% of 209 schools profiled
Senior Cycle Curriculum	71%
Discipline/Behaviour	61%
Pastoral care	51%
Remedial Education/learning Support	51%
Junior Cycle Curriculum	50%
Staff Development	50%
School Buildings/facilities	49%
Mission/Vision/Aims	46%

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[69] The DES would later offer both prompt templates and sample policies to schools on its website www.des.ie.

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Educational Disadvantage	44%
Attendance	44%

Table 4 SDPI Development Priorities (*SDPI, 2002: Table 5.2*)

The Report concludes that 'the list indicates that schools attended to both curricular and organisational needs in selecting their priorities' (SDPI, 2002: 32). This would also reflect the balance proposed in the draft guidelines (SDPI, 2001).

However, though strictly accurate, this seemingly positive conclusion is, it is acknowledged, potentially misleading. As the report goes on to explain most of these curricular priorities were generated by requirements to accommodate new national programmes and new prescribed subjects.[70] Thus:

> In general, therefore, schools were focusing more on curriculum provision than on teaching and learning processes during the review stage, but they would adjust that focus when preparing for the implementation of the new programmes, assisted by the relevant Curriculum Support Service (Ibid.: 33).[71]

What is more open to question was how teaching and learning priorities beyond the remit of new programmes and subjects might be selected. Regional Coordinators stated that:

> ...the overriding consideration is the need to ensure an appropriate focus on the quality of teaching and learning in all development activities. This focus is essential if SDP is to achieve its core purpose: school improvement. To date, although issues relating to teaching and learning have been prioritised by a significant proportion of post-primary schools, they have tended to be overshadowed in the SDP process by legal and organisational concerns (Ibid.: 51)

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[70] The programmes were the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme. The new subjects were Civil, Social and Political Education and Social, Personal and Health Education.

[71] There were dedicated support services for the new programmes.

This sets the context for more direct intervention to achieve this desired focus.[72]

While 75% of schools had mission statements only 46% actually named this as a priority. This probably indicates that they were satisfied with those they already had or had previously worked with trustee assistance on them.[73]

Lack of time for planning, a common refrain, is flagged as a serious bugbear (Ibid.: 41-2).

Partnership was meeting stiff resistance. A rhetoric-reality gap appears early here and is never closed. Schools wanted 'clarification of the relative roles, rights and responsibilities of the various partners in relation to SDP, information and training sessions for boards of management and parents' associations, and exemplars of good practice' (Ibid.: 42). Coordinators noted that:

> Although schools at Post-Primary level have reported some progress in this area, consultation has sometimes been perfunctory, giving partners other than teaching staff little meaningful input to decisions about priorities (Ibid.: 52).

On the other hand, the central commitment to 'capacity building' was held to be a strength of the work so far (Ibid.: 50.) Capacity building is premised on the need for skills, refreshed attitudes and reflective practice among teachers if SDP is to come alive. It is clear that SDPI came early on to see its support for schools as a form of facilitative teaching. That is, teacher learning came to focus the work, despite stated aspirations to wider partnership in SDP. The teacher as planner / learner became, in

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[72] The move to subject department planning, which is discussed below and in the analysis of interview data in chapter 7, was the main response.
[73] Mission exhaustion is commented upon in chapter 7.

consequence, an important preoccupation for team members as their work progressed.

6.2 Progress Reports 2001-2009: From 2001 to 2009, SDPI produced *internal* progress reports for its Internal Management Committee and the Consultative Committee of stakeholders to whom it was obliged to give an account of its work. These detailed reports comprise statistical data on the nature of its activities, the type and numbers of schools and participants in workshops, seminars and training sessions, resources produced and inter agency cooperation and networking. The format and content of the reports changed somewhat over time.

The topics chosen for regional seminars, summer schools and cluster meetings reflect developing concerns and expectations and a shifting focus in planning activity in schools. Reference to some of the materials used elucidates this data. Statistical account of school engagement also shows how SDP was progressing on the ground. The source of the data was detailed weekly reports submitted by regional coordinators. The overall picture contextualises much of the reflections in the interview data to come.

2001/2: Engagement with schools is largely through representative participation in clusters in Education Centres. 359 schools were represented and 3,715 participants attended (SDPI, 7-8/2002: 1; SDPI 8-9/2002: 1)[74].

Most of the presentations introduce SDP as a concept and a practice. There is a notable focus, even in this early stage on disadvantage (48 schools and 83 participants from rurally disadvantaged schools in Galway, Cork and Mayo (Ibid. 2.)

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[74] SDPI issued two reports in 2002.

2002/3: 305 schools (163 Voluntary Secondary (VS), 213 Vocational (V), 80 Community and Comprehensive (C&C) and 3 Special schools) received on-site services (SDPI, 20/11/'03).

The preponderance of VEC results from the industrial action by Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland.[75] Visits were with principals rather than whole staffs or working groups. At this stage 127 schools (53.81%) were getting started or at the review and prioritisation stage. 93 schools (39.41%) were moving to action planning and policy development. 16 schools (6.78%) were conducting a progress review or evaluation.

The regional seminar programme started this year. Three workshops were offered:

- *'Formalising School Planning'* for schools at the initial stages of the SDP process

- '*Action Planning'* for schools that had already identified priorities through the review process

- '*Continuing the Planning Cycle*' for schools with significant experience of SDP

40% attended the introductory workshop; 39% action planning and 21% the advanced workshop. These figures reflect the relatively more advanced planning stages of the VEC and C&C schools.[76]

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[75] The Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (ASTI) was a union representing nearly all secondary teachers in Voluntary Secondary Schools owned largely by religious trustees and a sizeable number in non-denominational community and comprehensive schools. Vocational Education Committees ran schools, providing a comprehensive curriculum, but without the involvement of religious bodies as trustees. Teachers in these schools, and many in Community and Comprehensive schools, were members of the Teachers' Union of Ireland, who were not party to any strike action at this time.

[76] The existence of more developed in-school management structures and practices also make these schools more likely to have a greater capacity and history of planning than in the Voluntary Secondary sector.

The most significant factor in this report is the adherence to the cyclical model of *whole school* developmental planning. There is an implicit assumption that schools will progressively work their way towards evaluation in ever widening iterative cycles of planning, embracing more ambitious targets as the early action model yields dividends in terms of greater school capacity and teacher faith in the planning process.

2003/4: 403 schools (214 VS, 133 V, 54 C&C and 23 Special) were engaged in 954 sessions.[77] Of these 317 involved whole staffs of which 193 were for whole teaching staffs (SDPI: 04)

A marked change appears.[78] Adhering to the cyclical logic of SDP 22.47% of attendance at regional seminars was for a session on *action planning.* However, 41.09% attended the session on *policy formation.* The perception that planning meant policy, and that compliance was proven by having policy documents, took hold strongly at this time. SDPI responded by trying to forestall a response of token compliance with little impact on school life.

Two points stand out. First, SDPI presented three templates for policy formation. In keeping with professed aims, there was a strong emphasis upon the centrality of mission.

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[77] Special schools catered for students with special educational needs who were unsuitable for mainstream schooling.

[78] Reports were not available for the activities in schools this year
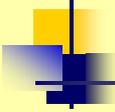
Policy Formulation

- **Values –** *link to Mission, Vision, Aims*

- **Desired Outcomes –** *policy objectives / goals*

- **Measures to Achieve Desired Outcomes -** *content*
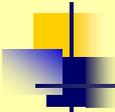
Policy Template

- **Name**
- **Link to Mission & Aims –** *creates relevance*
- **Scope –** *whole school, year group, class group etc.*
- **Rationale –** *why have it?*
- **Objectives –** *what are you attempting to do?*
- **Content –** *A B C D*
- **Roles & Responsibility –** *who & what?*
- **Success Criteria –** *implementation & outcomes*
- **Review & Evaluation –** *when & how?*
- **Legality & equality proofing –** *who & how?*

Policy Considerations

Consultation

Legislation

Resources

VALUES, DESIRED OUTCOMES, MEASURES

Evaluation & Review

Communication

Implementation & Monitoring
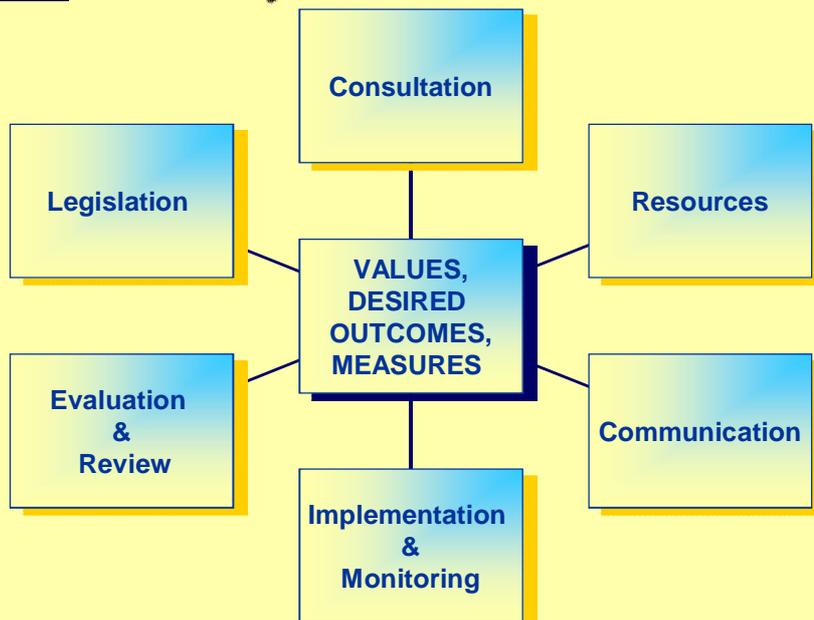
It was assumed that by anchoring policy in the articulated mission, vision and aims of the school it might thereby reflect *internal* reality and not just *external* compliance.

Secondly, the process here expounded adapted and applied the principles of the core sequential process of planning to the practice of policy formulation. That is, it sought to ensure an authentic developmental process despite the temptation to produce documents indicative perhaps of specious compliance.

Another significant development was that 41.36% attended the session on *teaching and learning.* Subject inspection, the impact of recent indigenous research highlighted by SDPI and a growing desire to achieve relevance to classroom experience for SDP may account for this development.[79]

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[79] The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and Economic and Social Research Institute were two agencies piloting and promulgating research and debate into learning and teaching in ireland.

2004/5: SDPI worked with 809 schools (437 VS, 268 V and 104 C&C). Of these 282 were with whole staffs and 315 with groups. 195 were with individuals. Only 2 sessions involved parents. 7 sessions were held with boards of management (SDPI, 05).

Much of the work (141) was in supporting staffs with a single priority identified already in the review process. 42 were on action planning continuing the steady induction of schools into the planning cycle. A great deal of consultation, pre-planning and progress checking took place (132, 215 and 84 respectively). Policy formation was the focus of 37 sessions. In many instances, however, single priorities identified by schools were, in fact, related to policies.

A notable new category is '*preparation for subject inspection*' (17). This, of course, reflects the impact of the novel experience of such inspections at second level. Again, in relation to subject planning superficial compliance vies with a thoroughgoing developmental process.[80]

SDPI designed an exploratory model of *subject planning* for the annual regional seminar programme. The aim was rigorous subject based self-evaluation and planning by members of subject departments working together. The planning might prompt experimentation in teaching that was both locally contextualised and informed by new knowledge.[81]

The other main session for the regional seminars was on the later phases of the planning cycle, *implementation and evaluation.* Though SDPI never overtly

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[80] This is key finding in the analysis of interview data.
[81] The HayMcber report on teaching published in 2000 was widely referenced at this time by SDPI. Assessment for Learning (AFL) would shortly form the knowledge base for pedagogical innovation promoted by SDPI.

abandoned the whole school planning model it was nevertheless rapidly falling into disuse.

Two further concurrent workshops were offered indicative of the intensification of new statutory requirements on SDP in schools: *planning for the inclusion of children with special educational needs,* prompted by the recent passing of the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (DES: 2004);[82] *'Attendance and participation: Towards a 'Statement of strategy',* a requirement for schools of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

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[82] As it turned out largely due to generous resource commitments written into it at a time of growing national prosperity, the act was never fully commenced once the economy started to decline (SDPI: 2006).

2005/6: Activity type and school sessions were presented as follows**:**

Chart 2: Analysis of Individual School Sessions by Activity Type

Individual School Sessions by Activity Type: 2005/06

Activity Type	Sessions
Action Planning	6
Board Briefing	9
Consultative School Meeting	143
Evaluation	11
Guidance Planning	30
Mission, Vision, Aims	2
Parents' Association Briefing	2
Policy Formulation	27
Preplanning	219
Progress Check	47
Review	19
SDP Introduction	5
Staff Seminar on a Single Priority	54
Steering Committee Meeting	7
Subject Department Planning	259
Task Group Meeting	13

Table 5: Individual School Sessions by Activity Type. 2005-6 *(SDPI 2005-7)*

41% of sessions were with full teaching staffs, 38% with groups, 20% with individuals and 1% with boards of management.

0% was the recorded engagement with parents. The failure to involve parents in SDP, already identified in the published 2002 National progress Report continued at an abysmal level. The small role played by boards of management is also notable. In effect, despite wider aspirations to a broad stakeholder participation in planning, the overwhelming focus was still upon teachers. Some effort would latterly be made to

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upskill and engage boards of management, including the publication of a briefing document, but little actual progress was made (SDPI: 2009). The exclusion of

parents was never satisfactorily addressed.

Subject department planning now dominates SDP. Review and prioritisation, as functions of whole school planning, recede dramatically.

Implicit in this development is disillusionment with whole school development planning on the original model. The majority of schools failed to follow through a complete cycle. The statistical record of evaluation at this time remains dismal.

Three reasons are likely to have contributed to this. First, time for SDP was scarce so schools tended to move on to new business quickly. Secondly, the process was heavily reliant upon the continued service of an external facilitator. SDPI resources were limited. To mitigate this dependence, SDPI laid greater stress on internal capacity building; establishing effective structures and monitoring processes, such as steering committees; as well as providing ongoing network support though regional clusters for SDP coordinators in schools.[83] A third barrier was that implementation over time, and more especially formal evaluation in relation to agreed success criteria, were radically unfamiliar activities perceived by many teachers as irrelevant and even counter-intuitive. The very word 'evaluation' connoted appraisal for many teachers, anathema in the Irish system as no such practice existed.

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[83] Structures and processes became an important sub-theme, for example, in the PGDSP.

Despite declared intentions virtually no school was soliciting aid in exploring mission, vision and aims. Again, the practical bias and effective veto of school staffs on work that was perceived to be abstract or wooolly is in evidence.[84]

2006/7: SDPI's work with individual schools this year was as follows:

SDPI Work with Individual Schools 2006/07: Activity Types

Activity Type	Percentage
Task Group Meeting	1.40%
Subject Department Planning	16.49%
Steering Committee Meeting	2.81%
Staff Seminar on a Single Priority	11.23%
SDP Introduction	0.94%
Review	2.22%
Progress Check	6.20%
Preplanning	23.86%
Policy Formulation	4.09%
Parents' Association Briefing	0.35%
Mission, Vision, Aims	0.94%
Guidance Planning	4.33%
Evaluation	1.05%
Consultative School Meeting	22.46%
Board Briefing	0.35%
Action Planning	1.29%

Table 6 Individual School Sessions by Activity Type, 2006-7 (*SDPI: 2007: 2*)

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[84] Mission, vision and aims were referenced in subject planning, however, in SDPI templates and guidelines.

Sessions involving full teaching staff constituted 33.60% of the total, while 40.99% were with groups, of which subject department groupings were most common. Less informative categories such as pre-planning and consultative visits reflect, nonetheless, a diversity of planning topics now pursued in schools. 93% engaged SDPI.[85] 50% of all post-primary schools received school based advisory and facilitation services.

Subject planning now moves to focus specifically on pedagogy. *Assessment for Learning,* already promoted by the NCCA, was now considered a sound evidence based source of practical guidance for development in the classroom. SDPI began to develop a model for sustained and systematic, rather than ad hoc and spasmodic action planning aimed at classroom teaching built upon adaptation of externally sourced evidence based pedagogies and subject departmental self-evaluation. Drawing on the work of Joyce and Showers (Joyce and Showers, 1995), as well as that of Black and Wiliam (Black and Wiliam, 1998) and the OECD (OECD 2005), AFL was to become the key means by which SDP could enter the classroom thereby linking on-site professional development with learning focused SDP.

Increasingly, a wide range of inputs on *raising academic standards*, *home-work policy* and *differentiation methodologies* closed the gap between the work of SDPI and the other main support service in the secondary sector providing generic teacher support, 'The Second level Support Service' (SLSS). This was noted by the inspectorate and may have contributed to the subsequent merger of the two organisations under the management of SLSS. Maintaining a specific planning dimension to such work was a priority for some members of the team. A parallel

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[85] This figure may suggest greater active engagement with SDPI than was the case as it includes schools which availed of grant aid whether or not they called on the services of SDPI.

concern for some was the loosening of specific association of SDPI with leadership issues.[86]

Regional seminars looked at '*Planning the Planning and Organising the Plan: useful tools'* in response to demands from schools for templates to enable them to bring the various planning documents together into a single 'school plan'. In effect, these guidelines sought to put order on a rapidly diversified range of themes and activities being carried under the heading of SDP. The templates reasserted the need to distinguish maintenance from developmental sections of the school plan.

Managing the transition from primary to post-primary responded to recent ESRI research published as 'Moving Up: the experiences of First year students in post-primary education' (Smyth, McCoy and Darmody, 2004). This was a good example of how SDPI's programme was attuned to topical agendas.

Another was evidenced in the final session, on *in-school management review.* SDPI devised a process for conducting this highly sensitive and frequently contentious exercise as a result of the recurring recommendation in Whole School Evaluation reports for schools to conduct such a review if they had not done so in the recent past in accordance with DES circular 29/02.

2007/8:   The pattern of engagement largely duplicates that of the previous year. Subject planning is now occupying 9.83% of activity type with 13.14% on pre-planning; 14.62% staff seminar on a single priority and 24.94% for consultative

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[86] A new support service for school leaders, Leadership Development in Schools (LDS), became the primary agency working with principals and deputy principals on leadership related matters. SDPI collaborated with LDS on middle leadership programmes. However, the decoupling of SDP as a key *leadership* function, notwithstanding the invitation to principals (fewer attended in later years) to attend regional seminars, may have diminished SDPI's status in relation to school leaders and, more importantly, the status of SDP itself.

school meeting. Full teaching staff sessions are now at 34.14% while group of staff members is at 41.86%.

These figures reflect increasing specialisation and diversity of focus. [87] The link between *assessment for learning* and *professional development* in SDP is reinforced in regional seminar workshops.

Nevertheless, the regional seminars do mark a decisive transition in how SDP was being viewed at this stage.

In line with national policy, *self-evaluation* came to replace SDP as the main discourse for school improvement planning. From this point on an explicit commitment to self-evaluation is evident both among the inspectorate and from SDPI.[88] An examination of workshop presentations confirms three principal emphases less evident or less insistently prominent in earlier presentations and workshops.

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[87] See Appendix 2

[88] This development closely mirrors developments in the UK in the previous decade as discussed in the literature review. See Chapter 3
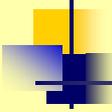
(SDPI, Regional Seminar 2007)

First, SDPI advocates a more rigorous approach to data, both quantitative and qualitative. This move implies recoil from what the National Coordinator of the team called the cardiovascular mode of inquiry – 'look into your heart and decide'. Much of the early work had been based on teacher opinion educed in facilitation sessions rather than more rigorous forms of review and evaluation in the review stage.

Second, is the use of *success criteria* or identified features of good practice, linked directly to sustained improvement in student learning based on generic good practice as well as contextual factors. While success criteria were specified earlier in the most popularly used action planning template by SDPI schools rarely addressed them.

Finally, there is an insistence that the process both starts and ends with an evaluative judgement on the quality of *outcomes* and the evidence of *impact* on learning. The value of the product now begins to supersede that of the process as

there is a decisive move from the planning teacher to the student as purported beneficiary. This thinking was to reach its apex in the final contribution of SDPI to planning literature, the DEIS planning guidelines. There is evidence here of the felt pressure to 'deliver', and a growing impatience with culturally focused and more patient capacity building emphasising the nurture of collaborative process per se.

2008/9: The pattern of engagement of the previous two years is maintained with less than 40% of school based sessions with full staffs. 40% involved groups and just under 20% were with individuals. Activity types are again dominated by single priority (20.2%), pre-planning (20.3%) and consultative school meeting (20.1%). Subject planning and ISM review are both around 6% of the total.

Diversification of work in schools continues, but the SDPI programme for regional seminars is now directly dominated by national priorities. The independence of the team drains away as recession bites and the Initiative drifts towards being subsumed with SLSS and eventual extinction as a separate organisation.

DEIS planning addressed schools classified as disadvantaged and in receipt of extensive extra funding. It is impelled in part by a 'value for money' audit, whereby schools had to set measurable targets in 8 key areas.[89]

SDPI's DEIS planning framework is the most detailed and prescriptive set of guidelines it has produced so far (SDPI, 2009). DEIS planning prompts a data -rich analysis of context and unique school factors, a baseline data set in fact; the setting of explicit and quantifiable targets along with specific actions and tasks in 8 areas considered of particular importance for schools with disadvantaged status. DEIS

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[89] The eight areas are retention, attendance, literacy, numeracy, examination attainment, education progression, partnership with parents and partnership with others – schools, community, external agencies (SDPI: DEIS, 2009: 1)

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represents SDPI's final incorporation of outcome focused self-evaluation into the SDP process.

The push for self evaluation continues as *'School self-evaluation: An approach for Subject Departments'* using themes from the DES publication, 'Looking at our School: a guide to school self-evaluation (DES: 2004).' The third seminar planning for a revised *Code of behaviour, audit and review,* is a response to recently published guidelines from NEWB, with statutory force under the Education (welfare) Act 2004.

Summary

Reports show that SDPI started out undertaking whole school planning reviews, but with limited success as the process tended to founder and rarely reached full cycle. Priorities in school reviews express intuitive teacher concerns rather than wider pedagogical or developmental issues.

Policy formulation then took centre stage as rapidly multiplying external requirements aroused compliance anxiety in schools. Subject planning saw a shift of attention to classroom experience and departmental collaboration. Teaching, learning and increasingly content rich guidelines for planning for academic improvement, dominated SDPI's output and work with schools in the middle years. There is evidence of a bringing together in loose synthesis elements of SDP, evidence based pedagogical initiatives (AFL particularly) and teacher professional development.

In the final stages, the discourse of self-evaluation, along with increased emphasis upon use of data, targets and evidence of impact, culminates in the DEIS planning

guidelines. National policy agendas and more exigent direction of SDPI's programme mark a diminution of the relative independence of SDPI in the closing stages.

Neither planning for mission, vision and aims, nor wider partnership participation, key aspirations, flourish amidst the pressures of SDP in real school life.

It is to be expected that a theory of action of SDP within SDPI formed from a combination of aspiration and experience, as a feedback loop modifies initial ambitions, and as the external environment, in schools and in the wider educational arena, have an impact on the professional culture of SDPI. The progress reports illustrate this interaction and its impact upon priorities within SDPI graphically. This underscores the historical specificity of the focus of this thesis. Internal dynamics, within SDPI, are likely to be in play also.

The following four chapters delineate this theory of action through analysis of the main body of interview data. However, it will be necessary in the analysis of this data always to be mindful of SDP as a school improvement project with a rich history prior to and coincident with the lifespan of SDPI itself.

Chapter Seven

A Theory of Action of SDP 1: The School

Introduction

Analysis of the interview data from the seven respondents discussed in chapter 2, section 2.6, distils five iterated themes that bear directly upon a theory of action of SDP in Ireland. This is, therefore, an important and obviously central category in the findings of the inquiry.[90] These themes, derived from an analysis of the approach adopted to SDP by SDPI as indicated in Chapter 2, in turn sketch out broad agreement qualified by illuminating differences in key areas, prefigured in earlier chapters of the inquiry, among the members of the team. These themes are:

- The aims of SDP and the underlying values that it purports to serve

- The early adoption and subsequent abandonment of a unitary whole school planning process in accordance with the classic cyclical model expounded by SDPI (SDPI, 2000: 2.2-2.9). This defines the earlier phase of SDP.

- The role of school leadership in enabling SDP, embedding authentic planning that influences classroom practice complicated by contested assumptions about positional leadership and collegiality.

- The evolution of a set of conclusions about what supports and what hinders effective SDP as a more realistic appraisal of contemporary school culture grounds more optimistic initial professional aspirations.

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[90] Two further themes that could also relate to this chapter are treated separately. The professional identity of the teacher as planner and tension between compliance and development merit separate examination as they broach important professional and political issues that stand out in their own right in the interview data.

- The rise of subject department planning, evident in the reports of the previous chapter, as the central thrust of SDPI's work with schools in the middle and later years, with a mounting concern to direct SDP explicitly upon learning and teaching in the classroom. This tendency culminated in the later advocacy of specific pedagogical methodologies as the recommended content of planning, most particularly assessment for learning. This defines the later phase of SDP.

Aims and underlying values of SDP:

7.1.1 School Improvement - Student Learning and Professional Collaboration:

A strong consensus emerged in the interview data that the fundamental aims and values of SDP revolve around *school improvement.* Ultimately this is conceived of as an enhancement of student learning and welfare. Crucial to achieving this is the creation of strong, collaborative professional learning among teachers as planners.

The leader of the team stated that the aims of SDPI in promoting SDP, in essence, were as follows:

> There is an extract from the Minister's speech announcing the establishment of the School Development Planning initiative. I think that was May 1999 where it was to stimulate and strengthen the culture of collaborative development i.e. school communities with a view to service school improvement and school effectiveness and so on. If you really plumb that you have got a huge amount of what SDPI is about (BR: 4)

The faithfulness to the official mandate of SDPI and its scholarly hinterland is noteworthy.[91] SDP took shape against the backdrop of this school improvement discourse (MacBeath & Mortimore, 2001: 1-22, Coolahan, 1994: 55-61). References to school improvement abound. Indeed. WB preferred to substitute the term 'School

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[91] This development is treated in greater detail in the Chapters 3 and 4.

Improvement Planning' for School *Development* Planning[92]. A beguilingly

plainspoken statement of intention expresses an unexceptionable commitment

widely shared:

> I think also that part of the belief system there must be (is) that, 'OK, things can be changed and made better.' That (it) is important to make changes and make things better because it is important to make the process of educating young people as good as it could be. (LT: 22)

KL elaborated succinctly the meaning of school improvement, making it more than a

truism:

> Well, I suppose the key value amongst many subsidiary values was school improvement, enhancement of teaching and learning and maybe the establishment of a culture of planning. (KL: 1)

This simple statement fairly and concisely represents one of the most repeated

propositions of all the respondents. As the idea of school improvement is unpacked

two complementary goals are asserted. First, there is widespread agreement that

enhancing student learning is the basic and most telling criterion. However,

throughout the responses this is closely allied to the need to create a collaborative

professional culture that aligns planning to the classroom.

> You will not bring about an improvement in your school or organisation alone. You need to do it together - or in small groups together. (FM: 2)

> A focus on the needs of the learner I think would come first...then we wanted, I suppose, a recognition of the importance of community of practice even though that was not the terminology that we used. (BR: 9)

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[92] The terms 'school development plan' and 'school improvement plan' have sometimes been used interchangeably. However, in the UK at any rate, the School Improvement Plan (SIP) is now the term used in official documents. However, the distinction here refines meaning from vaguer ideas of organisational growth to better outcomes for students' learning. This will be seen in WB's strong stand on subject planning and repudiation of planning that goes beyond a direct concern with the classroom. See below.

> ...you're bringing them through in their own mind - what's going to work for me in terms of improving the teaching and learning programme back in the classroom? And a degree of collaboration and consultation and openness and risk taking to be able to say to people 'go ahead and do it and look at whatever I can (and) I will help you (with) or call upon me whatever; let's give it a try'. That's what you need. (WB: 10)

Thus the responses strongly endorse Hargreaves' re-conceptualisation of 'new' professionalism, which could fairly be said to be an article of faith, whereby

> As far as possible, teachers ensure that their *collaborative energies* are directly connected to the task of improving teaching, learning and caring in school – and that those connections are made obvious not only to teachers, but to parents and students as well (Hargreaves, 2000: 171).

This conduces to what Fullan called 'a collaborative work culture' which results in 'purposive interaction in successful schools' and was a precondition of the creation of a 'professional learning community' (Fullan, 2001: 124)[93]

The references to student learning and to 'culture' and 'collaboration' as the twin pillars of SDP permeate the data and accord with emergent orthodoxy on both professional development *and* SDP towards the end of the century in the international literature (Joyce and Showers, 1995: 38-9; Stoll and Fink, 1996: 81-100; Hopkins and MacGilchrist, 1998: 410-411).[94]

A slightly more detailed but equally passionate avowal is offered by the team leader:

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[93] This point will be developed further below in considering the implied normative image of the identity of the teacher operative in SDPI.

[94] The centrality of a focus on learning is explored further in this section on subject planning. The formation of a collaborative teaching culture is expounded and analysed in greater detail in the section dealing with the implied conception of teacher identity as planner found in the interview data in chapter 8.

I would always emphasise this. In other words we were not into merely teaching the nuts and bolts of how to plan; that if you wanted to bring about genuine improvement and a genuine searching after what are the needs of the students that we deal with and how best do we address those well then you have to have a culture of collaborative development planning and you have to focus then on school improvement and making sure that the school is effective in the sense that schools differ; so that the school makes a difference, that it has some impact on the education of the young people within its care' (BR: 5)

This is, again, a revealingly, perhaps unconsciously allusive testimony. Phrasal echoes of the decades-long scholarly debate about the impact of schools upon student learning resonate with the history of the emergence of school effectiveness described in the chapter 3. More recent and local preoccupations, punctuating a stand upon the uniqueness of each school as much as its capacity for change, are also invoked in the urge to 'make a difference' on the premise that 'schools differ' in ways that matter. These phrases had native currency at the turn of the century because of the timely empirical research on the question of whether Irish schools differed in ways that mattered by the Irish Economic and Social Research institute (Smyth et al: 1999). The discursive traces of ways of thinking nurtured by the preceding decades of inquiry and interventionist policy in education abroad are evident across the interview data. Indeed, they are so pervasive as to be easily simply taken for granted:

It is evolutionary and how long it takes to develop, to embed, to feed in... my best experience was through the 'learning school project' where we engaged with schools in a self-evaluation approach...because of culture, practice, experience, capacity.(GS: 14)

Well, I suppose the key value amongst many subsidiary values was school improvement (KL: 1)

But in relation to bringing about school improvement and change for the better, I can't say that it always worked. (FM: 10)

> I mean it was helping schools with their planning, helping them with their development, helping them with improvement. (MH: 17)

> But in addition to that now they would be chief people who ask themselves; 'OK, I must continually look at new and better ways of organising their learning'. (LT: 8)

> Once we have gained people's attention for the purpose of an evaluation process we could have held their attention for the real purpose of long term school improvement. (WB: 13)

To get the measure of the level of assumption working here it is worth considering how unusual it would be for teachers spontaneously to use these terms in describing their own professional practice.[95] Indeed, the absence of such discourse from teacher talk was one of the obstacles members of the team felt they had to surmount:

> There was no conversation, really, in so many schools around education. I mean like we still have a long way to go in this regard - Just the lack of professional dialogue. (MH: 12)

> I don't think they were quite ready for that at a professional or at a political level of that professional dialogue. (KL: 9)

> ...we needed to spend a lot of time teaching them about the concepts. And even the language of strategic planning, indicators of success, quality, that was to some degree a language, it wasn't a language that was part and parcel of school culture. (FM: 14)

The relatively late start for SDP in Ireland meant that a strong overhanging set of assumptions and the discourse that encoded them helped form the professional identity and habitual language of the team. Put simply, the formation of a theory of action of SDP in SDPI was plainly in part a literary experience mediated by the texts both read and, indeed, written by the team in a terminology bequeathed by the

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[95] In chapter 3 it was pointed out how historically contingent assumptions about improvement may clash with different beliefs and values held by teachers.

school improvement discourse.[96] These were reinforced by the endorsement of similar assumptions by legislators and the Department of Education and Science. They imply the acceptance of a vocabulary saturated with the discourse of school improvement and the premise that professional collaboration is the best means to achieve it. These assumptions, however, did not necessarily have so wide a currency in schools.

The robustness of such assumptions, moreover, sets a baseline beyond which a more radical and reflexive critique may be unlikely to venture. No interview data demurs from such fundamental, meliorative assumptions.[97]

7.1.2 SDP as building capacity aligned to school mission: One consequence of this initiation into a developed discourse of school improvement *and* professional development was to formulate the professional task of SDPI and the precondition of effective SDP in terms of *capacity building*, often in terms of discursive empowerment. The language of 'capacity', where school development is heavily dependent on professional learning, was inculcated early within SDPI along with the theory of change it supported.[98] School improvement, mission and professional development are thus liable to be conflated, right down to an articulation of core principles.

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[96] While the team were exposed to a wide variety of literature, the most commonly cited texts in their deliberations, and those recommended to students on thePGDSP were Stoll and Fink (1995), MacBeath (1999), Schon (1987), Tuohy (1997 & 2008) and Black and Wiliam (1998).

[97] There most certainly was contention about how and to what extent at any given time they might be fulfilled.

