Desire Lines in Open Space :: An Exploration of the TeachMeet Phenomenon

This thesis is being submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

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____________________________________

Margaret Mary Amond
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*Heartfelt hug and thanks to you all ♡ Barróg ó chroí agus buíochas libh uilig*
Summary

This thesis presents an exploration of TeachMeet, a recent phenomenon in which informal gatherings are arranged by teachers in order to share and discuss practice with peers in a convivial setting. Although there has been little direct mention of TeachMeet in academic studies to date, a review was carried out of parallel literature, and of literature in the domains of professional development, and leaderless organisations. In order to establish the essence, nature, and niche of TeachMeet, research questions were focussed on four areas - characteristic elements of TeachMeet, motivations of those who participate, perspective of participants on its situation in the landscape of their professional learning, and consideration of the future of TeachMeet.

The methodological approach was informed by Weick's Sensemaking heuristic, combining principles of strengths-seeking Appreciative Inquiry with insider-mediated Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. A mix of methods was used to gather data: observation of TeachMeet events, an online questionnaire offered to participants, and interviews with those with experience of organising events. The quantitative data from observation notes (n = 15) and questionnaire (n = 302) were analysed using descriptive statistics, and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis - which acknowledges the insider positionality of the researcher as instrument, incorporating it via the double hermeneutic cycle of the procedure - was applied to the observation notes (n = 15), questionnaire returns (n = 302), and interviews transcripts (n = 15).

Findings of the research shed light on the elements of events; the profile, disposition and perspective of participants; and matters of concern arising from their lived experience. Events arranged are out-of-hours, voluntary, open, using online connectivity during and between events. Three signature elements give life to a TeachMeet event - the MC; the nanopresentation; the Open Space dynamic. Profiles show participants with varying length of experience coming from all levels and sectors of education. Participants
are categorised by disposition as: attendees seeking to improve; presenters willing to share; and organisers eager to bring the TeachMeet opportunity to their peers. Perspectives of participants identify TeachMeet as fulfilling the functions of Community of Practice, Personal Learning Network, and Continuing Professional Development, being in the intersections between the three, appreciated more for its value as informal Personal Learning Network and Community of Practice than formal Continuing Professional Development. Matters of greatest concern to participants find TeachMeet to be a personal, purposeful, practical, and political force in their lived experience. Personal experiences have had deep impact, developing relationships that have led to community and networks evolving. Purposeful action has been prompted by moral responsibility to do whatever it is they can do, as well as countering discontent with individual professional learning experience. Practical activities that are appreciated include the glimpse into the ‘black box’ of each other’s classroom, exchange of ideas and resources, and transformational effect of inspiration - a *spreagadh* (spark) that leads to future development. Political ideation includes resolution to keep TeachMeet simple, non-hierarchical; resistance to any commercialisation or appropriation; and realistic acknowledgement of the risks and benefits of any future evolutionary role.

Significance of the findings generates a dilemma regarding the niche of TeachMeet, a phenomenon where participants appreciate the freedom from formal structure and hierarchy which is at odds with the constraints and demands of formal professional learning into which others may seek to situate it. The research concludes TeachMeet to be a social, open and humble phenomenon found in the informal intersections of teacher learning, evolving through the agency of participants enacting desires which reflect their political, practical, purposeful, and personal experiences of TeachMeet.
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<td>British Education Technology Trade show</td>
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<td>CESI</td>
<td>Computers in Education Society of Ireland</td>
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<td>Cosán</td>
<td>Teaching Council National Framework for Teacher Learning</td>
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<td>CPD</td>
<td>Continuous / Continuing Professional Development</td>
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<td>CoP</td>
<td>Community of Practice</td>
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<td>DENI</td>
<td>Department of Education of Northern Ireland</td>
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<td>DERA</td>
<td>Digital Education Resource Archive</td>
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<td>ESAI</td>
<td>Education Studies Association of Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Froebel MU</td>
<td>Froebel School of Education, Maynooth University</td>
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<td>INSET</td>
<td>In-service Training</td>
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<td>INTO</td>
<td>Irish National Teachers Organisation</td>
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<td>Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis</td>
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<td>Irish Primary Principals Network</td>
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<td>IRC</td>
<td>Internet Relay Chat</td>
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<td>Irish Science Teachers Association</td>
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<td>ISTE</td>
<td>International Society for Technology in Education</td>
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<td>MC</td>
<td>Master of Ceremonies; Mic Controller; Market Co-ordinator</td>
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<td>NAAACE</td>
<td>National Association of Advisors for Computing in Education</td>
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<td>NESTA</td>
<td>National Endowment for Science Technology and the Arts</td>
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<td>NSTA</td>
<td>National Science Teaching Association</td>
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<td>OEP</td>
<td>Open Education Practice</td>
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<td>OER</td>
<td>Open Educational Resources</td>
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<td>OU</td>
<td>Open University</td>
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<td>OST</td>
<td>Open Space Technology</td>
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<td>PD</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
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<td>Professional Development Service for Teachers</td>
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<td>PL</td>
<td>Professional Learning</td>
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<td>PLC</td>
<td>Professional Learning Community</td>
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<td>PLE</td>
<td>Personal Learning Environment</td>
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<td>Personal Professional Learning Network</td>
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<td>SCoTENS</td>
<td>Standing Committee on Teacher Education North and South</td>
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Chapter One - Introduction

This thesis is focussed on the nature of TeachMeet and its niche in the context of professional learning. TeachMeet first appeared in Scotland in 2006 as a series of informal social gatherings organised by teachers for teachers (TeachMeet.scot, p. 1) in order to share ideas for classroom practice, and its grassroots appeal has seen it develop into a popular event format which has been described as “guerrilla CPD” (Bennett, 2012).

This first chapter introduces the reader to the thesis, outlining the purpose of the research, the research questions, and the structure of the thesis chapter by chapter.

The Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research has been to explore and analyse the emerging form of peer-organised participative professional learning, TeachMeet.

The researcher’s impetus for embarking on this exploration came after active participation in many TeachMeet events between 2008 and 2015, noticing patterns in how people acted and reacted in the room, and afterwards in conversation. Initial curiosity about what attracted participants, and kept them returning, grew gradually into informal but persistent questions. Why are people here? What did they value? What is happening in this room? Eventually a point came when questions crystallised into a decision - that it was time to make sense of what was being observed, and to find out, from those involved, what they appreciate in these TeachMeet experiences.
This decision was enacted as an exploration both inspired and underpinned by the Weick heuristic of Sensemaking, which involves “the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing” (Weick et al., 1995, p. 409). To achieve this involved adopting and adapting the principles of Appreciative Inquiry, the strengths-seeking method of data generation whose central aim is to “seek to identify the core features that give a system life when it is vital, effective, and successful” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 3). This would be done by observing TeachMeets in real time, seeking descriptive and contextual experience-based data concerning TeachMeet events and participants.

Adopting the axiology of nothing about us without us meant ensuring that participants in the research would be those who Pawson and Tilly (2004, p. 4) describe as “fallible experts”, participants in TeachMeet, those possessing what Anderson calls the “situated knowledge” (2000, p. 1) needed for appreciative sensemaking. Following Saldana’s (2016, pp. 4-30) advice, the thesis houses both “presentation and representation” – a descriptive and interpretive documentary presentation of the origins, evolution, and current status of TeachMeet, built on a representation of the lived experience and appreciative voices of participants who have shared their knowledge, opinions, and ideation.

Thus, the objective of the research was established as an exploration that would glean the essence, and examine the nature and niche of, the TeachMeet phenomenon in the landscape of teacher learning.

**The Research Questions**

Four research questions evolved during the searching and scoping phase of this research, during which I undertook a comprehensive online search for information about TeachMeet, to find as much as possible of what was already ‘out there’. The four questions
address the past, present, and future of TeachMeet to ask ‘What?’, ‘Why?’, ‘Where’, and ‘What next?’.

**RQ 1. What are the characteristic elements of TeachMeet?**

This question was the first to arise, addressing the past and present with the ‘What?’ question, aimed at filtering and distilling the elemental essence of TeachMeet. It sought both quantitative and qualitative data from direct observation, for descriptive and interpretative analysis.

**RQ 2. What motivates participants to engage with TeachMeet?**

This is the ‘Why?’ question. Given that TeachMeet is a voluntary venture, why have participants decided to take action in attending, presenting at, or organising a TeachMeet? Qualitative data about levels of lived experience, past and present, was sought from participants via questionnaire and interview.

**RQ 3. What is the situation of TeachMeet in participants’ professional learning?**

The focus of this question was the ‘Where?’, an attempt to locate where the perspective of participants places TeachMeet in their learning landscape. This question was prompted by comparing patterns noticed in the terminology that TeachMeet participants were using in online conversations with that in the professional learning literature under review. The overlap between these suggested that participants were beginning to categorise their TeachMeet experience as belonging to either (i) their continuing professional development (CPD), (ii) their activity in a community of practice (CoP), or (iii) their own personal learning network (PLN). The addressing of this complex question sought both quantitative and qualitative data about the lived experience of participants, via questionnaire and interview.
RQ 4. What is the relationship between evolution, impact, and sustainability in the context of TeachMeet?

The first three questions look mainly into the past and present, the focus here was on the future. It was the ‘What next?’ question, prompted during the initial search and review of informal online documentation pertaining to TeachMeet. As with Research Question 3, much of the open discussion and critical conversations that experienced TeachMeet participants have been informally sharing on the relationship between impact, sustainability, and viability of TeachMeet mirrored the critical discourse in the both the academic and popular literature being reviewed. This research question was included to record and analyse qualitative data, via questionnaire and interview, on participant ideation on the future of TeachMeet.

The Structure of the Thesis

This thesis presents, in seven chapters, the results of exploratory Sensemaking research into the TeachMeet phenomenon. The chapters, in turn, introduce the research and place TeachMeet in context; present the review of literature; the research methodology and methods chosen; the findings from analysis of data; the discussion of these in the light of the literature and research questions; and the conclusions, implications, and recommendations, and contributions arising from the research.

Chapter One serves as an introduction and synopsis of the research.

Chapter Two presents a brief history of TeachMeet to date, and places it in the context of the unconference world from which it emerged and within which it has evolved.

Chapter Three presents the Literature Review. It has three sections, reviewing respectively literature in three domains pertinent to the research - professional development, self-organised / leaderless organisations, and TeachMeet itself. The distribution of formal and informal literature in each domain is significantly uneven, with professional development having a large body of formal peer-reviewed academic
discussion, while the smaller body of literature pertaining directly to TeachMeet was mainly from informal sources. The chapter concludes by presenting how influential key sources in the intersections between the three domains of literature reviewed kindled a synthesis of ideas contributing to a conceptual framework for the research.

Chapter Four presents the Research Methodology and Methods. The methodology underpinning the research is the Sensemaking of Weick (1995), adopting the Appreciative Inquiry principles of Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) for the preparatory phases of data collection and applying descriptive statistics analysis and the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2012) to these data. A mix of methods - observation, questionnaire, interview - was used in the field work, yielding a body of data pertaining to TeachMeet events and to participants’ perspectives and lived experience of TeachMeet. The choice of IPA and the double hermeneutic in its cycle of interpretation is highlighted, as it acknowledges the positionality of the researcher as informed insider; this positionality is explained in the chapter.

Chapter Five presents the findings of the analysis in three sections - the first section is the analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data from observations of TeachMeets (n = 15); the second section is the analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data from questionnaire returns (n = 302); and the third is the analysis of qualitative data from interview transcripts (n = 15). This last section presents experiential themes generated from the cross-case analysis of interviews with key informants, illuminated with direct quotes from interviewees interwoven through the descriptive interpretation. The chapter ends with a summary of key findings about TeachMeet - the signature elements that give life to TeachMeet events; the diverse profiles and dispositions of TeachMeet participants, their perspectives on the role TeachMeet plays in their lives; and the four Group Experiential Themes that reflect what participants appreciate in TeachMeet – that for them it matters in ways that are personal, purposeful, practical, and political.
Chapter Six has two sections. The first section discussed the findings in the dual lights of how they reflected the literature and how they contributed to resolving the four research questions pertaining to characteristic elements, motivations, perspectives on situation, and ideation on the future of TeachMeet. The second section discusses other significant issues of the complex, open and undefined nature of the universe of TeachMeet that arose during analysis.

Chapter Seven presents conclusions, significance and contributions, limitations and mitigations, and recommendations. The significance of and contribution offered from this research are outlined; limitations are listed, and mitigations of these are explained. Recommendations to those who might become involved are made, reflecting the complexity of infusing the informal into formal professional learning. Conclusions based on the findings are outlined – recognising that TeachMeet is a humble, open, and social phenomenon of the informal intersections in teacher learning, evolving through the enacted agency of participants following paths that reflect their political, practical, purposeful, and personal experiences. The formation of these paths inspired the Freirean metaphor of the *desire line* in the title of this thesis.

**Figure 1.1**

*A ‘Desire Line’ Worn by Walkers into a Grassy Bank beside a Flight of Concrete Steps.*  
(*Photographs taken by Mags Amond at the University of Limerick, Ireland, 2018*)
Chapter Two - Context

This chapter presents two brief histories - the first is specific to the TeachMeet phenomenon which is the subject of the research, and the second is an outline of the Unconference world within which TeachMeet was conceived. While the information may be of interest to any reader, its main purpose is to inform a reader who may not have experience of a TeachMeet event, and provide a context for subsequent references to TeachMeet.

A Brief History of TeachMeet

This section will provide some details of the story of the origins of TeachMeet in Scotland and its evolution into a global phenomenon. It is a brief history, a thin description, collated from the many stories informally documented online, by the founders and developers themselves, in contemporary time-stamped blog posts and wiki entries. As the original TeachMeet participants were using web-based communications to organise the events, it turns out they were recording the early days of TeachMeet as they were happening. Key sources of the historical data in this chapter are the edu.blogs.com blog posts (McIntosh 2006-2016), the Scottish Leader article TeachMeet, The Story So Far (Hallahan, 2010), the online timeline The Evolution of TeachMeet (Amond, 2016b), the Once Upon A TeachMeet directory of early TeachMeet participants’ blog posts (Amond, 2017), the UK TeachMeet Wiki pages (TeachMeet, PBWorks, 2008, 2016), and Self-organised CPD: The TeachMeet Phenomenon (Amond, Johnston, & Millwood, 2017).
There are three parts to this brief history - firstly, the origins of TeachMeet across 2005 and 2006; then the evolution of TeachMeet from 2007 to the present day. The third part is a summary of the online discourse among participants that took place during the journey from them to now.

**Origins Of TeachMeet: 2005 and 2006**

“Teachmeet - The Story So Far. So where did TeachMeet come from?
The idea originated with three Scottish educators – Ewan McIntosh, David Noble and John Johnston – who knew each other online, but had never met face to face until SETT in 2005. After their first meeting, there was a desire to meet up again regularly to catch up on what they had been up to, particularly with regards to how they were using innovative technologies in education.
With the eLive conference to be in Edinburgh in May 2006, another meeting was proposed and this time 10 people signed up (with another 8 sending apologies!) and in the Jolly Judge pub in Edinburgh a legend was born – although the name TeachMeet didn’t arrive till later” (Hallahan, 2010).

In 2005, the Times Educational Supplement announced that “Last year SETT was branded the Scottish Learning Festival for the first time” (TES, 2005), SETT being the Scottish Education and Teaching with Technology conference, described as “the only major event in Europe where practitioners share with other practitioners on such a large scale” (Heppell in TES, 2005). SETT 2005 is where Ewan McIntosh, David Noble and John Johnston met and made the decision that led to TeachMeet.