[98] The Seamus O Suilleabhain Memorial Lecture by Michael Fullan on change process was widely read and distributed by team members (Fullan, 1995: 18-37). A copy of this lecture was given to all students on the PGDSP course as a concise summary of Fullan's theory of educational change. Many of the assumptions about change among SDPI were derived from or phrased in terms borrowed from Fullan, with frequent reference, for example, to 'implementation dips', allowance for the limits of mandated change, and reference to 'ready, fire, aim'.

But what you said about mission and values, it is very hard to get into it; It's back to the teacher capacity to think, to articulate, to intellectualise what is actually happening in the classroom press' (GS: 8)

This particular formulation of mission and values as discursive capacity is a strong underlying current in expressions of the aims of SDP in the interview data. It informs the repeated recourse to dialogic and collaborative practices as the proximal goal of SDP. Sometimes this is linked to the articulation of mission directly:

If you were starting on their terms in a way, you were starting with something that they had constructed within the school (i.e. school generated mission statement). But I found that the biggest enabler and conversely the barrier, was getting other members of staff to speak up or to voice their ideas. And that was woefully lacking' (KL: 4)

Approving references to 'dialogue' and 'conversation' support this view:

I mean I think we were trying to promote a professional dialogue. (MH: 25)

That is one of the legacies that I feel most proud of; that in some of the schools that I have worked with people are now having conversations about how they manage the pupils' learning. Not even how they teach but how they manage the pupils' learning. In other words, in some cases we have actually managed to get that change in perspective out there. (LT: 7)

The 'change in perspective' referred to above refines the nature of approved professional conversation. At its best, it is held to be informed by contemporary pedagogic theory, a growing preoccupation in later SDPI presentations and seminar topics, with increasing attention to active learning strategies, meta-cognition, and assessment for learning having been picked up by SDPI after 2004/5. There is strong endorsement of such developments in the scholarly literature (Kyriacou, 1997:

32; Hughes, 2006:65-7; CERI, 2005: 51-2; Moss and Brookheart, 2009 61-2; Joyce et al, 2009: 3).[99]

However, the early concern with capacity building in relation to basic collaborative engagement in SDP is not to be undervalued in the Irish context. As Jeffers discovered the supportive role of external facilitators in scaffolding those conditions necessary to forming a collaborative culture in Irish schools is significant (Jeffers, 2006: 202).

7.1.3 SDPI - formation and facilitation: Both the tone and import of the statements above resonate with a subtle but characteristic ambivalence. On the one hand they promote broadly democratic deliberative values as an aim of SDP so that the school may speak for itself (MacBeath,1998). Teachers need a vocabulary and a grammar, as well as the opportunity, to do so. That is, a support service that wants to help teachers to find their voice must also provide them with access to relevant knowledge and the professional and technical idiom in which it is expressed, in short, a theoretical capacity, to do so. Such conversations and either evidence based or theoretically informed dialogue was not widely developed in Irish schools as the groundbreaking OECD review made abundantly clear (OECD, 1991; 55).

On the other hand, such talk arguably reifies teachers as those who must be directed to perform as planners within the SDP paradigm that SDPI brought to schools. This is an important theme which finds several expressions within the findings from the

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[99] Regional seminars after 2005 first addressed research into effective teaching, such as the Hay McBer report's findings (HayMcBer 2000); it then went on to assessment for learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998) and finally sought to integrate the latter with models of professional development, of which Joyce and Showers' taxonomy of putatively successfully phased CPD incorporating collaboration in planning and non-appraisal coaching was particularly influential (Joyce and Showers, 1996)

interview data. Facilitation, the main role of SDPI in schools, is not simply an innocent other-determined service but rather a complex process comprising directive as well as participative intervention (Prendiville, 1995: 6). One notes facilitative and formative threads interwoven in KL's account:

> My view is that even something as basic as a mission statement which many schools have - it didn't have reference to planning and it didn't refer to things like the culture of staff collaboration or it didn't refer necessarily to planning. But the arrival of SDPI I think helped schools to refocus on what was hitherto a vague mission, mission statement or mission position which they had already, I mean lots of schools had this, maybe inherited historically from the trustee, governing body or that they may have just newly arrived at the mission position. But it was separate from and disjointed from the practice and the culture of the school itself.' (KL: 1-2)

SDPI, in this approach, clearly walks a fine line between supporting and enabling development in line with school identified needs (mission faithfulness in planning) and itself constructing those needs through intrusion of a planning discourse and a set of procedures and structures for action through facilitation. Moreover, even the most enthusiastically democratic of the respondents conceded both the directive role of SDPI and the scope of the challenge remaining:

> You would hope that in some small way and undoubtedly that has happened that the development of the SDPI initiative, the understanding now of that cycle of planning has given people some sort of train tracks upon which to put their concern and see that well we have a guided rule towards getting something done about it. I still believe that we are very firmly, relatively un-evolved as an educational planning nation in terms of our classrooms and our own school structures. (WB: 20)

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Nor was the identification of an animating mission unproblematic from the perspective of the school community itself.[100]

7. 1. 4 School mission and purpose: The historical importance of mission, vision and aims to Irish conceptualisations of SDP and in initiating and guiding the process model advanced by SDPI has been demonstrated.[101] However, as the internal reports showed this did not translate into work with schools on anything like a scale commensurate with its purported importance.[102] Nor does it figure prominently in the interview data. Mission exhaustion and the importance of addressing teachers' declared needs are frequently cited reasons.

In one sense, though, this is misleading. A passionate commitment to learning and collaborative culture is present at all times in the data. However, the idea of teasing out and articulating individual school identity in an ethical discourse, especially a mission statement, is largely absent. That said, some revealing positions in relation to mission and vision are outlined.

There was always the concern that the most vocal teachers and the holders of social power might take over any general discussion, especially when individual status anxiety is not mitigated by a culture of teamwork (Tuohy, 1999: 22). One response was an attempt to elicit core values indirectly from authentic reflection-in-process rather than working on mission statement per se directly. This is the idea that reflection is built progressively into activities that are initially and ostensibly practical and less contentious than talking openly about values and purpose. As one respondent put it, while 'there are always people who can hide in a crowd' the

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[100] This tension at the heart of SDPI's own mission will be explored in greater depth in the context of findings about the autonomy/policy dilemma and about the implicit professional identity constructed by members of the team in chapters 9 and 10.
[101] See chapters 4, 5 and 6.
[102] See chapter 6

facilitator could find 'plenty of opportunities to bring in the business (in a planning review) of what does it say about us'. (FM: 11)

Another way of approaching mission is through the explicit maintenance of democratic values as the touchstone of genuine SDP, even where the focus is concrete rather than abstract. Three of the respondents take a strong and direct stand on dispositions of power in schools and the role of SDP in 'empowerment' (FM), in securing 'pluralism, equality, inclusiveness' for student and teacher (MH) and the defence of the perspectives of the voice of the teacher and students as co-learners against institutional coercion as much as discursive impoverishment (WB).

Moreover, Tuohy's principled defence of SDP in service of articulated or implicitly operative first principles does receive some support (Tuohy, 2008: 35-7). These are derived from 'Irish history' and 'Christian values' for one of the most reflective and experienced of the respondents. She goes on:

> I would say a conviction and a belief and an understanding what planning is about and that it is ethical ; that it is not just a technical thing but somebody who believes that engaging and empowering all participants is core development. (GS: 17)

These values obtrude, therefore, at least rhetorically and reflectively as the basis of SDP. SDP serves school improvement embracing cognitive, affective and social values. This strongly supports a conclusion that moral purpose was highly valued but expressed as much in the quality as the content of deliberation within SDP. It may come down to asking 'why' as much as 'what' or 'how'.

This respondent further comments, in relation to the elusiveness of deliberation about values, that 'I have always found values work, really, really well is where there is contention' (GS: 8). She cites the demands for inclusion of students with special

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education needs as an example of where resistance forced facilitator and the school community to burrow down into the underlying values to justify and perhaps modify positions. (Ibid.)

Overall, a picture thus takes shape of the main themes from the respondents informing SDPI's theory of action of planning here. SDP posits an agenda for schools that purports to conduce ultimately to enhanced student learning and welfare. The primary means is the empowerment and discursive enrichment of the professional culture of the teachers who are the main clients of SDPI facilitators. SDP is an ethical project that valorises the particular, the student, the teacher and the school community. Nevertheless, on a cautionary note, one infers that SDPI is also itself, as social agency, an alien (though not necessarily unwelcome) presence in the school communities it seeks to serve. This paradox, while not overtly recognised, is implicit in the co-presence of directive and facilitative discourses in which respondents accounted for the main purposes of the type of SDP they sought to inculcate.

Whole School Review:

7. 2.1   Advantages of whole school review   During the early years of SDPI's facilitation in schools (circa 2002-4), as the annual SDPI progress reports revealed, the team used the 'classic whole school review' (LT: 2) within the early action strategic model. This required several visits to schools to facilitate each stage and set up structures to carry the planning forward. Theoretically, once established this was a wheel that would just keep revolving.

There was felt to be a need for 'early action planning leading to immediate gains, building credibility and trust in the process so then you could move on' (GS: 6)

There is broad agreement on what this approach achieved in conjunction with the 'Early Action Planning Model' (SDPI, 2000: 2.11-12).

> The strength was that you introduced people to this new process whereby you allowed them to identify strengths of the school and put them on a flipchart and they did it in groups. They identified the areas of weakness that needed to be worked on and they were given the opportunity to make their own contributions to that and if it was well led in the school some of these sub-committees that were set up did actually do some work...(LT: 2-3)

Others concurred:

> Because in my experience, and I did many reviews, together they would sit down and say 'this is our school today and these are the needs of our school today.' So our review worked in the sense that it was a very useful tool to engage people collaboratively...So it did work because, I suppose they had not a collaborative culture and this was their first experience of it. (FM: 10)

> Well I suppose if you wanted to take the theory on it, it would be our diagrammatic model which is very much, you know, review, design, implementation, evaluation and re-review and so on. So I suppose again you were trying to get people to narrow the focus. They might have broad areas and then – okay, can we narrow that down, can we narrow them down? What exactly are our needs here? What are the most important areas for us to invest time and energy and money in? (MH: 8)

Thus, the whole school review introduced staff to a review process that enabled them to explore the strengths and weaknesses of their school as they saw them. It introduced collaborative deliberation in a systematic way that was extremely rare in Irish schools traditionally. It provided a forum for collegial discussion as well as for small group work, the staple of SDP, though, it must be conceded, also a bugbear for many teachers who view externally facilitated in-service with a jaundiced eye. It was invitational and respectful of the authority of the school community. It is notable

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that both the previously quoted respondents slipped into the voice of the first person plural 'we'. The first characterises the process permissively as what was 'allowed'. One senses here the tentativeness of facilitators who had to bring their clients with them. They knew they were, to a great extent, at the mercy of their cooperation. While most respondents are aware of the potential for resistance to their promptings, at the extreme there were schools possessed of a 'toxic environment' that made the work very challenging (GS: 2). In general, however, reported experiences here are positive if challenging. Nonetheless, while the whole school review in the Early Action Model seemed a non-threatening way to get things started, its flaws were soon apparent as well.

7.2. 2 Disadvantages of the whole school review: Predictably, sustaining momentum, and securing implementation were major problems identified in the interview data, echoing Hargreaves conclusions from the previous decade in the UK (Hargreaves, 1994: 223-4). Staff commitment waned after the novel experience of the initial session. Indeed, perversely, it was sometimes only special interests rather than communal enthusiasm that could carry the process forward:

> The reason that some groups survived, when I am thinking of some of the schools now, was that there were probably one or two people who were very committed to a particular issue that they had identified and they wanted to run with that and get something done on it. (LT: 3)

The problem with this, as the respondent quickly notes, is that what most exercised staff members could be closest to sectional interests rather than broader school needs:

> Staff sometimes pick very, what you might call, self-centred issues that weren't really focusing on; they didn't focus on improving teaching and

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learning and issues like that. They focused on getting better resources into the school, redoing the staff room, setting up the staff development committee so that they could organise social activities for staff, you know? (LT: 4)

Beyond the obvious danger of self-serving prioritisation in an open and invitational review process there are two other serious concerns lurking in this statement. First, the question arose about how one could ensure that important matters pertaining to curriculum and learning and teaching figured in the final sort - out of the review. The review instruments which the team typically deployed in whole school reviews offered a varied menu of prompts that were meant to ensure a reasonable balance of issues, including curricular and pedagogic ones.[103] As one respondent put it, however, the early reviews were often so diffuse so that 'you could be dealing with the kitchen sink rather than maybe the broader issues which were more likely to yield dividends. For the kids that is anyway. '(MH: 8) 'Kitchen sink' here connotes both priorities that are not looking at matters of greatest importance for the welfare and learning of 'the kids' and, it is suggested, a tendency, perhaps, to look at more crass domestic needs of the staff themselves.

Indeed, the failure to really carry the main agenda of planning forward into the classroom where those needs would best be addressed was the principal reason for mounting frustration with the process. Ultimately, inconsistent and variable implementation and the failure to address what really matters to learning precipitated the shift of attention to subject department planning. However, it was the formidable obstacles to sustainable process through the planning cycle that first led to a change of heart:

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[103] By far the most commonly used instruments were the 'Characteristics of Effective Schools' worksheets, for an initial review, and 'Areas of School Life' for prioritisation.(SDPI, 2000: 3.28-30 and 3.40) The unprompted 'diagnostic window' was frequently used for a focused review of a particular prioritised area (Ibid.:3.31).

> Did it work in relation to that the review (which) identified five things and the five things improved as a result of it? I wouldn't say that was always the case - for various different factors, some internal, some external; many of them internal because we are a great nation of talking about what the troubles are. But actually implementing the strategies to improve them is where some people disappear. (FM: 10)

> Now in many ways that was not a successful model at the start because the groups didn't have experience of working together, there was no time in the system and as the seven years went on there was less and less time really within the system. And many day ones that we would have organised never became 'day twos' (MH: 8)[104]

> You got to the review with ease, design worked, implementation staggered but evaluation was like Lawrence of Arabia on the camel in the desert, miles off, a distant silhouette. (KL: 8)

One unavoidable impairment of wide ranging planning was simply the progressive

misalignment that comes over time as task groups move at a different pace:

> So I found in the final analysis you would have within the same school, within the same staff, you would have some task group maybe at the design stage but another task group at the implementation stage. So it became quite difficult to have whole staff sessions repeatedly, locked into the same point in the cycle because the reality within the different groups was quite, they were at different places (KL: 5-6)

The respondent marks this as a problem for the type of support being offered. If

SDPI worked with whole staffs on infrequent, set piece in-service days or half days

the presumption that groups are moving in step becomes increasingly implausible

and the input risks being only partially relevant if at all to several planning

constituencies within the staff. This is less a commentary, therefore, upon the

planning process itself as upon the need for greater flexibility from SDPI.

Another part of the problem was the convergence of mounting policy expectation

with a cumbersome whole school review process already started in schools:

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[104] The respondent means that either the SDPI coordinator was not asked back to the school to follow up on the review session or the school abandoned the planning process after that first session.

> The early action was a yes to whole school review but that lost credibility because we were there working in schools in 2003 and again I can look at that and see meanwhile the Department was demanding policy, policy, policy. (GS: 7)

This same respondent also classified a key drawback to whole school review as a 'danger of superficiality' (GS: 6)

The nature of the challenge for whole school development planning for SDP is further elucidated by my own experience at this time in conducting whole school reviews, corroborated by other team members. Never once while using the 'Areas of School Life' worksheet to assist prioritisation did a staff group select 'Teaching Methods' though the 'Development of Pupils as Effective Learners' and 'Provision for the Learning needs of all Pupils' were often selected. The reason, I submit, is that there is a striking difference between the recognition that curriculum, pupil learning and academic progress are important issues for a school, and the more unsettling corollary, that one has to change oneself and one's own practice in order to address them. MacBeath defined this challenge as 'the improvement of teaching purpose', where 'the commitment to critical and systematic reflection on practice is at the heart of what it means to be a professional' (MacBeath, 1998: 7) Fullan linked this to 'assessment literacy' whereby 'teachers as a group and as sub-groups examine together how well students are doing, relate this to how they are teaching, and then make improvements' (Fullan, 2001: 127).

The perspective of the whole school review was, perhaps, too synoptic and detached. It did not really direct the critical gaze inward. The absence of data supporting prioritisation in what were essentially one-off review sessions to initiate the planning cycle facilitated the easier option.   SDPI's move to self-evaluation and

professional development in the context of enhancing pupil learning originate in the frustration experienced with whole school review.[105] By 2004-5 the whole school review was largely discredited, though it did break the ice in schools largely unused to planning before.

However, there was also a slightly different perspective in which this was seen less as a failure than a development marked by an accretion of process competence:

> So I think that the, how do I put it, the process which we did follow, 'review, design, implementation, evaluation' became a very organic and diffuse process over a period - certainly towards the latter half of my six and a half year stint. In fact the key words I would be inclined to think that review was nearly dropped, design was nearly dropped and evaluation and implementation became the key because you now had, you weren't any longer in a green field. (KL: 6)

This is far from clear. However, it is unmistakably implied that as experience grew there was a shift towards ensuring that something was actually done and an outcome achieved. This account tallies with the drift towards rigorous use of data and self-evaluation in the later progress reports.

Since no formal evaluation of the impact of SDPI was ever carried out, not to mention one accomplishing the difficult task of attributing measurable outcomes to inputs, this was an impression based partly on casual observation and comment but perhaps more conclusively upon the undeniable tendency for schools simply to give up on planning mid cycle.[106] It didn't deliver tangible and lasting benefits because they stopped doing it before it had the chance to do so.

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[105] This point will be elaborated further in the section on subject planning
[106] This somewhat dismaying truth is amply demonstrated in the analysis of the progress reports in chapter 6.

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Leadership

7.3.1 Leader as gatekeeper and advocate for SDP: If the need to move to an explicit focus on teaching and learning is one key dynamic in SDPI's evolving theorisation of SDP, another pre-condition for success was the principal, as gatekeeper, manager and leader, who had a critical role in determining the fate and quality of SDP in schools. As gatekeeper she governed access; as manager the amount of time given to planning and the structures and procedures to sustain it; and as leader, the importance attached to planning for the school. These findings strike a chord with recent research on school leadership.[107] As Pont et al concluded in their review of research on factors influencing student learning, a 'measurable, mostly indirect influence' is exercised by principals. Notwithstanding the methodological and conceptual challenges of measuring such influence they nevertheless infer from recent research that 'School leaders influence the motivations, capacities and working conditions of teachers who in turn shape classroom practice and student learning' (Pont et al, 2008: 33-4). The respondents strongly concur.

An arresting metaphor describes the position of principal as gatekeeper:

> They (SDPI facilitators) were able to get over the gate with the principal who very often is the anti-virus system for us. And they got through the principal's anti-virus guard and they had to have the competency to do that. (FM: 15)

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[107] There are dissenting voices. Some have argued that the links connecting leadership to learning are either insufficiently established or simply tenuous (Hallinger and Heck, 2003).

SDPI's programme of regional seminars for school leaders and profile visits to schools as well as the consistently high number of pre-planning and consultative visits held largely with principals, recorded in the annual progress reports, have shown just how critical the backing of the principal was in the eyes of SDPI. This did not change. However, beyond acting as a gatekeeper, the quality and intensity of the principal's commitment to the type of developmental planning SDPI promoted was even more important. This led to the distillation of key supportive leadership behaviours by SDPI.[108] Acknowledgement of the importance of genuine belief in the efficacy of planning and its aims by the principal was deemed essential.

Indeed, more effort may have been needed still to elicit this:

> We didn't spend enough time working with leaders before ever going into schools almost. Ideally, you should have had a group of school leaders who understood what the process was all about and who understood the importance of taking control and taking the reins in the process themselves and I think it fell on those schools where the principal almost said – well we will have you in now and you will start this school planning stuff for us and sure off you go, you know? Almost off *you* go as in you are the facilitator now and you are our school planner so you will come in to us three times a year and it could be up to you more or less to steer this process along. If a leader did that, it failed because nothing happened in between your three visits a year to the school and that did happen in some of my schools. (LT: 5)

> We needed to be getting to leaders if our message was to get out there, we really did. (MH: 24)

> Well, in my view, it (school leadership) is the most significant influence. And in fact to some degree, and to emphasise my point, I'd say it's the only influence. So I'm using that point just to emphasise how important I think it has got. When we talk of leadership we're talking about the principal...(FM: 17)

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[108] See the internal document which I drafted in 2006 (appendix 1) listing the seven features of effective leadership of innovative practice under the auspices of SDP

Fundamental here is the deep understanding of the purposes and practices of SDP by the leader and the willingness to become the advocate for this vision within the school community. Leadership of planning is therefore, echoing Sergiovanni, a public 'purposing' informed by the moral authority of sound ideas mediated by a school leader (Serrgiovanni, 2001: 24-30). Tuohy has also built his revised understanding of leadership of SDP around a comprehensive amalgam of understanding, suasion, technical insight and delegation (Tuohy, 2008). The alternative, as suggested above, might be superficiality and passivity resulting in a sham engagement in planning.

7.3.2: Compliance Anxiety and Distributed Leadership: The danger of such tokenistic leadership was widely canvassed, with pressures upon busy principals to comply with a planning process by producing documents at the ready for display rather than guiding SDP into the classroom. Referring to bureaucratic compliance of this sort, it was remarked that:

> Yeah and in the end it was (just bureaucracy) and principals were happy. If that was there they felt well that is it and that is my role in instructional leadership to have it done rather than what is actually happening in the teaching and learning. (GS: 12)

Nevertheless, SDPI could help leaders to achieve a degree of assurance needed to achieve this:

> Well I would say by and large we had a very positive relationship with school leaders. I mean we were of great help to them, I think, a lot of the time. I can see myself now it's so much easier when you have somebody from outside that you call upon to come in and raise issues and facilitate discussion. And, you know, allow in a way the leader not to be centre and front as well, you know what I mean? That it takes the heat sometimes out of a discussion because issues can become (about a) management/teacher divide or can be made to become that way or appear to be one person's agenda and so on. (MH: 21)

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This defines a poise required by school leaders to engage and motivate SDP without at the same time making it merely a vehicle for their own agendas. In a sense, their challenge mirrors that of SDPI in its relationship with teachers. At the same time it points up the ever present micro-political context in which SDP is taking place. Ideally a balance is struck:

> And I think management, where they had a good disposition enjoyed that too (that 'everyone had an opinion'). Because it would reinforce maybe some of their own ideas, maybe instil or install new items on the agenda. It probably revealed a talent within the staff that they didn't know they had because they hadn't heard this level of critique or analysis. (KL: 6)

The account of leadership here is situated between the need to direct planning, project a vision for the school and the aim to democratise the school through using SDP to fan wider discussion and harness talents for initiative that might otherwise remain dormant. Tuohy, characteristically construes this relationship within SDP ethically. He had argued that implementation, in particular, was contingent upon effective 'delegation' and the formation of powerful teams. Moreover, delegation originated in a trust that reflected the unselfishness of the positional leader:

> The starting point for delegation is the belief leaders have in the people to whom they delegate. This means that leaders trust others and see their authority in terms of vision rather than ego. Therefore, they are willing to 'let go' personal authority in order to promote the wider vision of the school (Tuohy, 2008: 82)[109]

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[109] It should be noted that 'delegation' is widely differentiated from 'distributed leadership'. The former is a condition of the latter in that bounded discretion is ceded but distributed leadership connotes a wider diffusion of influence and power that may transcend or transform hierarchical organisational structure. (NCSL 3.1, 2004: 10-13; 3.2. 21-31)

'Self-confident and self-effacing leadership' and a 'culture of trust' were two of the pillars of effective distributed leadership posited by the National College for School leadership (NCSL, 2004: 23-4, 30)

Such a leadership that was open to participative decision making in a culture of trust was clearly most conducive to the democratic assumptions that were built into the concept of SDP for several team members:

> Well I think the role of the principal and the deputy principal is critical in establishing a good culture of school improvement planning. I think an open conversation with teachers about the, it's OK to come in and say 'things are not working well. We need to put a plan of action around trying to make them better'. To be open to what people are saying needs to be done and to be open to saying to people 'well, let's sit down together and see how we might begin to improve it' (WB: 9)

This is a particularly emphatic statement of the democratic tendency within SDPI's interpretation of SDP. However, it is something of an outlier in the interview data in its thoroughgoing endorsement of a highly responsive and collegial style of leadership. Nevertheless, the characterisation of facilitative and participative leadership is confirmed throughout the interview data. There is a clear recognition that an uneasy balance must be struck, at best, and that it was hard to achieve. At times, the pressures drove a wedge between school leadership and staff:

> Instead of a school feeling that it had the freedom to identify its own priorities for development and to focus on those you had the board of management and principals in particular rather than the body of teachers feeling that in order to protect themselves they had to look at the requirements and the statutory obligations first and deal with those rather than engage in planning per se. (BR: 7)

> It ended up providing a sense of security to boards of management and principals and perhaps in some instances, but in a very few, teachers in respect of ongoing accountability in relation to the Education Act. (WB: 2)

Throughout the discussion of the role of leadership there is this sense of an unresolved tension between the ideal and the real.

Principals, and indeed staff, particularly at traditional set piece staff meetings, may not have adopted such practices:

> …Very little discussion and whitewashing, But in the main if there was discussion maybe it was because there was, maybe, disagreement. There wouldn't necessarily be discussion to make an already good idea a better idea. And as I said the principal was invariably chairing and leading and providing the data that was being discussed - now at a very minimum level of discussion. (KL: 3)

This captures precisely features of a notoriously familiar type of school staff meeting: contention without adequate information; a managed agenda and limited data; airing of grievance rather than planning; and little constructive discussion.[110]

However, advocacy of collaborative empowerment is a common theme in the interview data. This implies both facilitative positional leadership and wider patterns of distributed leadership in schools hospitable to the type of deliberative and collaborative SDP advanced by SDPI. Nevertheless, it is worth recalling that comparison of leadership practices in schools and industry by Forde et al for HayMcber found that school leadership was stronger on individual development and motivation, but weaker on strategic planning and communication of vision (Forde et al, 2000: 6-18). Respondents may not have fully reckoned with the challenge to re-position such deliberation to wider strategic intent.

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[110] SDPI came to see the structure and chairing of meetings as a key skill critical for SDP lacking in among teachers in schools. Perhaps because teachers spent little time in professional collaboration and much time in classrooms the skills of normal adult on-task professional interaction were often lacking to a surprising degree. I was involved in drafting presentations both for teachers and review instruments for boards of management to try to formalise such discussions and distance them from informal social encounters to which they otherwise frequently reverted.

Thus, there were organisational implications. What is in evidence is a strong normative ideal, investing a particular model of distributive leadership that embeds the principles of deliberative planning within the strategic management practices of the school. This was, ideally, achieved through SDP operating laterally to endow schools with patterns of mutual influencing rather than fixed loci of power (Gronn, 2007: 4). More formally and working within the existing organisational structures, SDPI also looked keenly at patterns of distribution of leadership in the internal management structure of schools. In this way it hoped to create organisational structures more conducive to wider participation, through SDP as well as internal management positions, in the 'lived' organisation (Spillane & Camburn, 2006: 9). It is noteworthy that in the latter half of its existence members of SDPI worked on the inculcation of such distributive leadership through in-school management reviews and through experimenting with enhanced leadership roles in collaboration with positional leaders through its middle leadership programmes, both on its own and with Leadership Development in Schools.[111]

Culture, Structure and Learning

7. 4 Learning and Organisation: In addition to responsive and committed leadership and a culture of professional collaboration several other factors that were associated with SDP processes that members of the team deemed effective were adduced. The leader of the team gave an authoritative summation, consistent with the views of her colleagues. The main points are densely interwoven onto several

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[111] SDPI designed a programme for a review of posts of responsibility, initially in response to the frequency of recommendations for such a review in Whole School Evaluation reports by the inspectorate. Extensive presentations and exploratory workshops, particularly for principals, deputies and assistant principals were also produced from the middle years of the Initiative.

pages of data transcript so I have, on this occasion, decided to present them in summary form. This reflects her monitoring of reports and consideration of feedback from colleagues over the lifetime of the initiative. Thus the synthesis arrived at carries a particular weight. Her key points were:

- There existed or was nurtured a 'culture of collaborative planning' among principal and teachers

- Wider partnership involving parents and students is desirable

- Schools' differences were acknowledged so that planning addressed the unique needs of the school

- Yet schools must be sensitive to the wider environment, including community and wider society

- Technical skills (in review, target setting and evaluation particularly) were acquired leading to greater rigour in review and evaluation

- Planning worked best if it honestly employed valid and reliable 'base line data' and set realistic targets

- Student learning, viewed as holistic and not just in terms of exam results, remained the focus

- Development rather than compliance must drive planning forward

- The processes were systematic over time and not just ad hoc or packaged in set piece in-service days.

(Summarised BR: 4-6)

This synopsises views widely endorsed in the interview data, some of which have already been discussed. Three key ideas are put forward. The right culture for collaboration and shared endeavour, already discussed as a dominant theme; a

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focus on student learning that took account both of the uniqueness of the school and the wider environment in which it operated; and the technical and structural requirements for planning over time, with increasing emphasis upon rigour, use of data and focus on outcomes and impact and not just process. These might be simply denominated culture, learning and structure.

Culture has been considered, and learning will be analysed further in the next section. However, the technical and structural dimensions deserve mention here. One implication is that SDPI sought to mediate valid knowledge relevant to planning. The last point in the list, however, was a product of the last phase of SDPI's work.[112] SDPI spent a great deal of time through seminars, clusters, summer schools, its Postgraduate Diploma in School Planning as well as work with individual schools, in numerous publications, in 'teaching the language of strategic planning' (FM: 14). However, respondents agreed that the approach was pragmatic rather than didactic, seeking to build capacity without threat. Nevertheless, in working with schools, SDPI did seek to be a conduit for new knowledge and, as one respondent put it, 'one of the things we always did was bring a certain amount of information with us' (MH: 5).

 Other respondents were more specific in particular areas but all concurred on broadly these requirements for SDP to have any chance of impacting on student learning. Thus, the absence of systematic structures and routine procedures was regarded as disastrous, even if the initiation of planning seemed successful:

> I came back (to the school), having done a full day, prioritisation setting up task groups and so on and the task groups might have met once but they had

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[112] Focus on outcomes and impact came when school self-evaluation and DEIS planning dominated SDPI's working agenda.

> floundered and nobody had done anything in order to secure some calendar of meetings for them into the future and all that kind of thing. (LT: 5)

> The commitment of the school to continuity was a key factor (GS: 8)

> And often people because they didn't invest the time in the structures of groups meeting and reporting and all of that effectively the whole thing fell apart very quickly. (MH: 9)

Similarly, the absence of sufficient time for planning in schools was a major concern echoing without hesitation the concerns that go back to the 2002 Progress Report and even acknowledgement of the need for 'more discretionary time to conduct an SDP review' by representatives of the DES earlier (O'Dalaigh, 2000: 148)[113].

If the concern with structural support, time for planning and fostering a receptive climate remained fairly constant, the need to impact upon student learning became imperative. Subject planning was the chosen vehicle.

Subject Department Planning: Planning for Learning and Teaching:

7.5.1 The learner as beneficiary of SDP: Among the most insistent statements in the data are those which advert to two related sub-themes that have already been flagged in the foregoing analysis. One is the crucial shift of focus in the work of SDPI from whole school development planning (coupled before long with time consuming policy formulation) to subject department planning beginning around 2004/5. Despite a degree of overlap the sequence was plain enough:

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[113] As part of the Croke Park Agreement on public service pay and conditions, in 2011, specific time for activities outside of class contact time, including SDP, has been agreed by all parties.

> It began with the business of – I as in the team – the business of review and prioritisation, that kind of business. Then I think the policy stuff came in. I think then we began to focus on the business of subject development planning. I think we called it (subject) department planning in the beginning. (FM: 8)

The other is the compelling need to become more explicitly focused upon student learning in SDP.[114]

> Ann Lynch's {a former regional coordinator in SDPI} experience with LCVP (was important) always teaching and learning, and having a practical understanding of bringing it to bear; plus the subject planning. The movement towards it (subject planning) being a core dimension of what we were talking about and the development of teaching and learning... (GS: 9)[115]

> Central to the whole thing and this goes back to what I said yesterday is the notion of commitment to the progress and achievement of the learner and to see that in a broader context than purely exam results, because that is what planning is all about. (BR: 31)

Sometimes the emphasis was more specifically upon the quality and standards of that learning:

> It is all about the kind of standards that we set in the English department (for example) in the school. That is what is really important, spreading those out. You are beginning to get a little bit of that happening and some of the good professional teachers realising – yeah, we have to think that way. (LT: 10)

> What constitutes a quality service to students? (MH: 3)

The wholesale adoption of subject planning confirmed in the progress reports colours appraisal of SDPI's achievements and failures for several of the

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[114] A broad account of this shift has already been given in the analysis of the progress reports in chapter 6. I was present at meetings where this concern was repeatedly voiced, more emphatically in the later years of the initiative.