In 2006 the first instance of ‘unconference’ attachment of TeachMeet to the fringe of an official education conference was arranged for those attending the eLive conference in Edinburgh, Scotland (eLive, 2006). (Although not yet named as such, I refer to this event as ‘TeachMeet Zero’). It took place in The Jolly Judge, a public house in the city which offered reliable wifi (EH1 2PB, UK). All arrangements were made online in a (now defunct) wiki set up for this purpose (Scotedublogs, 2006). It was called ‘ScotEdublog Meetup’, and the logo used the distinctive ‘cracked’ font which very quickly became the
branding for many TeachMeet banners (see Figure 2.1). The basic format of that meeting is one which has persisted to this day - make arrangements to meet in a social setting, those who turn up are willing to either share a story from their practice, listen to stories of the others who are there, or do both.

**Figure 2.1**

*Banner Logo for ‘TeachMeet Zero’ Which Took Place on May 24th, 2006*

After the first meeting, a lively discussion took place on the ScotEdublog wiki in order to decide on a name. The outcome of the discussion was that the term TeachMeet was adopted, and was first used in the call for participants at the next event, the first to use the name TeachMeet and, as shown in Figure 2.2 here, the distinctive cracked font that has become the de facto logo for TeachMeet.

**Figure 2.2**

*First Instance of Use of The Teachmeet Logo (Source: Ewan Mcintosh’s edu.blogs.com, “Teachmeet06 Is Open For Business”, Blog Post Published on June 29th, 2006)*

This event was the first to invite participants “to contribute by giving a seven-minute talk”, and issue a global invitation to attend in-person, or online via Skype,

> “Anyone in education is invited from around Scotland or beyond to this free event. If you are abroad and cannot make it in person but would like to join our live Skypecast of the event then there’s space for you too”. (McIntosh, 2006).
**Evolution of TeachMeet: 2007 To 2022**

Between the early origins in Scotland and the present day, TeachMeet has expanded and evolved. It has migrated across the world. While keeping the same basic format - teachers gathering in a social setting to share stories of practice - it has been adapted by participants to suit the situation. In 2007, the fourth instance of a TeachMeet event took place on the fringe of the Scottish Learning Festival in Glasgow, with 24 people volunteering to speak and 47 ‘lurkers’ present (H-Blog, 2011).

The fifth instance of TeachMeet (Pbworks, 2008a) was the first outside Scotland. It took place in London on the fringe of the annual 2008 British Education Training Technology (BETT) expo. This TeachMeet added a new feature for volunteer speakers, the choice of doing a two minute ‘nano-presentation’, it is also the first time to see the statement stressing that “it’s not a tech event, with the emphasis very much on the teach” (McIntosh, 2007). This first BETT TeachMeet event was also the first to be the subject of blogs posted live from the event: one attendee Stevens types out during the TeachMeet “the rules are that you have 7 minutes or 2 minutes to present your message. PowerPoint is madly boo-ed and no sales pitches” (Stephens, !Vámonos!, 2008); another attendee posts live from the event “Here at TeachMeet enjoying the liveliest set of presentations and most enjoyable debate – more fun than the rest of BETT put together” (Millwood, 2008). 2008 also sees TeachMeet brought to Canada, and the first ‘standalone’ event organised in Perth, Scotland. Late 2008 sees the first instance of user-generated tagging of TeachMeet events, with Ewan McIntosh advising people to “tag, tag, tag” (PBworks, 2008b). The first instance of Twitter hashtagging of #teachmeet appears in a tweet (de Beer, 2008) advising a colleague to “go and try it”, as Figure 2.3 shows.
2009 saw TeachMeet migrate to the Netherlands, Ireland, USA, Wales, and Sweden. It also saw the first TeachMeet to be held fully online, #TMETRU2009, open worldwide to anyone who could sign up, and streamed live to anyone who could access it (Belshaw, 2009).

In the 2010s, TeachMeet continued to migrate and evolve. In 2010, Australia saw its first TeachMeet. At BETT in London, a ‘TeachMeet Takeover’ was introduced, an initiative in which teachers were welcomed by supportive vendors to hold a pop-up TeachMeet style event at their booth during the exhibition (Barrett, 2009). TeachMeet International (TMIO, 2011) was organised online and broadcast via YouTube. By 2012, Malaysia, Northern Ireland, and Croatia had their first TeachMeets; Hong Kong, Singapore, and China had theirs in 2014. In the UK, there are celebratory events like “National TeachMeet Day” (ukedchat.com, 2014) and “The World’s Biggest TeachMeet” (Eventbrite, 2014). Since 2015 TeachMeet has become an integral part of the annual Teaching Council conference in Ireland (Féilte, 2015, pp. 16-19), and the annual conference of the International Society for Technology in the USA (ISTE, 2015).

In 2016, there were two significant tenth anniversary celebration events: a gala one - with a birthday cake - at BETT London (PBWorks, 2016), and a smaller ‘return to roots’ event in the Jolly Judge in Edinburgh (McIntosh, 2016). An analysis carried out by Amond et al. (2017, p. 245) of data recorded online in 2016, for the UK and Ireland TeachMeet
events, found that “ten years after the first TeachMeet, there are an average of 30 such events taking place per month across the two islands. Thus there is at least one TeachMeet occurring somewhere every day”. Across the world, TeachMeet was still finding new homes - Thailand in 2016, France in 2017, and Slovenia and La Réunion in 2019.

In March 2020, as with the rest of the world events, in-person TeachMeets had to be cancelled or postponed as gatherings were halted temporarily due to imposed pandemic restrictions. As a result many events were held online for the two years until in-person events returned from March 2022.

At the most fundamental level, TeachMeet in 2022 still operates as it did in 2006. An event is announced for which volunteers sign up to present or attend, and during which practice is shared and discussed in a convivial atmosphere. A search online during June 2022 (Amond, 2022) shows that although there is still no incorporated organisation called TeachMeet, almost every day, somewhere in the world, a TeachMeet is happening.

**Talk About TeachMeet - Reflections and Critical Discourse, 2006-2016**

Many TeachMeet participants shared their thoughts in the open, posting on personal blogs, from the start. Co-founder Ewan McIntosh’s *edu.blog.com*, holds a series of 66 posts from the very beginning of TeachMeet (McIntosh, 2006-2016). This open documentary echoed the habits of participants in its unconference predecessor, BarCamp, whose first two rules (published as a parody on the rules of the movie *Fight Club*) are that ‘You do talk about BarCamp’, and ‘You do blog about BarCamp’ (Çelik, nd).

Most of the early blog postings comprised of information about TeachMeet events (or from inside events, as seen in the previous paragraph), but as the extracts presented in Table 2.1 show, TeachMeet became the subject of contemporary critical reflection and formative conversations while it was still emergent, which continue as it is evolving. A directory of early blog posts discussions of TeachMeet was collated and made available - attached to a blog post (Amond, 2017).
Table 2.1

**Selected Critical Reflections on TeachMeet Shared Online by Participants, 2008-2014**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author, Format</th>
<th>Summary Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Ian Usher, blog post</td>
<td>Reflection in which Ian invokes Winer’s Fundamental Law of Conventional Conferences: “The sum of the expertise of the people in the audience is greater than the sum of expertise of the people on stage” to illustrate why, given how expensive time at government funded conferences is, he is “drawn again and again to the unconference format demonstrated by something like a TeachMeet”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>John Connell, blog post and comments</td>
<td>A call for a conversation on developing the concept of TeachMeet attracts many responses expressing strong opinions and arguments about the philosophy, current and wished for, that drives, and could drive, the TeachMeet. The word ‘transformational’ occurred several times throughout this exchange articulating a positive perspective amongst participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Iain Hallahan, retrospective article in Scottish Leader magazine</td>
<td>Reflections from co-founders after four years of TeachMeet: Ewan McIntosh reminds that “TeachMeet was about the Teach first of all, and the tech was instrumental to achieving what we wanted to achieve pedagogically, and never the other way around”; David Noble linked the transformational dimension to the networking and personal learning aspects, highlighting “the transformative nature of TeachMeets in one’s own personal learning network rather than its erstwhile claim to be a cure-all for attainment in education”; John Johnston reflected its democratic and bottom-up nature by stating that ‘the rules are not really rules’ and ‘as TeachMeets are organised by whoever has the energy and good will it doesn’t really matter if you don’t like the format: you can change it. The power of TeachMeets is not, for me, the format but the proof that people can organise and share in a way that is not top down’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Tom Barrett, blog post and comments</td>
<td>A post already looking to the future, subtitled ‘Coming Of Age’, argues that “TeachMeet is reaching saturation point in the UK”, and asks if it is time to set up “a body to manage sponsorship ... provide support for organisers”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Ian Stuart, blog post and comments</td>
<td>A critical dissection of the nature of TeachMeet in a blog post from the Isle of Islay off the coast of Scotland; beginning as a commentary on the diminished quality of engagement for online participants (there was mention ‘over 100 people tuned in’) caused by a change in the technology being employed for broadcasting, it became a much wider discussion on the purpose of TeachMeet, with mention of ‘becoming too institutionalised’ and ‘reverting to formal CPD’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Mark Anderson, blog post and comments</td>
<td>The question “What Is A Teachmeet Anymore?”, written as a reflection on his own involvement as an organiser, this blog-post prompted a substantial number of responses and a robust discussion in the comments section. More than one commentator declares “nobody owns TeachMeet”. Some comments point to an almost emotional connection devotees of TeachMeet can develop - “teachmeet is about winning hearts and minds”, “it is by its nature a very political animal, maybe even quasi-religious in fervour and opinion”. One typical comment was that “we can’t be too precious with the forms and shapes of teachmeets as long as they don’t go too far down the road of conference/corporate events”. The agreed feeling of the thread of comments was “a desire to share the idea of TeachMeet”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In many cases, it is the comments provoked by the blog post that show the thoughts of other participants’ aspirations and anxieties. Amond et al. (2018, p. 240) report that

“Within five years, tensions were palpable between those who felt a need to make the movement more ‘organised’ and those who would remain free of any containment, and there was articulation of fears that TeachMeet might become part of the system the originators had been avoiding in the first place.”

Of the blog posts highlighted in Table 2.1 above, some are contextual reminders of the reasons for TeachMeet (Usher 2008; Hallahan, 2010), some are provocations that sparked robust debate (Connell, 2009; Barrett, 2010; Stuart, 2010; Anderson, 2013). Usher reminds of the reason that TeachMeet attracts those who wish to learn from peers. Hallahan’s conversations with the three instigators of TeachMeet, four years into its life cycle, has reminders that TeachMeet is about teaching, that it works on a personal level, and is fuelled by the energy of peers. Connell’s provocation opened a conversation about the transformative possibilities offered by TeachMeet. Barrett’s, Stuart’s, and Anderson’s provocations all prompt robust discussion, both practical and existential in nature, on the direction TeachMeet could and should take into its future.

In 2016, participants worldwide were invited to report the impact TeachMeet had made on them (TeachMeet10 Report, 2020). Among the respondents are those who expressed “concerns and hopes in appreciation that TeachMeet would remain the open democratic ‘thing’ it began as in 2006” (p. 10) and those who express appreciation for impacts that

“range from the immediate gut reaction to the atmosphere – ‘fun’, ‘sharing’ – to the far reaching and transformational – ‘developing connections’, ‘new networks’, ‘building a community’. By far the most common remark was one form or other of ‘thanks’, with much of the thanks directed at named individuals who had introduced them to or influenced them in some way. The list of people mentioned in these thanks is far longer than that of the respondents” (p. 6).
A Brief History of the Unconference

This section briefly outlines the genesis of the purpose, name, and formats of the unconference, as it is this context that TeachMeet developed. An unconference is a participant-driven conference (Wikipedia, nd). The first event in unconference format took place in 1984, introducing the Open Space Technology (OST; Owen, 1993). The agenda of an OST event is set by participants after they arrive, and a facilitator keeps that agenda on track for the duration of the event. OST is an open-source phenomenon, as in “there is no overarching Open Space organisation, no patent or trademark, and no global marketing budget: just lots of good people, active practice and shared stories” (OpenSpaceWorld.org).

The four principles of OST, which are more descriptive than prescriptive or directive, are “whoever comes is the right people, whatever happens is the only thing that could have, when it starts is the right time, when it’s over it’s over (Owen, 1993, p. 93).

In 2003, a new unconference format called PechaKucha emerged from Tokyo. It limited presentations to 5 minutes. This lighting presentation, the brief telling of a story, became popular and has been adopted and adapted widely. By 2005 the OST unconference format, with its long discussion sessions, was becoming popular due to its adoption by an “international network of user-generated conferences primarily focused around technology and the web”, BarCamp (barcamp.org). Table 2.2 presents a summary of the origins and formats of early unconference formats. In 2006, a fusion of the user-generated content of Barcamp with the lightning presentation of PechaKucha, interspersed with in-built conversation time, became the TeachMeet unconference in Scotland. The evolution and development of this by teachers for teachers phenomenon is the subject of the following chapters of this thesis.
### Table 2.2


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unconference</th>
<th>Origins (Date, Place, Founder)</th>
<th>Format and Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Open Space Technology | 1984 Monterey, CA, USA Harrison Owen openspaceworld.com | 1. Opening Circle - facilitated participant setting of agenda  
2. Multiple conversations happening in the same big space, several discussion sessions at the same time.  
3. Closing Circle *Lasts between half a day and three days.* |
| Pecha Kucha | 2003 Tokyo, Japan pechakucha.com Astrid Klein, Mark Dytham | A series of presentations, each consisting of 20 slides, each slide automatically forwarding after 20 seconds. *Lasts less than two hours.* |
| Barcamp | 2005 Palo Alto, CA, USA barcamp.org Tantek Çelik, Eris Free, Ryan King, Chris Messina, Andy Smith, Matthew Mullenweg. | Using OST format, participants host, and organise by consensus, a variety of sessions in a given time frame; session schedule suggestions posted centrally on a whiteboard 'grid'. *Lasts up to a full day.* |
| TeachMeet | 2006 Scotland, UK TeachMeet.org John Johnston, Ewan McIntosh, David Noble | Mixture of random order presentations (2 minute ‘nano’, 7 minute ‘micro’) and conversations, by teachers for teachers, followed by a social ‘TeachEat’. *Lasts from 90 minutes to a few hours.* |
| Ignite | 2006 Seattle, WA, USA ignitetalks.io Brady Forrest, Bre Pettis | Rapid fire presentations (20 slides for 15 seconds each, exactly 5 minutes per presentation). *Lasts less than two hours.* |
| EdCamp | 2010 Philadelphia, PA, USA edcamp.org Dan Callahan, Mary Beth Hertz, Kevin Jarrett, Ann Leaness, Christine Miles, Mike Ritzius, Hadley Ferguson, Kim Sivick, Kristen Swanson, Nicolae Borota, Rob Rowe | Using OST format, educators organise, by consensus, a variety of sessions in a given time frame. Session schedule suggestions are posted centrally on whiteboard 'grid'. *Usually lasts one full day.* |
Chapter Three – Literature Review

In Chapter One, the Introduction presented the overarching aim to be addressed in this research - to explore the nature and the niche of TeachMeet in a professional learning landscape - and outlined the structure of the dissertation. The four research questions to be addressed were presented:

RQ1. What are the characteristic elements of TeachMeet?
RQ2. What motivates participants to engage with TeachMeet?
RQ3. What is the situation of TeachMeet in participants’ professional learning?
RQ4. What is the relationship between evolution, impact, and sustainability in the context of TeachMeet?