[115] 'Ann Lynch' is a pseudonym. LCVP is a national programme for a modified Leaving Certificate developing entrepreneurial awareness. It is essentially the normal Leaving Certificate with modules on entrepreneurship added on. Mary Forde was an early member of SDPI who was formerly involved with the LCVP support service in the nineties.

respondents. It also mirrors in microcosm a similar trajectory towards more overt preoccupation with learning and away from wider organisational goals in the UK in the nineties already discussed.[116]

7. 5. 2   Learning - focused subject planning: There is wide agreement among respondents that the move to subject planning punctuated a more direct focus in SDP upon learning and teaching. Intuitively, having the content of planning directly relating to classroom practice seemed an obvious way to go. The whole school review of the first two years' work with school, it has been shown above, failed, in the eyes of respondents, to deliver significant achievements for schools in terms of demonstrable outcomes, notwithstanding the gain in 'capacity' for collaborative planning. Teachers, it will be recalled, were hitherto unaccustomed to such work in a traditionally and at times jealously guarded solitary professional culture (Coolahan, 1994: 44).

The need to make this connection to learning above all else in school improvement efforts had been forcefully argued by Hopkins at the turn of the century (Hopkins, 2001: 11). An important corollary is that highlighting student learning as a discrete activity goes with a corresponding conceptualisation of teaching as secondary to learning and meta-cognitive skills in pedagogic discourse (Reid, 2005:10-11;) .It is the learning rather than the teaching which is in bold type so to speak. Furthermore, Reed and Lodge, in a literature review of the move towards learning-focused school improvement, concluded that focus upon active student learning went hand in hand with a greater understanding of the need for teacher learning (Reed and Lodge,

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[116] See chapter 3

2006: 7). Reed and Lodge related such development, moreover, to 'a shift away from behaviourist to constructivist and new-constructivist views of learning' (Ibid.: 4).

The nature of the learning SDPI coordinators so frequently spoke of was rarely defined, though the adoption of the advocacy of assessment for learning as a favoured methodology clearly anchored the concept of learning within a broad active paradigm of learning, consistent with the tenor of Reed and Lodge's description[117] (OECD: 2004). This is the context in which the findings below must be considered.

SDP became above all else a vehicle for enhancing classroom experience of pupils through focusing teacher deliberation upon pupil-learning. While sometimes a distance between the SDPI coordinator and teacher is discernible in the data, a contrary inflection is noticeable here. Rather, respondents adopt the persona and voice of the teachers they sought to support:

> A focus on the needs of the learner I think would come first. Identifying what are the needs of the learners that I am dealing with. Not the ideal student that some of us picture where you just churn the stuff out or whatever - a concern for the learner, the needs of the learner and the learning of the learner (BR: 9)

> ...well having professional dialogue with your colleagues about your subject area and about your subject that would be important. And it's good development planning that facilitates that. (MH: 25)

> And everything we do from one end of the school to the next has got to be about supporting the teaching and learning programme. (WB: 10)

And with this there comes sensitivity about how the customary discourse of the teacher is respected and the teacher not alienated:

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[117] SDPI team members were familiar with the work of the London Institute of Education (LIE), and the 'Research Matters' publications. In 2008 the team attended a week long in-service programme in the LIE where a strong emphasis upon meta-learning (Learning about Learning) and active student learning strategies was reinforced.

When I became much more effective and successful I know in delivering our teaching and learning stuff when I used simpler language, real core, heart stuff. (GS: 10)

The most enthusiastic advocate of subject based planning, unlike colleagues who felt that teachers needed to be educated in how to talk about learning in an informed way, breezily dismissed the discursive challenge for subject teachers:

I don't believe there's a language required. I think teachers, if they are facilitated and prompted in the right direction, will use an opportunity to talk with other colleagues about shared experiences, shared hopes and ambitions and shared problems. In a manner of which will allow them to get something from that discussion to do something about difficulties that they have or to make improvements. (WB: 8)

There is an unmistakable rhetorical undercurrent at work here and in the earlier quotations in this section. More than enthusiasm, there is a moral urgency. It will be shown in chapter 11 that a strong ethical, even an evangelical streak characterises the professional disposition of the team. Its liveliest expression is found when the ambition of SDP to invigorate and hone teaching practice is its proximate goal.

A powerful signature discourse is forming here. Early on, discipline in the classroom and other 'house- keeping issues' (MH: 4) were apt to sideline this planning directly for enhanced student performance. The contrast can be epitomised in the following forceful statement of the mature position adopted towards the end of the initiative:

Knowing what good teaching is, knowing what a good learning environment is, knowing why, what (sic) good student outcomes are and then planning to try and first of all to identify the standards that exist and then maybe areas where they could be improved. And then looking at the environment and saying – okay, are we happy with the learning environment we're offering the students here? Is there anything we can do to change it? Then looking at some of the hard data, just in terms of what we were talking about earlier, the idea of outcomes for students and saying what does that tell us? And I

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suppose using these kind of reference points to say – okay now, we know what standards we have, we know the standards we're aiming for, we know what a good learning environment would look like and we know what we have to do. Then the question is – what to we have to do now? What do we have to plan to actually achieve these standards and keep ourselves constantly on a path of improvement? Because there is no doubt that the worst place you can be is a comfortable place in many ways because there's no impulse at all then to (look) critically at what you're doing and be moving forward. So that's my understanding (of) what quality is. (MH: 4-5)

This encapsulates well the transition in thinking in late SDPI to school self evaluation for learning, incorporating evidence based criteria of good practice; candid analysis of relevant data in the light of this evidence; collaborative adoption of appropriate targets or desired outcomes (note the recurrent 'we'); a practical and cultural commitment to incremental improvement, predicated on the identity of the teacher as learner and measured ultimately in terms of demonstrable learning gains for pupils; and the eschewal of what has elsewhere been termed 'cruising' status (Stoll and Fink 1996: 85-6).[118]

7.5. 3 Technical-moral dilemma: However, analytic tact is called for. This could be read also as a somewhat instrumentalist account of the role of the teacher as planner. Those scholars most sceptical of claims for the existence of pedagogic 'knowledge' and averse to any tendency towards the 'technicisation' of teaching might demur from this development within SDPI. The sustained critique by David Carr is a good example of this position (Carr, 2000: 36-8; 102-4). There is no doubt that SDPI did embrace, by the middle years, the idea that there was a technical knowledge base derived from empirical research in classrooms that could be tapped

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[118] In stating that this was the mature position it is not intended to suggest that this necessarily right or an unproblematic one. Establishing what 'quality' means is notoriously difficult and ideologically contentious at the best of times, just as the idea of what 'educated' means has long been debated. See, for instance, Bowring-Carr and West-Burnham 1997: 1-36 and McIntyre, 1987: 15-36 for accounts highly challenging to conventional thinking from widely different perspectives.

to improve classroom practice in the context of both teacher professional development and development planning. This started with the frequent references to the HayMcber typology of the excellent teacher, essentially a 'characteristics of the effective teacher' (HayMcber, 2000). It became most obvious in SDPI's subsequent energetic espousal of the efficacy of assessment for learning methodologies for classroom based action planning.[119]

However, it would be a mistake to read too much into this. SDPI did not acquire coercive authority or seek to impose rather than invite participation from the teachers with whom it worked. Only with the arrival of DEIS planning in disadvantaged schools in the final two years did SDPI mediate a prescribed programme of planning that schools were required to adopt, and even then its own templates were not themselves mandatory.[120] Most importantly, teacher initiative and agency remained paramount in the discourse of planning SDPI employed.[121] Nor could assessment for learning be characterised accurately as a set of technical prescriptions, though its abuse as such was certainly possible. Thompson and Wiliam, interestingly, demonstrated how the employment of AFL strategies without strong teacher motivation failed (Thompson and Wiliam, 2007: 23). Joyce and Showers also showed the dependence of a sustained and effective change in the practice of teaching upon levels of understanding and commitment. Rote mechanical compliance soon fizzled out (Joyce and Showers,1995: 132-3).

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[119] SDPI developed extensive materials for using AFL as the framework in self-evaluation of current assessment practice and for prioritisation, defining tasks, setting targets and applying success criteria within action planning.

[120] This is not to deny that several requirements, particularly in the field of policy formulation, were imposed by statute and SDPI assisted schools in their efforts to comply. SDPI, in this role, was assisting schools rather than mediating the requirements. Schools did not have to heed it.

[121] This point will be amplified in chapters 8 and 9.

Indeed, the account above probably approximates more to the idea of the 'learning school' envisaged by Macbeath and McGlynn, committed to teacher learning, enriched with a lively 'organisational memory and distributed intelligence' and accepting the litmus test for improvement in the classroom of which the classroom teacher acts as the 'gatekeeper' of change (MacBeath & McGlynn, 2002: 82-3). What is clear is that a fundamental transition is marked here by the gradual displacement of the language of development planning by that of self-evaluation.[122] The proximal focal point of attention ceases to be the school as an *organisation* but rather the *classroom* as the site of learning and teaching, notwithstanding the avowal in either case at all times of the ultimate aim of improving teaching and learning. What is at issue here is not so much such overarching avowed aims. Rhetorical agreement at a level of relative abstraction and generality about the goals of schooling is common in educational discourse and reveals little. What has changed is the *content* of SDP.

7.5. 4 Restricted teacher empowerment and organisational impoverishment:

The critical shift to much more overtly learning focused planning in SDP was helped by the promotion of subject planning that was more democratic and dialogic:

> (Subject planning) came in the middle years. It came for two reasons. One was the inevitable direction in which we were going. Because initially if you go back to team meetings the mission of SDPI was school development, development planning culture, school improvement and embedded in improvement and in planning is of course learning...But having established a kind of map or a plan that schools can work, a simple but effective plan – we did that, having broken away from the top-down, principal at the desk, supply and information (passed on) to staff, I think we've moved schools away from that as well in a very significant way - to the extent that you had healthy

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[122] It must be remembered that this development did not occur spontaneously but was propelled by the adoption of the language of self evaluation by the inspectorate early in the new century, influenced no doubt by international trends (DES: 2003). A further factor was the relatively high regard in Ireland accorded the Scottish education system, where an attractive framework of school self-evaluation had been pioneered (MacBeath, 1999: 21).

conversations about planning and development and learning by the end of our tenure. (KL: 11)

This is at some remove from instrumentalism. The connection of 'development', 'planning' and 'learning' was attributed to the implicit democratisation of planning through its centre of gravity having moved from the 'principal's desk' to the 'conversations' among subject colleagues. The 'simple but effective' plan was the series of templates for subject planning devised by the team to stabilise and focus subject conversations. Indeed, KL believed that SDPI should have taken up subject planning earlier as it would have more firmly identified SDP from the start with data and themes of 'common professional interest' among teachers. (KL: 12) The problem, he goes on, is that the typical task group (a small collection of teachers working on a particular priority area identified in a focused review after the initial general review) 'is that it hadn't a coat hanger upon which they could hang themselves, we're all in it because...we might randomly select four or five teachers to work on a substance abuse policy' (Ibid.). Thus subject planning motivated teachers because it was about what was of the greatest interest to them, their own teaching subject.

FM took up this notion that much of SDP, prior to subject planning, was perceived as imposed or de-motivating since it failed to speak to what mattered most to teachers:

> (SDP) empowered people to focus on policy stuff that what was really expected by the state when in actual fact they were trained to be French teachers, German teachers, Irish teachers and English and Maths teachers. And therefore they were being distracted from their day job almost by focusing on policies that were expected by the state. (FM: 8)

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The state here is seen as imposing demands for school policy ('expected' means required in this context), yet the teacher is 'empowered' in this domain. The problem is that this is not where her interests as a teacher lie. This seemingly innocuous short statement, which is highly representative of other statements from the interview data, needs to be sifted carefully. The rapid expansion of subject planning may be viewed as reactive as well as developmental. In prioritising what is assumed to be of immediate interest to teachers it may also represent a diminished interpretation of the relationship of teacher identity to the wider school organisational culture. One of the aims of SDPI, in its early years, was precisely to bridge that gap, to interest teachers in matters hitherto closed to them, such as school policy and wider, more inclusive decision making. The organisational, school wide sweep of early conceptualisations of planning must not be too hastily or simplistically misinterpreted as crass bureaucratisation. It has been clearly shown that the whole school was conceived primarily as active community serving to facilitate human agency rather than reified as an organisational structure constraining human agency in the avowed Irish formulation of SDP (SDPI, 1999: 12).

Ireland had, as has been stressed, a notoriously isolationist teaching culture with little opportunity for wider participation in school leadership afforded to or welcomed by teachers traditionally (Callan, 2006: 48). Moreover, what Hargreaves, following Lortie, characterised as 'the egg crate structure of schooling that divided teachers from one another and which efforts at collaboration always had to overcome' was in any case an international phenomenon (Hargreaves, 2000: 160). The return of SDP to exclusive concern with the classroom rather than the wider organisation of the school, so rhetorically appealing, may have obviated teacher disaffection from planning at the cost of rescinding from the greater challenge of greater teacher

empowerment, as a defining aim for SDP. This point must not be overstated. However, the stubborn inflexibility of inherited practices and self identification by teachers as subject- specialists first and last was not necessarily mitigated by the emergence of subject planning as the dominant planning paradigm.[123] This may also represent the lowering of the bar of SDP's contribution to creating more democratic schools or distributing leadership.

However, notwithstanding such reservations, SDP was still fulfilling an educative role in this new form of planning. Discussion was formalised beyond the norms of social intercourse and content was not monopolised by planning book lists and resources. The formidably resilient interactive paradigm of such restricted teacher interaction was not peculiar to Ireland, as Lortie's research in the seventies had established (Lortie, 1975). This educative thrust was argued by those respondents who *did* see SDPI as mediating a new language of planning:

> But it gave teachers the language to engage in discussion. Because prior to that I think if you sat a group of teachers down to engage in a discussion about their subject, it was inevitably on the obvious things like; when are we having our tests? Which book should we use? Is there anybody changing over from that group to that group? It was very much house-keeping stuff.(FM: 8)

The 'language' in question represented pedagogic and procedural-technical discourses that helped teachers to articulate issues and navigate the planning process more proficiently. Subject planning, in this perspective, was not just talk. It was still planning. However, it was proposed that subject planning progressed through a series of stages, incrementally building upon 'sharing assessments, writing

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[123] It must be remembered that unlike in the UK, there were rarely subject heads holding positions of authority within schools as organisations. The middle management structure, which was most commonly predicated upon year headships, had limited academic as opposed to pastoral and disciplinary roles. Thus the disconnection of subject planning from mainstream organisational planning and authority was significant.

the house exams and so on' moving on, under the tutelage of SDPI's support, to 'breaking down the isolation of the teacher in the classroom' before it moved on to the 'second phase of subject planning', a 'focus upon teaching, a focus upon learning' (LT: 6-7). One might envisage this as a variation upon the ascent of Maslow's hierarchy of needs whereby more basic needs are met first and higher quality deliberation follows thereafter (Maslow, 1943).

 Moreover, as noted above, as subject planning developed, SDPI became much more content- focused, with a particular commitment to 'assessment for learning' strategies, in how it sought to feed in to subject department deliberations information about research- based exempla of good practice (Black and Wiliam, 2002; OECD, 2005). In so doing, it was following the example already set by the National Council for Curriculum Assessment and was in line with the methodological developments in the University teacher- training departments. Occasionally, a respondent waxed lyrical about these latter developments. Thus, It was argued that this development, with its privileging of the students as active learners by collaboratively inventive teams of subject teachers 'spread out to all of the relationships in the school including the relationships that pupils would have when they were sitting in a pupil council in the school...and is only the very early stage of real partnership' (LT: 23). This comment is not quite matched in its unqualified optimism anywhere else in the interview data. However, it does reveal a normative tendency to prize democratic empowerment at subject department level with an ever widening participation by a community of learners taking shape.

Leahy and Wiliam argue that the successful adoption of AFL strategies, a primary pedagogic goal of SDPI, requires a turning away from 'top down' professional development strategies maximising teacher choice:

> In traditional 'top-down' models of teacher development, teachers are given ideas to try out in their own classrooms, but often respond by blaming the professional developer for the failure of the new methods in the classroom (e.g. 'I tried what you told me to do and it didn't work'). However, when the choice about the aspects of practice to develop is made by the teacher, then the responsibility for ensuring effective implementation is shared (Leahy and Wiliam, 2009: 6)

They also ascribe resistance in part to the necessary level of automation required in the classroom, as well as the contradiction of 'widely distributed and strongly held beliefs' (Ibid.: 6-7). They commend, therefore, contextually sensitive, piecemeal, teacher led innovation, informed by new knowledge without crass imposition, precisely the strategies of professional development SDP as it is here extolled sought to enable.

However, there were also familiar dangers. Subject planning was as vulnerable as any other form of planning to compliance- anxiety and an inordinate attention to producing paper artefacts less likely to guide practice than assuage inspectors. While this may be partly attributed to putative expectations by subject inspectors, SDPI's own voluminous subject- template may also have played a part:

> The unfortunate thing at the time also was that when the inspectors were busy asking about what policies you had they also began to ask various subject departments, more so in subject inspections, they began to ask them 'Where's your subject plan?' So therefore it was a paper exercise in many cases in the beginning where subject departments were sitting down together for the first time and they were saying 'right what are these questions we're going to be asked. Let's get these filled in' So we had a template for example of things like, where you would probably have been 12-15 pages in. (FM: 8)

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Subject planning was thus susceptible to competing motivations, ranging from learning focused empowerment to other directed compliance.

7.5. 5 A critical reflection – outlier perspective: However, WB went further both in insisting upon the necessity of promoting subject planning over all other priorities and in criticising SDPI for failing to do so, as well as offering a more forensic account of what it involved. This needs to be considered as this was in fact the regional coordinator credited with introducing subject planning in the first place, who was classed by a colleague, perhaps the most senior and influential of the regional coordinators, as 'the voice of the classroom' as opposed to the managerial voice on the team represented by the number of school principals (GS: 10). GS stated of WB that:

> I used to listen to WB and take down what he would say about the teaching and learning stuff because I felt that my voice was too managerial. I knew it was. I was over theatrical; over the top. (GS: 10)

WB represents an important voice for three reasons[124]. He introduced subject planning. He was the spokesman, as indicated, for an uncompromising commitment to the centrality of the classroom. And he was the most sceptical about the lasting impact of SDPI's work in this regard.

WB had worked on the School Curriculum Development project run by the Education Department of the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. He confirms that his interest in SDP was a direct result of the work with teachers on pedagogical reflection and innovation as a result of this project. WB is the most definitive in his

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[124] As it happens, WB was himself a school principal. Nonetheless, his identification with the 'voice of the teacher' was a strong and persistent note throughout his interview.

criticism of the 'legislative policy driven agendas' that occupied much of the work of both teachers in schools and SDPI. (WB: 2) Policy development 'scuppered, initially anyway, any opportunity SDPI had to promote real school improvement in terms of teaching and learning.' (Ibid.). He goes on:

> But in terms of promoting real school improvement which is looking at the achievement and the ambition of schools in terms of promoting a better student outcome, I think an awful lot of that legislative policy development has (done) nothing or has proved to be of little enough value to that ambition. (Ibid.)

Subject planning might, however, achieve this 'ambition':

> Yes, the subject planning focus as I saw it was one whereby we were trying to bring to a school improvement programme a sense of what goes on in the life of the teacher and in the life of the student as a learner in the classroom. What are the issues that impact upon me in my 40 minutes inside a classroom? And if I can relate those 40 minutes and those issues for me as an Irish teacher and I can get the English teacher and the Maths teacher and whatever else to do it, out of all of that we can then identify common threads which if the entire school and the systems and the processes and the roles and responsibilities within the schools were to identify and work with we're now working at things that matter to me inside my classroom. And that's real school planning that affects teaching and learning. (Ibid.)

This was a rare occasion when a respondent articulates a theory of planning *and* of the school as an organisation. It is, in effect, a textual explication of the model of school organisation graphically presented by Hopkins and Gilchrist:

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The Timetable

Premises & school environment

Resources

Pastoral care, behaviour & discipline

TEACHING

Staffing & their organisation into groups & teams

Partnerships with the community

PUPIL PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENT

Curriculum & assessment/ organisational policies

LEARNING

Decision making processes

Schemes of work

Staff development

Adapted from Hopkins & MacGilchrist 1998

SDPI

This model had, in fact, been adopted by SDPI in its regional seminar on teaching and learning in 2003 and became a recurrent reference point for its rationale for planning.

The radical shift urged by WB to thoroughgoing, deliberative subject planning, at its most idealistic and ambitious, exemplifies not just a particular prioritisation of planning objectives in pursuit of a greater focus upon student learning but also a pitch for more democratic disposition of power in schools. Thus it counters the threat of conservative parochialism that may follow upon the abandonment of more ambitious school wide planning and policy formulation, as discussed above. It constructs a school not as a system so much as a cooperative. A school just is its classrooms. It is no accident that the consciousness of the teacher is the final arbiter on what matters and what serves the interests of the student as learner. This implies a radically flat and collegial culture, a form of pedagogic syndicalism:

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> Indeed that is very much at the heart of what I've proposed. If I as a teacher say and we as a group of teachers then agree, so I have said and we as a group of teachers say that is all – we'd then respond on a whole school basis to that issue that seems to be coming out of all those different classrooms. We'll respond on a whole school basis by putting in some sort of plan of action which we evaluate back in the classroom as to how effective this has been in addressing. (WB: 9)

On this basis GW rejects the term SDP. It, characteristically from the perspective of 'the typical staff member' actuated by 'legislative policy development' has 'no value for me in the classroom'. (WB: 9). Indeed, subject department planning failed just because it was 'hijacked by whole school evaluation and subject inspections.'(WB: 3)

Is this progress? Or is it a reversion to utopian insularity? Certainly WB acknowledges that there is a need for accessing new knowledge and collaboration and discussion among teachers. Some teachers are 'good at doing what I do badly. And I'll stay good at it' (WB: 5). By this he acknowledges a power of inertia that conservative, inward looking school cultures can foster. It may, therefore, be necessary for SDP to play its part in challenging such cultures. But it must be seen that at this point the journey that has been taken from the initial ambitions of SDP. What is opened here, however, is one of the most important political themes in the emergent theory of action, the location of agency and power both within schools and between schools and the policy makers. Before addressing this, one needs to distil precisely those features of teacher identity that were most hospitable to the efficacy of planning as a deliberative agency, the subject of the next chapter. Firstly, however, it is necessary to take stock of where SDPI's conception of the effective and improving school, its own approach to emergent discourses of self-evaluation,

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its appraisal of its own contribution and the impact upon leadership in relation to it, are as the context for the foregoing analysis.

7.6.1 SDPI's conceptualisation of the effective and improving school: It is increasingly evident in this chapter, and will be expanded upon in the next, that SDPI coordinators evinced an evolving set of normative assumptions about SDP. They are, of course, influenced by the inherited discourses of SDP as a vehicle for securing effectiveness and improvement outlined in earlier chapters and culminating in SDPI's own published materials.[125] It has already been shown, in particular, that the idea of the effective school was taken from Sammons et al's synthesis of the prior work by scholars in the field at the end of the century to the point that their work was one of the most extensively used of SDPI's review instruments (Sammons et al: 1997, SDPI, 2000, 3.28-9). More pointed and direct emphasis over time towards impacting upon pupil learning, most overtly through subject department planning has just been demonstrated. SDPI coordinators also quickly became aware of the opportunities and limitations for SDP once they went into schools in earnest.[126] In effect, these assumptions, fleshed out in this and the next chapter, partially schooled by experience, amount to implicit criteria for good practice in SDP, which SDPI saw as its duty to nurture among those schools with which it worked.

These findings, especially in chapters 7 and 8, sketch out a set of normative expectations of SDPI, for the process and focus of SDP in schools, and the professional dispositions associated with their achievement in high performing planning schools. Therefore, it is no surprise that the discourses of SDPI are resonant with commendations of collaboration, professional learning and planning

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[125] An account of the historical emergence of these discourses is offered in chapters 3,4 and 5.
[126] This is evident from the 2002 report discussed in chapter 5, the changing programme of work outlined in chapter 6 and the findings in the current chapter.

forums, and an increasingly more insistent linkage to demonstrable learning gains for students as a consequence[127]. Moreover, the language of self-evaluation, stressing the use of data, setting of targets and clarification of learning based success criteria came to displace that of SDP in the last years (SDPI, 2009).

Furthermore, it is clear from the analysis of interview data in this chapter that informed and facilitative leadership was regarded as pivotal to achieving the levels of school improvement and effectiveness which, as has been shown in chapters 3 and 4, is the underlying rationale and justification for SDP in the first place. Two themes predominate here. Leadership should conduce to teacher empowerment, and so effectively be distributed across the professional community; and its end should be a process of SDP that engineers improved learning outcomes for pupils. It was shown in Chapter 6 that SDPI sought to maintain close connections with this important constituency through its annual programme of regional seminars.

The question may be asked, therefore, how SDPI assessed its own progress in promoting these developments in SDP, and what criteria it applied in so doing. More broadly, where did SDP stand in relation to the self evaluation process, as it was promulgated for schools and as it might apply to SDPI itself? How did SDPI assess, for example, its impact upon leadership in schools? These questions, however, upon closer examination, turn out to be problematic.

7.6.2 SDPI's position regarding SSE: The relationship of SDPI to self evaluation has been touched upon already in this study[128]. The discourse of SDP ceded to that

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[127] See chapters 7 and 8
[128] See 3.14, 6 .2007/8, 7.5.4

of self-evaluation in Britain in the nineties and in Ireland from the middle of the first decade. Salient in the emergent discourses of self evaluation at the time are a search for more robust data, clearer success criteria in terms of learning outcomes and empowered stakeholder voices, along with a mounting demand for greater accountability and performativity (MacBeath and McGlynn, 2002: 3-5, MacBeath 2006: 70-71, 171-2; McNamara and O'Hara, 2008: 97). The contradictions inherent in these contrasting goals have been amply discussed by recent evaluation research in Ireland (Mcnamara and O'Hara, 2008: 3-14).

However, the relationship of SDP to SSE in policy discourse is not just charged with conflicting aims. Rather, it is critically underdetermined, indeed functionally incoherent. This is because the terms do not hold a discernible, stable meaning in policy or scholarly discourse *vis a vis each other*. Thus, to take some highly visible examples, SDP may be seen as a component of SSE (DES, 2003: 11-15, Ireland, 2006: 31.4). On the other hand, SSE may be a function of SDP (DES, 2001). Yet again SDP and SSE may be regarded as essentially synonymous (McNamara and O'Hara, 2008: 61-2). Each position makes sense on its own. What is lacking is an authoritative discourse in which both SDP and SSE retain durable, significant and distinctive meanings in their various invocations in Ireland during the past decade.

The most likely explanation of this situation is the contrasting manner in which the two discourses were disseminated in Ireland. The concept of SDP as a key tool for school improvement, as discussed in this thesis, was imported from Britain and slowly naturalised in policy discourse with local inflections during the nineties.[129] References to self evaluation, rare enough, were clearly subordinated to SDP (Coolahan, 1994: 56). SSE, however, as a discrete and authoritative discourse,

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[129] See chapters 3 and 4

attained international prominence in scholarly debate and policy formulation, as the primary means towards securing school improvement, at the turn of the century (MacBeath 2006: 173-83).[130] Ireland, and its inspectorate particularly, took part in major international SSE projects at around the time SSE came to prominence in school improvement discourse in this country (ESSE: 2004, CSEP, 2006). There was no process of prior deliberation and appropriation to indigenous educational culture, such as accompanied the introduction of SDP, behind the incursion from OECD and EU of the self evaluation discourse into the discourse of public policy and then of school improvement (McNamara and O'Hara, 2008: 10). The result was a highly compromised and uncertain embrace of SSE (Ibid.: 11) Thus, in Irish policy discourse and within SDPI, concepts of SDP and SSE converged without benefit of critical clarification or a satisfactory determination of agreed and stable meanings.

SDPI thus fell in with the advocacy of SSE from around 2005. Examination of workshop materials produced at this time reveal a greater emphasis on achieving an impact on pupil learning, more skilful and rigorous assessment of data and clarification of success criteria in SDP. [131] Nevertheless, SDPI did not work out, nor did any other agency in Ireland at the time, a clear and distinctive understanding of SSE apart from SDP. Evaluation figured, principally, at both the review and evaluation phases of the cyclical model. In both cases, evaluation was internal to the process of SDP. SDPI did not, therefore, to take one important example from this chapter, design a self evaluation process specifically for leadership, either generically or as a key factor in effective SDP.

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[130] See 3.14

[131] These developments are evident in Tuohy's revised introduction to strategic planning which incorporates a new chapter on evaluation. SDPI contributed to a review of this text. The DEIS resource materials also reveal these new priorities (Tuohy, 2008: 98-118, SDPI 2009)

7.6.3 SDPI's evaluation of progress and leadership: Yet leadership was critically important for SDPI's implicit conceptualisation of the effective and improving school. That leadership, as has just been shown, is one which focuses on pupil learning and promotes the highest level of deliberation and experimentation among teachers. SDP entails a distribution of leadership beyond ascribed roles. Moreover, there is strong support for this conception of leadership as a means to promote wider initiative and for employing SDP as a vehicle for shared decision making in relation to learning centred change.

 Hallinger and Heck have shown that leaders influence the quality of learning in schools in three ways; directly, indirectly and reciprocally (Hallinger and Heck, 1999: 4-5). Southworth has argued that indirect effects are 'the largest and most common' (Southworth, 2004: 5) Leaders exert influence as their ideas are mediated by teachers (Ibid.). Pont et al argue that improving teacher quality and setting the strategic direction through development planning, as well as providing structural and training support and networking with other schools are the means by which leaders can influence learning. (Pont et al, 2007: 10). Bennett et al have linked distributed leadership as the foundation for learning focused leadership to an emergent rather than transactional form of leadership, whereby fluid leadership roles 'defined by expertise and creativity' create a climate of experimentation and openness (Bennett et al, quoted in Pont et al, 2007: 82). Lieberman has summed up what recent scholarly research on distributed and learning focused leadership is telling us:

> We are learning that good principals share leadership responsibilities as they build a team; that teachers take a lot of responsibility for instructional improvement; and that for improvement to be sustained a professional

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learning community needs to be developed and supported (Lieberman, 2008: 204).

O'Sullivan, however, has found that while leaders need to promote teacher agency within professional learning communities, cultural norms in Ireland make this especially challenging (O'Sullivan, 2011: 119). Nevertheless, the analysis of interview data here clearly goes with the grain of current international scholarship on reconceptualising leadership and its impact on learning in schools.

Yet if SDPI did form, as the interview data suggests, an implicit normative ideal, congruent with current scholarship, for leadership behaviour in relation to SDP, how did they evaluate their contribution to promoting it in schools? In other words, while SSE was in many respects an inchoate concept, how did SDPI itself evaluate schools' progress in SDP, and how did it evaluate its own contribution to it?[132]

Yet these two questions are also more problematic than it might at first seem. SDPI was a support service. Evaluation of schools was the exclusive province of the inspectorate. The feasibility and desirability of a complete separation of these functions is itself an issue that is raised in Chapters 9 and 11. Neither SDPI nor any other external agency conducted a formal evaluation of its work, let alone attempt any such evaluation in relation to stated outcome criteria.[133] Nor, given the nature of SDP, would it be easy to conduct such an evaluation. Linking outcomes to measures is notoriously difficult at the best of times. However, where the intended benefits (enhanced pupil learning and welfare) are indirect and achieved, it is assumed,

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[132] See 7.3.1 and 7.3.2

[133] Evaluation of the role of support services was not common. Two notable examples were the evaluation of the primary Curriculum Support Service by members of the Education Department in Trinity College, Dublin and Granville's evaluation of the Second level Support Service. The latter was based largely on interviews with stakeholders and did not have access to data about the impact of the service on pupil learning (Loxley, Johnston, Murchan, Fitzgerald, & Quinn, 2007; Granville, 2005).

through a host of intermediate processes (SDP) this becomes doubly difficult. This challenge is succinctly suggested from the early and authoritative definition of the purpose of SDP promulgated by DES and SDPI:

> The desired outcome (of SDP) of process and product is the provision of an enhanced education service, relevant to pupil's needs, through the promotion of high quality teaching and learning, the professional empowerment of teachers, and the effective management of innovation and change (SDPI, 1999: 9)

This is not a simple statement of a desirable outcome, but rather a series of intermediate goals that are ultimately (it is assumed) cashed in as enhanced pupil welfare and learning. What is clear in this chapter is that while SDPI became more directly concerned that that pupil learning and welfare were explicitly envisaged within SDP its substantive focus was on the intermediate goals of planning, professional development and changes in the wider school environment, including the disposition of leadership to SDP. Thus SDPI saw the successful school more in terms of proxy criteria than the classroom experience itself, to which, in any case, it was not in any sense privy. Active, well structured collaborative planning, engaging teachers and school leaders, where pupil learning was at the heart of the process and where changes in school culture and teaching practice ensued, were the proximal goals of SDPI[134]. In effect, SDPI evaluated its contribution to improving schools not by the application of set outcome criteria but in terms of the level of sustained activity in school planning and the adoption of learning focused planning procedures already discussed in this chapter and the supportive role of leadership.

The use of highly specific reporting, as analysed in chapter 6, shows how SDPI identified throughout its existence, the quantity and thematic focus of seminar

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[134] These primary aims are variously explicated in chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8.

sessions, facilitations and school visits, as well as the take up in schools, broken down by school type. In effect, the sustained volume of engagement was the critical criterion by which the SDPI coordinator team justified its programme to its management committee and the DES. The extensive time given to team meetings also allowed SDPI to discuss and review its work on an ongoing basis. However, as chapter 10 will reveal, there were limitations to the extent of such monitoring and evaluation of strategic direction, and so to the capacity of SDPI to undertake any form of systematic self-evaluation.

In sum, SDPI evaluated its contribution to school improvement and effectiveness largely through an implicit faith in the adaptive planning process it mediated to schools. Sustained, active engagement by professional communities in substantive planning initiatives, taking up themes promoted by the initiative, were taken as implicit evidence of a successful contribution to the quest for school improvement by SDPI.

Summary

Important thematic features of a theory of action of SDP are analysed from the interview data. They reflect core aims and subsequent adaptation to feedback from professional experience in the field.

Enhancing student learning and the creation of a professional learning culture emerge as framing goals for SDPI. Rather than work directly on mission SDPI facilitators favoured a multi-faceted approach to capacity building where the ethical values that drive planning are elicited pragmatically. There is a subtle mix of

pressure and support in the facilitative support offered to schools, with the potential for a more coercive intervention which cannot be discounted though it is not intended.

At first, whole school reviews in the early action model acclimatised schools to the structures and procedures of SDP in pursuit of early credible and teacher - friendly goals. However, also echoing international precedent, implementation proved elusive, commitment waned and priorities were often remote from the interests of pupils as learners.

Leadership commitment and support, consistent with scholarly consensus, was an indispensable condition for success. Leaders who encouraged wide distribution of influence and decision making, and promoted democratic deliberative cultures, provided the best conditions for SDP to flourish. Pressure on leaders to meet external demands, however, dampened developmental enthusiasm.

Increasing attention to the needs of the learner and active learning methodologies propelled the paradigm shift to subject centred planning. In one sense this may betoken more modest organisational transformation. However, teacher and pupil learning together exercised respondents most deeply. Support sought to combine technical development of the teacher's skill set through collaborative SDP and the empowerment of the teacher in the classroom as key agent for change within the school, a position forcefully argued for in one influential outlier contribution. However, subject planning could also be subverted through an anxiety to meet putatively imperative external requirements, a structural susceptibility already noted in SDP in earlier chapters.

Discourses of school self-evaluation, increasingly prominent, and of SDP, did not acquire a serviceable, stable meaning vis a vis one another. Moreover, self-evaluation of leadership, a critical component of successful SDP in these findings, to take one important example, was never really distinctively promoted by SDPI. In relation to its own evaluation of its own contribution, SDPI relied largely on proxy measures of engagement rather than direct evaluation of outcomes.

Central in terms of agency, in the theorisation of SDP in this chapter, is the empowered and learning focused teacher. In the next two chapters I will look directly at the identity of teacher entailed by this theory of action, and then at the contextual pressures that constrain the fulfilment of SDP envisaged for the empowered teacher.

Chapter Eight

A Theory of Action 2: The Teacher as Planner - Towards a professional planning culture in schools

Introduction

In delineating a theory of action of SDP within SDPI, a centrally important theme to emerge is the notional construction of the identity of the teacher *qua* planner. SDPI worked mostly with teachers. SDPI members were themselves seconded teachers and principals, and so tapped values that were embedded in their own experience.

Three aspects or, better, virtues of this implied construct are strongly supported across the interview data. 'Virtue' here connotes the virtue-ethical or neo-Aristotelian sense of a learned disposition and motivated deployment of skills conducive to the realisation of goods internal to a practice (in this case SDP) (McIntyre, 1985: 181-203). The term 'virtue' underscores the normative resonance of the identity so constructed and differentiates its potency from merely offering an aggregation of favoured behaviours. It insists on the rootedness of the teacher as planner in an ethical commitment to a mode of professional being. Clearly, these constitute a sub-set of wider teacher identity in a specialised but important domain of professional practice, SDP.

Professional identity (along with 'professionalism' and 'professionalisation') is a complex and contested concept; one may too readily formulate an essentialist or

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over-generalised taxonomy of features, dispositions or competences. In any case, many such lists exist (Hoyle, 1982: 161-3; Helsby, 1995: 317-20: Sachs, 1999: 5). Moreover, reified constructs of identity may coerce understanding into pre-set categories that marginalise the existential individuality of teachers (Stronoch et al, 2002: 112). The person in the teacher must always be recalled and respected when an objective assessment of professional identity is essayed (Hargreaves, 1998: Day, 2002: Carr, 2007). Yet teacher identity is, for all that, a serviceable heuristic illuminating 'operational definitions of professionalism over the last 20 years' (Day, 2002: 677). Moreover, it is at the moral heart of SDPI's theory of action of SDP.

In sum, delineation of aspects or virtues of normative teacher identity within the practice of SDP, from the perspective of SDPI coordinators, must be seen as a useful fiction abstracted from the individual personality and life experience of any actual teacher, operating as a free ethical agent. Above all, real identity is not a catalogue of formulaic norms.

Further discussion of more problematic implications of teacher identity will be reserved for the analysis of the central problematic of this inquiry, contested loci of power, in the next chapter.

The three main normative aspects emerging in the interview data are the teacher as;

- committed collaborator – competent and willing to break out of an isolationist self-identity and work skilfully in groups

- meliorist - a change agent morally convinced of the practicability and necessity of improvement of individual practice and of the whole school's service to pupils

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- self-directed learner – internalising an abiding willingness to learn, through experimentation, reflection and self-evaluation

Together, they construct the teacher as ideal driver of a preferred model of SDP in schools[135].

8.1 The teacher as collaborator: It has already been well established that collaborative culture is a fundamental requirement of SDP. The representation of the teacher as collaborator, with the consequential tension between a disfavoured individualism and commended collegiality is an evaluative stance present throughout the interview data. This is supported in the scholarly literature, as well. Hargreaves, in particular, has described the patterns of formation that typically may shape the purportedly collaborative culture of a school; fragmentation yielding a conservative retreat to the fortress classroom; balkanisation producing competing groups within the micro-politics of the school as a setting for contested status and influence; contrived collegiality, ersatz collaborative cultures either hastily imposed by fiat or through insensitive degradation of existing patterns of social collegiality; and effective teacher collaboration. (Hargreaves,1994).

In the interview data, however, as concern is restricted to the collaborative nature of SDP, teacher collaboration is not problematised in this way. Its virtues, in this context, shine too brightly for a more subtly shaded delineation to take shape.

However, there is an understanding that teacher collaboration must be nurtured rather than imposed. At the same time, it must transcend the norms of informal social interaction. There is also a moral undertone that collaboration is an imperative

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[135] See chapter 7

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of genuine professionalism, a principle already endorsed in the newly produced Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers (Teaching Council: 2007).

References to this aspect of teacher identity as collaborator abound, well summarised in the following statement:

> The change came when they realised that they actually had a responsibility to the other staff in the school to share some of the expertise to bring people on formally even though they would have done it on an informal way in many staff rooms but to bring people on formally to encourage them to even mentor them and so on and to be interested in the notion of mentoring and then share their knowledge. (LT: 9)

The corollary of this was to 'break down the isolation of the teacher in the classroom' and this respondent felt that this was indeed the achievement of SDPI to have done just that (LT: 6 & 25). For BR the most basic requirement was an 'ability to collaborate productively' (BR: 30). Moreover this must be professionally established as a cultural norm for 'if you are trying to collaborate you must have people willing to collaborate with you' and 'you can't build a collaborative culture on your own'. (BR: 33). She goes on to stress that 'though I have talked about collaboration and I think it is highly important but I don't want a touchy feely sort of collaboration and the skills are important as well' (BR: Ibid.) She elaborates this repeated point earlier:

> If everybody was the same within the school it would be no good anyway. So you want that synergy in any community. Things that I think we were trying to nurture; first of an ability to collaborate productively. I think that is a very high thing. An appreciation of the value of sharing experiences, not in a mode of blind acceptance but critically, if you like, using critically in a particular way that the people can relate others' experience to themselves and not take it on trust or not reject it totally but to assess what value it has in their own context and that kind of thing. (BR: 30)

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BR does echo the call for a balanced esteem for the individual and the group that constitutes truly effective collaborative culture rather than group think; "*Within these schools the individual and the group are inherently and simultaneously valued.*" (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991: 49, emphasis in original) The collaboration sought here is one marked by discursive openness, sound judgment, an awareness of contextual needs and, it may be reasonably inferred, evidence- based evaluation.

The emergence of the teacher as collaborator was pragmatic rather than aspirational in origin. FM saw collaboration building beyond what Lortie (1975) had characterised as baseline collegial engagement, agreeing text books and so on:

> (In subject departments) It wasn't for any values that they felt that they should engage collaboratively. So we were moving into a culture that had been highly individualistic and been based on teachers who trained in college, came out, were given a job and a timetable and away they went. (FM: 4)

Where such a culture did not evolve, and this respondent interestingly observed that this was most likely on boys' Diocesan colleges[136], 'complacency' and resistance posed an almost insurmountable obstacle to successful planning. (FM: 16)

On the other hand, GS saw collaboration as itself a process of building the affective bonds in teacher relationships through the joint creation of 'a culture of how we work together in building the cultural trust'. (GS: 4). However, running counter to this, 'a problem in Ireland (is that) the teaching contract really militates against that, reinforcing the reliance on the individual'. (GS: 15). This refers, most probably, to the contractual right of teachers not to take part in meetings and other prescribed work, such as SDP, outside of class teaching hours. Thus, participation in what was a

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[136] It was commonly felt among team members that these colleges, under the patronage of the local Bishop, were bastions of cultural conservatism.

statutorily required activity (SDP) in effect was on a grace and favour basis unless classroom tuition was suspended to allow the planning work to take place.[137]

Moreover, capacity to really question the quality of teaching and to innovate is held to be linked to collaboration in the conjunction of 'a degree of collaboration and consultation and openness and risk taking' (WB: 10) Several respondents felt that the formation of a teacher identity open to collaboration was the greatest achievement of SDPI

> Well I think it is – we gave three things to teachers. We gave them this sense that solutions could be found through collaborative thinking and collaborative reflective practices. (KL: 18)

> I mean I think we were trying to promote a professional dialogue. Now that must in itself impact on the professional identity of a teacher. (MH: 25)

There is a benign assumption operative here that was touched upon in considering Joyce's assertion of the robustness of teacher individualism as a factor inhibiting empowerment through professional development; collaboration abets professional autonomy. Their position strongly mirrors the argument of Fullan that 'autonomous isolation' rendered independent functioning professionally impoverished and so largely ineffectual in employing teacher agency to solve 'school-wide problems.' (Fullan, 2000: 121) However, Fullan went on, citing McLaughlin's and Talbert's research, teachers working in a collaborative professional community actually changed what happened in their classrooms and across the school (Ibid.: 130-1).

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[137] As already noted, teachers are required, since April 2011, as part of an agreement under the auspices of the National Recovery Plan, to give 33 hours outside of classroom teacher per annum to activities such as staff meetings, parent-teacher meetings and SDP. This is still a long way from the practice, in many other jurisdictions, where teachers would be available for all such work within the normal working day. Holders of additionally paid posts of responsibility would always have been required to do work in the school outside of the classroom. However, this situation was mitigated by widespread voluntarism, but the practice was uneven and sustaining projects made more difficult.

In the interview data, similarly, teacher collaboration is considered to augment teacher agency. SDPI sought to release collaborative energies within a policy context that ideally would trust teachers so engaged to serve the needs of their pupils in a context of iterative improvement. Thus SDPI saw its role as a national, policy driven support service as operating in a largely facilitative rather than coercive relationship with schools that would nurture an empowered professionalism rather than constrain or subvert it. This is, perhaps, an idealised and problematic conviction but undoubtedly strongly held.

The teacher as collaborator is closely allied to the second feature of teacher identity.

8.2 The teacher as meliorist / change agent: The historical rationale for SDP presupposes the validity of a concept of improvement, whether at system, school, subject or classroom levels[138]. It follows that the teacher as planner must evince a faith in the need and possibility for improvement.

> You have to have people who have a vision and part of that vision is that you do things better and then the second one is that it is important to do things better. That it is worthwhile to make things better. (LT: 21)
>
> Well, I suppose the key value amongst many subsidiary values was school improvement... (KL: 1)

LT noted that improvement depended upon empowerment, reflecting upon his own experience as a school leader:

> I kind of felt that a school would run better if you allowed people who wanted to make improvements and changes to have some opportunities or freedom to make changes and have their say. So I think that was part of it, democratisation, which really is just partnership...(LT: 2)

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[138] See chapter 3

It was pointed out in chapter 3 that it is by no means assured that the sentiments expressed are necessarily or importantly operative in any given teacher's practice nor is this an imputation of negligence. Nevertheless, the ethical imperative is strongly asserted in the data. For LT there is a connection with the prevailing faith dimension of Irish schooling; what is commended:

> It is actually a belief that you can make things better. That is a key thing and not everybody believes that so that is like the religious virtue of hope. (Ibid.)

It is directly from this virtue that collaboration and partnership in pursuit of improvement are deemed to be affirmed.

BR presents this same disposition towards improvement in terms of the needs of the learner, in an extract already quoted in relation to subject planning:

> Central to the whole thing and this goes back to what I said yesterday is the notion of commitment to the progress and achievement of the learner… (BR: 30)

Or more specifically in the classroom but expressing a strong moral value base also:

> And someone who, I think, has a desire to be a little more than what they presently are in terms of a subject teacher in the classroom…well there has to be a moral dimension to people who want to engage in their work and do a good job and continue to do a good job. I would say that somebody like this would have a high degree of humanity in that they recognise the needs and supports of colleagues. (WB: 19)

This respondent has defined the moral imperative of the teacher in an expansive view of planners (the 'high degree of humanity') specifically in terms of her empathic responsibility to support colleagues.

One respondent (the most senior of the regional coordinators) considered this values base 'actually links very strongly with Irish history and Christian values which are expressed through Irish history' (GS: 17) More theoretically, there is also an assumed adherence, in tone and content, to morally charged original judgement, rather than merely technical rationality, what has been termed a neo-Aristotelian adherence to phronesis in Irish scholarly formulation of professionalism (Dunne, 1999: 709-711)[1].

The learner, also, may be seen in a broader, ethical context

> …where they look through the eyes of the student. Through the eyes of 'how can we make this a better place? Not 'how can I make the teaching of French better' which is part of their job also, but 'how can I make this a better place' (FM: 27)

In a curious formulation, KL speculates about the inherent readiness of teachers to innovate once the right conditions are met was proposed:

> I found an extraordinary level of entrepreneurial spirit. The kind of, innovative (spirit), the gene for innovation had almost been suppressed. But given, I suppose, a reasonably well facilitated environment, a very positive management disposition, that was the key to it. (KL: 4)

The term 'entrepreneurial' is surely used metaphorically here to conjure initiative, imagination and optimism, rather than any economic account of the purposes of teaching.

However they describe it, the respondents are at one in defining the teacher as meliorist as essential to the success of SDP.

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> And really it was the tipping point in the staff where the naysayers, the people who were resistant to change and the ones who were keen to learn, It was a question of what was the balance there and where they often were in the pecking order. (MH: 10)

This implies, perhaps unconsciously, a political positioning in respect of teacher agency and autonomy, a key component of recent debate about teacher professionalism and identity (Helsby, 1996: Day, 2005: Callan,2007: 67).

It is a short step from affirming teacher judgment as change agent for improvement, and commending initiative and a 'keenness to learn', to defining the teacher herself as a learner.

8.3 Teacher as learner: Hall and Schultz, reviewing the concepts of professionalism and professionalization in Canada and the UK, argued that 'assuming an inquiry stance is frequently held up as a central attribute of the 'extended professional' committed to continuous self-directed learning.' (Hall and Schultz, 2003: 379). Furthermore, considering optimal modes of professional development, they commend site based collaborative and reflective learning (Ibid.: 381).[139] This closely mirrors the implicit theory of the teacher as learner in the context of SDP evident in the interview data.

It is strongly held that the teacher as planner must be a *self-conscious* learner. That learning is presented largely in terms of the teacher's disposition to learn rather than

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[139] The context of these recommendations is the need to reform the university's role in teacher education and to protect conceptualisations of teaching as an art over technical craft based definitions. The point about the latter relevant here is that they would diminish the teacher's own moral and personal control of their professional development through the imposition of external, generalised behavioural types of instruction.

in terms of specific types of knowledge or craft. It implies that learning is not automatically consequent upon experience but may be attained through a disciplined reflection in and upon experience (in SDP) as well as through motivated access to relevant bases of knowledge. The best schools for planning were populated by teachers 'where there was an openness to new ideas.' (MH: 10). It was especially helpful when 'those perceived as leaders were keen to learn'. (MH: Ibid.). A negative corollary was a kind of intellectual incuriosity and dependence that frustrated developmental process:

> And I remember going along to different groups and saying – well, what do you think you could do about these problems? I must say I was absolutely astounded that they really found it very hard to come up with any solutions. So, in the absence of that, I think, they were looking to you then – well, what do you suggest? What have you read that would help us in this situation? (MH: 6)

MH saw a role for her acting as a conduit 'to bring accessible literature to people who wanted to read it.' (MH: 7). In defining the professionalism of the planning teacher, it was asserted that 'an openness to professional development is a key part of it, absolutely key' (LT: 8).

 The teacher as learner was, of course, learning *through* and not just *for* SDP; thus is formed what might be termed a nascent 'community of practice' (LT: 13):

> So now we have the twin planks of good planning. We have the usefulness of reflective conversation and collaborative approaches allied with inputs, information and knowledge. (KL: 19)

> But I would engage collaboratively with my fellow teachers. That I'm going to engage in some personal learning. So, I'm going to do some personal research. I'm going to (study) some aspect of what I'm doing or education (generally). It might be on the internet, it might be, I might just go and read about a school in Scotland and how the school in Scotland is managing itself. So I think, to put it in context, then I think a teacher who's going to contribute

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to whole school planning in that context has to engage in a little bit of individual reflection. (FM: 28)

What was its situation? What were the needs? Who were the students that were being served? What were the needs of the community from which the students came and that the planning would focus on that and in that sense I suppose you could say, looking at your teacher identity kind of thing, that the notion of reflective practice or a version of reflective practice was central to it because if a school was not willing to be rigorous in getting the base line data, in assessing realistically what its strengths and weaknesses were well then the notion of building a plan on it just wouldn't work (BR: 5)

Three dimensions of the teacher as learner presented here are widely endorsed in the interview data.

Learning is first and foremost about oneself and one's own practice and then, by extension, one's own school. With mounting insistence that learning had to be 'rigorous', well founded, free of self-regarding delusion; thus there is a creeping conflation in the later documents produced by SDPI of teacher learning and school self-evaluation, in the final three years, more sensitive to the dangers of self-serving delusion. This is a central tenet of recent self-evaluation literature (MacBeath and McGlynn, 2002: 24-5).

This led to a closing of the conceptual gap between SDP (increasingly transformed into the discourse of school self-evaluation) and continuous professional development. Following upon this, learning is carried out *within* the planning experience itself. SDP was, inter alia, a form of continuous professional development. This idea caught hold very strongly in the closing years of the initiative.

The teacher as planner was becoming in this line of thought, by definition, an action-researcher. Action Research, particularly as presented by proponents like Jean McNiff, is not only rooted in personal values but is highly individualistic, the research

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leading to the 'production of their living-I-theories of research' (McNiff,2007: 1). Carr has criticised action research's potential 'diminution both of both the intellectual and practical horizons of teachers' (Carr, 2000: 72). The emphasis here, however, is upon collaborative action research in a common professional endeavour open to new sources of knowledge and exemplars of skill.

It entails, therefore, looking beyond the school as well, to incorporate new ideas and information, useful new knowledge to invigorate the planning process. New evidence - based practices may thus inform the pedagogical experimentation carried out under the aegis of SDP. Parochialism is eschewed in seeking new ways that can be adapted to find new practices suitable for one's own school. Thus, as Joyce and Calhoun have defined appropriate types of evidence or knowledge for professional development, personal, inter-personal and formal knowledge may be involved (Joyce and Calhoun, 2010: 110).

As learner, then, the teacher is, centrally, learning about herself as teacher, as reflective practitioner, and also as a self-evaluating agent of school improvement.

She is, however, susceptible to the 'habits of assigned practice', the siren song for young teachers about to be sucked into the conservative indigenous culture of a school (WB: 7).The best prophylactic against seduction by an inert established culture is disciplined self-evaluation. Self-evaluation may be another way also of saying that the teacher as planner, 'committed to whole school development' must 'be au fait with the values of the school; the tradition of the school, what the school is trying to stand for *but not simply to take it on trust…to interrogate it.*'(BR: 12).

Thus a critical stance and personal independence must qualify the induction of the teacher into the established school culture. There are several references to the

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importance of reflective practice. Indeed, the PGDSP was conceived and taught upon the learning model of reflective practice.[140]

One sees therefore, in the way the teacher as learner is framed in the interview data, a convergence with the trajectory of SDPI's programme development towards highlighting the centrality of evidence based, collaborative self-evaluation, linked to authoritatively attested pedagogical theory (AFL, for example).[141]

As elsewhere, attitudes are tempered by experience. One account focuses an anti-intellectualism that militates against the learning identity:

> Or what David Tuohy calls the profound un-intellectual stance of the Irish teacher. The absence of reading, we are not a reading profession and it is a great challenge; so there isn't that capacity to intellectualise what is happening or articulate it. (GS: 3)

Despite occasional references to cultural resistance in the interview data, this anti-intellectualism is not widely commented upon. What is, however, insisted upon, is the need for teachers to acquire an informed discourse with which to articulate their experience.

> Peaks (of achievement for SDPI) are; one of the peaks was changing the language that people use. We are now using the language of school as if they were born with it and that means they have changed perspectives and we have changed the way that people do business in school. (LT: 24)

> We needed to spend a lot of time teaching them about the concepts. And even the language of strategic planning, things like success criteria, indicators of success, quality, that was to some degree (a question of) language; it wasn't the language that was part and parcel of the school culture. (FM: 14)

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[140] The work of Bolton and Schon was referenced at the start of the course, which deployed a reflective diary, case study and portfolio to develop reflective practice as the dominant mode of learning on the course (Schon, 1987; Bolton, 2001).

[141] This development is clearly seen in the regional seminar priorities in later years discussed in Chapter 6.

> The key achievement has been embedding a language and a process that is fundamentally educational in terms of how schools operate and how teachers work. (GS: 2)

At the same time, the scope of this challenge was widely commented upon:

> I don't think they were quite ready for that at a professional or at a political level of that professional discourse (KL: 9)

> ...Just because there had been no conversation, really, in so many schools about education. I mean we still have a long way to go in that regard. Just the lack of professional language (MH: 12).

Respondents thus recurred to the notion of teaching a discourse that provided the vocabulary and grammar of planning, without which professional dialogue simply could not happen. It will be recalled, however, from the analysis of interview data about the rise of subject planning in Chapter 7, that WB, the strongest advocate of democratic tendencies within SDP, downplayed this need for subject teachers to master a specialised discourse: 'I don't believe there's a language required' (WB: 8). In this, however, he stands out from the other respondents, even if their aim for teacher empowerment is the broadly the same.

Summary

Three aspects of notional teacher identity emerge as strong norms in the interview data. They constitute important learned dispositions that SDPI sought to inculcate within a theory of action of SDP.

A disposition towards collaboration is fundamental. Teacher agency within SDP is largely conceived as collaborative endeavour. It is characterised by openness, respect for individuality and effective dialogue.

Change agency and a commitment to school improvement are seen as the moral basis of a teacher's participation in SDP, particularly where student learning is central. SDPI respondents display a positive faith in teachers' roles in SDP, echoing a strong traditional regard for the vocation of teacher.

The third idea is of the teacher as reflective learner. A critical component is the acquisition of a discourse within which professional dialogue and learning can occur.

These ethical norms are congruent with the aims of SDPI for SDP outlined in chapter 5. However, the highly prized empowerment of the reflective, collaborative teacher must be seen in the context of wider expectations and external demands for accountability increasingly made upon schools.

As has been seen, in the analysis of the interview data so far, a theory of action is shaped not only by aspiration, assumption and belief but also by ongoing reflection upon experience. Many of the positions adopted, on, for example, the importance of mission statements or partnership in SDP, were promptly diluted or effectively

abandoned because of pragmatic decisions made once SDPI worked in schools in earnest and came to terms with the scale of the challenge they faced.

Events may also disclose structural weaknesses in the theory of SDP itself. A leitmotif in this inquiry has been the structural tension in SDP between external and internal sources of power; competing internal and external forces seeking to determine how school development should be conceived, valued and brought about. The bi-directionality of cleaving to national policy in quest of demonstrable school improvement and the logic of SDP as school directed development, while not contradictory, was nevertheless proposing a balance of interests that would be difficult to sustain, especially if there was not a strong alignment of intention from the centre to the periphery. This would always be a tall order. Policy makers and teachers are not cut from the same cloth nor do they live similar professional lives. This tension comes to a head in the interview data most starkly in the relationship of SDP to inspection, and SDPI to the national inspectorate.

Chapter Nine

A Theory of Action of SDP 3: SDP, SDPI, DES and the Inspectorate: Contested Loci of Power

Introduction

The Education Act 1998 had already determined that evaluation was henceforth to be the core business of the inspectorate (Ireland, 1998: s. 13) The State Examination Commission, established in 2003, took over work connected with public examinations which had hitherto engrossed much of the inspectors' time and limited their capacity to carry out evaluations in secondary schools. Whole school and programme evaluation, subject inspection and a more active policy role commenced in earnest soon afterwards.

It is important to take the measure of this change. Holding schools to account for their performance through inspection, though well established at primary level for years, was a profoundly significant and radical innovation at second level in Ireland. This is in striking contrast to the long established, if sometimes changing, approach to school inspection in the UK. The arrival of external evaluation was, thus, an historic shakeup for a sector that had gone largely without outside scrutiny up till now. Irish schools were, to borrow Elmore's apt term for the socio-political intractability to policy- led change of American schools, traditionally well 'buffered' from outside interference (Elmore, 2000: 6). A long preserved cultural purdah was lifted in Irish Secondary schools.

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Understandably, the profile of the inspectorate and its own impact upon national policy was greatly enhanced by this development. In the past, according to one commentator who had experience at advisory level to a former Minister for Education and Science, the inspectorate exercised little direct influence upon policy decision making outside of the area of curriculum (Harris, 1989: 15). This now changed, with explicit sanction of legislation for the enlarged role of the inspectorate (Ireland, 1998: s. 13)

More specifically in relation to SDP, the DES, it will be recalled, saw whole school SDP as a statutorily designated vehicle for achieving school improvement (O'Dalaigh, 2000: 145). Members of the inspectorate originally managed SDPI, and remained on the management committee when overall responsibility was transferred to the Teacher Education Sector of DES. It fell to the inspectorate to judge the quality of SDP in schools under the headings laid down in Area 2 of the publication, 'Looking at our School: an aid to self-evaluation in second-level schools' (DES: 2003), which became the template for whole school evaluations.[142] The components comprised the planning process, the content of the school plan, implementation and impact of the school plan and monitoring and evaluation of the school plan leading to review (Ibid.: 11-14)

Inspectors reviewed school planning documentation, including school policies, carefully as well as triangulating claims through observation and discussion with different personnel. Reports were publicly accessible on the DES website. Presumably, from aggregate conclusions in WSE's, and the cumulative impression

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[142] Drafted as guide for internal school self-evaluation, this publication became, by default, the reporting template for WSE, with five areas of quality; school management, school planning, curriculum provision, learning and teaching in subjects and support for students. Each area was broken down into aspects, components and themes, in successively more detailed sub-division.

formed in the minds of the inspectors, a view could inferentially be formed of how well SDPI was serving schools in its support for SDP[143].

For these reasons the relationship between SDPI and the inspectorate is important. It turns out to be a significantly troubled one in the reflections of the respondents in their interviews.

9.1: Differing relationships with schools between SDPI and the Inspectorate -

The context: Both SDPI and the inspectorate were agencies of the DES. As MH noted regarding SDPI; 'we weren't just agents of change we were agents of government as well.' (MH: 29)

 SDPI, however, always saw their relationship with schools as self-bounded and privileged.[144] They worked in schools by invitation only. They reported to no other agency about individual school issues, and tended to see their role as unqualifiedly supportive in intention, without any inspectorial overtones.[145] Since they worked with many schools on several occasions over extended periods of time, they saw the building of mutual trust, even adopting betimes the role of critical friend, as characterising that relationship at its best. The inspectorate, on the contrary, adhered resolutely to their role as professional and impartial evaluators, though their statutory role was designated also as advisory, specifically in relation to teaching methodology

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[143] 'Presumably' in this sentence marks a scruple or qualification. I was told, with colleagues, at a meeting with very senior inspectors in 2007 that they did not report all that they found. This was in the context of a highly critical comment on how SDP was going in schools conveying a negative judgment that could not be supported from evidence of the actual published reports which were consistently if blandly commendatory. No official evaluation of the work of SDPI by the DES was ever undertaken. The inspectors at this meeting took a somewhat jaundiced view of SDPI's engagement with schools in nurturing SDP.
[144] I am drawing on first-hand experience in the account that follows. These features of SDPI's self understanding are also writ large in the progress reports reviewed already in chapter 6.
[145] This is evident both in the tone and content of the interview data throughout.

(Ireland: 1998 s. 13)[146] Inevitably, the inspectorate's relationship was likely to be cooler and more formal, though regulated by an exacting code of professional practice in accordance with section 13 (8) of the Education Act 1998 (DES: 2002). Standards of courtesy and professionalism by inspectors were widely acknowledged as being consistently high (McNamara & O'Hara, 2008: 84-5_. Given the sensitivity and public scrutiny of its work and the need for such consistency, the inspectorate was unsurprisingly a tightly line - managed organisation.[147] One consequence of this, as will be seen shortly, was the difficulty it posed for ease of relationship with other agencies and professionals, especially at field level.

Both organisations ostensibly honoured contextual difference and characteristic uniqueness (DES, 2003: ix; SDPI, 2000: 6.3). This was encapsulated in a phrase used by senior inspectors, tellingly heard only in the earlier years of the decade, of the role of inspection as 'looking at' rather than 'looking for'.[148] The starting point of evaluation, echoing the language of the 1998 Education Act, was the 'characteristic spirit' of the individual school and the alignment of mission statement, school activities and policies with this spirit, and its faithfulness in turn to the 'founding intentions' of the Patron (DES, 2003: 4). The asserted rights of religious patrons plainly hovered over the shaping of this provision. However, notwithstanding this deference to school autonomy there was an inevitable tension with the strictures of a newly imposed external accountability system.

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[146] These reports were compiled by the Evaluation, Support and Research Unit of the inspectorate to examine aggregate data and distil key lessons from clusters of subject and programme inspections..

[147] The inspectorate's organisational structure comprised 'business units' within a hierarchy headed up by an Assistant Chief Inspector, who with the two more senior Deputy Chief Inspectors and the Chief inspector composed the internal management committee of the inspectorate.

[148] These phrases were quoted to members of SDPI during meetings with the inspectorate and INSET offered by SDPI to inspectors about planning before 2005. It is also notable that the preposition is found in the template for inspections cited above, 'Looking *at* Our School.' (DES, 2003)

As a result, a series of familiar antinomies in this study, between development and compliance, autonomy and prescription, the inner world of the school and the wider policy and inspectorial environment, SDPI and the inspectorate, signal a leitmotif in the interview data that comes down to contested loci of power and control. It is an important qualification in what follows that since this inquiry is seeking to delineate SDPI's theory of action it cannot therefore arbitrate authoritatively upon the rightness of the positions asserted in the responses.

The findings may be reviewed under two main headings. First, there is the relationship of inspection of SDP in schools, and secondly, the relationship of the inspectors to SDPI.

SDPI, Inspection and Policy

9.2.1 The radical Impact of WSE and SI: In forging the 'new relationship' with schools by OFSTED in England and Wales, it was appreciated that in the shared drive for improvement through professional effort 'support is accompanied by challenge' (MacBeath, 2006: 14). Similarly, along with the supportive efforts of SDPI, inspection lent a degree of urgency and a dimension of accountability to schools' embrace of SDP. At a basic level inspection created a situation in which SDP could not be shirked:

> Some school principals did feel it (provided) the additional spur of knowing that you could have a WSE; and therefore you needed to have done some work on reflecting on what was going on in school and you needed to have some evidence that you were planning and you were putting together your policy documents and your various plans. That was very helpful to our work because it meant that for some schools that was the reason they got you in because they wanted to have things done for WSE. When the WSE reports began to come out they were very helpful to our work because they did

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exactly what we had been encouraging schools to do themselves which was to document their own good practice as step number one and then identify a few things that could be done in order to improve....in other words I think there was a reasonable convergence between what they were encouraging schools to do and what they validated in their reports that they saw schools were doing. That was generally very helpful. (LT: 16-17)

This is a comprehensive statement of how mutually complementary the work of the inspectorate and SDPI could be.[149] It captures well what was widely hoped for in the early days especially. Inspection motivated and channelled the planning through the cycle of iterative improvement by means of the mutually aligned focus of inspectorial inquiry and developmental planning priority. In relation to planning process, what the inspectors commended, it was hoped, was what SDPI recommended (SDPI, 2010: 11). This respondent goes on to note that 'all the feedback that I was getting, first of all about subject inspections themselves and secondly about the match between our work and what the subject inspectors were looking for was all very positive and very good'. (LT: 17) There was wide agreement, certainly, that schools responded vigorously to the 'impact of WSE' (GS: 9). Accountability helped motivate teachers:

> So because people suddenly realised that a word that was not in their vocabulary prior to this was suddenly there and that was accountability. So accountability had come over the horizon and for a long time they were derisive of accountability, even when it had come over the horizon, but suddenly it came very close. It was now at the door and somebody was going to come in and sit in their classrooms and write a report. Now that, you know, all the talking in the world by SDPI would not have brought about the movement that that brought about. (MH: 11)

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[149] This statement is an outlier in the interview data in its unqualified endorsement as purportedly describing fact, though as an aspiration it would not be contentious.