Chapter Two - Context told the story to date of the phenomenon being researched, TeachMeet, an event arranged by teachers to share ideas with their peers. This chapter introduces and highlights the readings that have informed the research to date, helped to focus the research questions, and guided the decision making about methodology and methods. The search for writings on the topic is outlined, their scope examined, the selection criteria for inclusion declared, and the categorisation of writings described. An iterative cycle of searching, scoping, and selection generated three separate (but not wholly discrete) clusters of writings: those concerning professional development, those concerned with the world of self and peer organised events, and those referring directly to TeachMeet and similar phenomena. The main body of the chapter, the review, presents the
examination of viewpoints found in the writings within these three clusters, in order to
discern the nature of the TeachMeet phenomenon and ascertain its niche in the landscape
of professional learning.

**Searching the literature.** Hall (2013, p. 4) suggests a search for areas of debate on
the key concepts, keeping note of the main perspectives, the gaps or “where the existing
knowledge is ‘thin’”, and inclusion of “parallel literatures” – this last has proven to be
most useful advice for this search. Once the search for academic literature directly
addressing the topic of TeachMeet began, most noticeable was an obvious gap therein. For
a phenomenon that did not exist before mid-2006 this was not surprising given the normal
time-lapse between research and publishing. The yield of peer-reviewed papers was
minimal; mention in book chapters was seemingly non-existent. Where the search yielded
encouraging results was in grey and informal literature; a surprising number of government
and academic bodies on at least three continents have referred to TeachMeet by name or by
category. These references are fleeting and unexpanded, but many have served as useful
‘breadcrumbs’ to direct continued searching. Where the search yielded a huge body of
informal writing (which at first seemed as shallow as it was wide but turned out to hold
some of the clearest and most helpful recorded thoughts and arguments) was in the open
discourse found on the internet. This was no more surprising than the lack of volume in the
academic sphere; at the time of writing the internet is probably the closest thing
TeachMeet has to a forum for discussion.

**Scoping the literature.** O’Leary (2017, p. 108) recommends always keeping in mind
that coverage reflects the broad purposes of the literature review – “inform readers of what
is happening in this field, argue the relevance and significance of the research questions,
provide the context for the chosen methodological approach”. The scope of the search for
relevant literature was decided with boundaries loosely set by following the pointers in
TeachMeet participants’ informal discourse of TeachMeet, which styled it as an
opportunity for professional learning, as self-organised and lead from within rather than
delivered by authorities and as having a particular design derived from the unconference
model. Thus the three spotlights used in scoping were: one scoping the literature on
matters of the professional learning of teachers, a second scoping writings on the nature of
non-hierarchical networks and communities, and a third scoping writings on the
TeachMeet ‘unconference’ phenomenon itself.

Selecting the literature. When the body of literature discovered is expansive, and
too large to include everyone’s contribution, decisions must be made on criteria for
selection of what will be read and reviewed. In this research two main criteria emerged –
selecting, in each domain, for expertise and for experience - in order to balance inclusion
of knowledge and advice from established experts with those writing from lived
experience in the micro world being studied. Selecting from the enormous body of
academic work relating to the ‘CPD’ domain was a complicated process; this body of
academic literature is huge, and choosing who was in and who was not was a dilemma; in
the end, selection favoured those who offered the clearest critical insight into what is
shaping professional learning in education. Selection of literature in the ‘self-organised’
domain was less difficult; those chosen offered thoughts and theories on matters
influencing the recent evolution of non-hierarchical organisation. As for selecting from the
domain of TeachMeet itself, the constant guide was to include the records those with lived
experience of TeachMeet. There being little in the formal literature, selection became a
process of sifting through many informal materials uncovered in searching in order to
choose representative pieces. For the purpose of organisation of reading and writing for
this chapter, the selected literature from each of the three broad domains - ‘CPD,’ ‘self-
organised,’ TeachMeet - was sorted into categories according to source, adopted and
adapted from steps suggested in similar literature review by Vogel (2010, p. 10). Table 3.1
presents a summary of these categories.
Table 3.1

A Categorisation of Literature Selected for Review in this Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Samples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other Materials</td>
<td>Informed Individual</td>
<td>Personal Experience, Opinion, Reflection, Recording, Sharing</td>
<td>Online Sites: Event Management, Media sharing and Broadcasting</td>
<td>Graphic, Video, Podcast, Multimedia slides, Source Code</td>
<td>TeachMeet wiki, Eventbrite, Flickr, YouTube, Facebook, GitHub</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The four categories form a continuum of formality ranging from peer-reviewed literature (written from an academic perspective) and ‘grey’ literature reports (from official bodies) through informal literature (blog posts, discussion forum contributions) to the ‘other materials’ identified as useful sources of secondary or ‘found’ data - online websites, posters, wikis, event management tools, emails, comments section on blog sites, podcasts, webcasts, and videos (this list is not exhaustive). This categorisation of the selected literature shows that the literature about leaderless organisations is evenly spread across the formal and informal categories, the literature for CPD and professional learning matters is mainly in the formal end of the continuum, and TeachMeet and unconference literature is mainly in the informal categories.
Section One: Review of Literature in The Domain of ‘CPD’

This first section of the review traces how approaches to Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in the literature have developed in the years leading to the current context in which TeachMeet has emerged. This section outlines the wide selection of terms and acronyms used in peer reviewed and policy paper discussion about professional learning in education; explores characteristics factors of professional learning; examines reports of how teacher learning is developing in professional networks and communities; and offers a brief comparison of several models currently used for the evaluation of professional development.

‘Terms and Conditions Apply’ - Deciphering Acronyms Of Professional Learning

One of the first things to notice in the literature about professional learning is the abundance of two-, three-, and four-letter acronyms and abbreviations.

In the introduction to this review of the literature, the acronym CPD (Continuing / Continuous Professional Development) has been used as a catch-all reference to all modes of the professional learning of teachers, in particular as they refer to participants of TeachMeet. The use of this particular acronym was a result of two things – first was a result taking the lead from the comment “best CPD ever”, noticed in social media posts as reported in the informal and “other materials” literature on TeachMeet; secondly taking the lead directly from the title of Bennett’s (2012) TeachMeets: Guerrilla CPD. Use of CPD as a temporary ‘catch-all’ phrase was a decision made at the outset, as initial reading of all levels of literature offered at least ten variations of the same theme using combinations of seven words: continuous / continuing, community, development, learning, practice, network, teacher. These have been combined to form terms represented by two letter acronyms e.g. PD, PL, TL; three letter acronyms e.g. CoP, CPD, CPE, CPL, PLC, PLN; and a four-letter acronym PPLN. The acronyms stand for the terms found across the
literature, are presented in Table 3.2 below. The list is not exhaustive, and new terms and acronyms keep appearing.

Table 3.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>Professional Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TL</td>
<td>Teacher Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoP</td>
<td>Community of Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPD</td>
<td>Continuing Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPE</td>
<td>Continuing Professional Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPL</td>
<td>Continuing Professional Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPD</td>
<td>Continuous Professional Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLN</td>
<td>Personal Learning Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLC</td>
<td>Professional Learning Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLN</td>
<td>Professional Learning Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPLN</td>
<td>Personal Professional Learning Network</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some scholars refer to the entity and some to the people within it; sometimes different terms are used by different people to mean the same thing; sometimes different people use one of the terms to mean different things. Although there is no hard and fast rule visible in academia, initial reading would suggest a geographic pattern in habitual use of terms in scholarly writing and policy reports – documents from UK and Ireland sources (Granville, 2005; Hogan et al., 2007; Bennett, 2012; Murchan et al., 2009; Kennedy, 2014; Sugrue, 2016), very often lead with CPD; documents from the Americas in general seem to favour (or favor, even) the use of PD (Guskey, 1998; Borko, 2010; Avalos, 2011; Desimone, 2011); those from the southern hemisphere feature mainly PL or TL (Timperley, 2007; Webster-Wright, 2009; Mercieca, 2018). Informal chatter on social media seems to follow the same pattern. Some other terms that appear, albeit less often, are Teacher Education (Darling-Hammond, 2018) and in older documents and conversation it
is often ‘in-service’ (DES, 1980) or INSET. Even within some acronyms there can be confusion; in particular with both CPD and PLN, the two most often used in abbreviated form only without clarifying what the C and the P denote. For CPD, Sugrue and Merktan (2016, p. 171) speak of “‘continuing’ becoming ‘continuous’, the latter more strongly suggesting than the former that it is uninterrupted”.

Guest (2019, p. 19) refers to these terms as “a slippery term”, and categorises five current perspectives of some PD and PL scholars thus (italics are mine):

“some conflate or confuse them causing a distinct vagueness or lack of precision in the way PD or learning PL are defined … Friedman and Phillips, 2004; Mayer and Lloyd, 2011; Mitchell, 2013;
some decry definitions to be absent from the literature … Evans, 2002, 2017;
some tease out some common themes … Guskey, 2002; Knapp, 2003;
Kwakman, 2002; Bubb and Earley, 2007; Day, 1999);
some seek to put distance between PD and PL … Timperley, 2011; Garet et al., 2001; Wilson and Berne, 1999;
some put PD and PL under the same umbrella … Clarke and Hollingsworth, 1994; Fraser et al., 2007 … “which consequently might require the acronym be extended to CPLD or CPDL” (Cordingley & Bell, 2012, p. 19).”

Evans’s 2019 award winning paper Implicit and informal professional development: what it ‘looks like’, how it occurs, and why we need to research it continually refers to either ‘professional learning and development’ or ‘professional learning or development’ throughout, (although Evans stops short of adding PLD as another acronym, as is done by Stevenson in the editorial (2019, p. 1). Evans’ emphatic statement summarises an issue significant in this research, where the goal is an attempt to categorise unconference events which are nevertheless professional learning in their nature …

“The number of published papers that purport to be about professional learning or development but that fail to conceptualise and define these terms is both astonishing and disappointing. … How, then, can we hope to uncover what makes for effective professional learning or development – what works and
what does not … if we are unclear … about what does and does not count as professional learning or development?” (p. 6).

Webster-Wright’s influential idea of “reframing professional development thru understanding authentic professional learning” (2009, p. 712) crystallises the use of development as opposed to learning: respectively done to versus done with, passive as opposed to active. “The term PD is part of a discourse that focuses on the professional as deficient and in need of development rather than a professional engaged in self-directed learning”. This is the foundation of Webster-Wright’s definition of PL, or its compound version APL (authentic professional learning) which is “the lived experience of continuing to learn as a professional.”

This term Professional Learning seems to encapsulate what the academic literature search to date has presented about the broad view participants of TeachMeet as professed in their online conversations and posts, that it is an active process they are undertaking, done with and for their peers. For this reason, the term Professional Learning will be adopted and used from here as an umbrella term for the ecosystem being studied – self-organised education of educators. Taking a cue from statements of participants offered online, the spotlights within this research of the PL landscape fall on formal professional development and on teachers learning in networks, and communities. Teachers learning in informal networks and communities will be discussed in Section Two of this literature review.

**An Overview of the Literature on Professional Learning**

In this area of research, any search for literature returns a large body of relevant material, the majority as peer-reviewed academic papers, a minority as policy documents. The scoping process became key here, prioritising works that would throw light on factors influencing the professional learning landscape into which TeachMeet was born. These
factors included context, impact, motivation, professionalism, participant perspective;

Table 3.3 presents the key sources whose writings contributed to this discussion.

**Table 3.3**

*Key Sources Informing Review of Literature on Factors Influencing Professional Learning*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Key Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
<td>Timperley, 2007; Murchan et al., 2009; Borko et al., 2010; Webster-Wright, 2010; Sugrue et al., 2016; Korthagen, 2016; Wenger, 2010, 2017; Evans, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impact</strong></td>
<td>Guskey, 1998; Granville, 2005; Kennedy, 2010; Desimone, 2011; Wenger, Trayner, &amp; de Laat 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation</strong></td>
<td>Maslow, 1943; McMillan et al., 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participant Perspective</strong></td>
<td>Hogan et al., 2007; Carpenter et al., 2016a, 2016b; Amond et al., 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy</strong></td>
<td>Darling-Hammond, 2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In reading contemporary descriptions of PL, one stand-out reaction is the feeling of ‘*plus ça change …,*’ of the rate of progression being slow, of a conversation being repeated over and over. In 2010 Borko et al., are discussing the ‘clear and concise’ comparison by Stein et al., from 1999 (p. 263, Table 1), of *old versus new* paradigms (see Table 3.4).

**Table 3.4**

*Characteristics of Old Versus New Paradigms For Professional Development*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics Of Old Versus New Paradigms For Professional Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inputs To Design Process</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Traditional In-Service</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bounded, strict control over content and format</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge and Beliefs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top-down agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not factored in Deficiency model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical issues</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on developing the teacher, not seen as leaders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25
In the 1999 Stein et al. (p.263) comparison the old “forms of professional development for teachers were designed to support a paradigm of teaching in which… teachers’ roles consisted of demonstrating … assigning … grading”, and the new models use “strategies to build teacher capacity to understand subject matter, pedagogy, and student thinking”.

It is noteworthy that much of what was is being called new in 1999 is still being discussed as new by many in the years between then and 2019, two decades later e.g. the “atomistic versus holistic” and “delivery of versus support for” of Webster-Wright in 2010; the “transmission versus transformation” of Kennedy in 2005 and again in 2014; the “performativ versus transformative”, “done to versus done with” and “conforming versus rejuvenating” in Sugrue and Merktan in 2016; the “theory-led” versus “practice-led” versus “professional and personal intertwined” of Korthagen in 2017; the “development or learning versus development and learning” of Evans in 2019.

In 2005, a major national primary curriculum support review in Ireland (Murchan et al.) has an observation of note, prescient perhaps given that this was the time of TeachMeet emergence, speaking of “renewed experience of and interest in professional learning by teachers themselves offers hitherto unavailable opportunities to promote greater engagement by teachers in teacher learning in the coming years”. The report recommends that (italics mine)

“teachers should continue to be involved in planning designing and providing professional development experiences for their peers … a level of choice could be afforded to schools and teachers in selecting the form and source of support that best meets their particular needs … professional development opportunities should be provided in relation to aspects of teaching and learning, not necessarily subject specific … strategies should be put in place to foster sense of ownership of professional development among teachers.” (p. 9)

This seeming prescience is echoed in a contemporary review of the secondary education teacher support service (Granville et al., 2005, p. 57) in which there is discussion of two
discernible modes of implementing education policy - centrally designed and delivered, versus “deregulation, networking, partnership, were education is seen as a fluid process involving localised negotiations and choices”. Granville refers to this as “cultivating professional growth” quoting Senge’s “we keep trying to drive change, when what we need to do is cultivate change.” This discussion was presented in the light of Fullan’s thoughts about the “tensions involved in lessening central control on CPD” in which he seems to be predicting a change in CPD that was indeed happening

“We are not talking about replacing “informed prescription” with “informed professionalism.” We are not moving from command and control to letting “a thousand networks” bloom. Instead the goal is to create a blended system in which local and central levels are intactly influential both within and across levels” (p. 56).

In 2007 Hogan et al., reporting on another major PD initiative which took place between 2003-2006, speak of the positive effects of cultivating teacher networks:

“de-privatising practice to this level, where particular teachers have become at ease in researching and discussing pedagogic practice in front of mixed audiences has, for many, taken significant amounts of time, clarification, trust-building and persuasion. This is understandable, particularly in the light of the prevailing traditions of insulation and isolation” (p. 39).

Of fostering continuity and ownership in PD, they speak of

“three kinds of CPD … focus on needs of system, school, individual teacher … until recently in Ireland, provision concentrated on the first of these … the term INSET, or more simply ‘in-service’ was much more common than CPD … and that term ‘in-service’ became primarily associated in the minds of the teachers with the needs of the system … delivery formats as opposed to participatory” (p. 61).

Timperley et al. (2007, p. 188) in their seminal Best Evidence Synthesis declare

“how teachers’ own ongoing professional learning occurs is equally complex. It is one of the ‘black boxes’ of how learning actually takes place—whether it be the learning of young people, or of teachers, or of those who
teach or coach teachers” … “this synthesis focuses on unpacking the black box of professional development”.

Webster-Wright (2009) reports on a scan of 203 PD research reports that the majority were “evaluative but not critical”, “only 26% challenged or critiqued notions of PD delivery in some way”; the point was made “not to denigrate, but to add quantitative weight to the assertion that despite decades of research into effects of PL little had changed in PD practice across most professions” (p. 710).

One review (Avalos, 2001) of publications on teacher professional development, published in the journal Teaching and Teacher Education during the decade in which TeachMeet appeared (2000–2010), speaks of the complexities of professional learning highlighted within the documents reviewed. In this review, PD was defined as “teachers learning, learning how to learn, transforming their knowledge into practice for the benefit of students’ growth”, p. 10). Avalos reports that over this decade, during which “we have moved away from the traditional in-service teacher training (INSET) model”, and “the good news … is that diverse formats of professional development have effects of some kind or degree” as “the power of teacher co-learning emerges very strongly”. One standout reflective conclusion of this review is that “teachers naturally talk to each other, and that such talk can take on an educational purpose” (p. 17).

Korthagen (2017, p. 399) outlines a provocative developmental summary of the history of PD for teachers to date (see Table 3.5 below), summarising much of what has been presented by Borko (2010), Webster-Wright (2009), Sugrue and Merktan (2016), and others in this review, calling it an ‘inconvenient truth’. Although it references mainly ideas from the formal PD provision world, the “open-ended”, “values based” and “personal” features listed in what Korthagen calls the “inconvenient truth” of “PD 3.0”
Table 3.5


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradigm</th>
<th>Approach Adopted By Providers</th>
<th>Methods Used In Delivery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PD 1.0</td>
<td>“Theory-to-practice” approach</td>
<td>Tell teachers what works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD 1.1</td>
<td>Examples from practice included</td>
<td>Share exemplars e.g. on video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD 2.0</td>
<td>Teaching practice experienced</td>
<td>Partnership between schools and teacher training institutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD 3.0</td>
<td>Link personal strengths with academic knowledge; Link the professional with the personal; Take into account unconscious, multi-dimensional and multi-level nature of teacher learning</td>
<td>1. Values-based 2. Open-ended 3. Personal 4. Start with the learner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A small number of education policy documents refer to TeachMeet, either directly or indirectly in reference to informal formats within PL.

In Ireland, both the Teaching Council and the National Association for Principals and Deputy Principals (NADP) highlight the recent emergence of informal PL. Teaching Council publications make increasing mention of the informal area of PL since 2011, when their ‘Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education’ (2011), in outlining how CPD is a part of teacher formation, states “individual teachers should actively shape their own professional development in the context of the professional development portfolio commenced during initial teacher education and retained throughout teaching career” (p. 20). In the Teaching Council report on teacher learning, Cosán (2016), there is explicit mention of ResearchMeet as a form of TeachMeet for educational researchers (p. 17); and ‘informal learning’ is listed as a ‘key question’ to be addressed in PL for teachers (p. 6). An article in Leader (2015), the NAPD magazine, acknowledges the “‘nearest neighbour’ approach to learning”, advocating that “The Teacher Next Door” is often the best in-service professionals can engage with, and sees “teacher dialogue as CPD” (p. 37).
In Northern Ireland, a 2009 report from HM Inspectorate specifically mentions TeachMeet as an example of “increasing use of approaches which showed ingenuity and flexibility and capitalised on available expertise and resources” (DERA, p. 12). This is one of the earliest mentions of TeachMeet in an official policy document. By 2015, the same body states: “A key element of the Strategy will be working collaboratively in professional learning communities to share best practice. We know that this is already happening in a range of settings, including ALCs (Area Learning Communities, in which “schools come together to plan the curriculum they offer on an area basis”), individual school communities, principal groups and TeachMeets” (DERA, p. 25).

**Conditions That Support And Promote Teachers To Grow Professionally**

The heading for this paragraph borrows directly from the landmark analysis of (teachers’) professional development by Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002, p. 947), who argue that “if we are to facilitate the professional development of teachers, we must understand the process by which teachers grow professionally and the conditions that support and promote that growth” (cited in Evans, 2019, p. 3). The literature suggests this ‘process’ has both a ‘hard’ central core of tangible conditions necessary to guarantee the process, and a ‘soft’ edge of intangible factors that may enhance the process and drive engagement.

**Factors Necessary To Facilitate Professional Development Of Teachers.** There are many who offer analysis of the optimum conditions to facilitate PD, the tangible conditions that must be present. Three are compared and summarised here – Guskey (2000), Desimone (2010), and Kennedy (2005, 2014).

Guskey (2000, p. 16) insists that all PD must be intentional, ongoing, systematic, and lists four principles of effective PD: clear focus on learning and learners; emphasis on individual and organisational change; small changes guided by big vision; ongoing PD that is procedurally embedded. Desimone (2009, p. 183) looks for PD that aims to increase
teachers’ knowledge, skills and practice (although there is no explanation as to what is meant by an ‘increase’ in practice) and calls for “five factors to be present for effective professional development”, be the events “formal or informal, discrete or embedded: content focus; active learning; coherence with beliefs; ongoing duration; collective participation”. Desimone offers an evaluative Path Model (p. 184) for “use in all empirical causal studies of professional development” which will be revisited later in the chapter, in conjunction with other evaluative frameworks. The Kennedy (2005, 2014) model is the most comprehensive and practical of the three, mapping CPD along a continuum with five dimensions: knowledge as procedural or proposition; development of individual or the collective; accountability high or low; professional autonomy high or low; facilitates transmission or transformation (p. 247). Kennedy also categorises 9 models of CPD, to be divided into 3 groups according to their perceived effect on participants: Transmission models (training, award based, deficit, cascade); Transition models (standards-based, coaching/mentoring, community of practice* (although Kennedy (p. 248) admits this one is on the cusp of the transformative level); and Transformative models (Action Research, communities of enquiry: made up of a combination from all the above). Both Guskey and Desimone both look for a focus on ongoing active learning. Kennedy and Desimone both stress the importance of collective learning; this marries with Guskey’s view that change must be at an organisational level. All three models aim for transformation - vision based change.

Factors That May Enhance Professional Learning For Teachers. While the literature suggests a general consensus on features, discussed in the previous paragraph, of PD that it is important for providers to provide, there is no guarantee that even if present they will generate the outcomes wished for. There are others who suggest there must be the willingness to engage that is fostered by more intangible factors that drive participation and collaboration such as moral purpose (Fullan, 2003; Webster-Wright 2009; Fullan &

**Moral purpose.** Fullan (2003) speaks of the importance of moral purpose in PL, that it “must go beyond the individual; must be larger and more collective in nature” (p. 12), and extends it further such that “moral purpose is not enough. We need the enormous power of people working together” (p. 35). Hargreaves and Fullan (2012, p. 3), addressing the topic of ‘transforming teaching’ quote Leana on social capital that ‘the group is more powerful than the individual’. They argue that “Individuals get confidence from, learning and feedback from having the right kind of people and the right kind of interactions and relationships around them” (p. 4). They quote Warren Little’s ‘continuum of collaboration’, a four-stage scale, of which stages 1 and 3 echo the reaction of participants’ in non-formal PL: “1 - Scanning and Storytelling - exchanging ideas, anecdotes, gossip; and 3 - Sharing of materials and teaching strategies” (p. 112). They also suggest their own 10 guidelines for action for teachers, of which numbers 4 and 5 seem quite complementary to the sharing nature of the Little continuum: “4 - Build your human capital through social capital and 5 - Push and pull your peers” (p. 154). Webster-Wright reminds us that PL “cannot be mandated, coerced, controlled but can be supported, facilitated, shaped”, and names four constituents that make PL authentic: understanding, engagement, interconnection, openness (2009, p. 12). The last two in particular resonate with the discussion of open and connected networks in the second section of this chapter.

**Motivation.** If one of the key aspects of TeachMeet is the voluntary nature of self- and peer-organisation which makes it happen, motivation is certain to be a factor at play. Maslow’s (1943, p. 394) classic and oft-quoted five sets of goals or needs that drive human motivation – closely aligned to those he reputedly observed in the Choctaw nation he studied (Blackstock, 2008 in Michel, 2014) - these are “physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization”. McMillan et al. (2014, p. 164) take Maslow’s and other’s (Basset
Jones & Lloyd, 2005; Herzberg, 1996; McClelland, 1976) theories into account when
“exploring the motivating and inhibiting factors relating to teachers’ engagement with
CPD” (p. 164). Although the study considered mainly formal CPD, most of the findings
are applicable to any form of PL. The most notable point made concerns how little
research has been done in this area (in comparison to the plethora devoted to measuring
outcomes such as performativity, confidence, competence), from Mathieu et al. (1992)
describing this “a neglected area” to Ng (2010) stating “little is known about what factors
can motivate teachers to engage in professional learning in a meaningful way”. Teachers in
this McMillan cross-border study in Ireland, “expressed a preference both to seek out and
to pursue CPD that they valued for their own personal reasons and in response to their own
personal and professional needs” (p. 157). Italics are the researcher’s, as this is an area in
which there is a gap in the research – the McMillan study respondents were reporting their
views on formally provided CPD; there is no corresponding study as yet on the same
cohort’s motivation to seek out or to organise their own events. As McMillan et al. point
out in conclusion

“development of effective teachers CDP policies … depend upon careful
consideration of the motivational factors involved in engagement and upon
close listening to the voices of those involved – the teachers themselves” (p.
165).

Passion. Hattie (2015, 16) reminds us that “we rarely talk about passion in
education, as if doing so makes the work if the teacher less serious, more emotional than
cognitive, somewhat biased or of lesser import”; citing the current economic climate of
many countries, with depleted education budgets, and quoting a comment from Doug
Reeves – “passion may be the only natural renewable resource that we have”. Mercieca
(2018, p1), in a study reporting on the value of a CoP, leads with the Wenger-Traynor
description of “a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do,
and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly”.
**Conviviality.** This is the least tangible of the intangible factors, being about mood and atmosphere, as a more low-key but no less emotional counter to Hattie’s defence of passion. It is what Illich (1973, p. 12) calls the “autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment”, and what Guest (2019, p. 208) describes as being the “comfortable and relaxed” mood of hygge. In popular culture hygge is a “comfortable conviviality with feelings of wellness and contentment” (Wikipedia, nd). Illich explains the decision to use the word conviviality “to designate the opposite of industrial productivity” as having the wider meaning of something that brings “individual freedom realised in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value”. Guest (2019, p. 208), in presenting the notion of a place for hygge in PL, includes non-formal occasions such as TeachMeet. Guest makes the point that hygge as “having the freedom to choose one’s path is clearly important, but it appears that being comfortable and relaxed have a part to play too. Hygge, a Danish term, is not something you can point to, but is more a feeling or mood”.

**Teachers Learning In Professional Networks And Communities**

In the discussion about terms and acronyms at the beginning of this section, the word *network* and the word *community* each feature in various forms. In this section, they appear in Title Case as they appear commonly in teacher learning e.g. a Professional Learning Network or Professional Learning Community in which teachers take part. (In the following section they feature mainly in lower case as common nouns and verbs, common currency in the discussion of self- and peer-organised groups). The working description of and distinction between the terms network and community being adopted in this research is that offered by Wenger, Trayner and de Latt (2011, p. 9):

*Network.* A network is the set of relationships, personal interactions, and connections among participants who have personal reasons to connect.
Community. Community refers to the development of a shared identity around a topic … representing a collective intention to steward a domain of knowledge.

Teachers Learning Together as Professional Learning

In 1999, a chapter called ‘How Teachers Learn’ in the book ‘How People Learn’ (Bransford et al.,) states that “Teacher learning is relatively new as a research topic, so there is not a great deal of data on it” (p. 190), adding that “much of what constitutes the typical approaches to formal teacher professional development are antithetical to what research findings indicate as promoting effective learning.” (p. 204). They list five “Opportunities for practicing teachers” as

(i) own practice, with or without action research
(ii) interaction with other teachers, formal and informal
(iii) from teacher educators
(iv) graduate programs and
(v) “real life” learning (p. 191).

As an example of the second type, interaction with other teachers, they discuss a 'teachmeet style' arrangement at in-service in use. They conclude that

“Teachers need to develop models of their own professional development that are based on lifelong learning, rather than on an ‘updating’ model of learning, in order to have frameworks to guide their career planning” (p. 243).

The importance of interaction between teachers, and the danger posed by the isolation in silos have always been stressed – from Lortie’s suggestion that “teaching demands, it seems, the capacity to work alone for protracted periods without sure knowledge that one is having any positive effect on students. Some find it difficult to maintain their self-esteem” (1975, p. 144) to the current lament from Socol et al. that “brilliant educators are hidden in schools all over the United States” (2019, p. 213). As Hattie says, “teaching can be a lonely profession” (p. 23). All of these remind of Freire’s (1968, p. 73) warning: “without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there is no true
education”. Korthagen (2017) summarises the importance of teachers learning together thus:

“Teachers’ learning processes are complex and dynamic (Hoban, 2005; Jörg, 2011). They are multi-dimensional, multi-level in nature and often unconscious. The building of communities of practice and the organising of individual or group coaching, including peer coaching, seem pivotal to success, as Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) emphasise in their review of the literature on teacher learning.” (p. 399).

This matter of teachers learning together is the subject of much debate in discussions of Professional Learning Networks and/or Professional Learning Communities.

**Professional Learning Network**

Speaking about the importance of networks and professionalism, in a podcast conversation recorded to celebrate 50 years of free education in Ireland, Sugrue (2018) states that the teacher is a “public intellectual” (something that might surprise many of us teachers). Webster-Wright (2009, p. 26) remarks that professionalism in education is “a largely unexamined presumption”, before listing four characteristics of professional knowledge, obligation, autonomy, commitment. Hargreaves (2000, p. 167) placed us in a Fourth Age in which “teaching professionalism is by no means fixed”, and speaks of tension between forces seeking to ‘de-professionalise’ and those trying to re-define the profession into a “widespread, postmodern professionalism that is open, inclusive and democratic will come about only through a conscious social movement (citing Touraine, 1995) of committed people – teachers and others – who work together for its realization”.

Úi Choistealbha (2019, p. 28) describes professional learning networks as “broad, multi-faceted communities of practice”, adopting the Trust et al. (2016) description of “uniquely personalized, complex systems of interactions consisting of people, resources and digital tools that support ongoing learning and professional growth”. It is pointed out by Úi Choistealbha citing Sallah (2017) and Stoll et al. (2006) that PLNs hold both
individual and collective capacity building for members of the network; this duality may be a factor that contributes to the seeming interchange of the qualifiers personal and professional when describing one’s learning network. Credit for the PLN acronym is given to Tobin (1998) who coined the term to describe a group of people and resources that support ongoing learning. It reminds of the connection Hattie describes when speaking of what it is to “build a coalition of the successful” (2015, p. 23).