This was an elaboration of an earlier general acknowledgement, from this

respondent, that without external pressure it might have been very difficult to get

schools to engage seriously with planning at all:

> Now I mean I suppose to some extent the whole thing could have imploded inwards were it not for WSE and subject inspection riding shotgun. Okay because I do think to some extent that that galvanised and it made the whole business of planning more focused. Now not necessarily for the best reasons but certainly in some schools it did get people started in a way that I think perhaps our own process was failing to do at the time. (MH: 9)

One notes, however, a more nuanced endorsement here. Pressure was needed.

Invitation on its own struggled to compel engagement. SDP was languishing prior to

the advent of inspection. However, 'riding shotgun' and compromised motivation

('not necessarily for the best reasons') suggest a more questionable state of affairs is

brewing.

However, BR picked up on a more fruitful complementarity and the validation of

SDPI's work by effective inspection and evaluation that adhered closely to its initial

published manifesto:

> What you could say is one possible contributory factor too is having changed from that would be the mainstreaming of subject inspection and WSE. Because if there was awareness in the system of this and *Looking at our School* was out there and we had played a great role in disseminating that, that there was an awareness that this was the image of good practice that was being disseminated by the inspectors and that this is what they expected to find; the notion of collaboration and planning and review and revaluation and so on. (BR: 32)

However, several other respondents commented upon a growing misalignment of

the impact of inspection and SDPI's intentions for developmental planning. They

attributed this to various sources. Thus, it might be a question of compliance anxiety,

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policy overload and a version, one might say, of teaching to the test. One notes the threatening register of the following observation:

> I don't necessarily think it (SDP) was SDPI driven. Soon school principals were now having the fear of god in them; is it true that we have to have 57 or 93 policies? So they wanted to make sure they were WSE ready. So, in the context the vision of the principal may not have gone as far as an improvement in teaching and learning. It may have gone as far as if the inspector calls here I got these policies to show him over. (FM: 5)

A fateful concern thus transpires from the interview data, running counter to more benign accounts of the relationship of SDP to inspection.[150] Schools, it is alleged, felt increasingly put upon, by the requirement to write policies to script and make them available for inspection. More insidiously, in this mindset, inspection was engrossing attention as an ordeal to be passed, with as little collateral damage as possible to the status quo. Such anxiety and cynicism militate against developmental imagination and a sense of school based agency. SDP becomes defensively reactive rather than creative.

9.2.2. Policy overload: A key complaint was that inspection conspired to ratchet up the pressure felt as a result of importunate demands for school based policies to be in place. The scale of expectation, within a matter of five years or so, is undeniable[151]. SDPI identified twenty five new mandatory school policies linked to specific legislative or Departmental circular requirements since 1998 (SDPI, 2009: 14-17).[152] SDP, for many, was largely an onerous exercise in compliance whose

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[150] This claim will be substantiated in the section that follows.
[151] Chapter 6, which charts the relative amount of effort devoted to policy formulation in the early to middle years, offers a useful backdrop for this section of the findings
[152] See Appendix 2 for an indicative but not fully comprehensive list of these policy requirements and the legislation or departmental circular requiring them.

rationale bore only the remotest relationship to addressing perceived needs within the school community. This was summed up as follows:

> But you see the focus in the early days wasn't on, was more on policy development. This was the influence of the inspectorate as such and we were on the back of the Education Act 1998. And then we had the Education (Welfare) Act and we had the arrival of a version of the EPSEN (Act) which became the Equal Status Act and a few others...we were living in the kind of culture there where schools were expected to have policies on everything and anything. (FM: 4)[153]

This respondent goes on to spell out the implications:

> But one of the criticisms I would have would be that whilst we maybe set out to try and encourage collaborative approach and bringing about school improvement very often it ended up that there was an expectation that schools would have policies and therefore the focus of the school went on policies rather than the focus of the school going on teaching and learning. (Ibid.: 5)

This reflection resonates across the data:

> The early action (model) was a 'yes' to the whole school review but that lost credibility because we were out there working in schools in 2003 and again I can look at that and see that and meanwhile the Department (of Education and Science) was looking for policy, policy, policy. Trying to marry the 'early action' and policy was difficult and there were schools that said that unless you give us policy for the sake of the paper or document and compliance sake this stuff is all very airy fairy and problems went back...It was back to looking for too much, looking for it a different way. So I think the whole national thing of policy was very, very damaging at that stage. .. (GS: 7)

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[153] The Education (Welfare) Act 2000 aimed to promote better attendance and retention in schools by requiring schools, inter alia, to devise a statement of strategy to make the school organisationally and culturally more effective, proactively and through intervention, in tackling the issue. The Education of Persons with Special Education Needs Act (EPSEN) 2004 contained a wide range of measures and practices required to deal with the inclusion of students with special educational needs. As there were substantial resource commitments written into the act it was only partially commenced with the onset of the economic recession. The Equal Status Act (2000) and the Equality Act (2004) demanded equality proofing of all policies in relation to the nine grounds designated in the act.

> Yes, I think we were caught up. You see in some sense we became the jack of all trades for legislative concern with the Department of Education. And we were allowed and there is again a significant statement; we were allowed when somebody should have shouted 'stop! This is not really the rationale for SDPI. (WB: 22)

> And it was very much the notion that there wasn't really much point in it (SDP) or there wasn't much in it for the school or there wasn't much in it for the teachers but it was something they had to do to keep the Department happy. (MH: 9)

These complaints converge upon the accusation of a deflection of SDP from its proper purpose in service of school improvement, as advertised by SDPI, by an obsession with the production of policies which were, it is alleged, policed by the inspectorate.[154] In fairness, the inspectorate did later try to minimise policy overload by providing templates and sample policies for schools in key areas.[155]

This apprehension of the oppressive constraint of policy resonates with Hargreaves' depiction of a 'post-modern' de-professionalisation whereby schools are subject to 'details of policies which have been pre-decided centrally and for which they, and not the policy makers, will be held accountable' (Hargreaves,2000: 169). Hargreaves argues that 'initiatives like collaborative planning' are cynically rejected in such a climate where power rests with the central authority rather than the professional community.

However, as can be seen from the above quotations from the data, in the Irish context it is as much the *production* of policies that is at issue, albeit in accordance

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[154] Policies were reviewed by the inspectorate in the course of school evaluations but it is questionable whether they were as important, as giving the inspectors what they sought, as the attitudes here presented assume. A concern with triangulation of evidence, whereby practice was scrutinised and conclusions validated through the analysis of several sources of evidence, including documented policy, is more likely. However, the institutional remoteness and poor communication between the inspectorate, schools and SDPI is really what may explain the attitudes seen here. How little was done to facilitate mutual understanding may explain the peremptoriness and lack of nuance in some of the judgements one brings to bear on the other. However, it is beyond the remit of this inquiry to develop this observation.

[155] These policies were reviewed and significantly shaped by SDPI personnel as well.

with statutory or administrative criteria, as it is the proliferation of regulations and nationally binding policy constraints upon schools. Schools were cowed, it is being suggested in these extracts, while at the same time anxious not to be exposed to adverse conclusions in an inspection report by lacking the necessary documentation.

This pressure may have been inadvertently exacerbated by the misalignment of the language used by SDPI and the Education Act (and indeed, LAOS). The Education Act defines the requirement to produce a 'school plan', with connotations of a finished product, whereas SDPI always referred to incremental, iterative process. SDPI's role could be misconstrued by schools as a result:

> We did have this experience and this may just illustrate it where we were trying to cultivate this culture of collaborative development planning and one of our people in the first year went to visit a school and the reception he got was, oh! You are the person who was here to write the plan. (BR: 7)

Moreover, besides policies produced with little developmental intention or practical conviction, there are planning records that ought to be read as revealing genuinely fruitful developmental planning but are regarded as little more than paper exercises:

> I would say that any inspector would expect the documentation. Their problem was they could not understand that this was a system in transition. In every school now there needs to be a good documentary trail for what is happening in terms of what is fundamental for good practice. For new people coming into the school, this is where we are going, but it is only a base line. It is where we move from there and how we move to that or use that to express where we need to go in terms of priorities and dynamic: It is not an end in itself. The problem was the inspector assumed this was all that was done. (GS: 11)

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These extracts offer a testimony of a lack of trust, or at the least, cross purposes between schools and inspectorate in relation to planning in the eyes of members of SDPI.

9.2.3 SDP – a function of management or educational creativity: A deeper conceptual dialectic is at work here than the irksome effects of burdensome imposition. These reflections instantiate recoil from a toxic mode of SDP that becomes fundamentally *other* directed. When evaluated in the light of the foregoing vision of planning in chapter 7, in relation to leadership distribution, collaborative deliberation and collegial strategies to improve learning, as well as in relation to the published commitments to capacity building and affirmation of school uniqueness examined in chapter 5, a powerful stand is taken upon internal directedness. It has been shown that this normative stance has a long pedigree both in the UK and Ireland. It has international resonance.

Cook, one of the most influential proponents of strategic planning in schools in the United States posits that planning may be a tool of management yielding compliance or of strategy releasing a creativity for change rooted in the possession of the power to pursue vision by the school community itself (Cook, 2004: 74). An analogous dichotomy is in play here.

The implication is that SDPI was doubly damaged. On the one hand, it is implied, SDPI was identified with this unwelcome and superficial imposition from the point of view of schools for which mandated, written policy was not understood as something worthwhile, as contributing to the improvement of the school. But more than this, the

developmental agenda itself was stymied and to the extent that SDPI colluded with such a rush to compliance planning it lost sight of its defining mission.

Teaching and learning, along with the unique developmental journey undertaken by an individual school in harmony with its mission, were sidelined.

The American educationist Schmoker defined learning- focused professional communities as forums where 'effective teachers must see themselves not as passive, dependent implementers of someone else's script but as active members of research teams' (Schmoker, 2004: 429). This is precisely consonant with the theory of subject planning advanced in the interview data, especially with the idea of the subject department as a conversational forum with serious pedagogic intent proposed by WB, the most impassioned advocate of teacher driven planning. Yet he acknowledges;

> Unfortunately for us in SDPI that teaching and learning focus which was very pragmatic and very practical, really, it's so simple. In a sense was hijacked by the need for documentation by the WSE events whereby teachers were being told 'you need subject plans'. And subject plans need to follow a particular routine. And in a sense, in some respects, the subject planning became the business of providing a standardised argument for the Department (of Education) which took away from its value...But it became a little bit hijacked by WSE and inspections (WB: 3)

The case here is presented unmistakably as one of empowerment versus coercion for the subject teacher as planner.

The sense of a false empowerment is noted:

> ...empowered people to focus on policy stuff that was really expected by the state when in actual fact they were trained to be French teachers, German teachers, Irish teachers and English and maths teachers. And therefore they were being distracted from their day job almost by focusing on policies that were expected by the state (FM: 8)

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Again, the prevalent interpretation is strikingly unqualified. There may be a

somewhat naive Manichean contrast between implausibly stark positions on the

spectrum of imposition and empowerment.

This pervasive judgement was summed up by the team leader unambiguously:

> There were tensions between the vision of school development planning that
> we were trying to promote on the one hand and the pressures that schools felt
> under to comply with the statutory obligations to have a policy on this that or
> the other. Instead of a school feeling that it had the freedom to identify its own
> priorities for development and to focus on those you had the board of
> management and principals in particular, rather than the body of teachers
> feeling they had to protect themselves; they had to look at the requirements
> and the statutory obligations first and deal with those rather than engage in
> planning per se. (BR: 7)

What Tuohy defined as the 'empowerment model' propagated by SDPI thus buckles

under external pressure.[156] Policy overload was an obvious impediment.

And the tone of the interview data is unmistakable and rueful:

> What I would say is that we did feel that there was a pleasing level of
> enthusiasm almost in the very early days of development planning. Before this
> full sense of obligation in people where there was the sense that this school
> having the freedom I suppose you could say to identify priorities and to work
> towards them and that was energising for some schools that we worked with
> in those very early days. It was really after the Education (Welfare) Act and
> the subsequent legislation like that. Plus when Section 29 started to raise its
> head that the full rate of obligation for compliance with that policy in place and
> getting your procedures absolutely right and having everything legally proofed
> was felt. (BR: 8)[157]

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[156] This phrase was used by David Tuohy in a recorded discussion with me.
[157] Section 29 of the Education Act (1998) detailed conditions and procedures for appeal by parents, or
students over 18, against refusal of enrolment in a school, suspension for 20 days or more or permanent
exclusion.

The key contrast here is between 'obligation' and 'freedom'. SDP, insofar as it serves a school's response to such demands, becomes little more than a necessary evil. As this respondent noted, 'teachers backed off after the first year' (Ibid.). The inspectors were caught in the crossfire of this complaint since, as one respondent put it, 'the inspectors were driving policy'. (FM: 5)

9.2.4 School and teacher agency in the context of scholarly debate – a discussion: The findings in this and in the previous two chapters are strong defence of empowerment and agency in SDP governed by internal moral commitment to development and learning. External policy demands, and inspectorial scrutiny, inhibit and distort the proper energies of SDP according to this outlook.

 In considering these findings it must be recalled that this dichotomy between school autonomy and external policy is a leading, at times dominant, motif in the scholarly literature of school improvement and systemic reform.[158] Scepticism about such externally sourced reform initiatives and the specific instruments of prescription and accountability that mediate them are ubiquitous (Hargreaves, 2008).

Teacher autonomy was being eroded and teacher identity conceptualised in terms of narrow, instrumental competencies (Day, 2002: 678-9). Day, in particular, fears the uprooting of teaching from its moral base through a loss of moral agency in pursuit of school improvement and enhanced student performance according to pre-set, restrictive criteria (Ibid., 2002: 682).

For Sachs, teachers struggle against 'managerialist conditions, a cult of individualism (that) would re-infect the occupational culture of teachers' (Sachs, 1999: 7). A collaborative professionalism requires, above all, an 'activist teacher professional

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[158] See chapter 3 for discussion of the broader issues.

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identity' (Ibid.: 9).Otherwise, teachers may be called to collaborate in fulfilling a script that diminishes rather than enhances their influence and moral freedom.

Carr has consistently argued that the very nature of teaching is both personal and inter-personal in a way making it more akin to virtue - ethical deliberation than contractual, technical discharge of impersonal skills or craft (Carr, 2005: 270). Indeed, teachers may themselves be cooperating in their own 'de-professionalisation' by a failure to grasp the core public moral commitments of their own professionalism and how best to exercise it (Bottery and Wright, 1996: 96-7). Even scholars who believe collaborative culture is the best bulwark against emotional 'engulfment' recognise that it comes at an emotional price itself, especially in a context where schools are under assault from a demeaning and aggressive policy climate (Hargreaves, 1998: 324, 327-8). This fear, I submit, is a defining problematic of SDP in terms of loci of power. Does this also extend to teacher identity as advanced in the findings of chapter 8 as well?

Sachs has contrasted entrepreneurial and activist types of professional identity, stressing the performativity and externally directed nature of the former, and the agentic and democratic credentials of the latter (Sachs, 2003). There is no mystery where virtue lies. Schmoker has advanced a startlingly crisp and self-assured agenda for school improvement in the United States through professional collaboration, dismissing systemic reform agendas peremptorily, preferring a model rooted in teacher empowerment within learning communities.[159] Hargreaves has also

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[159] It must be conceded that Schmoker does allow for the need for teacher accountability, particularly in relation to achievement data. However, he resolutely commits to teacher empowerment, to agency and initiative residing within the teacher learning community such as the subject team. Moreover, he regards the knowledge base within the school as adequate to the task. In contrast, the inspectorate in Ireland, while generously affirming 'good practice', nevertheless increasingly promoted particular, pedagogic strategies often influenced by current scholarly thinking. That is, they moved steadily towards the adoption rather than

outlined a 'postmodern' and 'collegial' professionalism (as opposed to de-professionalisation consequent upon public 'discourse of derision' and central control) where securing a locus of power within the school is critical in the UK (Hargreaves, 2000: 169-171).[160] He speaks disparagingly of 'the imposition of false certainties' and, quoting Bishop and Mulford, 'procedural illusions of effectiveness' through which teachers are ever more closely micro-managed (Ibid.: 19-9). There is now much greater insight into the formidable practical challenges and complexity of effective policy implementation, now well documented in the literature if doggedly ignored by administrators (Mclaughlin, 2008).

Respondents' critique is, however, much more pragmatic and theoretically under-developed. Irish research has not yet acquired a hard edge in these matters or, where it has, its influence is restricted. Sugrue, considering Irish research practice in relation to the fault line between economy and society which inheres in competing humanistic and instrumentalist orientations of policy, has noted:

> The paradigm wars that have been waged on both sides of the Atlantic have largely passed us by here in Ireland in the sense that there has been little if any public discourse on research quality. Nevertheless, we have not been insulated from the ideological struggles that are a very definite subterranean influence on more public pronouncements, and information flows. (Sugrue, 2008: 50)

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adaptation of preferred teaching practice. SDPI took a position whereby it sought to validate teacher initiative and reflection on current practice while offering the nutrient of new ideas from current pedagogic research. Much more needs to be said about the inspectors' rationale and practice, by no means as straightforward as may be inferred from the data here. However, the focus of the inquiry is precisely upon those perspectives.
[160] It must be noted also, however, that Hargreaves, in affirming such teacher agency at school level, concedes that it must justify itself through a demonstrable willingness 'to set and meet an exacting set of professional standards of practice' and to embrace openness to the community, including parents. (Hargreaves, 2000: 171-176). Nevertheless, teacher professionalism is defined against the 'assaults on professionalism' by neo-liberal, market oriented national policy (Ibid.: 169). This is a very common refrain in the literature on teacher professionalism.

There was, albeit through subterranean influences, an instrumentalist logic within the official embrace of school improvement since 1998, intensifying in the 21st century with a new discourse of accountability and practice of school evaluation. It cohabited uneasily with a rhetoric of school empowerment, a familiar dialectic in the history of SDP. However, there is a discursive drag on the *thematisation* of this development in Irish public discourse.[161] Moreover, the most radical critique in recent scholarly literature has focused on equality, with gender equality particularly salient (Lyons, Lynch et al, 2003; Lodge and Lynch, 2004).

 Defence of teacher agency and humanist educational ideals are less evident.

Thus, the critique of policy overload in the interview data is couched in pragmatic terms. It displaced 'good' development planning. The fact that SDPI coordinators were practitioners first and foremost also meant that they were less likely to theorise their own experience in a discourse prevalent in the wider scholarly literature and policy making controversies.

There is, nonetheless, in the data a valorisation of professionalism, teacher agency and the developmental integrity of individual school planning. Consequently, there is a generally (but by no means universal) negative characterisation of the impact of policy requirements and external evaluation that run counter to these.

9.2.5 A cautionary note – teacher skill and teacher motivation: From the earliest days some scholars have sounded a sceptical note about the recourse to teacher empowerment in the drive for greater school effectiveness. Levine argued for balance and ascribed facile advocacy to ideological motives:

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[161] It is not suggested that there has been no treatment of such issues in Irish scholarly literature and theses, just that it has not gained significant political traction or been the main focus of more publicly potent critique.

First there is a real dilemma in moving to provide teachers with more decision-making authority at the same time that research clearly underlines the importance of administrative action and initiative in improving school effectiveness (Conley, 1989). The dilemma cannot be resolved successfully largely on the basis of flip ideological claims to the effect that empowering teachers by itself will somehow transform them into members of a cohesive faculty committed in practice to the extremely difficult work of reforming schools (Levine, 1994: 40)

The two pivotal words here are 'in itself'. The rationale offered by SDPI has been pegged consistently to a programme of teacher education and sustained support to give substance to empowerment beyond ideological posturing. Yet Levine also lights upon the motivational challenge to become 'committed in practice'. Bland assumptions about an axiomatic quest for improvement and teacher motivation, this inquiry has argued, cannot be taken for granted.

Bruce Joyce is one of the most experienced and authoritative exponents of teacher professional development and agency. He has, for years, advocated focused and extensive teacher collaboration firmly geared towards improving classroom practice. He is unabashedly an advocate of teacher empowerment through collaborative learning that is defended here (Joyce, 2004) . Responding to Schmoker's 'just do it' demand for a wholesale, radical reorientation towards the formation of teacher learning communities, Joyce nevertheless reminds him of the conservative power of cultural norms in schools. He echoes Elmore's rueful recognition of the 'resilience of inherited teacher culture' (Elmore, 2006).

He makes three specific points that may help to elucidate and qualify the implications of the findings in this section.

First, he makes the general claim consonant with earlier scholarly observations recorded in chapter 3 of this inquiry, especially the pivotal work of Stoll and Fink, that school / teacher norms and culture are deeply embedded and intractable. When reform initiatives, including those ostensibly deferring to collaborative teacher autonomy and empowerment, such as that mediated by SDPI, for example, collide with the 'norms and structure of the workplace', including norms of egalitarianism and isolation, a reaction occurs that ensures that teachers 'recapture their socio/professional space' (Joyce, 2004: 79). This may apply a fortiori here as the existence of strong norms of professional privacy in Ireland, as it has been argued on chapter 4, was reinforced by historically and exclusively hierarchical models of traditional governance in Irish schooling over many years that effectively shut teachers out from wider decision making. Does this legitimise greater control from outside the school in a democratic school improvement agenda serving the common good?

Second, Joyce argues, teacher empowerment may seem like anything but that to teachers, since what is entailed in the planning models proposed as empowering would 'drastically change how teachers work and currently prefer to work' (Ibid.: 77). Citing Miles he points out that 'many people select teaching precisely *because* schools are workplaces of high isolation' (Ibid.). This is perhaps tendentious but it is still a far from implausible assertion. Ironically, SDPI may underestimate its *own* perceived coerciveness masked as its work may be as the exercise of the soft powers of support and invitation. The key issue here is the questionably forthright distinction in the data between the inspectorate and SDPI in terms of their alignment with external or internal loci of power. Both agencies mediate national policy

expectations notwithstanding their different roles in relation to accountability and support. Was SDPI another intruder?

This ambivalence, it is proposed more generally, is intrinsic to the legislative agenda of SDP in Ireland itself in that it marshalled agencies ambiguously mediating mixed messages to schools about autonomy and expectation, school self-evaluation and external accountability[162]. In a familiar pattern, school and teacher autonomy were initially affirmed and then progressively qualified in practice.[163] This is reflected obviously in the impact of mounting demands for written policies and the role of the inspectorate but also to an extent, I submit, by a 'support' group like SDPI, both of whom became more prescriptive as time went on[164]. Furthermore, it remains a challenge for *any* external agency working with schools where it is fulfilling *any* agenda sourced outside the school, even, paradoxically, an agenda of empowerment and support. Ironically this was the case, rhetorically at least, for both the inspectorate and the support agencies in the first decade of this century.

Thirdly, and as a balancing observation, Joyce also notes that 'high levels of technical support' may be needed since 'many folks lack the tools to engage in either small-group collaboration or whole school action research' (Ibid.). This is an important counterweight to idealised evocations of collaborative inquiry and any overly permissive conceptualisation of teacher empowerment, so central to the SDPI agenda.

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[162] It must not be forgotten that the template for school inspection was drafted originally as a guide to self-evaluation.

[163] Something very similar is evident in the UK after the 1988 Act

[164] DEIS planning, the final phase of SDPI's work, illustrates this clearly. Inspectorate reports became more substantive in delineating the 'best practice' sought in terms of a more uniformly conceptualised pedagogy in later years.

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9.2.6 SDPI - A Different perspective: A more judicious approach to this issue is, in fairness, shown in SDPI's published agenda.[165] Moreover, there was awareness of serious questions of basic capacity which led to SDPI working on core deliberative practices: meeting skills (chairing *and* participating) and protocols for establishing registers of relative formality in task group settings for teacher professional collaboration, needed to punctuate the transition from common norms of informal and intimate social interaction.[166] This was an essential component in teaching the professional discourse discussed in chapter 8. This work, carried out with school staffs and also further developed on a project on enhancing the role of middle leaders in school development was prompted by observation of strikingly poor levels of adult to adult professional interaction and planning skills displayed in planning sessions among many teachers:

> (There was) very little discussion and (much) whitewashing - If there was discussion it was because there was disagreement. But there wouldn't necessarily be discussion to make an already good idea a better idea. (KL: 3)

> I remember going along to different groups and saying – well, what do you think you could do about these problems? I must say I absolutely astounded that they really found it hard to come up with any solutions. (MH: 6)

> The norm and tenor in the staff room was absolutely social or gossip or anecdotal and rarely from an educational perspective, so there was an opportunity to look at that. There was huge resistance to that. (GS: 3)

There were perhaps, therefore, barriers of competence as much as motivation and cultural resistance.[167] This need was at the heart of capacity building.

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[165] It is, moreover, the main justification and rationale for its highly successful, oversubscribed PGDSP, for example.

[166] I produced some of the materials used for this work.

[167] I wrote materials for workshops in schools on working meetings for improved planning as well as modules for the project on enhancing middle leadership in collaboration with the leadership support group, Leadership

It is hypothesised, with Joyce, that teaching, especially in highly individualistic cultures, may actually deskill teachers in the 'businesslike' inter-adult interaction SDP calls for if particular attention is not paid to ensuring that the skills, protocols and acknowledged importance of professional meetings are included on the ongoing professional development programme of the school. 'Businesslike' may offer a hostage to fortune. What is intended is not that schools become like businesses, but that a quality of seriousness and formality, second nature in many professional and commercial settings, may prove surprisingly elusive in some schools, especially when relationships are longstanding and friendly. Absent such qualities, it can prove very hard for groups to function creatively and to sustain focus.

One can thus too easily attribute difficulty encountered in promoting teacher agency in planning to external influences, such as that of the shadow cast by the inspectorate or mandatory policy, when they are at least in part constituted by deficits in process capacity among the putative beneficiaries of empowerment. There is, certainly, little direct, if some implicit, acknowledgement of this in the interview data in relation to the role of inspectorate or mandated school policy. Moreover, one must give due weight to the perhaps contradictory viewpoint in the data that the external pressure was itself necessary to get things going in the first place.

There is, further, a degree of disconnection from SDPI's own practice which suggests that the interview data may be somewhat one-sidedly unrepresentative of the SDPI position. This disconnection is indicated by the fact that SDPI, through seminars, resources, summer schools and the syllabus of PGDSP, did a great deal of work to try to convey the values and legitimate goals of the key mandatory

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Development in Schools'. I also worked on this with several Vocation Education Committees, regional educational authorities with their own schools.

schools' policies to teacher and school leaders, and to guide their formulation though collaborative planning processes to ensure their adaptability to individual school conditions. Tuohy maintained that SDP as empowerment required critical understanding of external policies by school planners if they are not to be 'swamped' by them.[168] Simple obduracy was not an option. In this way they do justice to values that transcend the perhaps parochial interests of the school community without ceding the moral agency implied by empowerment (Tuohy, 2008: 33). The frustration in the interview data reflects, perhaps, just how difficult it was to achieve this level of awareness in the field.

In sum, the empowerment / coercion dichotomy strongly advanced here in SDPI respondents' depiction of the work of the inspectorate, while it carries great force and indicates an important finding, must be qualified by recognition of the complexities actually in play here.

However, what is undeniable is that the *perception* of the work of the inspectorate by SDPI soured. This raised the question of the working relationship between the two organisations.

SDPI and the Inspectorate

9. 3 SDPI and the Inspectorate: a lost opportunity?   Given their joint mandate to give effect to the aspirations of the 1998 Education Act and their engagement with schools in their respective roles, it is unsurprising that the relationship *between* SDPI and the inspectorate should figure significantly in the findings. There is a strong

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[168] The central point made in his lecture on national and international policy at the summer school for the PGDSP course and repeated to me in recorded discussion.

consensus that an opportunity of alignment and mutual enrichment was missed. Moreover, respondents attribute the decline of the standing of SDPI in great part to the misunderstandings and mutual distrust that was increasingly to characterise that relationship.

Differences emerged quite early. Thus, the proposal to offer a post graduate diploma in school planning in 2001, subsequently to become an important arm of SDPI's work with teachers, though it received the approval of the Secretary-General of the Department of Education and Science, was, according to the team leader, less favourably received at first within the inspectorate. It was delayed for over a year as a result. Territoriality may have been an issue:

> Part of it was I think that even though we hadn't hidden what was going on and it had been mentioned to those involved in managing. Remember at this stage SDPS and SDPI were managed by the inspectorate. They were not managed by ICDU at that time. Even though we weren't trying to hide the fact that we were hoping to get this on the road and that we had been involved in discussions. Nevertheless, it seemed to me that there was a feeling that things were being done behind the backs of the inspector or perhaps the Secretary General was imposing upon them, something that hadn't come from themselves and in which they weren't particularly interested. (BR: 18)[169]

GS also saw the baleful impact on the relationship between the inspectorate and SDPI as 'maybe a territorial thing' (GS: 18). This is a familiar story that could no doubt find echo in any large enterprise involving different organisations or even sub-groups within an organisation. However, it did not augur well for close cooperation in the future.

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[169] SDPS was the School Development Planning Service, the primary equivalent of SDPI. ICDU was the In-Career Development Unity of the DES, the predecessor of the Teacher Education Unit which looked after teacher professional development from the DES perspective.

Certainly there is a view that power resided firmly within the inspectorate. Referring to looming dominance of national policy over school based planning, the primacy of the inspectorate was clear:

> So those ripples (of statutory requirements) then began to hit SDPI from about 2002-3 on...I don't necessarily think it was SDPI driven, we were reacting to what was going on. The inspectorate was driving policy. (FM: 5)

Moreover, the relationship between the two organisations was a disappointment.

> Well, I suppose I always felt it was an uneasy relationship between the inspectorate and ourselves. For whatever reason, and I don't know the reason, I'm not sure if the inspectorate warmed to our approaches. (KL: 19)

This respondent, however, proceeds to belie his purported ignorance by accounting for this uneasiness in terms of a better relationship SDPI developed with schools.

> So we were more benevolent... we were affable, supportive, friendly. We gave them a lot of good quality information...there was good recourse back to us. If the school was challenged by something we said they could come back or we could go back and visit the whole staff or a sub-group. So I think we had the odds up on the inspectorate in terms of our capacity to develop relationships, impart information and very clear opportunities for follow up. (KL: 20)

He goes on to argue that the inspectorate 'were perhaps envious of the relationship we had.' (Ibid.) This view is supported by David Tuohy in an interview with me about the PGDSP:

> I do think that my main analysis of the demise of SDPI is professional jealousy within the inspectorate. I don't think they understood what was going on. I think they have taken responsibility for the changes (in schools towards planning) without understanding the reason for the changes has been a whole culture shift that had been supported by SDPI.[170]

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[170] Quoted from recorded conversation with Dr. David Tuohy.

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Cultural differences between SDPI and the DES, including the inspectorate, may have shaped the emergent non-relationship.

> I think the problem has been at times a disjunction or an over pressure from one side, a failure to understand. I think the problem has been the absence of expressed links. The way I see the department is that (they) keep their cards very close to their own chest and they are territorial. They don't engage in collaborative planning, not in the way we see it. (GS: 18)

At the very least this suggests a failure to forge a mutually supportive relationship. It punctuates an abiding difference in role identity and a lack of cooperation where there was scope for mutual support. This need not have been so. Indeed, at the ground level there was some useful liaison.

> And then inspectors involved in particular teams and areas would have a lot of engagement with individual regional coordinators and would have had a lot of regard (MH: 21)

However, there was a sting in the tail, for SDPI 'maybe spoke our minds too often' and 'that mightn't have done us any good in the long run' (Ibid). This suggests a strategic naivity on SDPI's part. Moreover, though there was also contact between senior inspectors and SDPI on a few occasions the discussion was largely confined to 'generalities' and the approaches of the two organisations failed to gel (Ibid.).

On the whole, therefore, an opportunity for offering schools complementary direction and support was missed. Moreover, even if the relationship was frankly one sided it could have achieved greater coherence:

> I mean we did get a certain amount of direction, like from time to time we were told, you know, evaluation was to be on the menu and so on. But like that it was a generic thing. But I think it could have been a more coherent model of support (we could have offered schools) if that had been happening. (MH: 20)

There are dissenting voices, however. FM has strongly placed the tension that arose on competing needs emanating from national policy and schools themselves. He argues that SDPI was closer to schools while inspectors were 'bombarding schools saying they have to have policies'. (FM: 9) Some inspectors were visiting schools 'to make sure that they could tick all the boxes (FM: ibid.)

However, on the direct relationship he is more positive:

> At no stage did I ever feel the inspectorate or the Department were overly interfering in what we were doing. Certainly they wanted to make sure we weren't doing something that was irrelevant. But I think they valued what we were doing. And they valued the fact that we were able to go in and stand in front of a group of teachers and engage collaboratively with them. And the inspectorate hadn't always been in that position where they could do that. (FM: 9-10)

This is certainly a more positive construal. One must always bear in mind that individual experiences may colour people's more generalised reflections. Yet in substance what is being said is not so very different from what other respondents have said. While there may have been regard here there is no question of a collaborative relationship. Something closer to benign indifference and a minor vigilance for off- message inputs seems to be the height of it on the part of the inspectorate, according to this view. Moreover, the account of the difference in relationship with schools is similar to that of GK though with contrasting emotions. SDPI are considered to have gained access to a much richer encounter with teachers, which may be a source of envy or of admiration.

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Another view, from GW, saw the missed opportunity not one of a potentially closer relationship but of failure to achieve true operational independence to pursue a more teacher friendly and learning focused agenda. Referring to the few meetings with senior inspectors, GW concludes that the agenda was fatally set by the inspectors:

> We responded to an almost prepared agenda around certain topics that were not drawn from us. In a sense I'd say they were drawn from the Department and the inspectors themselves in the sense that they put an agenda in the conversation. And if we had used those opportunities to pursue our own agenda in terms of what we felt needed to be done I think we may have had a better chance of securing a future for SDPI that's presently not there. (WB: 12)

This extract reinforces the strategic naivity of SDPI. Overall, a sorry picture emerges from the data of perceived missed chances and a constrained relationship. It is not within the scope of this inquiry to explore the perspective of inspectorate on these issues. However, the more important consequence is already established. Two agencies, one statutory and permanent, the senior service, so to speak, and the other temporary, constituted by seconded teachers and principals and subordinate in stature and authority, failed to establish a mutually supportive and open working relationship. By any reckoning, and whatever the rights and wrongs of particular decisions, this was a strategic failure to attain clarity, coherence and balance in drawing schools into a new culture of improvement and accountability. When taken with the commentary on the impact of inspections themselves, the failure to address the relationships among key service arms of the state's newly embarked school improvement programme and to consider the ways their work might complement rather than undermine joint efforts points to a fundamental challenge for policy makers as well as the purported implementers of that policy.

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Summary

A critical fault-line in SDP runs through potentially coercive and empowering mixed messages conveyed to schools. This theoretical possibility was instantiated in the relationship of SDP to inspection, and the corresponding relationship of SDPI to the inspectorate.

 A central finding regarding a theory of action, strongly foreshadowed in the chapters 3 and 4, is a clash between internal and external loci of control in SDP. Inspection did serve to motivate, and could, if aligned to developmental agendas, reinforce SDP. However, a fundamental contestation arises between an empowerment model of collaborative SDP with agency centred within the unique self-determining school and a progressively more importunate climate of policy prescription and external evaluation. There is a rhetorical consensus on school development in the statutory remit governing SDPI and the inspectorate, but in practice great tension and damaging erosion of developmental purpose is recorded.

SDPI's own position is ambiguous. It adheres to a capacity building and facilitative approach, but is an agency of government policy itself. Moreover, deficiencies in deliberative capacity necessitated considerable work on imparting the skills upon which SDP depends.

The failure of SDPI and the inspectorate to establish a mutually open and synergistic working relationship is a major failing, fatal for SDPI and for SDP to function as intended in support of genuine school improvement. Territoriality and organisational /

cultural differences may have contributed to this unfortunate outcome. It is

necessary, therefore, to turn to the internal culture of SDPI itself to consider how it

may have contributed a theory of action, including the looming deterioration of its

status and influence.

Chapter Ten

A Theory of Action 4: SDPI as a Community of Practice: self-perceptions of team

Introduction

It is necessary to inquire into SDPI itself to gain a balanced sense of how it functioned as a community of practice with its own internal norms. The presentation of findings here is structured differently from the three previous chapters. I will briefly outline the elements of the theory of communities of practice that I find useful to elucidate these findings based on the inner culture of SDPI. However, the focus remains, firmly, upon the analysis of interview data to elicit those findings.

SDPI conforms to standard definitions of a community of practice, with strong internal bonding around common values, meanings and ties of affection; a shared repertoire of resources; a common professional purpose; mutual interaction and largely practitioner learning.

Four key themes in the findings in this regard centre upon the qualities of membership of a 'team' and the formation of identity ; strength and limitations of its mode of learning; external relations with other groupings and the way in which the team negotiated boundary threats.

10.1 The organisational nature of the group of SDPI Coordinators: SDPI recruited members by interview from a panel of interested applicants for the positions of regional coordinators from 1999 until 2007. Most long standing members, and all the respondents, were recruited before 2003. No specific training was required nor, indeed, available in the early years, when most of the team joined up. Later members of the team had qualified in the PGDSP offered since 2002 by SDPI in conjunction with NUIG. They also would have engaged in SDP in their own schools and attended summer schools and seminars organised by SDPI. However, the majority of the team was in situ prior to this.[171]

So the transition from school life to SDPI for the respondents was abrupt and largely without prior training specifically related to SDP. In addition, in those early years, there was little planning in schools of the type that SDPI would itself go on to advocate. Though several respondents refer to their own embrace of a form of planning or staff involvement in school decision making in their schools there was little precedent to prepare for what was to follow.

 Moreover, by 2002/2003 a busy schedule of school based work began in earnest. Thereafter there was little pause for reflection or review as demand for the services of SDPI grew rapidly. As the annual reports show, the pace never let up.

Typically, then, new recruits to SDPI would have a brief period of several months at most for preparatory familiarization with SDPI resources and observation / co-facilitation with colleagues facilitating in schools before they moved on to working on their own. Original members, obviously, had no such opportunity. Each Regional Coordinator had, as the title suggests, his or her own region. However, the title is

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[171] The first members simultaneously partially wrote, taught and took the SDPI/NUIG course.

misleading in that they did little 'coordinating' and functioned more as all purpose facilitators, presenters and workshop leaders. Unlike other support agencies at the time, SDPI coordinators generally worked in schools without co-facilitators once they were up and running.

However, as the data will attest, resources were generously and unselfishly shared among team members, with frequent email communication and exchange of resources. It will be recalled that materials, such as presentations, guidelines and templates, were created 'in real time' in response to need, often in collaboration, as the thematic focus of the work shifted. Thus learning was interwoven with practice as new challenges called forth new resources and strategies.

Furthermore, apart from joint projects regional coordinators attended whole team meetings with the National Coordinator approximately once a month. Dr. David Tuohy, as academic consultant, attended many of these meetings for sessions devoted to preparation for the PGDSP. Guests, including sometimes a Department of Education and Science inspector, would attend for a session relevant to their role by invitation. These meetings, more often than not, involved two, or occasionally three day residential sessions together at different locations around the country.

The mutual reliance and the strong relational bonds that formed over time, derive in no small measure from the unprecedented nature of the kind of work SDPI did, the high stakes emotional context, especially in schools, in which solitary facilitators found themselves, and the relatively unhindered operational independence afforded to the team, at least until the last two years of the Initiative. The extended residential meetings, along with summer school and special project collaboration, clearly contributed also.

10.2 SDPI: Situated Learning and a Community of Practice: The organisational culture and professional trajectory of SDPI exemplify well what Wenger and Lave called 'situated learning' (Wenger and Lave, 1991). Wenger and Lave expounded this concept as follows:

> A person's intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a socio-cultural practice. This social process includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills (Ibid.: 29)

This argues for the strong contextual and pragmatic tenor of situated learning; learning that is simultaneous with doing and task specific, as opposed to more detached or de-contextualised learning.[172] Skills are not pre-learned. Situated learning dissociates learning from pedagogical intention and formal learning settings and associates it with reflective and social practice (Schon, 1987; Bolton 2001).[173] Moreover, learning is not solitary but social.

One learnt on the job, in other words. But, of course, there was more to it than that. Wenger and Lave go on:

> In the concept of situated activity we were developing, however, the situatedness of everyday activity appeared to be anything but a simple empirical attribute of everyday activity or a corrective to conventional pessimism about informal, experience based learning. Instead it took on the proportions of a general theoretical perspective, the basis of claims about the relational character of knowledge and learning, about the negotiated character of meaning, and about the concerned (engaged, dilemma-driven) nature of learning activity for the people involved. (Ibid.: 33)

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[172] The period of inactivity in the field during the ASTI industrial action (2001) did give a breathing space which led to the writing of the Draft Guidelines. However, the exercise was itself formative of strong collaborative learning and preceded the main influx of longstanding members (with two exceptions) who are the respondents in this inquiry.

[173] This model of learning was also espoused, albeit by formal reflection *upon* rather than reflection *in* practice, as appropriate for the PGDSP.

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The key terms here are 'relational', 'negotiated' and 'concerned'. Consonant with such learning is a professional team working under perhaps unremitting pressure ('dilemma driven'), adapting to a rapidly changing environment and expectations, evolving particular and joint meanings of its own work in the process and relying upon regular mutual engagement to do so. In time, the reference points for meaning within the prevailing discourse of the team may not be quite the same as those found outside it (Fuller, 2007: 22).It acquires its own lore and judgments. Thus the group constructs its own, meaningful identity through joint participation in its enterprises (Wenger and Lave, 1991: 53).

This sociological interpretation is a key tenet of this inquiry. High structural differentiation is a commonplace of modern sociological theory (Jewson, 2007: 78) SDPI jostled amidst a wide variety of agencies operating in the field of school support, inspection and governance, each staking out its own territory. [174]

Furthermore, with specific regard to the induction of new participants, as referred to above in the account of SDPI's recruitment process, drawing upon previous studies of apprenticeship, Wenger and Lave posit what they term 'legitimate peripheral participation' This is a scaffolded induction into practice whereby the inexperienced are gradually introduced into the working knowledge base and norms of the social practice. (Wenger and Lave, 1991: 29-43).This social practice was called a 'community of Practice', though it is first so denominated here (Ibid., Wenger, 1998, 2002). It is helpful, sometimes, I submit, to modulate this into a 'community of practitioners' to underscore the primacy of relational activity by working individuals in this concept.

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[174] Sugrue has identified 30 different 'established agencies' and 'think tanks' active in the Irish educational scene in recent times. He omits SDPI! Or more likely, given his background in primary education, he conflates it with its Primary counterpart, SDPS. (Sugrue, 2010: 59). The list has since been depleted by recession.

Three points are particularly relevant in employing a community of practitioners, as expounded very briefly here, as an aid to analysis of this section of the findings.

First, fundamental to a community of practitioners as here proposed in a professional context is the emotional and ethical bond that constitutes the group qua professional group. That is, the affective and ethical relationships are not secondary to the professionalism, as might obtain with work based recreational association (though it, too, may be contribute to the deeper bonding) but drive the work itself. Professional identity is formed in part through the affective inter-dependence that membership of the professional group mediates to individuals in the course of the work they share (Wenger, 1998: 56, 192). Fuller has argued that the broad perspective of a community of practice 'foregrounds the notions of participation, belonging and social relations' (Fuller, 2007: 23). She notes further that for Lave and Wenger concentrate on the 'learning that takes place in small tight knit groups (Ibid.).

Second, the group has itself a distinct identity and shared meanings over time derived from mutual engagement or regular interaction, a joint enterprise or set of purposes and a shared repertoire of resources and practices (Ibid.: 73).[175] To a great extent this has already been established in the findings and document analysis so far. What needs to be stressed is that this also creates the identity of the community of practitioners that is SDPI as well as impacting through its work on those whom it sets out to serve. It should also be stated, on a cautionary note, that excessive convergence may be dysfunctional and so the presence of strong group norms and beliefs, or excessive care for affective harmony, should not be taken as an

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[175] But this does not entail identical meanings or norms, for that matter. Individuals remain with their differences, as has been indicated already in relation to the interview data analysis so far. However, the substantive alignment (perhaps a better term than 'shared') of critical beliefs and norms is a crucial constituent of any community of practice and is in evidence in SDPI.

unqualified good (Wenger, 1998: 132-3; 2002: 139-59; Schein, 2010: 212). This is pertinent to the analysis to follow.

 Third, the presence of a concern or threat that in some form problematises the community's relationship with the environment in which it operates just as it may intensify adherence to group norms; As a result of this, the importance of boundary to the well being and survival of the community (Wenger, 1998: 103-121; 2002: 153-4)

This section of analysis of the interview data will focus primarily, therefore, on the first and third of these areas, namely the nature of the bond between the practitioners in the team and concern about tis relationship with its environment .

10.3 SDPI as a self-conscious 'team':

Members always referred to the organisation as a 'team'. This may seem an unremarkable and conventional appellation. However, intense connotations of loyalty and affiliation attach to self descriptions of the group and permeate the data:

> Complete openness and honesty -Nobody trying to hold cards close to their chest – absolute generosity with regard to the sharing of resources - the creation of an atmosphere where people could be very creative and where original ideas could surface, because nobody felt defensive about their ideas. Nobody felt that if they threw out an idea and somebody said; no! That wouldn't work at all – nobody felt personal about that. In other words there was sufficiently close personal trust in the group and sufficient level of professionalism in the group that led to a richness in the dialogue and that richness in the dialogue allowed for very creative ideas that came up in relation to what we had to do in schools. (LT: 26)

> Two values (defining the team) come to mind straight away; I'm sure there are others but certainly a culture of respect and a culture of sharing...in education I've worked in seven different roles. And in all of those seven I have never before or since come across a culture of such sharing and assistance and help. And therefore that for me was a really strong bond. (FM: 19)

The working in teams (in SDPI) has been very, very powerful. The learning from everybody so there has been a very open climate of hearing and learning and appreciation. There has been a lack of territoriality but there has also been a great appreciation and respect for people with specific expertise. They have been so generous and I think the team culture has been so open and appreciative that it has been development and sharing of where we were going. (GS: 19)

I thought – I've said this outside of education circles that it was for me, professionally the best experience I've had in my life. (KL: 14)

I think collaboration was extremely important (for the team). I mean there was very much a team approach. And a lot of planning at the level of team and great sharing of resources and ideas and great professional dialogue really was ongoing all the time...I think harmony was an important value...there were no raised voices. I don't think I ever saw anybody get really angry or cross at any of the meetings. (MH: 15)

There is clearly a very strong affiliation in evidence here. The extracts resonate with appreciation for the team as a deliberative professional forum that encouraged individual contributions while maintaining robust group alignment around common values of mutual respect and support. References to sharing and collaboration without side are common. The tone of the responses, and there are many more in this vein, conveys a strong sense of personal, emotional commitment to the enterprise. This is buttressed by a gratitude for the social experience of membership. This extended to recreational social bonding as well:

Another value was 'fun'. There was a great social mix. We made it our business to go out in the evenings and have decent meals and have good chat and good fun and that; I think it was an important part of the success of the team. And, you know, I suppose it was commitment at a kind of personal level. And a lot of people stuck with that even though they could have found other people to go out with and what have you, they made the effort generally speaking, to stick with the team and to be part of that kind of friendly group that was our team really in a sense.(MH: 16)

Stressing the personal, PF stated:

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> Now apart from that it wasn't just the (professional) values, it was camaraderie, friendship. I don't recall any team meeting I was at where there was any personal conflict.(FM: 19)

However, it is of great significance that the team's devotion to duty, according to respondents, is undiminished by its collegial atmosphere and is heightened by the challenge of the work:

> And then there is a huge challenge and what has been achieved through that, it has never been laissez faire, but what has been achieved through that liberation and freedom has been the motivation to work hard, to develop, to read, to explore the creativity that has been unleashed in that and I would say we can stand over the work that we have done, the material that we have put into the system that did not have anything like that before. (GS: 19)

> I think another value (defining SDPI) would have been service to schools, you know. Like, really, if a school needed something or wanted something then it was absolutely incumbent upon you to deliver. That came really before everything else, I think; meeting the needs of individual schools. I mean it was an incredible service really - and a very small team providing that service. (MH: 15)

There was also a strong sense of intellectual capacity commensurate with the work:

> Well, they were bright people and I enjoyed the company of (such people); they were just a bright team - Sharp, very intuitive, very innovative and thorough. (KL: 14)

> The team were fortunate to have some very, and I don't use the term unadvisedly, brilliant minds. And people who had a very good sense of what was needed at a particular time. (WB: 11)

Therefore, a potent personal affiliation, rooted deeply in highly valued collaborative and social experience, characterises these reflections upon team membership. It might be sceptically remarked that there is an element of collective self-regard here. However, this would be a misreading of the tone of the accounts and insensitive to the emotional register of the reflections, tinged, as they are, with regret.

Moreover, though supported by social interaction outside of work, they forcefully describe a mode of professional mutual engagement that incorporates strong personal commitment.

Beyond this, it is submitted, there is an ethical as well as an affective energy in play here. It seems to the author that there is warrant for inferring from the data presented a synergy between affiliation to an organisation's moral purposes and a deeply satisfying socio-professional experience. Furthermore, how that valorised experience is perceived within the team influences the content as well as the form of its engagement with others, including its clients. Where, as here with SDPI, there is an educative role, or advocacy of new ways of working addressed to its clients, teachers for the most part, the experienced mode of interaction within the team is likely to colour the message it transmits about how others should do their business.

There is overwhelmingly positive and indeed at times effusive endorsement of collaboration and sharing on the team, allowing difference to emerge without upsetting the harmonious inter-personal climate. This may explain in part the extent to which these same qualities figure so conspicuously in the reflections upon SDP and the imputed dispositions of teachers favourable to it, already presented as findings and discussed in chapter 8. There was, in other words, a strong experiential basis for the advocacy of the kind of deliberative learning community, markedly open, unselfish and professional, that informs the portrayal of planning at its best in the data. Thus, the pervasive affirmation of discursive competence and deliberative integrity, as the engine of effective planning throughout the data, may in part at least derive from deeply satisfying social and collaborative experiences within the team. They may be somewhat idealised but that is beside the point. They frame reflection

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and constitute an evaluative norm expressed as recollection. This is precisely the sense in which SDPI, it is proposed, evolved as a distinct community of practice in a way that gave it and the theory of planning it embodied its unique character.

Day and Gu have argued for the importance of what they term 'the personal in the professional' and, in particular, in the formation of effective 'learning communities' (Day & Gu, 2010: 26-39).They argue for the importance of emotional well being and a positive identity to promote teacher efficacy and agency (Ibid.: 38). Distinguishing 'identity' from 'role', they cite Hargreaves and Goodson's (1996) seven principles of professionalism (Day & Gu 2010.: 36). These principles, taken together, seek to integrate ethical judgment (phronesis) with a highly socialised conceptualisation of learning, responsibility and work. This account accords with both the espoused norms of teacher agency in planning operative within SDPI and, as is here evident, with the self-perception of SDPI from the vantage point of its members.

10.4 Impact of Leadership: Apart from the mutual respect within the team, the quality of team leadership is widely praised for vision and meticulousness:

> A well led group as well because that doesn't happen (commitment to work and collaborative culture) in a team unless there is sufficient structure built around it to allow all that to happen and direction given, but at the same time sufficient freedom to generate new ideas and a leader that had the complete respect of the group in such a way that nobody felt under threat if they suggested a change or made a criticism of something we were doing or anything like that. There was complete openness in the discussion and nobody felt intimidated by the leadership and in fact the leadership just facilitated and encouraged contributions. (LT: 26-7)

> ...the strengths (of the team leader), absolutely superb leader...in relation to what were the things that really were the strengths, very good leader, highly organised, responsible...(FM: 20)

> I suppose when I go back to schools and I will say: what is the key factor in how a school thrives? leadership. The leadership team has been extraordinary and this is an absolute affirmation of {the team leader's} leadership.

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There was attention to detail, and they (SDPI) benefitted from great leadership. (KL: 14)

I think the leadership team: the {national coordinator}, in other words, {offered} incredible leadership, really. I mean talk about leading by example; she was incredibly organised, incredibly well prepared for meetings. Very open. Genuinely wanted to hear what everybody had to say. It probably was for that reason it took us a long time to make decisions from time to time but I think her leadership style really made a huge difference to the way the team worked. (MH: 18)

There is particular appreciation for the nurture of autonomy and creativity by the team leadership:

Leadership; because I can speak as a team member for what has allowed for my development and the team development has been encouragement, the expectation, the challenge that has always been there but also I have found the liberation and the excitement one experiences in being given free area in which to create, develop and practice, knowing that there is confidence and support, utterly, from the team leader. (GS: 19)

Well, I think the strength was that the leadership of SDPI team was one which facilitated a certain degree of professional autonomy among the team members that the person in charge allowed people who were leaders in their own right coming out of schools to exert their own leadership in terms of their role as SDPI coordinators. And I think it allowed people to form a team and to enable strengths in certain areas to shine through. (WB: 11)

It is noticeable, again, how such praise for a leadership style attributed to the team leader reflects the main characteristics of the type of leadership recommended for school leadership of SDP. Strong support, attentiveness, insight, distributed decision making and an emphasis upon dialogue and collaboration are highlighted. This is further evidence of how the emergent self-identity of the team imbued its own developing normative theory of SDP. However, there were also concerns about the team that grew over time; concerns, paradoxically, that may be regarded as the shadow side of its alleged virtues.

10.5 solidarity and inertia: Wenger has noted that communities of practice may become disordered, and so sub-optimal in performance, for a variety of reasons relating to the faulty structure of the community or the human frailty of its membership (Wenger, 2002: 140-1).While a community of practice is particularly vulnerable to factionalism or internal fission, it is conversely vulnerable, when internal cohesion is tight, to 'narcissism' or cliquishness that can undermine its functional effectiveness and its learning (Ibid: 143,145). Wenger notes that:

> Pushed to an extreme, close friendship and the desire for a sociable atmosphere can prevent members from critiquing each other or from seeking to deepen their understanding of their domain. The community then becomes blocked in a blind, defensive solidarity. (Ibid: 145)

Such communities may become too bounded and display excessive 'localism' (Ibid.: 146).

Schein, in his much updated, classic study of organisational culture, observes that there is a stage in group formation where the group becomes an 'idealised object' for itself (Schein, 2010: 205). At this stage there is an 'emotional focus on harmony, conformity and search for intimacy' and 'member differences are not valued' (Ibid.) Schein notes the 'strong emotional need to feel merged with the group and to deny internal differences (Ibid.: 212). He notes that sometimes the 'over-personal' member will police this cohesive intimacy and may suppress different or 'counter-personal' voices (Ibid.) he concludes that some groups may 'get stuck' at this stage of development (Ibid.: 213)

While there is clear evidence in the interview data of strong emotional bonding in SDPI, and a highly prized internal harmony was achieved, respondents have also

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been at pains to stress the creative licence afforded to members, particularly through the tactful support and attentiveness of the leadership. Respected differentiation of function and expertise are also in evidence.

However, there are some indications that there was a limitation to group learning that may make Wenger and Schein's analyses more relevant. Unsurprisingly, this theme is less pronounced but it is present all the same.

LT, following testimony of the openness of the leadership and lack of intimidation of any sort, nevertheless goes on to comment on a failure in SDPI to reflect deeply enough about its own direction:

> It didn't reflect that much on where it was going. I suppose the team was too busy. A lot of time at team meetings was spent developing material for the next round of whatever it was. There is always a pressure on there. I think that if you are really going to stand back and reflect on where the work was going and what we were doing. We attempted it a few times but it would want to have been very well structured and maybe it needed to have been done by an external facilitator and not by the leadership or David; some very experienced facilitator needs to come in and have a structured programme which would put us into a variety of groups around a variety of tasks. And, like we were doing with schools, almost get us to reflect on our practice, on what we thought was working well, on the evidence...we didn't really get the opportunity to consider those questions ourselves and to stand back from the process. (LT: 27)

LT is explaining how SDPI did not stand back and take stock, but was carried forward in the onrush of busyness. He tactfully seems to be acknowledging that difficulties other than the availability of time impaired previous attempts to reflect as a team on fundamental questions of direction, in his conclusion that an experienced, external facilitator was needed to do the job. There is also an implied distinction between creative and reflective freedom. While debate and diversity were encouraged in the production of new materials and planning for sessions to come,

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there may have been less encouragement for a more through-going reflection upon

the team itself.

FM also adverts to this lack of self-reflection:

> Well I remember, many years ago, the question was asked in relation to what did we need to do now? Let's start and look and see where we need to go. And there was a reluctance to allow that to happen for a while – there was a reluctance to allow it to happen. (FM: 20)

There is an oblique hint here, it may be put no more strongly, that personal

sensitivities may have contributed to this reluctance. GS has conceded that 'we

became a bit defensive at moments...' (GS: 20). GW breaks cover to make a more

explicit point about this demurral from reflexivity:

> I think, in a sense, there was a hesitancy most of the time amongst our leadership, and in the team, to engage in serious reflection of what the team was doing as a national agency for fear of, in some sense, discommoding the Department and so on. And that militated against the future of the team ultimately. But the team was cosy, in that it identified areas like legislative development...it had identified...core business, that we were able to do again and again and again. The only difference was the address you were going to. (WB: 11-2)

'Cosy' is an interesting word to use. It connotes a dangerously seductive insularity

and contentment with acquired competence. KL saw the failure as especially

applying to a lack of 'debriefing' after difficult sessions. He saw the team as

> ...forward planning all the time...a massive pressure to deliver...but there were insufficient, built-in reflective periods in our own work...I think we would have benefited from that professionally and I think we needed the therapy of it. (KL: 15)

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'Forward planning' clearly precluded planning for the future as an onrush of necessary productivity engrossed available time. MH, however, makes the most explicit connection between group harmony and constraint on critique:

> I think harmony was an important value. Now that could be a plus or a minus, you know, in the sense that it was a very harmonious group to work with...And the other side of that then was because everybody was so nice, it was hard to be critical. And it was hard to say hard things, in a way. Now I suppose, like any piece of work, there are always things that could be better; so that could be a difficulty, at times. I think people were given their head; they were encouraged to take initiative. Initiative was encouraged and if anybody came up with an idea or if anybody was involved with any other group or whatever that was really facilitated and encouraged. (MH: 15-16)

This is the most forthright statement differentiating strong creative freedom, looking always to the future from a reticence about anything that smacks of critique addressed to past performance or more fundamental inquiry into the direction the team was taking. A relentless schedule of work, sensitivity to interpersonal harmony and a degree of complacency about current competence are all adduced as possible contributing reasons for this recoil from critical reflection. But what of the consequences?

10.6 A political challenge: It has been argued that the statutory role of SDPI placed a strain upon the team as it sought to navigate contested loci of power, situated in national governance structures and in schools. This reflects an inbuilt tension within the very concept of SDP itself, both in Ireland and, earlier in the UK, where a policy that sanctioned external intervention and demands accountability nevertheless seeks to empower local decision making and school autonomy in the context of a presiding push for school improvement, however protean a concept that

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might turn out to be. O'Neill well observed that the drive for accountability in public affairs paradoxically may diminish rather than increase trust (O'Neill, 2002).)

One consequence of the poverty of wholesale reflection may be the vulnerability of SDPI as it needed to navigate politically charged and ever changing circumstances.

FM posits a direct connection between this reluctance to self-review and a failure to read the signs of the times, particularly as SDPI competed with other agencies now serving schools:

> But I think the writing was on the wall in some shape or form. But like any organisation we don't always see it until afterwards. The support service system was made up of 30+ support services. So, as far as the Department was concerned we were one of a group of 33 or 34. As far as we were concerned we were the centre of the world. So, somewhere in the middle we needed to communicate our sense of who we were. (FM: 20)

This nicely expresses difference between a strong internal perspective and the view from outside. As has been shown with regard to the inspectorate, there is shared view in the interview data that channels of communication, especially though not exclusively at management level, needed to be more active if SDPI was not to drift out of favour. FM argued that the leadership:

> ...needed to mix and rub shoulders, maybe to be more of a politician almost. And that may be an area that maybe could have been improved upon. (FM: 28)

This suggests, again, a lack of strategic thinking. GS gives an interesting inflection to the political disposition of the team:

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> I would see the team as being very open. From time to time we became over politically aware, maybe....personally I found that difficult even though I enjoy political speculation but I don't like when that threat comes across and that becomes our main purpose: to offset threats. (GS; 20)

This seems to contradict the prevailing view of strategic naivity. However, it reflects, more likely, a personal recoil from 'political' contention that might destabilise the emotional security and harmony of the team. The more common inference from the data is that SDPI generally shared the squeamishness about political tactics voiced here. Political awareness did not translate into action or go beyond 'political speculation' as essentially a form of entertainment. There is significant support for the view that a heavy price was paid for the lack of political assertiveness, the complement of a failure to regularly review direction at team level. WB felt that SDPI needed to move to take charge of the support schools needed following evaluations and 'at a much earlier stage we should have grabbed the opportunity to begin to pull together that fragmented support service' (WB: 12). He goes on:

> And I think we lost out on that and in fairness, I don't think the leadership, and I'm talking about the committee and all of that, I don't think they had the political stomach to engage in that. (WB: 13)

This is a bold analysis. It reveals two circumstances. One, that SDPI lost prominence and status as the decade wore on. Second, that critical to its survival was its relationship with other agencies. It is here, that an unreflective, highly bounded community of practice, displaying this kind of functional introversion, is vulnerable.

As MH observes:

> I think we weren't political as a team. We didn't court favour with those in power. And I think we didn't really blow our own trumpets in terms of the quality of work we were doing and that. And I suppose it wasn't in the nature

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of the team to do that. But I suppose it did mean that other people in other organisations and other groups probably did both these things and ultimately I would say that it worked against us in terms of our survival. (MH: 19)

The lost opportunity to forge closer links with the inspectorate, already discussed, is a case in point, though responsibility for this does not rest solely or even principally with SDPI. There is a clear connection, then, between an avoidance of more searching reflection and review; a highly valued and personally charged cohesiveness; and strategic inattention to changes outside the boundaries of SDPI that were to have a fatal impact upon its status and survival.

In particular, as one influential policy maker and commentator with a particular interest in educational reform argued, there is a need to introduce 'contestability' and 'competition' to dissolve the 'collusive culture' of Irish public service. (Thornhill, 2009: 13).

Summary

A crucial source of a theory of action is socio-cultural experience of the group who create it. This analysis of interview data concludes by looking at the evidence of how SDPI's own experience as a professional team contributed to that theory.

SDPI displayed many of the classic features of a strongly bonded, internally cohesive community of practice. Creative freedom, mutual regard and intensive collaboration fuelled shared professional identity in a way that maximised productivity in a fast changing environment. Sensitive, attentive leadership played a pivotal role in ensuring that SDPI retained these qualities, securing loyalty and commitment.

Norms constituting the teacher as planner, such as collaboration, initiative and reflective learning are identified as also distinguishing the norms of the team itself, suggesting an experiential basis within SDPI contributing to the values strongly attached to SDP by team members.

However, an unintended consequence of such bonding is a reluctance to engage in radical self-critique, partly by privileging affective loyalty over professional need. Once consequence of this is the lack of political assertiveness that may have been needed as SDPI competed with a growing number of other agencies in an increasingly more fraught and complex environment. This reluctance left it less well placed when important decisions about how the future of support services were taken.

SDPI's strategic naivity may have concealed important changes in its working environment which saw SDP itself lose its discursive and political potency. The decline of SDP and SDPI are thus complexly intertwined.

Chapter Eleven

Discussion of Findings and Consideration of their Implications

11.1 SDPI and an internal theory of action: introduction; I proposed in Chapter 1 that in my discussion of the findings I would review the analysis of the internal professional culture of SDPI in Chapter 10 by using as a lens certain concepts drawn from Argyris and Schon's original formulation of a theory of action. I sketched the main features of that theory there in my exposition of the emergence of the idea of a theory of action as an analytic tool. Such a review, I submit, throws into relief important assumptions framing the internal dynamics of the team that might otherwise lack the saliency they deserve. Most valuably, it highlights a problem of satisfying competing needs to conserve and adapt within any professional group like SDPI that attempts over an extended period to navigate treacherous and shifting waters without losing its own grip on its own agenda or jeopardising internal social cohesion.

In Chapters 7 through to 9 I have presented, particularly within a framework borrowed from Hargreave's broader, derivative understanding of a theory of action, the underlying assumptions that constitute an inferred normative theory in use among SDPI coordinators from the interview data. At times this theory in use diverged from the espoused theory enshrined in SDPI's official literature and initial programme. I have focused in these chapters, therefore, primarily upon SDPI's relationship with its clients and co-professionals. That account, and the choice of Hargreave's conceptualisation of a theory of action as a stipulative definition, was

particularly designed to relate, in an historical context, the unfolding theorisation of practice in the promotion of SDP in Ireland that followed the contours of the changing programme of action summarily presented in chapter 6. Linking this account to the prior history of SDP in Britain and Ireland was one of the contributions I have sought to make in this thesis, one that contributes particularly to our understanding of an indigenous appropriation of wider planning discourses and practices.

 In chapter 10 I proceeded to analyse the interview data in relation to SDPI itself as a team. I have argued that in several important respects SDPI is best elucidated as a particular cultural formation known in the scholarly literature as a community of practice. What implications, I now ask, can be drawn from this analysis for understanding SDPI's theory of action as it appertains to its internal culture in terms of Argyris and Schon's approach to professional effectiveness? I will argue that there is a common thread in the two theoretical approaches, noting however certain differences in emphasis.

In this discussion of the findings, I will first identify some of the governing variables and associated action strategies that can be elicited from the foregoing analysis, particularly in chapter 10. I will then pose the question of whether SDPI, in its internal professional culture, structures and practices, can usefully be analysed as conforming to Argyris and Schon's paradigms of theories of action classed as Model 1 or Model 2. [176]

It must be understood at the outset, however, that an application of the concepts in Argyris and Schon's original account must to a degree be approximate and

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[176][176] It is important to bear in mind, however, that the notion of a theory of action as developed by Argyris and Schon was never explicitly avowed by SDPI. This, in itself, is unremarkable. The thrust of Argyris and Schon's analysis was largely in the elucidation of theories in use that their proponents were unaware of or pursued despite often conflicting overt intentions. Most of their subjects were blind in large measure to their own theoretical dispositions towards action as subsequently expounded by Argyris and Schon.

improvisatory. Argyris and Schon developed their theory largely in relation to individual professional practice, focusing heavily on difficult professional decisions involving a relationship with clients, rather than upon the internal working practices of a professional community over a prolonged period of time[177]. While much of what they say is suggestive it is never a perfect fit in terms of the exposition offered by Argyris and Schon.