“When a teacher joins an online community or subscribes to education blogs, podcasts or news feeds, the teacher is building a professional network, a PLN”, states Trust (2012, p. 133). The description in this report is equally true whether the reader considers the ‘P’ to denote personal or professional. The motivation of being thus connected is highlighted as a positive force: “when teachers develop a PLN, they become part of the other members’ networks” (p. 138) “collective knowledge from various experts is what helps PLNs grow”. Trust maintains that this teacher participation in PLNs shows what the US National Research Council calls “adaptive expertise” (2000, p. 48), “willing to be flexible and grow with the changes they face”. Along with Krutka and Carpenter (2016), Trust carried out a survey of 732 US teachers on their experiences of P(professional)LN. They acknowledge (i) a significant gap in the literature regarding the value of PLNs and how they shape teaching and learning; and (ii) the huge overlap and ‘interchangeability’ between the two meanings of PLN (p. 17), and indeed their findings resulted in quite a sophisticated definition which can be applied to either: “PLNs are uniquely personalized, complex systems of interactions consisting of people, resources, and digital tools that support ongoing learning and professional growth” (p. 28). In findings they “identified four themes – affective, social, cognitive, identity” – that offer understandings of the benefits teachers’ attribute to PLN activities. The main conclusion was of interest to this research – “it seems worth the time and energy of those in education to continue to explore the potential of PLNs to meet teachers’ diverse and holistic needs” (p. 32).
Professional Learning Community

In coining the contemporary term Professional Learning Communities, Hord (1997) used the strapline *communities of continuous inquiry and improvement*. The original concept was built around school and school districts becoming formal PLCs built on the principles of Senge’s (1990) ‘learning organisation’

“where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (p. 3).

By 2004, du Four was warning us that “the term ‘professional learning community’ is used to describe every imaginable combination of individuals with an interest in education. In fact, the term has been used so universally that it is in danger of losing all meaning” (p. 6).

Socol et al. (2018) speak about how their planning PD for teachers is based on the research on transfer from Showers at al., (1987) which found that “simply attending courses, workshops, conferences – traditional PD alone – doesn’t end up making much difference in changing classroom practice” (p. 206). Socol at al. state that in planning PD which aims to motivate teachers to integrate new learning practice, they ensure that it involves shared social settings for teachers – travelling or dining together. They describe the beneficial effect of the social and community building PD activities thus:

“We noticed over and over again that teachers who connect and inspire each other take that inspiration back to their class communities where it develops into a contagious creativity to construct new learning paths for themselves *and* the students they serve” (p. 187).

PLCs as Communities of Practice. Most discussions about community in education refer to the concept of community of practice and draw on Wenger, writing alone or in various partnerships (Lave and Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998-2018, Wenger-Trayner 2015-, Wenger, Trayner, and de Latt 2011-), as the most often referenced thinker on the subject. When first addressing the concept of learning by apprenticeship, Lave and Wenger
combined two concepts in the title of their book, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, which - despite the fact they were not targeting education specifically - have become the underpinning concepts of CoP as the espoused intent of Professional Learning Communities. In 1991 Lave and Wenger speak of “community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice” (p. 98); in 1996, Wenger defines CoP as ‘a model of situational learning, based on collaboration among peers, where individuals work to a common purpose, defined by knowledge rather than task’; most recently the definition offered is

> “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2006, 2009, p. 1; Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 1).

Lave and Wenger speak of legitimate peripheral participation as a way to become part of a community of practice - although they point out that “there is no place in a community of practice designated ‘the periphery’ and, most emphatically, it has no single core or center” (p. 36), they are very clear that the path to full involvement is by each individual taking action: “newcomers' legitimate peripherality provides them with more than an ‘observational’ lookout post: It crucially involves participation as a way of learning” (p. 95). Wenger often speaks of peripherality as the first step into a community for a newcomer, an “inbound trajectory construed by everybody to include full participation in the future” (1998, p. 166), labelling CoP as a “learning community, a living context” (p. 214). For Wenger, *identity* is seen as the crucial factor that raises community above network as a learning force; in considering that “communities emphasize identity and networks emphasize connectivity” (2010, p. 10). And yet he is prescient enough not to dismiss the potential of connectivity for communities, “The Web … and the internet have extended the reach of our interactions beyond the geographical limitations of traditional communities … the increase in flow of information does not obviate the need for
community … In fact it expands the possibilities for community and calls for new kinds of communities of shared practice” (2006, p. 5).

Wenger reflects on what he calls the “career of a concept” (2010, p. 1), referring to the Frankenstein effect of coining a term that becomes globally adopted, and offers cautious and practical advice in speaking to educators. He reminds that CoP was “not intended as a pedagogical technique but as more of an observational tool … both a theory and a practice” and refers to “the danger of success” in that the term may be “bandied about … a buzzword … without people actually understanding what it is when they use the term”. He recommends that educators not discount the “tips and tricks” level of PD, as these can be a good entry level to CoP and reminds that an authentic CoP cannot be designed and built per se but evolves organically as participants develop along a continuum from ‘bumbling beginner’ to ‘master’ (SCoTENS workshop notes, 2016).

**Evaluating The Impact Of Professional Learning**

Although this research is an exploration not an evaluation of TeachMeet as CPD, it has a declared interest in finding out how TeachMeet participants perceive it to be situated within their professional learning. If they consider TeachMeet it to be CPD for them, it is important to examine what are considered by the experts to be the worthiest criteria with which to consider professional development (Guskey, 2002; Ellis, 2017; Hattie, 2015; Evans, 2019; Loughran, 2006; Webster-Wright, 2009, 2010), and compare four of the most highly regarded models (Katzell-Kirkpatrick, 1959; Guskey, 2002; Desimone et al., 2009; Wenger-Trayner et al., 2011).

**What Makes For Effective Professional Development?** Guskey (2002, p. 5) advises that the only way to tell the difference between what he colourfully calls the “rotten things” done in the name of PD from the good is “to provide evidence to document the difference between the two” by evaluation. Ellis counsels that “evidence demand increases as we move towards policy” (SCoTENS keynote, 2017), which is also one of the
Conole “eight reasons to research” (2016, p. 12). Hattie (2015, p. 23) speaking of “the politics of collaborative expertise” warns to beware of collaboration that is ‘just about sharing resources, anecdotes’ (although Wenger is conversely quoted above as saying this is ‘a very fine place to start’), and warns that the “focus of attention needs to be on the evidence of impact”, in order to develop ‘a community, based on expertise’. Evans (2019, p. 6) cautions against too much emphasis being placed on reaching the higher levels of evaluation seeking a “generative component: an impact on students’ learning or attitudes” and posits Fraser’s suggestion that “an alternative to measuring the ‘effectiveness’ of CPD [for teachers] through pupil learning gains” is needed, arguing that

“to assume that any generative impact of professional learning or development will be (immediately) evident represents over-simplistic reasoning that fails to incorporate consideration of the complexity and, I argue, the multidimensionality, of professional learning and development”.

Korthagen quotes the same opinion from Loughran (2006) about “seeking the Holy Grail: an effective method of educating teachers which would positively influence daily teaching practices in schools” (2017, p. 387). Webster-Wright cites Rodrigues’s caution about critiquing teacher PD by suggesting the need to “walk a fine line between trying to demonstrate accountability and impact, without loss of agency and enquiry” (2009, p. 8).

**Measure For Measure - Comparing Models For Evaluation Of PD.** I examined and compared four models for evaluation of PD: the Kirkpatrick-Katzell (1959) four-level model upon which many others have been built, originally devised for evaluation of training in the business world; the Guskey (2000) five level model, a direct descendent of the Kirkpatrick model, tweaked for the evaluation of PD in the education world; the ‘Path Model’ proposed by Desimone (2009) for measuring effects of PD in education; the Value-Creation Matrix that Wenger, Trayner, and de Latt (2011) proposed for use in evaluation of any PD programme and which they acknowledge has its roots in the Kirkpatrick system. Table 3.6 contains my comparison of levels in each of the four models.
Table 3.6


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Four-Level Model of Training Evaluation (Katzell/Kirkpatrick)</th>
<th>Five Critical Levels of PD Evaluation (Guskey)</th>
<th>‘Path Model’ for Measuring PD Effect (Desimone)</th>
<th>Value-Creation Matrix (Wenger-Trayner-de Latt)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Reaction</td>
<td>Participants’ reaction</td>
<td>Teachers experience PD</td>
<td>Immediate reaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Participants’ learning</td>
<td>Increase knowledge and skills, change in attitudes and beliefs, or both.</td>
<td>Potential value - new resources and relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>Organisation support and change</td>
<td>New knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs improve instruction, approach to pedagogy, or both.</td>
<td>Applied value - promising practice leading to improved practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Results</td>
<td>Participants’ use of new knowledge and skills</td>
<td>Instructional changes boost students’ learning</td>
<td>Realised value - return on investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Student learning outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Retaining value - new framework may emerge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each starts with the same entry level evaluation of immediate reaction of participants – this is what the Trust et al. (2016) and Carpenter et al. (2016) studies cited earlier were reporting about teachers’ reactions to district Edcamp events in the USA. It could also be used to classify the casual social media posts during or after non-formal events. The second level in each model is also quite similar, looking for evidence of new learning in those involved. The third and fourth degrees of evaluation look, in different orders in different models, at possible new practices and behaviours adopted by participants. The Wenger-Trayner-deLatt matrix moves one stage further than the others, investigating the possibility for further developments emerging from the process being evaluated.
Another perspective to consider, reminding of the notes of caution from Evans (2019), is about how evaluation is approached. Wenger (2010, p. 13-14) argues that “it is a common mistake to presume horizontal means lack of accountability” and offers another pathway, suggesting that the “regime of accountability” of a community of practice “could be defined as horizontal in that it exists in mutual relationships among participants”. He posits that “power works along two axes of accountability -

*Vertical accountability* – associated with traditional hierarchies, decisional authority, the management of resources, bureaucracies, policies, regulations, accounting, prescriptions, and audit inspections

*Horizontal accountability* – associated with engagement in joint activities, negotiation of mutual relevance, standards of practice, peer recognition, identity, reputation, and commitment to collective learning”

- and stresses that “the key skill is *transversal* – to be able to negotiate and work between the two axes”.

‘*Mind The Gap*’

The body of literature in this domain is almost endless, however it is mostly in the formal writings of the academy, and mostly focussed on formal formats of CPD. Publications focussed on less formal professional learning are definitely on the increase, however the number of papers and reports focussed directly on informal events such as TeachMeet to date is a very tiny fraction of a large body of work.

**Summary of Section One – Review Of Literature in The Domain of CPD**

Section One of this review of literature has presented those readings which have helped to shape and educate the researcher’s thinking on past and current aspects of ‘CPD’, tracing how approaches to CPD have developed over time leading to the current context in which TeachMeet has emerged. An outline has been presented of the terminology used in, features of and factors driving participation in professional learning, followed by a discussion of criteria and mechanisms for evaluation of impact. This sets the stage for next
Section, which considers how literature presents the second domain under review, that of
the self- and peer-organised world of open networks and communities within which the
unconference event format was conceived; the third section of the review will look in
detail at literature dealing directly with the TeachMeet phenomenon.

Section Two: Review Of Literature In The Domain of ‘Self-Organised’

The first section of this literature review addressed a large volume of shared
thought on CPD and how to glean the perceived value of its impact, given that TeachMeet
is considered by many participants to belong within this domain (Bennett, 2012; Carpenter
et al., 2016; Amond et al., 2017). This second section presents a review of the broad
spectrum of work on self- and peer-organised open leaderless networks and communities,
as this is the domain in which many unconference formats, including TeachMeet, operate.
The chapter concludes with a review of the less formal literature featuring thoughts and
analyses pertaining directly to TeachMeet, set up in 2006.

This section of the literature review reports on the examination of academic and
informal literature about the origins and development of Open Space Technology, the
original Unconference (Owen, 1987, 1998; Holman 2004), self-organised leaderless
organisations, networks and communities and the factors that enable them (Brafman &
Bergstrom, 2006; Ferguson, 2017; Poe, 2006; Raymond, 2000; Rogers, 2018; Weick,
1974, 2010). It addresses the influence of connectivism (Siemens, 2005; Downes, 2012;
Bell, 2011), rhizomatic growth (Cormier, 2008), networked individualism (Wellman,
2002) and how they may fit with emergence of open education (Paquette, 1979; Couros,
2006; Weller, 2014; Cronin, 2017).

The World Of The Unconference and the Format of Open Space Technology

Unconference is a term used often in discussions of self-organised conference
events. Self-organisation is taken as “the spontaneous formation of well organised
structures, patterns, or behaviours, from random initial conditions” (Rocha, 1998 in
Siemens, 2004, p. 3). The word unconference is not (yet) defined in classic dictionaries; the crowd-regulated dictionary, Wikipedia, offers “a participant-driven meeting with no agenda until attendees make one up” (wikipedia.org/wiki/Unconference).

Harrison Owen devised the first OST conference (in retrospect classed as the first “unconference” format) in the 1980s in reaction to feedback from traditional conference attendees stating that their best experiences happened during the coffee breaks. Owen speaks of “the primal power of self-organisation, and if so the real significance of OS has little to do with better meetings, and everything to do with a deepening understanding of who we really are and how we might effectively get on in this world” (2007, p. xiii). Owen lists the critical elements of OST as “four mechanisms” (p. 5) and “two engines” (p. 83), and the “one law” (p. 95).

**The Four Mechanisms: Circle, Breath, Bulletin Board, Marketplace.** The circle represents “the fundamental geography of open human communication”. Breath suggests a rhythm to the proceedings in which participants choose to work together. Bulletin Board refers to providing some means for people to declare their interest. Marketplace is a term for the forum in which people spend time together. Circle and breath together form the dynamic of the event; bulletin board and marketplace ensure some form of order on the content and timing. The four mechanisms work together to prevent an informal event becoming a chaotic one.

**The Two Engines: Passion and Responsibility.** In explaining how to run an OST event, Owen states that it “runs on passion bounded by responsibility” (p. 83). There is evidence of an appreciation for these drivers in the tone of how participants react to TeachMeet. Seeing “passion” and “infectious passion” in peers was what was reported as inspiring (Amond et al., 2020, p. 4). A recurring reaction to experiencing TeachMeet is a feeling of moral purpose to partake and to provide more opportunities for participation, as reported by Amond et al. (2017, p. 6): “The most striking change was the number of
participants who reported that they went on to attend, present at, and organise TeachMeets”.

**The One Law: The Law Of Mobility.** Originally called the ‘Law Of Two Feet’, this states that *If at any time you discover you are neither learning nor contributing, use your two feet and move on.* This tacit permission to disengage is a feature that was adopted from the beginning in TeachMeet. McIntosh (2007b) questions the conventional conference configuration which sees sessions “take place in rows, facing a guru at the front, with tables blocking the flow of movement of ideas and people?” and states “that’s why I've enjoyed enforcing unforced spaces in the TeachMeets”.

**Self-Organised, Non-Hierarchical, Open Networks And Communities**

Both *community* and *network* as nouns have become common terms in 21st century education, used to denote groups to which an individual teacher might belong or look to form or join. Quite often the words community and network are used interchangeably, or without definition, alone or as descriptors of the focus of the action – *practice* or *learning*. Each of them, in their Title Case format, may feature in any of the myriad of formal two-, three- or four-letter acronyms which was discussed in the earlier ‘CPD’ section of this literature review. Sugrue et al., (2016, p. 3) point out that “network is a verb and a noun: in verbal mode, one engages; as a noun, one is a node. One can be a meeting point for a number of networks”. In this section of the literature review, the more generic view of the nature of non-hierarchical open human networks and community will first be the focus, outlining some forces at work within them, and looking at some classic metaphors that may help to explain their development as open self-organised leaderless entities, and looking at how this trend moved into the world of education. The final discussions in this section will feature the growth of open practice, and how its adoption in education is enabling the non-formal professional learning sector being researched here.
There is an overlap between literature that discusses learning networks and communities of practice in education; literature focussed on the networks and communities in formal professional development was reviewed in Section One; now it is the turn of the literature reviewed about informal self-organised network and community to be reviewed.

The Nature Of Networks

A network, or to network, conjures up a picture of things linked together, or the action of linking things together; the links may be visible or invisible. Networks in which humans themselves are the nodes are becoming more widespread and complex as communications technology develops.