11.1.1 Argyris and Schon and the internal dynamics of SDPI: There are three central insights from Argyris and Schon's text that are especially pertinent in this discussion of the internal dynamics of the SDPI coordinator team.

First, Argyris and Schon recognised that a theory in use by definition had conservative as well as developmental purposes, and this in two senses, one internal to the theory and one external to it. First, a theory in use, as considered in chapter 1, served to sustain a coherent and stable set of purposes and strategies for the actor. In so doing, it tended to 'maintain a person's field of constancy', and thereby to create the terms of the 'behavioural reality' it sought to influence by picking out features that confirmed its governing assumptions (Argyris and Schon, 1974: 16-17). In other words, the range of variability of behaviour was restricted by assumptions embedded in the theory, and so Argyris and Schon used the term 'governing variables' to represent this idea.

Furthermore, however, a theory of action, Argyris and Schon recognised, within the terms of these variables may seek explicitly to conserve as well as change the reality in which it operates. In fact, they distinguished between 'managing variables' and

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[177] Argyris & Schon, 1974: 35-62

'change variables' governing a theory of action in a way that interestingly mirrors SDPI's own theory of SDP, echoing British precedent, whereby SDP was designed both for maintenance and development purposes (Argyris and Schon, 1974: 30; Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991: 17-20; SDPI, 1999: 35). As a consequence of this combined conservative drag on radical change, Argyris and Schon saw that new behaviour and so new learning, especially when it went beyond the current governing framework of the theory in use, always faced the challenge of robustly if often unconsciously preserved assumptions that do not yield easily to disconfirmation since the theory in use may screen out the potentially disconfirming data.

Secondly, Argyris and Schon's critique of modern professional culture is committed to validating ethical intentionality and personal responsibility as the wellsprings of professional life (Argyris and Schon, 1974: 154-5, 162-3). It foregrounds the importance of the integrity of inter- relationship, the primary focus of ethical concern, at the heart of professional practice. They set out, conversely, to reduce the overriding dominance of what they see as the technical, 'rational', means-end reasoning they associate with that culture. This theme obviously resonates with the tension between ethical, deliberative and collaborative agency and rational, instrumentalist forces at play in the modern educational milieu and within SDP itself as already discussed in several places in this thesis[178]. Argyris and Schon further differentiate 'technical' and 'interpersonal' theories *within* a theory of action of professionalism with the clear assertion that the latter ought to be more fundamental and determinative of professional practice (Ibid.: 146-155, 164). The client focused

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[178178] Detailed consideration of this topic is found in Chapters 3 and 7.

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and collaborative conceptualisation of professional practice and learning they commend is built on this premise. This notion resonates with the analysis both of SDPI-client and internal SDPI culture in the four preceding chapters.

Thirdly, the collaborative accessing of 'valid data' in the professional setting (involving professional and clients in collaborative if differentiated inquiry) upon which developmental decisions and professional judgment will be made is critical to allow 'free and informed choice' leading to maximal 'internal commitment to decisions made' (Ibid.: 87). Data here has a very broad range of possible meaning, from diagnostic data in a medical examination to whatever may be relevant and proposed for a general policy decision. In all cases, however, unmediated access to the pertinent reality by all parties to the professional project is the elusive but fundamental desideratum of professional effectiveness[179]. A combination of interpersonal collaboration and valid data lay the foundations for sustainable professional effectiveness and the avoidance of self sealing and unresponsive inertia that controlling professional behaviour promotes in increasingly less efficacious theories in use, typically evincing features of the model 1 paradigm (Ibid.: 86-9). This study has also represented a mounting concern with the quality of collaboratively educed data within SDP in SDPI's work with schools. This aspiration has a particular relevance however to the internal work practices discussed below.

Nevertheless, while Argyris and Schon posit relational trust as a key pre-condition for this access to 'valid information' to come about, it is a finding of this study that norms of group solidarity and apparent trust may constrain exploratory inquiry even where

[179] The question of whether such a concept of unmediated access to data is possible or even coherent is an issue that cannot be pursued here.

there is no evidence of dissent or disaffection (Ibid.: 158-163)[180]. Moreover, it is argued that the conceptual frame of a community of practice, perhaps better elucidates this situation. However, too much should not be made of this as it does accord with another important theme in Argyris and Schon's work, namely the insistence that protection of self and other and the management of affect is a key component of both model 1 and model 2 theories of action and professional engagement (Ibid.: 69, 87).[181]

11.1.2 Dominant Governing Variables: Governing variables are defined by Argyris and Schon as 'the goals the actor tries to satisfice' (Ibid.: 66).[182] They resemble constitutive conditions which frame, direct and limit purposive action. Argyris and Schon inferred the governing variables, with considerable interpretative licence, from actors' second order accounts of their intentions, thoughts and reflective assumptions in relation to case studies written by the actors (Ibid.: 65). A key component, therefore, of a governing variable and a diagnostic guide to it is the unlikelihood of thinking or acting outside the scope of the variable in normal circumstances, or even under pressure; that is, until it is challenged by incongruous, competing variables or un-assimilable and unavoidable circumstances. It is thus consistent with their approach to infer the governing variables from the analysis of the interview data, itself a body of second order reflection on prior professional

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[180] See 10.5

[181] The way this is achieved is obviously different in the two models.

[182][182] 'Satisfice' is a coinage of Herbert Simon's that refers to sub-optimal decision making where adequacy rather than maximal satisfaction is the aim. The term is used as a function of what Simon called 'bounded rationality' where in conditions of uncertainty the cost of the decision making process is taken into account and one opts to make do rather than always strive for the best. This latter condition underscores Argyris and Schon's recognition that governing variables are conservative forces for stability and predictability as well as effectiveness in their relationship to 'assumptions about self, others and the behavioural setting' and thus are highly resistant to change (Simon, H. A. (1956). "Rational choice and the structure of the environment". *Psychological Review,* Vol. 63 No. 2, 129-138Argyris & Schon, 1974: 21

experience, mainly, for present purposes, in chapter10. Argyris and Schon, moreover, use the term 'governing variable' in two senses both of which are invoked in this discussion. First, it represents a tacit knowledge comprising assumptions that may be very varied themselves and reflect the character of the activity in question (Ibid.: 15-17). Secondly, however, the term is used more restrictively to characterise two contrasting species of professional learning behaviour, named as model 1 and model 2 (Ibid.: 66-7, 86-9).

Governing variable	SDPI Action Strategies	Learning Mode
Productivity	Calendared activity; regular meetings; absence of un-programmed/ strategic reflective space	Model 1
Collaboration	Creative working groups on generation of materials; open access and critique of artefacts; Use of information technology communication for information sharing; facilitative leadership	Model 2
Service ethic	Identification of authoritative guiding themes for work[183]; regular debriefing; discourse of commitment and values; Invitation to visiting	Model 2

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[183] 'Internal commitment to the choice...learning oriented norms' Characteristics of model 2 learning behaviour (Argyris and Scgon, 1974: 87)

	speakers on key topics	
Cohesiveness	Sociality; guarding of non-critical group norms	Model 1

Table 7: Governing variable, action strategies and learning mode of internal professional culture of SDPI

Following this approach, the first governing variable, in the first sense used above, that can be discerned from the entire corpus of interview data may be termed adaptive *productivity.*[184] SDPI was absorbed in producing and disseminating materials in response to an evolving understanding of its professional mission in changing circumstances. Internally, this meant that a relentless process of busyness within the framework of a calendar of activities that established a pattern early. Thus norms of productivity and short term, highly determinate goals were internalised by members of the team[185]. This is important because it formed the temporal frame of the team's activities and probably engrossed most of its strategic energies. There was little time for anything else.

A key associated action strategy was to operate within a clearly calendared set of recurrent activities. Thus, for the team as a whole, regional seminars occupied September to December; preparation for summer schools started early in the new year; the PGDSP set priorities at stages throughout the full working year, and so on. Team meetings monthly or at intervals of no more than six weeks as a rule anchored this activity. One consequence, of significance that will be shortly examined, was the

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[184] See 10.1 and 10.3
[185] 'Define goals and try to achieve them' a governing variable characteristic of model 1. Argyris and Schon, 1974: 68

absence of longer term reflective space. Another related strategy was the ready assumption of externally set agendas, whether from the DES, the fallout from legislation, schools or topical issues. Across the interview data one sees this reiterated expression of what is subjectively experienced as relentless busyness.

On the other hand, the account of a highly participative leadership in chapter 10 in relation to ongoing work, within the scope of the terms of the prevailing programme of work, established a governing variable of deliberative, creative *collaboration*.[186] Each member, it is clear from the testimony of the coordinators and its analysis, internalised norms of great freedom to contribute to the shaping of the detailed content of the resultant professional programme. As a result, the danger of self sealing action was greatly mitigated. Insofar as this was genuinely practised, and the testimony of the respondents suggest that this was perceived to be the case much of the time, the collaborative dynamic supported 'sharing directly observable data, by sharing interpretations of that data and by sharing our testing of the attributions we make about others.' (Argyris and Schon, 1974: 161) The data in question was above all else the artefacts the team co-produced and employed in their subsequent professional engagement with their clients. It also includes the interpretations and intentions that give rise to these artefacts, such as the understanding of what works in the field, what can be jointly owned by all team members, what accords with shifting understanding of professional priorities.

A related strategy was to form small working groups who produced drafts of working documents and presentations that would then by processed by the team as a whole,

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[186] See 10.3 and 10.4

re-edited and ultimately adopted across the team. It was frequently a lengthy process. Another was the use of technology, email and PowerPoint particularly, as devices for designing, displaying and critiquing work in progress in a maximally collaborative way. Thus, collective, unconstrained evaluation of relevant artefacts, in circumstances of trust and mutual inquiry, valuing individual differences but seeking a common excellence, accords with norms of deliberative effectiveness advanced by Argyris and Schon (Ibid.: 103)[187].

It is further proposed that the 'instructor's faith in participants' in the inculcation of effective theories of actions argued for by Argyris and Schon is analogous to the leadership style of the national coordinator which underpinned this governing variable (Ibid.: 104)[188]. No attempt to close this facilitated creativity is recorded in the interview data with several references to the painstakingly patient accommodation for this work at protracted team meetings.

There is also a forcefully expressed assumption of a powerful *service ethic*, whereby respondents have testified repeatedly to the sense of mission and importance of value directed service to their clients.[189] This also informed the trust established within the group where it was not the case that cynical or radically dissenting behaviour was discountenanced but became simply inconceivable. The data confirms this and so suggests a governing variable that reinforced a professional ethos of service but also set boundaries for discourse within the theory in use that made it inconceivable to challenge the moral basis of SDPI's work. The data also

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[187] See 10.3
[188] See 10.4
[189] See Chapter 1 (*insert section number for page* 5 of amendment 1) and 10.3

shows that this service ethic meant that the externally sourced expectations, especially from legitimate authorities in DES, were successively taken on board by SDPI.

One strategy was to seek new authoritatively endorsed themes for each year's work along with internally sourced proposals[190]. Another important strategy towards maintaining the service ethic was to build in time for debriefing on work with schools at team meetings. Yet another was to invite speakers with specialist knowledge and particularly commitment to social issues (equality, special needs, challenging behaviour etc.) to address the team. The interview data, however, is eloquent with this foundational sense of mission.

However, chapter 10 also noted a further and more substantive limit to potential critical openness. A concern to achieve affective harmony and stability meant that SDPI recoiled from more fundamental questioning of its changing mission, relevance and positioning in the wider politico-professional context. Thus a governing variable that may safely be inferred is the maintenance of group identity through the affirmation of internal bonds and the policing of data that might threaten it, *cohesiveness*.[191] As was seen, a core strategy was the attentiveness to social activity ancillary to team meetings and to standards of courtesy and respect within them.

It was argued in chapter 10 this last finding was critical towards setting the limits of critical reflection within the team. A conservative nurturing of group norms and limits was essential to maintaining the type of professional theory in use SDPI worked with.

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[190] A summary of these main themes is found in Chapter 6
[191] See 10.3. 10.4, 10.5 and 10.6

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It thereby bracketed out core strategic inquiry from any process of self-evaluation within the team.

11.1.3 Heuristic value of a theory of action and a community of practice: This important finding, essentially of a conservative boundary to change and new learning constituted by the theory in use, must be considered carefully in relation to the lens of a theory of action and that of a community of practice, both of which have been employed in this study. While both perspectives support this main finding, emphases differ.

Argyris and Schon emphasised the conservative pull of existing governing variables, and a fortiori the resilience of governing variables evincing model 1behaviour, while Wenger argued that creating and conserving identity, as the product of mutually negotiated experience, in and through practice, is of critical importance to a community of practice (Ibid.: 82-4; Wenger, 1998: 143-214. Whereas Argyris and Schon model interacting individuals antecedently possessed of theories in use, Wenger has a much stronger sense of the formative power of community. He explicitly differentiates his understanding from that of Argyris and Schon because the instrumentalist tactics of organisational politics that Model 1 behaviour tends to foster underestimates, for Wenger, the inescapably *communal* negotiation of meaning as 'a social process, not just a statement' (Wenger, 1998: 298) . In simpler terms, Argyris and Schon construct behaviour from the premise of relatively disconnected individuals who ought ideally, in professional-client interaction, achieve common

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purpose working from a shared utilisation of valid information.[192] Wenger argues that individuals in a community of practice do not bear antecedently established positions but construct their identity as members within community.

Given the nature of SDPI as a long standing professional cultural community, Wenger's emphasis is an important recognition of the power of the social group to shape and constrain individual positionality and behaviour according to its own emerging norms. The theory in use becomes a collective phenomenon and so even more robustly entrenched. It perhaps strains the applicability of Argyris and Schon's theoretical framework not to acknowledge the difference between the internal culture of a professional organisation over time and that of initially disengaged professional actors as found in the examples they deploy.[193]

Nevertheless, with this qualification granted, the governing variables of that theory in use do conform largely to Argyris and Schon's account of their role.

The capacity of an organisation to learn, Wenger argued, depends upon its ability to attain what might, without distortion be called, using Argyris and Schon's terms, double loop learning (Wenger, 1998: 226-8). Such learning, for Argyris and Schon, dismantles governing variables that undermine effectiveness. Wenger saw resistance to such learning that inhibited effectiveness largely as a problem of managing identity, which through a community's own competence (e.g. single loop learning) sees the community setting its own limits (Wenger, 1998: 136-8). Wenger

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[192] Argyris and Schon themselves acknowledged this limitation in the introduction they wrote for Classic paperback edition of their text. 'We saw that we lacked a systematic perspective on organisational learning and that we needed to do for organisations what we had begun to do for individuals' (Argyris and Schon, 1974: xv).
[193] While Argyris and Schon's case studies involve people who are members of organisations their focus is on individual decision making behaviour in relation to clients or subordinates in circumstances of relative autonomy and authority.

stated that a precarious balance was required for a community of practice to be adapted to learning, speaking of 'the combination of perturbability and resilience is a characteristic of adaptability' (Ibid.: 97). He argued, therefore, for what Argyris and Schon might have called a source of double loop learning as follows:

> There is a wisdom of peripherality – a view of the community that can be lost to full participants, it includes paths not taken, connections overlooked, choices taken for granted. But this kind of wisdom often remains invisible even to those who hold its potential, because it can easily become marginalised within established regimes of competence (Ibid.: 216)

It is submitted that Wenger's insistence upon the delimiting effects of shared identity in community and the implicit boundaries set by established competence, a version of 'the way we do things around here', corresponds to Argyris and Schon's portrayal of potentially self sealing practices in a theory in use. However, instead of offering a binary contrast in the manner of Argyris and Schon Wenger argues for the importance of peripheral positionality to access new thinking and the formation of discursive communities that accommodate such discrepant voices. While features of openness and shared inquiry are broadly compatible with model 2 behaviours as expounded by Argyris and Schon it is nevertheless not presented in their terms of discrete alternatives. This is relevant here when one looks, finally, to answer the question of whether SDPI displayed the classic governing variables ascribed to professional practice, in the more restricted sense Argyris and Schon use the term, of model 1 or model 2 behaviours.

11.1.4 Model 1 and Model 2 Behaviours: It is clear from the above findings that in fact SDPI evinced features of *both* Model 1 and model 2 behaviours. Within the limits of its programme of work those criteria of the model 2 paradigm, 'valid

information, free choice, internal commitment' is confirmed by the analysis in chapter 10 and the governing variables described above (Argyris and Schon, 1974.: 170).

While Argyris and Schon illustrate professional behaviour most commonly through examples drawn from clinical relationships, one may nevertheless infer that the tenor of their account of 'diagnosis' (Inquiry, forming a perspective, remaining faithful to the data and holding an 'apparently contradictory attitude toward your perspective of the data') describes a process of collaborative, open-eyed and dynamic inquiry that corresponds to the picture given in the analysis of SDPI's working procedures when the team met (Ibid.: 158-9). This chimes with Fullan's change theory, where he has referred to double loop learning, citing Argyris' support, as building enduring commitment through rigorous inquiry and the avoidance of premature or facile consensus (Fullan, 2001: 194-5). Furthermore, the prioritisation of the interpersonal over the technical through a commitment to connecting to professional moral purposes is also evident in the expressly moral discourse used in depicting that culture outlined in chapter 10, and which can also could be inferred also from the normative picture of SDP in chapters 7 to 9.

However, it is equally clear that features of model 1 are also prominent. Unsurprisingly, given the nature of SDP itself, controlling behaviours such as the defining rather than negotiation of strategic goals, managing of the environment and of feelings, and minimising negativity are in evidence at the most basic level[194]. It has been argued that the relationship with schools was ambivalent in the unstable presence in the interview data of facilitative and coercive behaviours (Argyris and

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[194] See 10.5

Schon, 1974: 68-9)[195]. SDPI's theory in use similarly combined permissive and controlling elements. In terms of the latter, there were clear limits to the contestability of the most basic strategic aims and assumptions over time[196]. There was no accommodation within the theory in use for the outsider voice. Thus double loop learning, at the most strategic level, was avoided since the cost to group harmony, stability and current forms of competence would have been too high. Defensive reasoning, avoiding rather than utilising conflict, is at the heart of model 1 behaviour (Ibid.: xvii). Communal identity thus set formidable barriers to potentially threatening reflection and critical learning.

Operationally, and within limits, SDPI displayed many features of a highly responsive theory of action susceptible to significant changes in orientation. This suggests a capacity to adapt through structural change (e.g. new working agendas, changed assumptions of primary goals from whole school to small group change, abandonment of unachievable core aims) in accordance with the model of double loop learning proposed by Argyris and Schon.

However, *strategically*, with powerful governing variables of commitment to an unremitting programme of internally highly valued work and of a strong protection of group identity and relationships, there was ultimately a failure to attain to a commensurate level of adaptive learning. Paradoxically, the presence of highly charged mutual bonding meant that mounting incongruity between the theory in use and a changing environment, accounted for in chapter 9, failed to trigger the necessary learning and adaptive behaviour that was required to meet the new

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[195] See 7.5.3
[196] See 10.5 and 10.6

challenge. This suggests that trust may be vulnerable not only to conflict, dissent and competitiveness, as Argyris and Schon aver, but also where there is too heavy a moral or affective investment in communally valued relationships and shared professional identity (Argyris and Schon 1974,: 79-82. Wenger, 1998: 82, 152-3).[197] The opposite of trust in this circumstance is not untrustworthiness but fear of the unknown, alterity, potentially disruptive information flowing from outside.

It is argued, in conclusion, that a powerful conservative impulse in organisational behaviour is propounded in both the work of Argyris and Schon and Wenger which counterbalances the quest for learning and adaptive effectiveness. While necessary to maintain theoretical coherence in action or sufficiently stable communal identity, at the limit it may imperil continued effectiveness. It would require a deliberate strategy, perhaps along the lines of Argyris and Schon's theory of professional education or Wenger's later work on the construction of effective communities of practice, to design an organisation that would display, over an extended period, the precarious range of practices that would maintain a fitness for purpose through a rapidly shifting environment of expectation and challenge (Argyris and Schon, 1974: 173-196; Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002). The price of not attending to such needs, in the long run, is a high one.

11.2.1 Historical context and findings of study: This inquiry set out to discern those themes that make up a serviceable theory of action of SDP operative within the professional culture of SDPI. 'Theory of action', as Hargreaves proposed, meant

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[197197] Argyris and Schon do acknowledge, that model 1 self sealing theories in use may involve collusive avoidance of disconfirming information by professional and client, though the example used to illustrate this point is one of mistrust and suspicion. (See Argyris and Schon, 1974: 161)

delving into the assumptions, beliefs and motivations, in a specific historical context, that propelled an agency whose raison d'etre was promoting substantive change in schools (Hargreaves, 2008: 19). The study has analysed SDPI's promotion of SDP in Ireland in a historical and conceptual context, for the decade in which SDP was the primary vehicle of national school improvement planning.

SDP long predated SDPI. Moreover, the findings show that the formation of SDPI's conceptualisation of SDP is in part experiential, but also in part literary. Contingent circumstances, a teachers' strike in the earliest years of the Initiative, intensified the engagement of SDPI with both the available theoretical resources and the literary production of its own guidelines that resulted in a comprehensive, if subsequently modified, approach to SDP.

I first looked back therefore, to before the establishment of SDPI within DES, to discover how the concept of SDP originally took shape in these islands. The study has traced the rise and relative eclipse of SDP as a term of art dominating school improvement discourse, in the UK from the eighties and into the nineties, and in Ireland a decade later. While SDP may now be routinised in many schools it is no longer invoked with the same passion or promise. The study found, moreover, a remarkable parallelism, with a ten year lag in Ireland, as each jurisdiction rode the wave of an ambitious agenda to achieve school improvement through the twin aims of devolving developmental responsibility to schools while instituting centrally governed accountability mechanisms (Robinson, 1994: 69-74; Woods, 2000: 126).

In both jurisdictions a newly invigorated and restructured inspectorate was formed just as qualified school based autonomy was asserted. In both, self consciously groundbreaking legislation, the 1988 Reform Act in the UK and the 1998 Education

Act in Ireland, punctuated a forceful statutory commitment, explicit in Ireland, 'de facto' in the UK, to the idea of SDP in the context of a national policy of school improvement (Dempster, Kruchov & Distant, 1994: 28-29). Both acts ostensibly if ambiguously affirmed a significant degree of organisational and professional autonomy within schools, albeit with the addition of a new National curriculum in the UK (Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1994: 7; Coolahan, 2000: 117).

The study finds the justification for these strategic decisions resided in great part in policy makers' espousal of the currently influential research on school effectiveness, notwithstanding serious methodological questions about its validity and pragmatic applicability to schools. Scholars subsequently further refined their inquiries into the internal processes of schooling conducive to achieving greater effectiveness in what came to be known as school improvement research. The product of a convergence of these two powerful if flawed conceptualisations of school organisation and experience was SDP. The very idea of improvement itself, elusive and variable as it may be, was rapidly naturalised and popularised in the prevailing discourses of schooling, issuing in a variety of proposed strategies linked to planning (Fidler, 1996:19-49).

SDP is expounded as the process whereby schools would chart their own paths to improvement, attaining standards of heightened effectiveness, ultimately if imprecisely defined as achieving greater learning outcomes for more students or, increasingly the school 'adding value' to pupil achievement relative to entry levels and background (Stoll & Fink, 1996: 27-8, 179-181).

An indispensable proximal goal to these ends, it soon emerged, was a transformation in the professional culture of the teachers within schools who, along

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with school leaders, were to be at the frontline of these radical developments. Among teachers, isolation was to cede to collaboration, an early phase of which was aptly called 'extended professionalism' (Hargraves and Goodson 1996:14-17). Leaders would 'invite' professional colleagues to share in a common mission towards improvement in an effective re-culturing of schools with a widening diffusion of consultation and decision making through SDP (Stoll & Fink, 1996: 80-100; 108-117: Hargreaves, 2000: 165).

Technically, SDP enacted a four phased cyclical model of action planning by which schools systematically identified and follow through on changes that were deemed necessary on the basis of a focused review of their needs. The language varied, with a harder edge in the British model, but the processes were similar: an iterative sequence of review, design, implementation and evaluation (Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991; SDPI, 1999). SDP, I argue, thus heralded a period of policy led activism that placed great weight on the organisational and cultural capacity of school communities to lead and implement ongoing change. Tensions resulting from interventionist policy expectations and a demand for accountability, on the one hand, and school autonomy and culture, on the other, were noted.

Ireland, for historical reasons, was largely untroubled by the restless quest for improvement in the quality of schooling per se until relatively recent times. However, the study shows that strong, largely Christian humanist values underpinned a robust if implicit conservative philosophy of education. This went with underdeveloped organisational structures in schools, and scarce distribution of or opportunity for the exercise of leadership or initiative beyond the classroom among ordinary teachers.

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This study has proposed that the threat to untrammelled, Catholic school governance and cultural authority led to the paradoxical support for the empowerment of school communities, and the buttressing of the moral authority of individual school identities. This was particularly evident in the emphasis placed upon the articulation of authoritative value statements through internal consultation within school communities among the trustee backed exponents of SDP in the early nineties. While they imported technical, process features of SDP they took a stand upon the primacy of individual school mission, what came later to be known as the characteristic spirit of the school, and a resistance to wholesale instrumentalism and economically oriented philosophies of education. This study has further found that this affinity with values of particularism and empowerment were carried into SDPI, helped in part by the mediating role of David Tuohy. SDPI thus came to advocate a form of SDP endorsing the uniqueness of school identity and the pivotal role in planning of teacher collaboration and decision making. These beliefs softened latent instrumentalist and prescriptive tendencies in nationally mandated SDP, until SDPI's control of its own working agenda was usurped by more directive and explicit policy within DES towards the end of SDPI's existence.

This study has also charted the deliberations and contestations about SDP that led up to the Education Act 1998, with a statutory obligation for schools to produce school plans, but with a paucity of detail about what this meant apart from a responsibility to address educational disadvantage and special needs. It has shown how originally more bullish economic intentions were modified by those influences already adverted to among traditional stakeholders in Irish education, trustees particularly.

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This study has, therefore, two original stories to tell. Positively, it recounts a theory of action which, despite certain internal differences, paints a remarkably coherent picture of how SDP in Ireland was conceived as hinging on the empowerment of teachers to transform their professional culture, thereby refining the service they offered their pupils. This account picks up on themes already found in the culturally sensitive theory of SDP in the UK and tendencies latent in the Irish tradition. SDP became, ideally, for SDPI, a flexible process whereby a systematic inquiry by teachers fused teacher learning and incrementally more conscious pedagogic refinement, as feedback guided collaborative research teams in schools towards evidence based improvements in their teaching and provision for pupil welfare. This finding importantly shows SDPI working towards positions in relation to learning, professional development and SDP that are largely in tune with current thinking about professional learning communities (Stoll & Louis, 2007).

Negatively, however, this study has found that SDPI, and the theory of SDP it propounded, was caught between competing loci of control and power. Tension between accountability and autonomy in SDP has long been recognised (Robinson, 1994; 70-1 Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996: 18). The comparative fate of SDP in both jurisdictions analysed in this study suggests unresolved tensions are not merely circumstantial but are structurally encoded in SDP as long as it derives its impetus and authority from its statutory and policy driven origins. That is to say, SDP must be understood as an historically determined and contentious praxis. The study finds, furthermore, that SDPI's own fate mirrors thematically that of SDP in schools, and that SDPI's own internal culture also helped create its theory of action of SDP, both in terms of its strength and its weakness.

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11.2.2 A Positive Theory of Action of SDP in relation to clients: SDP, this study has found, was seen to be both dependent upon the formation of a particularly rich notional identity of the teacher as planner, and itself formative of that identity.

Notwithstanding initial commitments to school mission and partnership in SDP, the preoccupation of SDPI with teachers and school leaders is unmistakable in the interview data and analysis of its programme of work in chapter 6. On this evidence SDP steadily evolved theoretically and pragmatically within SDPI so as increasingly to merge with teacher professional development, ideally locating it within a programme simultaneously and reciprocally designed to align teacher and pupil learning. This is a key finding. The evolution outlined above followed upon an early retreat from whole school development planning adhering faithfully to the cyclical model which, following international precedent was found to be difficult to sustain through the implementation and evaluation phases and remained too remote from the classroom. SDP, the findings suggest, thereafter became more a form of action learning, or, allowing for a collaborative variant, action research. Thus, this study has found that SDP for SDPI purports to empower schools *through* empowered teacher agency. It is premised on a deliberative, collaborative professional culture self actuating to transform schools progressively from within. This development exemplifies Wiliam's urging that teacher quality is the key variable for genuine school improvement:

> The biggest impact appears to be those that involve changes in practice, which will require new kinds of teacher learning, new models of professional development, and new models of leadership (Wiliam, 2010: 1)

It is a strong finding, consistent with previous inquiries into SDP that for such a culture to be created, the quality and disposition of school leadership is hugely important. While recognising the crucial role of the positional leader, SDPI came also to see SDP as ideally a function not merely permitted and supported by highly focused, committed and knowledgeable leadership, but itself a mode of distributed leadership. SDP, at its best, in the findings, therefore implicitly bridged hierarchical positions within schools, or better, transcended them by invoking professional, deliberative collegiality. This finding squarely associates SDPI's mature view with principles advanced for distributed leadership in the context of the school as a vibrant learning community where decision making is fluid, lies close to relevant expertise and concentrates on the improvement of instructional practice (OECD, 2008: 81-83).

Theorisation of the teacher identity associated with this self-motivating empowerment bears a marked resemblance to Hargreaves & Goodson's earlier account of post-modern teacher professionalism (Hargreaves, 1996: 20-21). Three salient qualities resonate across the interview data:

- Collaborative rather than isolationist teacher identity

- a moral commitment to improvement and willingness to participate in the changes necessary to achieve it

- and a profound and enduring disposition to see oneself as a learner, and pupil learning as inextricably dependent upon one's own learning (Ibid.: 20-21).

This notional identity is a professional construct compounded of dispositional or motivational as well as cognitive and practical qualities. This identity accords with the strong insistence in much of the scholarly literature in the nineties upon the

importance of school culture, highlighting underlying assumption and attitude as much as belief and strategy. These were identified as key variables in assessing and producing an environment supportive of high quality SDP (Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1994: 18-19; Stoll& Fink, 1997: 80-100; Hopkins & McGilchrist, 1998: 421-423).

Relationship to the formation of such identity, a key component of its theory of action, is more problematic in the findings. SDPI, it must be recalled, comprised seconded teachers and principals. Whilst respondents concur in valorising a *facilitative* relationship with schools and teachers the term is somewhat rhetorically inexact. The findings, probing more closely into this relationship, reveal a range of related but distinct positions. At one extreme is a highly democratic, even deferential belief in the liberation of deliberative, professional teacher communities. Metaphorically, this outlook sees teachers as constrained and thwarted by extrinsic pressures who only need to be released into a space where their inherent moral and professional virtues will flourish. This may be a view born as much of frustration with the perceived machinations of the DES as of an idealised view of the teacher.

More commonly, in the findings, however, there is the position that SDPI had an *educative* role that included two key dimensions: acting as a conduit for relevantly and attractively packaged knowledge from the wider world of research and exemplary practice, including the craft of SDP itself; and, a very strong motif in the interview data, the inculcation of a competence in professional *discourse,* a specialised vocabulary and grammar needed if teachers were to articulate their practice and effectively conceive of changes to it.

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These findings are largely supported by the tenor of SDPI publications and the reports of the Initiative's wide ranging and often explicitly pedagogic activities, in schools, seminars, presentations and summer schools. Thus, though the findings do reveal a strong faith in the importance of the ethical integrity of the teacher, they do not concur with theorists like Carr who downplay the technical dimension of professional deliberation (Carr, 2000: 85-88). The gap in discursive capacity that SDPI sought to bridge may pinpoint an inherent anti-intellectualism in teacher identity as it was encountered or a more historically specific legacy of Ireland's quietist tradition of schooling. Either way, it marks a key finding in how SDPI conceived of its pedagogic responsibility.

A further important finding, in this regard, is that while the promise of a substantial focus on mission was not fulfilled, there was nonetheless an attempt to derive values from a reflection-in-action, a development most formally noticeable in the rationale and design of the PGDSP. Partly derived from its own internal culture, the strong finding of a discursive educative orientation of SDPI towards subject development planning, and further formalised as a more general pedagogic programme in PGDSP, reflects Schon's proposition:

> A professional's knowing-in-action is embedded in the socially and institutionally structured context shared by a community of practitioners. Knowing-in-*practice* is exercised in the institutional settings particular to the professional, organised in terms of its characteristic units of activity and its familiar types of practice situations, and constrained or facilitated by its common body of professional knowledge and professional artistry (Schon,1987: 33 italics in original)

In these terms, SDPI increasingly conceived of 'characteristic units of activity and its familiar types of practice situations', evoking 'a common body of professional

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knowledge and professional artistry' through a narrowing focus upon the subject department as the most apt deliberative micro-community practising SDP as a form of reflection-in-practice. More generally, the values of reflection, learning and innovation are the foundation of a professsional ethos of SDP widely endorsed within SDPI.