Dutton (2008, p. 21) conceptualises a Fifth Estate that is powered by this “network of networks”, “individuals at the centre of their own personal networks enabled in ways that can provide an independent source of accountability across multiple arenas – a Fifth Estate” (p. 21). Wellman (2002, p. 10), speaking of a rise of glocalisation, argues that “in networked societies boundaries are more permeable, interactions are with more diverse others, linkages switch between multiple networks, and hierarchies are both flatter and more complexly structured”, suggesting that a simpler structure does not necessarily mean simpler to organise. The term Wellman gives to this flatter complexity is “networked individualism”.

The Growth Of The Network. Ferguson (2017, p. 19) points to the origins of the word hierarchy as derived

“from the Greek ‘rule of high priest’; up to 16th Century ‘net’ was just ‘interwoven thread … only in the later 20th century did ‘networks’ begin to proliferate, and not before 1980 was ‘network’ used as a verb to connote purposive career-oriented socialising”.

The growth of the human network, in particular those of educators, is often explained in terms of biological growth. Cormier (2008), Wheeler (2015), Socol et al. (2019) all use the Deluezian metaphor of growth via rhizome, the widespread and complex connections
formed in the shallow root systems of some plants. The advantage for plants which use this method is that the vegetative spread via rhizome is much more rapid and dependable, bypassing the seed formation / dispersal cycle which takes much longer and is dependent on variables and forces outside the plant. This rhizomatic growth is also called guerrilla growth. Wheeler (2015, p. 43) points also to Cormier’s use of the rhizome analogy when speaking of “the way learning communities form … and … create their preferred ways of communication”. Socol et. al (2019, p. 175) credit the rhizome metaphor as being their inspiration for driving educational change within a community of teachers in a USA school district, speaking of the “literacy of the rhizome, a spread of the community’s knowledge through words, images, interactions”.

Downes (2014) attributes rapid rhizomatic growth, central to the spread of self-organised systems, to the power of connectivism. Connectivism has been declared as “a learning theory for the digital age” by Siemens (2004, p.1), stressing the early 21st century evolution in knowledge transfer from “know-how and know-when” to “know-where” (the understanding of where to find the knowledge needed”. This seminal paper itself was first published with an accompanying web page (ironically long since ‘lost in cyberspace’) dedicated solely to the paper. Millwood’s (2013) Map of Learning Theories places connectivism as an arm of Social Constructivism Theory within whose “culture of shared artefacts with shared meaning” connectivism is summarised as “knowledge distributed across a network of people and information – learning consists of the ability to construct and traverse those networks”.

There is a debate as to whether connectivism is a theory, or “enabler of learning” as argued by Kopp and Hill (2008, p. 11), or merely an accelerating vector within network or community formation and growth, which Gladwell (2000, p. 34) might call a ‘connector’ or Brafman and Beckstrom (2006, p. 91) call a “catalyst”. Bell (2011) argues strongly that connectivism cannot be a learning theory per se, but as it
“makes its contribution mainly as a phenomenon, ‘a thing as it appears, rather than as a thing in itself’ (Collins Concise Dictionary Plus, 1989, p. 997), connectivism exists as an influential phenomenon that inspires teachers and learners to make changes in their practice”. (p. 100).

It may be fair to project onto connectivism what Wheeler (2015, p. 42) says about rhizome theory, i.e., that importance “is not invested in individual components but rather in the direction and speed of motion the entire organism can adopt at any given time”.

**Personal Learning Networks.** The terms Professional Learning Networks and Professional Learning Communities were coined respectively in 1998 and 1999, as outlined previously. By 2004, Siemens was writing of networks at the same time but as *personal*, due to the rise in connectivism. Where the professional network has its focus decided by an ‘official’ source or body, the personal network develops around the individual, it is ‘yours’. According to Richardson (2014, 1:11) “a PLN is when you connect to people who share passions or interests, who will push your thinking, ask and answer questions, that you can interact with”.

**Learning In Networks and Networks In Learning.** On educational theory and practice in the digital age, Wheeler (2015, p. 36) says that

“Our understanding of our world is changing rapidly as a result of our connections to others and to contact through vast networks and widely distributed computational power.” (p. 36).

In 2004, Siemens speaks of both “communities of practice” and “personal networks” (p. 1). Whether time and academia file connectivism under theory or other, what has been most influential on and informed the practice of forming and developing non-formal learning events such as TeachMeet is what Siemens presented in 2004 as the Principles of Connectivism (p. 7) – “diversity of opinions, connecting sources of knowledge, capacity to know more is more critical than what is known, nurturing and maintaining connections, currency and accurate knowledge, decision making as a learning process”.
Many academics (Warlick, 2009; Bennett, 2012; Wheeler, 2015) attribute the origin of the term Personal Learning Network (PLN) to the aforementioned Siemens paper. Downes (2009) argues for its correct attribution as being “derived directly from PLE, Personal Learning Environment, a term first used at The Personal Learning Environments Session at a JISC/CETIS Conference in 2004”. No matter what the place of origin of the term PLN, it is notable that the timing of putting “learning” and “personal” together is concurrent with the environment that bred those who formed and fed the TeachMeet network that evolved after 2006. However, using ‘personal’ and ‘network’ together is not so recent a combination – it is a critical factor in Rogers’s Diffusions of Innovations (1962 - 2003) adoption cycle, in which “late adopters wait until many others in their personal network have adopted (p. 358, italics mine). While Rogers uses the language of the business world (‘market share’), his categorising of networked humans in social systems transfers well to the education world when examining the update of an innovative practice – innovator, early adopters, early majority, late majority, laggards. (Laggards is a word of its time and context, and one which might be read as being judgemental, having as it does synonyms which are less than complimentary; perhaps eventual adopters, reluctant adopters or non-adopters might be more suitable terms to apply.)

**Learning Networks In Education.** Speaking of the effect of networks in education, Wheeler (2015) posits:

> “Learning is changing because of these connections, prompting research into its influence on our minds, how it is changing knowledge and how it is advancing our understanding of the learning processes. (p. 36)”

One visible example of the entanglement of ‘widely distributed computational power’ and connections is seen in the recent popular culture of creating and sharing, on social media, a ‘sketchnote’ summary of learning in a topic. The example in Figure 3.1 below sees Duckworth (2016, Twitter) presenting on a sketchnote summarising the personal or professional learning network. Of the many examples shared online, this was chosen for its
relevance to this research - it tacitly suggests that in learning networks, the *personal* and *professional* are interchangeable.

**Figure 3.1**

*Sample Sketchnote: 10 Reasons Why Every Teacher Needs a P.L.N. (Duckworth, 2016)*

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**The Nature Of Informal Communities**

The idea of community is so central to human ideals that is listed as one of the English language “keywords” by Williams (1976, 1983) and considered part of the “vocabulary of … our most general discussions in English …of the practices we and institutions which we group as culture and society” (p. 15). Community is described therein as

“the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing social relationship … unlike all other terms of social organisation (state, nation, society, etc.), it never seems to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term” (p. 76).

Williams includes “a range of established senses” for community, from those that indicate actual social groups - “(i) ‘the common people’ (ii) an organised society (iii) the people of..."
a district” - to those which are descriptors for “a particular quality of relationship … as in
communitas” – (iv) the quality of holding something in common (v) a sense of common
identity and characteristics (pp. 75-76).

Cormier (2008, p. 6), speaking of increasingly connected educators, echoes much of
what Wenger says when he writes that “most people are members of several communities.
Knowledge seekers in cutting-edge fields are increasingly finding that ongoing appraisal of
new developments is most effectively achieved through the participatory and negotiated
experience of rhizomatic community engagement”.

**Insights Into the Success Of Non-Hierarchical Networked Communities**

In this section, factors that contribute to the success of some non-hierarchical
networked communities will be considered. Four insights into the nature and nurture of
self-organised systems, which may help to explain how seemingly leaderless organisations
work, are examined. Each uses a mental model or metaphor to highlight contrast between
traditional systems with leaderless systems - The Cathedral and the Bazaar; The Hive; The
Starfish and The Spider; The Tower and The Square.

**The Cathedral and The Bazaar.** Raymond (2000, p. 21) tells the story of the open-
source software, Linux. In examining the factors that enabled the growth of open-source
software community, Raymond highlights that Torvalds’s three tenets were the central
enablers of a “great babbling bazaar of differing agendas and approaches” (i) “release early
and often (ii) delegate as much as possible (iii) be open”. This suggests that trust in peers,
and openness, are key. Another question posed by Raymond (p. 111) for “further research
about projects of this type” is that “there’s a big sense abroad that each such project is sui
generis and stands or falls on the group dynamic of particular members; but is this true or
are there replicable strategies that a group can follow?”.

**The Hive.** Poe (2006) uses the metaphor of a hive in explaining the genesis of one of
the world’s largest and most visible open networked communities, Wikipedia (which was
seven years into development as TeachMeet was being born). Wikipedia is the world's largest wiki, “a website on which users collaboratively modify content and structure directly from the web browser” (wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki), which relies hugely on volunteer time given to editing and checking, and community moderation. Early TeachMeet event organisation was within wikis - these are examined in the third section of this chapter.

The Starfish And The Spider. Beckstom and Brafman (2006) use this metaphor as a business model used to explain how so-called leaderless organisations may prosper. This starfish v spider metaphor was used in 2014 by the Australian TeachMeet community to frame a seminar discussion about the development of their community, which they reported in a document they called TeachMeet[Aus]. The idea is that a ‘spider’ organisation, ruled by a head, is hierarchical; a starfish organisation can function without hierarchy. They explain the starfish as an organisation with five ‘legs’ - circles, catalyst, ideology, network, champion - upon which it can stand without needing central governance. Much of what is outlined in this model is an echo of Open Space Technology in the unconference world, discussed earlier in this section. They have in common the circle that is “not lawless, but depend on norms rather than rules” (p. 90); differences are a champion who is “charismatic” (p. 98) and explicit mention of the network which is “enabled by social media”.

The Tower And The Square. Ferguson (2017) uses this metaphor in a history of hierarchy versus horizontal control in society which discusses the affordances and effects of information technology on community formation, claiming

“technology has enormously empowered networks of all kinds relative to traditional hierarchical power structures – but that the consequences of that change would be determined by the structures, emergent properties, and interactions of these networks” (p. 399).
Ferguson highlights two technologies of most importance in flattening hierarchies – the rise of use of smartphones and of the social media site Twitter:

i. “the use of phones for social networking …becoming more advanced … with smartphone, social networks could be online all the time”

ii. “If Facebook initially satisfied the human need to gossip, it was Twitter - founded in March 2006 – that satisfied the more specific need to exchange news, often (though not always) political” (p. 365).

Citing the power of what Schmidt and Cohen (2010) called “the interconnected estate” – citizens with smart technology and the skills with which to wield them (p. 366), Ferguson reminds of the Wellman “networked individuals” discussed earlier as the population of Dutton’s Fifth Estate.

This echoes Rogers’s “homophily accelerates the diffusion process” but it is equally important to note Rogers’s corollary that it “limits the spread of an innovation to those individuals connected in a close-knit network” (p. 306). Homophily alone might tend formed a closed echo chamber; Ferguson suggests that modern social networking mitigates this risk.

These analyses by Raymond (1999), Poe (2006), Ferguson (2018), and Brafman and Beckstrom (2006) each describes some of the factors that drive non-hierarchical organisations - a community of individuals with shared interests who share wisdom by communicating in a technology enabled open network, with a tolerance for an acceptable level of chaos. Brafman and Beckstrom (p. 202) describe this as “the network effect – the increase in the overall value of the network with the addition of each new member” and the power of chaotic systems that can be - “wonderful incubators for creative, destructive, innovative, or crazy ideas ... where creativity is valuable, learning to accept chaos is a must”. Their description echoes that of Hock’s chaordic world (1999, p. 1) of “any self-organizing, self-governing, adaptive, non-linear, complex organism, organization, or system, whether physical, biological or social, the behavior of which harmoniously blends
characteristics of both chaos and order” It also aligns with the aspiration of Holman (2004, p. 1) who declares, when speaking of an appreciative inquiry approach when researching OST networks: “I am on a quest for ‘it’: the feeling of connection and effectiveness that infuses groups when ‘it’ is in their organizations and communities”.

Other factors mentioned in each of the descriptions above as key are the open democratic nature of the environment in which the networked community arises, and individuals who act as catalysts for action - Raymond’s questions about replicability (2000, p. 11) stems directly from the latter.

What the literature offers on the topic of ‘open’ and its growing influence in education is reviewed in the next section.

**The Emerging Influence Of ‘Open’ In Education**

Earlier in this section, the specific unconference format Open Space Technology was described as the accepted progenitor of learning events such as TeachMeet, it is worthwhile to examine the literature relating to the broader domain of open education. Open education is not a new concept - the Open University has recently celebrated its fiftieth birthday (50.open.ac.uk), but there is an emergent debate about open thinking (Cuoros, 2006), open education resources (OER) and open education practice (OEP) (Paquette, 1979; Weller, 2014; Hendricks, 2017; Cronin, 2017) which may be relevant to the open professional learning movement. Hendricks (2017) presents a blog post outlining the 1960s and 1970s history of ‘open’ in education, in which much of the debates and reports catalogued pertain to open pedagogy within the context of student education; however the citing of what Morgan (2017), translating from Paquette’s original in French (1979, p. 18), presents as an “ambitious definition of open education” present three fundamental values of open pedagogy that without doubt ring true about any unconference form of learning: autonomy and interdependence; freedom and responsibility; democracy and participation.
Open Thinking and The Networked Teacher. In 2006, Couros coined and defined the phrase open thinking as “the tendency of an individual, group or institution to give preference to the adoption of open technologies or formats in regard to software, publishing, content and practice” (p. 141). In using the term ‘open’ in this section the definition being used is that offered by Cronin (2017), pointing directly at education: “Open Educational Practice (OEP) is a broad descriptor of practices that include the creation, use and reuse of open educational resources (OER) as well as open pedagogies and open sharing of teaching practices” (p. 4). Cronin and others, notably ‘historian of open’ Weller (2014), describe the ‘open’ of OER and OEP in terms of adjectives rather than nouns – open admission, open as free, open as libre. In outlining the history of open in education Weller dedicates the book to Siemens, Downes and Wiley as the “three pioneers of open” (p. v), tying together the genesis of open educational world with those of the personal networks and communities discussed in the previous section.

To explain how open thinking can influence education, Couros (2006) offers a picture in which a “networked teacher” is situated at the centre of a world of two-way instant communication (Figure 3.2). First published in an open dissertation online, a search shows it still extant and quoted in a widely; last seen being used in a keynote at a prestigious education conference (INTED, 2019). The connectivism visible in this teacher’s network brings to mind what Wellman (ibid.) says about a networked individual, be they learner, teacher or both – “the cycle of knowledge development (personal to network to organisation) allows learners to remain current in their field through the connections they have formed” (p. 11).
Although Couros’s diagram is still used and remixed widely to the present day, one point to note, referring back to a historical point outlined in Chapter Two – Context, is the inclusion of the now almost defunct Internet Relay Chat (at six o’clock in the diagram); this is the communication channel in which the founders of TeachMeet were active participants in 2006. Couros’s open thinking points to another aspect of the ‘open’ nature of the leaderless or self-organised world which, now growing into a wider movement called "the open-source way: open-source projects, products, or initiatives embrace and celebrate principles of open exchange, collaborative participation, rapid prototyping, transparency, meritocracy, and community-oriented development” (opensource.com).