Hargreaves & Goodson had advocated 'occupational heteronomy' rather than 'autonomy', which combined with a 'self-directed search and struggle for continuous learning' defined openness to knowledge and an inherent professional sense of responsibility to others (Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996: 21). Similarly, in the findings, 'empowerment' thus differs from 'autonomy' in that it incurs precisely such a responsibility to others and duty to learn. Empowerment qualifies autonomy by setting it within a larger professional ethos of collaborative service. Autonomy, in the findings, is not a species of insularity.

SDPI, therefore, theorised its own work in such an educative vein, incorporating facilitation, motivation and instruction. Indeed, the bulk of the work reported over the years could be classed as teaching. Viewed from the perspective of the school, SDPI's role then can be characterised, and was often so characterised, as *capacity building*. Moreover, capacity building, in the findings, is not just a means to an end but an end in itself, morally resonant with the community building intentions of the earliest pioneers of SDP in Ireland. Tuohy's influence here is significant. In this regard, it is important to remember, also, that SDPI, moreover, exercised no authority over schools or teachers. It served at the pleasure of those who availed of its services.

'Building capacity' requires the acquisition of knowledge and skill through guided, reflective practice. It also implies a political affirmation of 'professional values', where the formation of professional identity is not reducible to standards of competence but requires 'ethical values' as well (Arthur, 2003: 317-319). Hargreaves draws the political inference well in pinpointing the attitude of patient and optimistic deference demanded of external authority towards professional learning:

> Within this 'aspirational' framework, considerable emphasis is placed on capacity building – the assumption or theory-of-action that failure to improve is due to lack of capacity until there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary. (Hargreaves, 2008: 25)

The findings indicate subtle accommodations with reality qualifying such an 'aspirational framework'. There is, for example, a negative momentum also to the shift to subject planning, small scale teacher deliberation and a more direct focus on the classroom. For some, this was the acme of a kind of grassroots democratic professionalism. However, it is also evident that SDPI was rescinding from the greater *organisational* empowerment of teachers, who would or could not grasp it, for what might be a less ambitious and fragmented focus on teachers clustered around common subject interest. It is possible to construe this development as a covert adaptation to a conservative rather than a developmental school agenda. This is reinforced by the pervasive recognition that schools were far from malleable and school culture might be a formidable bulwark against externally sourced proposals for change. What lies beneath, however, is a potent abiding, assumption. It is one that was intuitively contestable by many teachers: namely, that the quality of what

happens inside classrooms is heavily dependent upon what happens outside them. This conviction, or rather assumption, permeates the findings.

One further finding that reinforced the theme of capacity building in SDPI was the realisation that it had to wean schools from dependence. SDPI was incapable of providing the sustained, labour intensive support the whole school development model required. SDPI, therefore, had to concentrate upon capacity building measures in order to avoid institutionalising its own relationship with schools in the long term. The word 'Initiative' in its title bespoke its mortality.

Consequently, the progressively more insistent and direct linkage of SDP to pedagogy, and the inclusion of bodies of knowledge, such as AFL in the later seminars, demonstrate a twin strategy of addressing teachers on ground more intuitively appealing and securing a tighter connection between planning and practice where it matters. Thus the theory of action, while energised by strong ideals, was tempered by a pragmatic flexibility and even opportunism in finding ways of working with schools and teachers in particular.

However, there lurks here a problem greater than achieving a deft reading of the staffroom mood or how with limited time and resources SDPI might best leave a mark on the schools with which it worked. The findings show that SDP, viewed as an institutional phenomenon in a historical context, was much more complex and contentious.

11.2.3 Competing Loci of Power: the Central Problematic for SDP

The findings reveal a complex and difficult relationship between SDPI and the inspectorate, and SDP and inspections. Ultimately, the findings disclose a perception within SDPI of competing loci of control. This is attributable, I conclude, drawing on the history of SDP in the UK as well as Ireland, to the conflicted historical role of SDP in service of interventionist national policy for improvement governed by statutory fiat and the logic of school autonomy and teacher empowerment SDP entails.

At first, there is a strong, if not universal recognition in the interview data that some degree of external pressure was required to motivate schools and staffs to embark on SDP. However, a pervasive tension across the interview data paints the inspectorate and inspection less as complementary than disruptive to SDPI's agenda for capacity building through and for SDP.

It emerges that school autonomy was rhetorically honoured, symbolically and publicly by the primacy given to characteristic spirit in legislation and the importance attached to the uniqueness of school identity shown in published documentation from the inspectorate (Ireland, 1998: DES: 2003). In effect, however, respondents register an increasingly prescriptive rather than facilitative relationship with schools by the inspectorate and DES. A key factor illustrating this more coercive relationship is the volume of policies required by schools. Respondents record a corresponding disaffection of school leaders and teachers from bureaucratic tedium, sometimes expressed as compliance anxiety, which has the effect of leeching perception of control in SDP from school communities. SDP, the findings suggest, became

essentially an 'other' directed activity when policy formation or inspection intruded upon the consciousness of school planners.

Again, SDPI's role is complex and ambiguous. SDPI sought to assimilate policy formation to developmentally oriented planning principles. Nevertheless, the findings show greater empathy with mounting scepticism within schools than with the perspective of the DES and the inspectorate.

What is most telling in the findings, however, is that SDPI was evolving a theory of action that saw this polarity as foundational. SDP is increasingly framed within a contested landscape of outer and inner directedness. The findings show a fractured front presented to schools by DES policy, the inspectorate and SDPI.

What was needed, in the Irish context, is what Fullan and Barber argue is the key to school improvement and educational reform, alignment and inter-relationship between levels, from the school to the national government (Fullan & Barber, 2005).

What the findings further show is that growing impatience resulted in a missed opportunity for SDPI to use its unique position and the potential of SDP to bridge different levels. Instead, schools were subject to steadily more prescriptive direction undermining the developmental logic of SDP as SDPI has sought to present it. As Davies and Ellison noted, arguing for a less prescriptive 'strategic intent' in place of strategic planning, capacity building requires a scaling down not up of external demands that fail to capture the imagination of school leaders and teachers (Davies & Ellison, 1998). Instead, largely incoherent messages were received by schools. From drafting policies to increasingly more exacting target setting requirements schools assumed a largely passive role within the change process.

In the latter years of the Initiative, indeed, central prescription extends to both the process and content of SDP. The language of school self evaluation, mirroring developments in the UK, subtly displaces that of SDP. SDPI, typically divided, itself saw the need for a more rigorous approach: a data driven process of review; sharper success criteria framed as targets; and greater attention to outcomes and impact. These do punctuate a more instrumentalist re-conceptualisation of SDP as school self evaluation. SDPI incorporated these emphases, designed presentations that adapted them to AFL, for example. They were theoretically compatible as they were with the classic SDP process.

Despite this, there is still a rhetorical tension in the interview data between a widespread focus on the circumstances and quality of teacher deliberation and the emergent instrumentalism, this being so particularly in the context of DEIS planning. At issue, here, is then nature of professional identity SDP nurtured and its relationship to power. Ultimately, If power is perceived not to reside within the deliberative community engaged in SDP but outside it, then the normative theory of planning operative in SDPI breaks down. Technically SDPI may adapt a more instrumentalist process but it remains, across the interview data, committed to the moral agency of the professional community. In so doing, it has abandoned a wider quest for stakeholder partnership in pursuit of a vision of teachers as planners.

SDP is inextricably bound up teachers' sense of their own professionalism. This is what SDPI respondents register so acutely. Helsby has noted, with the introduction of the national curriculum in the UK, that 'professional confidence implies a belief both in one's authority and in one's capacity' (Helmsby, 1995: 324). He went on: 'The major changes in terms of being, and being treated as, a professional related to the perceived loss of autonomy, an increase in prescription and a loss of trust' (Ibid.:

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325). There is a strong sense that such trust eroded, or failed to develop around SDP to a level that ensured that it really would be embedded in school cultures without the need of intensive support or even pressure.

The divisiveness noted is most marked, in the findings, in the deteriorating relationship between the inspectorate and SDPI itself as an organisation. The findings show a breakdown in trust abetted by poor communication and the lack of strategic coherence. SDPI's own strategic naivity failed to take the measure of what was happening to SDPI's status, and so SDP's diminishing pre-eminence in school improvement strategy.

Precisely those qualities that made SDPI an exemplary community of practitioners, the findings show, deflected the kind of strategic reflection that was needed to adapt to changes in the wider political climate. As a community of practitioners, it transpires that SDPI's theory of action of SDP was richly nurtured by the socio-professional experience of a deeply collaborative bonding that nonetheless sanctioned creative individuality. Many of the normative elements of good practice in SDP propounded in the interview data are reflections of qualities and practices adverted to in accounts of the functioning of SDPI as a team. There emerges a picture of a highly collaborative, venturesome, developmental and purposive community of practice.

An ironic consequence of the intensity of personal affiliation with the team, however, was a tactful reluctance to drill down critically into core strategy as circumstances changed and the context became more politically threatening. SDPI was therefore less in control of its own fate in the later years, and ultimately succumbed to an amalgamation that rapidly eroded its separate identity and independence of action.

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Its boundaries were too high for it to discern a changing landscape. Perhaps, it needed to define more assertively its dual relationship with schools and with other state agencies working alongside it.

It is to be regretted that a more fruitful and mutually respectful relationship between the inspectorate and SDPI did not ensure that they presented a more coherent front to schools. On the other hand, whether there were not deeper theoretical differences is a moot point. The findings suggest that competing loci of control in SDP were bound to emerge where there was not an achieved alignment of purpose among all stakeholders of what SDP might achieve and how it might do so.

11.2.4 Wider implications of the findings: Ireland, in a dire economic recession, has drastically reduced its support for professional development and school improvement planning. Moreover, in response to disappointing results from evaluations received in Ireland as part of the Project for International Student Assessment, scarce resources are pouring into literacy and numeracy programmes, to the exclusion of other needs (OECD, 2010). Compared to three years ago and before there is little engagement with schools by support agencies, virtually none in relation to SDP. Teachers, as the most visible cohort of public servants, are subject to a sustained bad press in many quarters. There is much talk of the need for increased productivity. Specified time (33 hours) outside of classroom teaching has been negotiated for, among other things, SDP, as part of stringent public service agreement[198]. Detailed conditions for the use of this time have been set down as a

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[198] This agreement, referred to above colloquially as the 'Croke Park Agreement', after the location where it was negotiated, between the government and public service unions, frames public service employment conditions, as noted earlier.

precondition for the avoidance of further pay cuts. The times are not propitious for imaginative adventures in school renewal.

The findings of this inquiry have implications that swim against this tide. The theory of action of SDP outlined here revolves around the enhanced professionalism of teachers as collaborative, self consciously learning practitioners of SDP. Much needs to change, the findings suggest, in current teacher culture in Ireland for such professionalism to thrive but patient, professional capacity building, in which SDP has a leading role, is believed to be the way to achieve such a culture and secure, in consequence, improved outcomes for pupils in the long run.

There is not empirical evidence to support or challenge this view in Ireland yet. There is a need, therefore, to pursue local research projects into the connection between teacher and pupil learning in Ireland. Is there empirical evidence to confirm or disconfirm the efficacy of the type of professional culture SDPI supported? This is the local question. Is there value in trying again to empower teacher learning and professional initiative?

If there is, indeed, value in this aim, then more contentiously, the findings prompt the larger question of whether there ever can be a climate of trust and common purpose between policy makers and school communities which can transform school cultures from within without depriving teachers of their agency or their dignity? Is there hope of disseminating a practice of SDP, for example, creating an 'intelligent' school in the sense Barbara McGilchrist et al have described, that gels with the findings of this study? (McGilchrist, Myers & Reed, 2004) Such SDP would be competent in the discourses that raise social chatter to the level of professional dialogue. It would also

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link reflection grounded in local practice to wider banks of knowledge beyond the school.

A further ambitious research goal would be to explore the possibility of synthesising without reduction legitimate accountability, including instrumentally defined targets and professional- ethical values, perhaps the challenge SDPI was ambiguously edging towards. There is evidence that a combination of accountability and autonomy in curriculum, assessment and resource allocation lead to better learning outcomes (OECD, 2011).

There is a need to find ways of overcoming the framing of the policy-practice relationship as one that separated so starkly design from implementation. SDPI may have played a modest part in the effort at democratising policy making by shifting and supporting greater responsibility and power to the school, in a way that could draw sustenance from traditional Irish educational values even if it disturbed the organisational inertia of its schools (Elmore, 2000: Oakes, Renee, Rogers & Lipton, 2008)

Elmore has well described the 'relatively weak professionaliasation of teachers' on the one hand, and a futile 'hyperactive policy dance' on the other (Elmore, 2000: 5, 18). This is the backdrop to this study. He has argued forcefully that expectation must be matched by support, not merely in a notional parity of effort but in a common instructional focus that overcomes the 'loose coupling' that isolates the voices of different stakeholders in school reform (Ibid.: 32). The findings support the search for a common perspective of interested stakeholders. Alignment, which accommodates difference that is not mutually destructive, rather than the uniformity of shared values, is the precise goal.

The findings also confirm just how high the bar is in such a quest, and how easily key stakeholders may be sidelined. Yet the proceedings of the National Education Convention in 1993, discussed in Chapter 4, offer an encouraging precedent in this country for the wider exploration of common educational values and an indigenous philosophy of school improvement. Ireland's current chastening economic abasement may open a space for imaginative rethinking of what we want our schools to be like. But first we would need to grasp the scale of the challenge.

Dawkins has argued that culturally powerful ideas may propagate themselves through a range of successive mutations to shape the culture in a way analogous to the way genes shape evolution. He called such clusters of ideas and information 'memes', the drivers of cultural evolution (Dawkins, 1989: 192). I submit that this study supports the idea that a candidate for the status of 'meme' in discourse about school improvement and teacher professionalism would be the centre /periphery, prescription/empowerment axis at the heart of this study. Goodson delivers a version of this antinomy at a high level of abstraction when he talks of 'curriculum as prescription' in service of 'the mystique of central and/or bureaucratic control' (Goodson, 2008: 124-125). Curriculum, as Goodson uses it in this context, has a capacious sense covering the spectrum of centralised reform initiatives. He asserts an 'alliance between prescription and power' (Ibid.). Opposing 'curriculum as prescription' to 'curriculum as practice', he states: The agencies of curriculum as prescription are seen to be 'in control' and the schools are seen to be 'delivering' and carve a degree of autonomy if they accept the rules' (Ibid.: 124). The strong outcome is:

Of course there are 'costs of complicity' in accepting the myth of prescription: above all these involve, in various ways, acceptance of established modes of power relations. Perhaps most importantly the people intimately connected with the day to day social construction of curriculum and schooling, the teachers, are thereby effectively disenfranchised in the 'discourse of schooling' (Ibid.)

Goodson sums this problem up in a word that I believe is precisely correct for what this study exposes in Ireland during the past decade. He says this is a problem not of practice or research, but 'positionality' (Ibid.) 'Positionality' I take to be the mutual disposition of key stakeholders embroiled in a movement for school reform over the exercise of power, the distribution of agency in school improvement policy. Positionality, moreover, baulks at glib valorisation of professionalism without giving the legitimacy of national democratic policy its due. SDPI implicitly, perhaps clumsily and inconsistently, sought to enact a theory of action of SDP that ensured the defence of agency as collaborative professional judgment while honouring the purposes of school improvement in public policy that for all its flaws represents the legitimate democratic expression of the common good. SDPI straddled two domains. This is what makes the perspective of SDPI so interesting in relation to this abiding problem for school improvement efforts. This study shows that there was a level of seriousness commensurate with the task but a profound lack of coherence at system level, including within SDPI itself, to carry through such a project.

The findings echo Sugrue's observation:

The thread of continuity woven through the emergent fabric of educational change is the necessity for new forms of engagement that are populated by 'coalitions of the willing' rather than the serried phalanx of the coerced. Instead, individual agency that is readily reciprocated becomes the senate for new beginnings, new forms of leadership and collective agency. (Sugrue, 2008: 223)

The metaphor of the senate, a dialogic forum, sits well with the idea of SDP as the collaborative site for the creating of deliberative, professional communities, communities of practitioners such as SDPI itself became for a period. Hargreaves has also defined the best in modern educational reform as 'post standardisation', singling out unimaginative basic skills interventions in numeracy and literacy as a retrograde step in an otherwise optimistic climate of change (Hargreaves, 2008: 26-27).

The story of SDPI is in many respects one of failure. Yet the conceptualisation of SDP this thesis recounts is a legacy for future planners. SDPI became intimately and challengingly involved in individual schools across the country. Future ventures in school improvement, to have a chance of success, need to build from an idea of the type of professional culture that is the prerequisite of a 'coalition of the willing' and, it must be added, the able.

More generally, the findings support the view that agencies whose remit overlap or are mutually conditioning must communicate as equals in respect. Furthermore, any agency so tasked must build in practices of penetrating strategic reflection if they are to remain focused and aligned to rapidly changing needs.

11.2.5 Researcher Positionality: I must finally refer to my own positionality in this research project. I have already argued that positionality is a key concept in relation to mediating agencies in school improvement practice. What of my *own* positionality as reflexively constituted in my research, seen from the perspective of having completed the study? By positionality I understand my stance in relation to the

project, the personnel and organisations it probes and the conclusions that I draw as researcher.

Sultana has stated:

> Reflexivity in research involves reflection on self, process and representation, and critically examining power relations and politics in the research process and researcher accountability in data collection and interpretation (Sultana, 2007: 376).

In these terms, I have argued for an adoption of a relatively objective but not positivist position in this inquiry, whereby I have deferred the authorial voice as far as possible from intrusion upon the voice of the respondents in the process of gathering and coding of the data, acknowledging the relative nature of such a deferral. I have, thus, sought to curtail the foregrounding of self as a constitutive source of data that, for example, a constructivist methodology might entail.

However, I must also acknowledge that my relationship with SDPI is invested with personal emotion. My professional self was substantially formed by experience within SDPI and as a colleague and friend, including all the respondents in this inquiry. While I have sought scrupulously to draw valid conclusions I cannot forbear to testify to a sense of regret, a tonal register that may be at times be evident if still somewhat muted, in the analysis of the data. Thus, by the end of this thesis, my own voice becomes more insistent in an avowal of the significance of the professional role of mediating agencies in support of school communities in the context of what has emerged, in the final analysis, as a missed opportunity to embed a valued if still inchoate practice in Irish education. Thus self emerges situated within a potentially

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engaged identification with the subject of the inquiry. Such emergence, however, is, as far as possible, deferred and yet openly attributed when noticed.

The use of the first person pronoun, the 'I' of the writer, paradoxically greatly assists this transparency. I do not assume a factitious impartiality through impersonal authorial denomination, but rather cleave to it in my own voice. I speak, and in speaking I avow the discipline of relative detachment while acknowledging the ever present possibility of personal interest. In deferring my own substantive voice for as long as possible I cannot deny that the analysis may inevitably betray deeper preconceptions than I either acknowledge or even know. The point is, in the end, that this is not ever really completely avoidable but the effort, given my avowed approach, is ethically required.

Yet my positionality is also counter- defined by my current role as principal. I have moved on. The emotional register of an inquiry so intimately bound up with the formation of professional self is chastened by a new and engrossing sphere of experience and responsibility. Representation of self and other in this inquiry is thus mediated not merely by prior engagement but subsequent distancing. The richness and challenge of current professional preoccupation de-familiarises the domain of inquiry to a point where a potentially formative emotional and ethical positioning are infused with a degree of calmness and alterity that supports the more detached, cooler mode of inquiry that has been throughout espoused.

However, positionality in relation to power is still, I now see, an issue. While there was not a significant power relationship in working with the respondents, where a relative equality is reinforced by the finding of exceptionally robust and nurtured collegiality, there is a note, nevertheless, of exasperated powerlessness in the

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handling of the data on the relationship of SDPI to the inspectorate. This is not a simple case of resentment; there is an argued case for a mutually enabling alignment rather than a partisan endorsement of any investigated position. However, the historical perspective is rueful and clearly positions the researcher in some small degree as elegist. This, I believe, to the extent that it obtains particularly in the final three chapters, certainly shifts the positonality of the researcher closer to being *within* the practice examined, notwithstanding the methodological discipline or the passing of the practice into history. It constitutes a residual interest, an investment. This argues not for a different stance, it is scarcely possible unless the author rescinds entirely as a human investigator into a positivism I neither believe possible or desirable. Rather, it argues, ethically, for a similar inquiry, drawing on an analogous balance of investigative rigour and reflexive honesty, from other stakeholders, especially the inspectorate itself. The counterweight to emerging voice is other voices.

Finally, I position myself as truly accountable for what I have done. This is, after all, my research project, a point whose obviousness should not conceal the importance of ethically signing off on one's own position qua researcher.

Land has argued that significant learning involves a passage through liminal space towards a reconstituted subjectivity, a new positionality of self in relation to the subject focus of the learning. This is often a 'troublesome' experience (Land, 2011: 176). This represents an ontological correlate of the epistemological reconstitution entailed in double loop learning where governing variables buckle under the pressure of new knowledge that is not congruent with current frames of

understanding (Argyris and Schon, 1978: 2-3). This thesis may betray the tonal echoes of a troubled shift in knowledge. Moreover, on the basis of what I now know I certainly could no longer simply identify with the professional self who espoused on trust the aims and practices of SDPI back in 2001.

The journey from practitioner involvement to practitioner research necessarily involves a repositioning of self that is constituted by the ontological impact of significant new knowledge (Land: Ibid.). My final emergence, therefore, as calling with some passion for structural changes in school improvement practice amounts to a new positionality towards the domain of my inquiry having completed the research journey across it. It cannot be seen as partisanship in relation to prior loyalties.

Thus I emerge, as the thesis closes, avowedly and personally, as a voice and an advocate, willing to take a stand on how in current circumstances priorities might be assessed. I declare myself. To adapt Wittgentstein's metaphor, I end my research journey by taking a stand, kicking from under my feet the methodological ladder that got me, validly and honestly, I hope, to the position I have reached (Wittgenstein, 1961: 6.5.4). Beyond that point, I now speak for myself. The ladder is gone.

11.2.6   Final reflections on the research procedure: This study was conceived first as a reflective inquiry into the most vivid and energising experience of my professional life as it was drawing to a close. I came to see that if I was to do justice to the subject I must either approach it as a social constructionist, accepting the centrality own voice and perspective, or I must try find a way of gathering data that did justice to the inner world of the team I was a just one member of. I chose the latter. Accordingly, I designed a study in order to give prominence to the testimony of

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colleagues against a backdrop of a documented programme of work and in a particular historical context. Though I recognise the foregone possibilities of a much more dialogic research procedure for producing richly textured meaning I am happy that the data is, for all that, rich enough to offer valuable insight into the inner world of SDPI. Perhaps it was self knowledge that led me to subdue my own voice to make room for the respondents to speak freely and largely unprompted. I feel that the results validate that procedural decision. The analysis, findings and conclusions, inevitably, are my own, though I have striven to be faithful to the letter and spirit of the data before me.

Given that I was a colleague and co-worker it was remarkable how surprise attended the distillation of findings from the analysis of the data. I have asked myself the question whether if I had embarked on a prolonged and focused reflection I would have arrived at the same conclusions that are drawn in this study. The answer is paradoxical. I endorse and identify with much of what has been determined on the basis of an analysis of my colleague's interviews, but I would not have reached those conclusions on my own. My adoption of a dual perspective had this effect, I think. I attuned my analytic ear to the individuality and at times differing positions of respondents, and to the thematic patterns that slowly gathered systemic authority as I worked my way through the data and revisited it at several levels of coding. I learnt not just what people thought and why, but where that thought coalesced into patterns of meaning that constructed a theoretical position fairly attributable to SDPI. It is not merely coextensive with my own, perhaps idiosyncratic position. Nevertheless, it helped make sense of much of what I was not explicitly conscious of at the time. The fact that the respondents were all reflecting on a personally and professionally significant past experience also gave poignancy and depth to their contributions. The

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data is entirely devoid of cynicism. I think that the idea of honouring testimony was an important anchor.

The formal setting of the interview was both artificial and liberating. As a facilitator I enjoyed the experience of trying to make the interview formal enough to focus attention on professional matters over an extended period and relaxed enough for respondents to really open up. I was fortunate, for certain, to be interviewing a group of people who made a living out of talking! I found the interviews satisfying, also, because the respondents seemed genuinely keen to contribute to the research. Their support was, I now see, a great source of motivation for me to carry through to the end.

The single greatest insight for me originated in the literature and then refocused my research question. Once I learnt how important the historical association of SDP with legislative agendas in Britain and Ireland was I found the historical perspective indispensable to my inquiry. This, in turn, led me to explore more closely SDPI documents and reports to help ground the interview data in a sense of what was actually proposed and done by SDPI, and to see the historical thread that led not just to SDP, but to an Irish understanding of SDP. I saw value in telling an Irish story. However, seeing how it resonated with international scholarly debate was instructive as well. I did not want to lose the particularity of the Irish experience yet I did recognise how underexplored our educational recent history has been.

I also acknowledge the limitations of what I have attempted. The research prompts the need to inquire into the positions of other key stakeholders, inspectors, school principals and teachers especially, regarding SDP. A further inquiry, one of immense methodological difficulty, would be to evaluate the work of an agency like SDPI, or

the practice of SDP in its various declensions, in relation to student learning and welfare.

I am more confident, however, in the heuristic value of the idea of a theory of action. This study argues that there is a pressing need to work towards greater alignment of purpose among stakeholders in education at this time. A theory of action helps the researcher to include the most important elements that constitute the unique characteristics of a professional group or constituency of interest without superficiality or glib generalisation. It links value to practice, and assumption to belief. It posits a unity of purpose without devaluing dissent or divergence of opinion and motivation.

While I have worked with the interview data, in particular, I have found that finding the right conceptual frame to unlock its meaning is a great analytic challenge. This has struck me most forcibly when my encounter with the literature of communities of practice, allied with study of organisational culture, alerted me to possibilities in the data most intimately associated with SDPI as a social and professional team.

With Eisner, I think that finding the right and epistemically valid relationship between data and analysis in qualitative inquiry is, at bottom, a form of artistry (Eisner, 2001). While I make no great claims to be such an artist, I have learnt to respect the most basic tenor of such research, to discover the human dimension in our work: flawed, partial, improvisatory, but also, at its best an attempt to refine a practice that honours the inner meaning of professionalism – to provide a service to others.

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Appendix One

Leadership for effective change in Continuous Professional Development and School Development Planning

1. Leaders need to **understand** the proposed change both theoretically and practically. Without such in depth knowledge their endorsement will ring hollow and their commitment will flag

2. They must **organise the programme,** make time available, ensure reports are written, arrange for the facilitation sessions and meetings and ensure that there are no logistical barriers to successful implementation of the action plan(s) of the innovation.

3. Leaders must be **profoundly committed** to the proposed development. By this, a precise distinction is intended. On the one hand, there is the dutiful provision of staff development and school planning that allows for their place in a busy calendar amidst its many requirements by a frequently hard pressed principal. This can range from the enthusiastic launch of new initiatives to perfunctory box ticking. On the other hand, as is meant here, there is the commitment to change which, as an authentic instructional leader, the principal regards as a **primary goal for the school,** not an activity secondary to the 'real' business of the school. It is 'front and centre' in her order of important things to do and see through to fruition. Most particularly, she must envisage and communicate the desired improvements and be able to articulate the destination in a compelling way. Sustained changed in practice delivering improvements in student learning for which there is robust evidence is the ultimate and only justifying objective.

4. The leader needs to **communicate this vision**. She needs to be a presence to the project, not just at the innovation of the programme or at its set piece events such as facilitated whole staff sessions, but most especially when the implementation and monitoring phase is well under way. Thus, talking to staff about it, visiting meetings to see how things are going, getting and reading reports from these meetings, reporting herself to parents, the board of management and other stakeholders about it, putting it on the agenda of staff meetings with reports on progress and discussion of issues and problems that might arise, showing by word and deed that this matters a great deal to her, acknowledging progress etc.

5. In common with everyone else who is involved, **resilience and persistence** are indispensable. Any significant change will encounter setbacks, resistance and weariness. The principal must constantly re-energise others. She should enlist the active engagement of senior teachers whose role must be aligned to the principal's as here described, and everyone else who is involved. A studied optimism is the face of the 'implementation dip' can keep the desired aims alive for everyone.

6. **Evaluation** might be regarded as unusual or even counter cultural in our schools. It is challenging technically and people need to be convinced of its value. The principal needs to ensure that evaluation is undertaken in line with best practice. This means gathering data, applying success criteria and drawing conclusions from a variety of types of evidence. Successful evaluation builds credibility, punctuates the move to a new level of engagement with change and justifies the focus on learning gain for students by insisting ultimately on measuring the worth of initiatives in terms of their impact in this regard.

7. Recognise success. The principal must **celebrate achievement** and be careful to attribute it to the planning process where this is warranted by the results of the evaluation. Nothing motivates further improvement better than publicly valuing prior achievement and the collaborative work of those who have brought it about.

Appendix Two

Required Policies: (Indicative rather than comprehensive)

	Required Policies (NB: Some overlap)	Source of requirement	Requirement for document
1.	Equality of access to and participation in the school for all students, including those with disabilities or other special educational needs	Ed. Act 98, 21 (2)	Explicit part of school plan
2.	Equality of opportunity for male and female staff and students	Ed. Act 98, 9 (e)	
3.	Data protection	Data Protection Acts 1988 & 2003 Template / Guidelines on DES website	Explicit
4.	Access by parents of a student (or by a student of 18+) to records relating to the educational progress of the student	Ed. Act 98, 9 (g)	
5.	Integration of students with disabilities or other special educational needs—admission, participation, provision, accommodation	Ed. Act 98, 15 (2) (d) & (g) EPSEN Act 2004	Extension of point 1 above
6.	Admissions	Ed. Act 98, 9 (m)	Explicit
7.	Code of behaviour, including procedures for suspension and expulsion, compliant with NEWB *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools*	Ed. Welf. Act 00, 23 Ed. Act 98, 15 (2) (d) NEWB Guidelines 2008 NEWB Audit Checklilst	Explicit
8.	Anti-bullying policy	DES Guidelines 1993 DES Requirement Template / Guidelines on DES website	Explicit
9.	Statement of strategy for fostering	Ed. Welf. Act 00, 22	Explicit part of

	Required Policies (NB: Some overlap)	Source of requirement	Requirement for document
	appreciation of learning and encouraging attendance at school		school plan
10.	Attendance—maintenance of register and attendance records, communication with EWO re individual students, annual reports to EWO and parents' association re attendance levels	Ed. Welf. Act 00, 21	Explicit
11.	Guidance and pastoral care	Ed. Act 98, 9 (c) & (d) Circular M37/03 DES Inspectorate Circular PPT12/05 *Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications of Section 9 (c) of the Education Act 1998, relating to students' access to appropriate guidance* Template / Guidelines on DES website	Explicit
12.	Moral and spiritual development (interpreted by some sectors as religious education/faith formation)	Ed. Act 98, 9 (d)	
13.	Irish language and culture	Ed. Act 98, 9 (f) & (h)	
14.	Social, Personal and Health Education (including Relationships and Sexuality Education--RSE)	Ed. Act 98, 9 (d) DES 1995, 96, 97 RSE Template / Guidelines on DES website	Explicit
15.	Assessment and evaluation	Ed. Act 98, 9 (k)	
16.	Homework	Standard recommendation in Whole School Evaluation reports	
17.	Management and staff development	Ed. Act 98, 9 (j)	
18.	Substance Use	National Drugs Strategy 01-08	Explicit

	Required Policies (NB: Some overlap)	Source of requirement	Requirement for document
		DES Circular 18/02 Template / Guidelines on DES website	
19.	Intercultural Strategies	National Children's Strategy 2000	Explicit part of school plan
20.	Literacy and numeracy	a) National Anti-Poverty Strategy 2002 b) DEIS 2005	a) "All school development planning will include a focus on literacy and numeracy and the setting of targets in these two areas" Appendix A2 b) Required for schools in DEIS School Support Programme
21.	Health & Safety (including, for example, safety audit, risk assessments, fire safety procedures, first aid, out of school activities, psycho-social health, etc.)	Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 2005 HSA Guidelines Duty of care	Explicit
22.	Child Protection—adoption of DES *Child Protection Guidelines and Procedures for Post-Primary Schools* without amendment	DES Guidelines 2004 DES Circular 0062/2006	Explicit (The DES Guidelines **are** the policy but must be explicitly adopted by the school's Board of Management)
23.	Internet safety—acceptable usage policy	DES Requirement Template / Guidelines on DES website	Explicit
24.	Student Council	Ed. Act 98, 27 DES Guidelines 2002 Template / Guidelines on DES	

	Required Policies (NB: Some overlap)	Source of requirement	Requirement for document
		website	
25.	Healthy eating and active living	National Taskforce on Obesity, 2005 "All schools, as part of their school development planning, should be encouraged to develop consistent school policies to promote healthy eating and active living, with the necessary support from the Department of Education and Science. Such policies should address opportunities for physical activity, what is being provided in school meals, including breakfast clubs, school lunches"	

Ed Act: Education Act (1998)

Ed Welf Act : Education (Welfare) Act (2000)

EPSEN: Education of persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2004)

NEWB: National Education Welfare Board (statutory agency concerned with attendance and retention of students in school)