‘Mind The Gap’

As discussed in the previous section, there is a significant body of literature discussing the emergence of open education, most of it about open thinking, OER and OEP. There is little to date which offers critical debate on open professional learning. Searching for open PL yields documentation about actions at the level of access to training
materials and online course, placing them in the low-impact transmission end of the Kennedy’s 2014 continuum discussed in earlier in the light of evaluation of impact of PD.

In 2013, the EU set forth a Digital Agenda for OER with great fanfare (Kroes, 2013, p. 1). It committed to “Opening Up Education”, with “Teachers and trainers will need to embrace open resources and adapt traditional practices to the new online environment”. However, examination shows this to be limited to placing materials online and allowing access to static substantial Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)-type training, professional development presented as training for the business market. In contrast, Open Education Practice (OEP) in Higher and Further Education is gaining traction – the inaugural lecture in a webinar series celebrating 50 years of Open University (2019) features Weller’s lecture Aspects of Open – the evolution of the meaning of open in education, denoting the importance with which it is being considered. Even here however, there is yet little to be read in academic discourse about open professional learning for practicing teachers as seen in the unconference world.

**Summary of Section Two: Review of Literature in The Domain of the ‘Self-organised’**

Following on Section One of the Literature Review, which considered the world of professional development and the evaluation of its impact on professional learning, Section Two of the Literature Review has examined the less formal leaderless, open, networked communities operating in what is known as the unconference world. A wide range of literature from that about the specific unconference known as Open Space Technology to the broader space of open education, was examined to present an overview of the mechanisms and factors driving this self-organised world - connectivism, networked individualism, technology enhanced social media - that might also be formative in the evolution of TeachMeet past, present, and future. The next section will look in detail at the literature directly linked to the specific topic of TeachMeet itself.
Section Three - Review Of Literature In The Domain of TeachMeet

The first two sections of this literature review introduced and highlighted readings on two domains - professional development, informal leaderless networks and communities - as they both relate to the topic of TeachMeet. This third and last section examines literature with direct focus on TeachMeet.

In contrast to the previous two domains reviewed, literature pertaining directly to TeachMeet exists more in the informal categories than the formal. This is not surprising - it takes time for a body of academic literature to evolve; TeachMeet did not exist before 2006. There is a widespread reference to TeachMeet in informal publications, and a smaller volume of formal academic work referring to TeachMeet, directly and in parallel with treatment of other unconference formats.

The small body of critical academic literature includes Bennett (2012), Tumelty (2012), Carpenter et al. (2014, 2016, 2018), Amond et al. (2018) who all discuss TeachMeet directly or in parallel with similar unconference formats. More recently, more critical research on TeachMeet, with participant involvement, is being published (Engeness et al., 2019; Charles, 2021).

The larger body of grey literature includes reference, more descriptive than critical, to TeachMeet in varying levels of depth. These include government policy documents (Cosán, 2016; DENI, 2017; AITSL, 2014; education.nsw.gove.au 2018), commissioned reports (Richardson, 2017; Doust, 2013; TeachMeet[AUS], 2014), newspaper reports (Guardian, 2008; bbc.co.uk, 2009; IT, 2015), and conference proceedings (ESAI, 2017, 2018; SCoTENS, 2016, 2017; INTED, 2017; PDST, 2017, DCU DLRS, 2016; BETT 2008-2017; SLF, 2007-2017).

There is a large volume of informal literature and Fifth Estate material. A lot of this doubles as secondary data - that which O’Leary calls “data that is situational, which needs screening for credibility, accuracy, bias, and to be taken in context” (2017, p. 268). Much
of this exists in Dutton’s Fifth Estate - those writing in blog posts, posting videos and podcasts, trading comments in open discussion forums. This includes an almost endless and continually renewing stream of online generated data about which O’Leary advises “this pool of data is substantial and just waiting to be explored through various means of research” (p. 272).

In the “Other Materials” category, descriptive information about TeachMeet is found in diverse sources such as event management wikis and websites, media sharing sites, social media platforms. This widely scattered information about TeachMeet in informal sources informs the literature review and also serves as secondary data which help to enrich the thick description of TeachMeet outlined in Chapter Two - Context.

**Teachmeet In Formal Academic Literature**

The body of peer-reviewed literature dealing specifically with TeachMeet is slim, as is the ‘parallel’ academic literature dealing with self-organised and less formal professional development for teachers. However, even in the duration of this research, publication in both bodies is beginning to advance.

**Formal Academic Literature Dealing Directly with TeachMeet.** The first sentence in the first academic paper published on the topic of TeachMeet reads thus - “Dubbed as ‘Guerrilla CPD’, TeachMeets are a relative newcomer to the style, structure and principles of continuous professional development, CPD” (Bennett, 2012, p. 23). Bennett coined this phrase ‘Guerrilla CPD’ to title and introduce the paper, denoting the “radical” nature of TeachMeets whose “intention is to provide teachers with a forum for sharing their practices outside of the classroom without the structures of normal staff development. Bennett’s choice of words has been crucial in both determining the scope of the reading for, and the choice of terms used in this research.

The choice of this modifier conjures images of the various uses of the word guerrilla; the use here is “referring to actions or activities performed in an impromptu way,
often without authorization” (oxforddictionaries.com) such as the ‘guerrilla gardening’ or ‘guerrilla gigs’. There is another less well known use of the word guerrilla in plant biology, which defines the spread of plants by ground level or underground vegetative means, “a guerrilla growth form provides them with opportunities to escape from resource-poor sites” (Xue-Hua, p187). This resonates with the Cormier (2008) work on Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic theory of learning alluded to by Bennett (p. 27) as discussed earlier. There is not yet an official entry for the term TeachMeet in an established dictionary; the closest is inclusion in Wikipedia’s list of portmanteau words, and an brief explanatory entry in one paywalled dictionary of education (Wallace, 2015), in which is it described as “An informal, pre-arranged meeting of teachers for the purpose of sharing best practice”.

By the coining of the name ‘guerrilla CPD’ Bennett (2012) opened the door into this research, leading into a landscape where the ‘connected’ (Siemens, 2005; Downes, 2012), ‘rhizomatic’ (Cormier, 2008), ‘Open Space’ (Owen, 2008) and ‘participative learning’ (Davidson and Goldberg, 2009) of the unconference world could form an ‘effective fit’ within formal CPD. Bennett concludes that “principles of building community within formal CPD programmes are not new, but TeachMeet structure offers one way in which it can be organised effectively” (p. 27), citing Heppell’s claim (2009) about ‘viral peer-to-peer learning made possible through social media’. The importance of social media in “the genesis, development and dissemination of the teachmeet idea” is also stressed in the short Tumelty et al. report (2012, p. 8), which details reactions to a 2010 TeachMeet which was used as ‘an alternative form of training’ (p. 1) for librarians (the first profession outside teaching to adopt TeachMeet and record their experience and response). The response was positive, and their conclusion was similar to Bennett’s, stating “TeachMeets are an effective and inexpensive way to enable sharing of experience and networking of colleagues locally across various sectors. They support CPD for the organisers as well as the attendees and can be a supportive environment to encourage first-time presenters” (p. 8).
Walsh (2011, p. 2) also reports reactions to TeachMeet used as a training activity for librarians, whose aim was “allowing us a valuable little window of insight into what our colleagues were doing with their own teaching”. Feedback included appreciative comments about “lots of activity in bite sized chunks”; “excellent, thoroughly enjoyable and informative”; “great networking and information sharing experience”; “really good & stimulating session - enjoyed very much”.

Amond et al. (2017, p. 245) report many instances of TeachMeet participants typifying TeachMeet as their Community of Practice or CoP, as well as a growing use of both ‘community’ and ‘network’ as tags used by TeachMeet participants in online discourse; in addition, many say that the ‘networking’ is something they appreciate. It is clear they are using the action form of network which is a favourite activity in the business and social world, echoing the reminder from Sugrue et al. (2016, p. 3) that “network is a verb and a noun: in verbal mode, one engages; as a noun, one is a node. One can be a meeting point for a number of networks”.

Discussing possibilities for the future of TeachMeet as community, Bennett (2012) presciently concludes that the “principles of building community within formal CPD programmes is not new, but the TeachMeet structure offers one way that it can be organised effectively” (p. 9).

**Emergent Literature Examining Teachmeet.** During the lifetime of this research, several more writings have been published, each considering either general or specific issues of TeachMeet in an increasingly critical light. Commenting on TeachMeet in the light of discussions on Innovative Pedagogy, Basnett (2021, p. 142) speaks of benefits in providing both practical and critical space

“the chance to chat with colleagues at a TM gives a much-needed opportunity for educators to collaborate with and learn from like-minded individuals. Some even take the opportunity to let off steam about educational issues and policies, which might not be possible in traditional forms of CPD”.
There are publications on specific professional applications of TeachMeet being examined, implemented, and discussed. Hammersley et al. (2015, p. 17), in a report on ‘Evidence-Based Teaching: Advancing Capability and Capacity for Enquiry in Schools’, include TeachMeet as one of ways for teachers engaged in the study choose to disseminate their experience,

“… anecdotally proving highly popular amongst teachers who have engaged in this process as it not only alerts them to work being undertaken in other places but also gives them opportunities to talk through ideas without spending vast amounts of time on this”.

Charles (2021) reports on evaluating over a seven-year period (at third level, in the USA) a decision to “investigate TeachMeets as the framework for the regular meetings to facilitate conversations and cooperation among the librarians. The intended beneficiaries would be the librarians and, ultimately the students who received instruction” (p. 2). The interim findings of this intervention are that for the librarians involved,

“TeachMeets are an impactful, effective, sustainable, and transportable means of strengthening an IL instruction program. In this case, specifically in pedagogy, assessment, sustainability of partnerships, and professional development” (p. 5).

A case study by Jones and Edwards (2014, p. 52) reports on the responses to an informal exit survey which asked participants, who were student teachers, “‘What did you learn?’ and 'What would you like to do next?’”. They present the comments in summary form:

“the event supported participants in further developing their own sense of professionalism;
how inspirational the participants felt the event to be;
how the event provided the participants with the opportunity to build their skills;
how enthusiastic the participants were to promote ideas which would really benefit the learning and well-being of children and young people, not just in their own school community but in the wider community created by the TeachMeet event.”
Those final italics are mine - the authors did not highlight or discuss this specific interpretation of the participants' comments. But given the open nature of the questions, this stood out as suggesting that some participants may view TeachMeet as having an effect that lasts beyond one single event. Engeness et al. (2019, p. 26) also report on feedback from participants in TeachMeet. In this case, 39 responses to the question “How does participating at TeachMeets contribute to the developing of your Professional Digital Competence (PDC)?”. The summary of the findings here is that “the vast majority of teachers in our research say that participating at TeachMeets contributes to

… overall enhancement of their PDC;
… developing of a sharing culture among teachers;
… building their social and professional learning networks;
… creating opportunities to meet like minded teachers.”

Although this question asked specifically about PDC, the benefits recognised by the respondents align with the professional and relation benefits inferred by previous groups’ comments - skills, culture, community.

**Formal Academic Literature Dealing Indirectly with TeachMeet.** In the ‘parallel’ literature - not mentioning TeachMeet directly but dealing with similar events - a key source of academic critique and analysis which has given direction to this research is the work of Carpenter et al. (2015, 2016, 2018). They deal with Edcamp in the USA and teachers' reactions to it as an ‘untraditional learning experience’ (2016, p. 1). Edcamp (edcamp.org) is an unconference format with enough similarities to TeachMeet (both having roots in the Open Space Technology philosophy as outlined earlier in the Literature Review and in Chapter Two - Context) to make fair assumptions that conclusions drawn from participants’ reactions to an Edcamp experience would be informative. The results of their most recent survey reported that “participants felt that Edcamp content was more relevant than other PD available to them”, listing “diversity” … “range” … “variety” as positives. Also appreciated was the format’s “interactivity” … “autonomy”
“responsiveness” …discussion-led” … “choice” (2018, p. 80). The implications for practice and policy being that “existing mental models of PD might need to be challenged so that they allow for informal, spontaneous, and more intimate professional conversations” (2018, p. 80). To this they add a warning to “traditional PD organisers”, citing Kennedy (2014, p. 691):

“If providers do choose to incorporate Edcamp-like elements into more conventional PD structures they must be careful to avoid the tendency to tie “bureaucratic managerial knocks that squeeze out autonomy and instead seek to reward compliance and uniformity” (2015, p. 80).

Carpenter et al. also discuss limitations of Edcamp. Comparing the current outcomes with the “five critical characteristics of PD” as defined by Desimone (2009, p. 183) – “content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, collective participation” – the Edcamp model arguably only checks one of them – active learning. This raises a central issue about the nature and niche of TeachMeet, which is also raised in discussion of the literature about the domains of CPD and self-organisation, and in the outlining of the research questions. The most vital recommendation and conclusion presented by Carpenter et al. in their work is this:

“The education field would benefit from additional research on Edcamps and other unconference PD models, as this and the few other extant studies of the topic raise as many questions as they answer” as “principles associated with unconference approaches to professional learning are likely to influence the professional development landscape in years to come” (2016, p. 106).

*Teachmeet In The ‘Grey’ Literature*

In this category there are several sources of literature about TeachMeet - official agency documents, conference proceedings, award citations, and reports from commissioned studies.
Teachmeet In Official Documentation. In this category, TeachMeet appears as fleeting mentions, but with increasing frequency in more recent official documentation. Samples of inclusion in education agency documents in Ireland (Teaching Council: Cosán, 2016), the UK (DENI: Learning Leaders, 2017) and NWS Australia (AITSL, 2014) are statements about the importance of acknowledging the positive effect informal and self-directed CPD activities have on teachers’ careers. Increasingly, TeachMeet is mentioned by name in these documents, reflecting a growing acknowledgement of possible positive effect on teachers. The official website of the Department of Education in New South Wales, Australia (education.nsw.gov.au) indexes TeachMeet as a ‘future-focused resource’ and describing it as a ‘professional learning event’. A short inspection report (Richardson, 2017) about TeachMeets in Wales (learning.gov.wales) reports that “the digital learning unit of the Welsh Government (hbw.gov.wales) have used local HWBmeets held across Wales for the last couple of years as one vehicle for sharing practice.

Teachmeet In Conference Proceedings. Conference proceedings since 2016 to date include references to TeachMeet, either as an event in the programme or as the subject of a paper (ESAI, 2017, 2018; SCoTENS, 2016, 2017; INTED, 2017; PDST, 2017; DCU DLRS, 2016; BETT, 2016, 2017; SLF, 2017; ISTE, 2022; Scratch 2015, 2017, 2019; e-Twinning, 2017). The professional periodical for the largest all island teaching union in Ireland, the INTO (In Touch, 2018), lists TeachMeet and ResearchMeet as two of the CPD events on offer to delegates at their annual conference. Another conference to feature TeachMeets is Féilte, the annual festival organised by the Teaching Council of Ireland. Since 2015 it has archived all the presentations on the official website (Féilte, 2015-2021). The programme notes on the Féilte website describes TeachMeet as

“an informal session, where teachers share practice for teaching, learning and assessment with peers. Participants volunteer to demonstrate good practice they’ve delivered over the past year, or discuss a product that enhances classroom practice for approximately 5 minutes”
and encourages participation by classroom teachers by direct invitation:

“Have you a great resource that you find particularly valuable for learning? Maybe it’s a simple methodology that has improved your students’ learning experience. Or, have you and your colleague shared practices to enhance student engagement in the classroom?” (Féilte, 2018).

**Teachmeet In Awards And Citations.** Two awards for TeachMeet in education cite collaboration and innovation respectively. In 2012, NAACE, National Association of Advisors for Computers in Education (now The Educational Technology Association) gave their annual award for Collaborative Group Project to TeachMeet (see Figure 3.3).

**Figure 3.3**

*TeachMeet receives Collaborative Group Award from NAACE, UK, 2012*

In 2014 the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) gave an Innovation Award to TeachMeet Sydney, citing:

“An increased number of teaching participants in New South Wales, TeachMeets establish in Western Australia, and collaboration with other institutions; opportunity for individuals to collaborate across sector, experience and curriculum area, at TeachMeets and beyond, and to apply learnings in the classroom; and opportunity for educators at all levels to lead, engage in disciplined collaboration and take collective responsibility for improving practice” (AITSL, 2014, p. 8).
Teachmeet In Commissioned Reports. A report of a project commissioned in the UK by the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA, 2013) and a report from a strategy workshop held among the TeachMeet community in Australia (TeachMeet[AUS], 2014).

The 2013 Nesta Project Report. This NESTA report details an observation tour to study ten TeachMeets in the UK in 2013. Reasons for this study were “they marry digital networks with physical meetups, their protocols enable the fast paced dissemination of ideas, and they foster communities of sharing” (Doust, 2013, p. 7). The report suggested that a majority of participants reported

“attending a TeachMeet to be a valuable reflective process, and an opportunity to be amongst professionals who were sharing their ideas freely and openly”;
“the need to be more open”;
“Some expressed concern that a two-tier system might emerge in the teaching profession with one group connected and developing professionally at a much faster pace and those teachers colleagues engaged in teacher networks” (p. 12).

This NESTA study concludes that, from what was observed and learned in the ten TeachMeets visited, these “self-organised groups are working at the fringes of the education system … forming one part of a wider movement of change looking for a more open system … this powerful ecosystem of network teachers has the potential to grow and be a force for change” (p. 13).

The 2014 Teachmeet[AUS] Report. This 2014 report from the TeachMeet[AUS] group in Australia summarises the outcomes of a facilitated workshop organised by the TeachMeet community to discuss, analyse and record, in a professionally curated forum, their thoughts, feelings and aspirations for the TeachMeet movement. This workshop used a logical framework based on the ‘Starfish and Spider’ model of Brafman and Beckstrom (2006); the starfish standing for organisations where no one is the leader and everyone is a
leader, and the spider standing for the organisations with a hierarchical structure in which everyone knows whose role it is to be in charge.

This workshop had three key objectives – “identify the values of TeachMeet, develop guiding principles for how TeachMeet will operate, develop goals and identify actions required to achieve them”. Participants agreed upon a set of key principles which describe TeachMeet’s ‘DNA’, which would affect how it would operate going forward, and articulated several aspirations for the future of the TeachMeet community:

TeachMeet is a Voluntary community, Open to all, Free of charge, Multi-disciplinary, Flexible / Open-Source, Egalitarian, A safe, positive, enjoyable place, Honest and authentic” (p. 8); and with aspirations that “The TeachMeet community continues to grow, be accessible to all, and be sustainable” (p. 9).

That last aspiration seems to have been the crucial point in the discussion on whether to be more starfish or be more spider (these emphases are mine); being more starfish would mean remaining at the non-hierarchical but slightly more chaotic level of organisation, becoming more spider would mean adopting more structures and order.

This report suggests that although deciding to be more starfish would drain energy and perhaps risk “diluting the DNA of TeachMeet and lead to the appropriation of TeachMeet branding and model by others”, the risks of deciding to be more spider – “loss of the credibility of the TeachMeet voice, loss of empowerment, risk of becoming politicised, increased requirement for governance and the stress of increased administrative burden” were far greater. The parting observation of this process was that although TeachMeet may need to “adopt some spider characteristics” to “ensure sustainability”, “it is OK to remain a starfish” in order to “maintain the value of TeachMeet”. (p. 12).

**Teachmeet In Informal And ‘Fifth Estate’ Literature**

A search in informal literature and the Dutton ‘Fifth Estate’ - the social networks and online discussion media - is a rich source of informative comment and discussion about TeachMeet. Cooper (2006, p. 302) used the term ‘blogosphere’ to describe “the rise
of the Fifth Estate”. He posits that “Quite simply, the blogosphere exists because it fills a need”. Potthast et al. (2012, p. 3) use the commentsphere (all user-generated comments on web items) as “derived from the term blogosphere”, as coined in a comment on a blog post by a user named Wolff. Reflective and insightful thoughts on TeachMeet are shared by many as blog posts, podcasts, or videos and these posts may prompt, or invite, others to respond with comments. Other discussions referencing TeachMeet can be found in mailing lists, as curated conversations or in media articles. Much social network media posting is ‘zero hour’ in nature, generated live on the dedicated backchannel from a TeachMeet event.

**Blog Posting: ‘Thinking Out Loud’**. The rise of the blogosphere, and the accompanying commentsphere, offers individuals a place to ‘think out loud’. Many discuss TeachMeet in terms of its possible value as professional learning, social learning, or learning networks. Hallahan (2010) calls TeachMeet “a model of CPD which involves those attending as participants in delivering the training as well as receiving it”; McIntosh (2010) writes of TeachMeet as an example of “open professional development”, or “DIY CPD”. Loughland (2012) blogs about TeachMeet as

“professional learning network … part of the small scale incremental change that builds hope and empowers teachers … you cannot buy professional learning that is as practical and credible as the kind where interested professionals come to share information voluntarily … that teachers are establishing for themselves using online social media applications such as Twitter. These networks are unfunded and a parallel universe away from the mandatory professional development on pupil-free days that most people associate with teacher professional learning”.

In early blogs about TeachMeet, McIntosh (2007b) reminds that TeachMeet from the outset was engineered with the principles and philosophy of Open Space Technology (OST, as outlined earlier in this chapter) in mind. Bray (2009) offers ideas to TeachMeet organisers and suggests they share it with their “personal learning network” (an almost
tacit presumption that anyone reading a blog had a PLN of their own). Price (2013) posits “six powerful motivations behind the rise of social learning: autonomy, immediacy; collegiality; playfulness; generosity; high-visibility”. Each of these fits well with the established TeachMeet elements and habits as outlined in Chapter Two - Context (Amond 2017b; McIntosh (in Bloom, 2016); Morrison-McGill, 2013; Anderson, 2013). Price contends that “the social learning seen in TeachMeets and through a plethora of social media platforms offers a glimpse of more democratic, less hierarchical, professional learning” and describes such communities and learning networks as “self-organised informal, fluid”. One blog post which has been re-blogged or retweeted more than any other – a sign that a reader considers it worthy to be more widely known - is a post from Gonzales (2014) in which Edcamps and TeachMeets are the subject, which declares “every teacher should attend an unconference”.

Call and Response: Online Discussions and Conversations about TeachMeet.

Occasionally the responses to a blog post, the commentsphere, reveal as much about the perspective of experienced TeachMeet participants as the post itself does e.g. this, is in response to a blog post which asked ‘What is a TeachMeet anymore?’

“As a regular attender to TeachMeets, either physically or virtually, since their inception, I have been fascinated to watch the evolution, and philosophical debates well laid out here … It is by its very nature a political animal, maybe even quasi-religious in fervour and opinion … What’s in a name? Well, quite a lot actually. The point about TeachMeet … its charm and nature… deliberately evolved north of the border to be a different beast …is that it is an UNconference”. (Parkin in Anderson, 2014; capitalisation is Parkin’s own.)

A thought shared by Wenger (SCoTENS, 2015) that “theories must also be subservient to sharp interesting storytelling” echoes another critical comment responding to the same blog post

“I think TeachMeet is about winning hearts and minds. It’s about encouraging teachers to tell stories. The original idea was that everyone coming to the event
should have something to share, the events were about giving and sharing, not taking. They changed teachers because they had to do something to be involved” (Yeomans, in Anderson, 2013).

Because of global communications connectivity, there is a non-stop, mainly asynchronous, conversation referencing TeachMeet visible on the internet, as shown above, all offering rich descriptions from TeachMeet participants.

One location for these conversations is in curated spaces to which users may subscribe to offer opinion, ask or answer questions, and make announcements via email e.g. that of the Computers in Education Society of Ireland (CESI, cesi.ie). Posts of interest range from an early one exemplifying a positive self-replicating effect of TeachMeet

“I just wanted to pass on that … hosted their first Teachmeet this evening for principals …. None of the principals (bar one) had ever heard of a Teachmeet but at the end, they all spoke of that amazing buzzing feeling that we all know so well on this mailing list … who hasn't been to a CESImeet to do your best to get to one … Not only are they a great way to do CPD, they're great fun too!” (Lewis, 02.10.2012),

to many others which show how of use social media is encouraged to allow remote participation - “we hope people might join us on the live Twitter feed using #tmfroebel” (Grogan, April 2nd, 2015).

Another growing social media forum for debate is Edchat, a curated “Twitter conversation that any educator can join to discuss and learn about current teaching trends, how to integrate technology, transform their teaching, and connect with inspiring educators worldwide” (edchat.pbworks.com). Two such examples in which the topic discussed was the benefit of TeachMeet were an Edchat (#Edchat, 2011), hosted in the USA, and one hosted in the UK (#TeachMeetImpact, 2012). The comments from these two separate very dense hours of synchronous commenting show participants declaring the value they placed on the *networking, community, personal and professional development* aspects of
unconference formats. Placed side by side (Table 3.7), it is clear that what was of value to the USA participants seemed very much the same as those of the UK participants.

**Table 3.7**

*Extracts From Comments About TeachMeet from Participants in “#edchat” Events Hosted on Twitter, (#edchat, Hosted In USA, 2011 and #TeachMeetImpact, Hosted in UK, 2012)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extracts from #edchat, 2011, USA</th>
<th>Extracts from #TeachMeetImpact, 2012, UK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>o I enjoy the laid back, collaborative, inspired feel of TeachMeet.</td>
<td>o Revolutionised my whole approach to my work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o One of the highlights of any PD is meeting other educators, Edcamp seems to put this in the centre.</td>
<td>o Given the learning in my classroom fresh impetus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o The key with traditional PD is that the teachers don’t have a choice, TeachMeets give them choices.</td>
<td>o Refreshing … inspiring.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Another key to learning at TeachMeets are the twitter backchannels - networking, sharing, &amp; discussions all happen during sessions.</td>
<td>o Told me that I was not alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o It’s about agency, choice, method, context.</td>
<td>o The most important thing … is an expanded network of inspirational people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Love the networking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Shot in the arm of collaboration with supportive enthusiasts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o The most powerful catalyst for change in my thinking in the last 20 years.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**News Media Reports About Teachmeet.** There is not a lot of mention of TeachMeet to be found in the mainstream media, but there are some printed articles. A 2008 article in *The Guardian* describes how a conference can incorporate unconference mode:

“For me, this year’s BETT came alive on Friday evening at 6 PM when the show closed and 100 teachers came together in loose association under the guidance of young web 2.0 wizard Ewan McIntosh - they gathered to share their experiences in five-minute chunks at the BETT TeachMeet” (Davitt).

A 2009 report on the BBC website (bbc.co.uk) highlights TeachMeet as part of the “fringe” events at the Scottish Learning Festival, being hosted by BBC Scotland. Both reports suggest this type of learning event has embedded itself in the UK within just three years of being formed. An Irish Times article takes a dramatic stance in an article titled ‘Seven Minutes To Revolutionise Teaching’, describing the convivial TeachMeet
atmosphere of “sharing of classroom tips and tricks” … “unpredictability that’s encouraged at Teachmeets”… “that keeps it a little bit informal” … “It’s serious and the content is solid, but we do want to have fun”, and also suggests that “this method of training can be incorporated into teachers’ continuous professional development in the future” (Valentine, 2015). In another Irish Times article the then Director of the Teaching Council in Ireland includes TeachMeet as an example of professional learning for teachers in Ireland: “Teachers told us they are engaging in professional learning in a wide variety of ways. They attend subject association meetings. They attend conferences throughout the year. They share their learning with each other and the public at the Féilte festival of education. They organise their own “teachmeets” around the country” (O’Ruairc, 2016).

**TeachMeet In Less Than 280 Characters.** One dynamic but uncurated source of commentary and description of TeachMeet is found in the social media platform Twitter. This has been used by TeachMeet participants since at least 2007; an advanced search of Twitter shows what is possibly the first mention of TeachMeet, as part of a short post-event conversation (Figure 3.4) took place in 2007 (Harrington, 2007).

**Figure 3.4**

*First Recorded Post on Twitter to Reference Teachmeet*

Since the use of the hashtag became a way to aggregate comments about a single topic, the timelines tagged with #teachmeet and #teachmeets have become a round-the-clock stream of short text (< 280 characters), images, and links pointing to TeachMeet. Repeated random checks typically reveal the same words and phrases used in the short descriptors “inspirational … brilliant and transferrable ideas … opportunity to … catch up
… share knowledge and expertise … there certainly is power in collaboration” (random search #teachmeet December 2nd, 2021, 12:27pm). One singular example, linking to Hattie’s point about passion already discussed in this chapter can be glimpsed in the tributes to a young Irish teacher, a passionate proponent of TeachMeet, who had died suddenly. Many tributes were paid publicly on the #teachmeet timeline, with one tweet summing up the passion this teacher brought to both her work and her commitment to TeachMeet: “oh how she LOVED, LOVED, LOVED being a teacher” (Ni Loinshigh, 2015).

**TeachMeet in the ‘Other Materials’**

There are many ‘other materials’ one can find which refer to TeachMeet online. An internet search for “TeachMeet” will return links which point to (i) sites used for organisation purposes, and (ii) platforms which offer hosting and sharing of multimedia files as well as broadcasting live events. Content is a variety of mixed media with content that reveal aspects of TeachMeet - images, sound, video, source code, presentation slides; some are mixed with text. These materials, as secondary data, have added value to the analysis in the research as well contributing to the literature review. Details of key samples are reviewed here.

**Event Management Wikis And Websites.** Online sites used for organising and managing events are mostly wikis, websites, and commercial ticket booking engines.

**Wiki.** A wiki is “a hypertext publication collaboratively edited and managed by its own audience directly using a web browser” (Wikipedia, nd). The earliest information about TeachMeet is written in wikis, making them the closest thing to a historical primary source. The original wiki called ScotEduBlogMeetup is now extinct but preserved in The Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine (ScotEduBlogs, 2006). The other ‘original’ eponymous wiki (http://teachmeet.pbworks.com, nd), set up and hosted in the UK since 2008, is still extant though used only sporadically. Although some pages in the UK wiki
are corrupted, many more are preserved, forming a *de facto* archive. The signs of a developing Community of Practice can be gleaned in the language, rules, and conventions of TeachMeet in typical event pages (TeachMeet NE London, 2009; TeachMeet BETT, 2010).

*Self-Determination In The TeachMeet Wikis.* Each wiki page is created for a new event, with an invitation to sign in and sign up by editing the page to include oneself.

*Language Used In TeachMeet Wikis.* The language used is inviting, open: “You can come along to loiter, contribute, chat, meet new people, or give a talk”. Names given to elements of the event - *micropresentation* (7 mins), *nanopresentation* (2 mins), *mininote, enthusiastic lurkers, breakout, electronic fruit machine, MC, TeachEat* - are unconventional.

*Rules Listed In TeachMeet Wikis.* Rules listed are few in number, and point to the acceptable (classroom based) and unacceptable (advertising) content of presentations: “Please make sure that what you're showing has actually been done in your classroom/school”; “Whether it is about your classroom displays, encouraging speaking and listening or an engaging web tool, your talk must be about real learning activities. “No sales talks please”. In these wikis a reader can also see that format of presentations was an issue - some pages present a blunt “No PowerPoint” and others are more laissez-faire “You can use whatever presentation format you want including PowerPoint, keynote, Prezi, slide rocket, you could just talk, show something from the web, hold up a poster or you could sing a song or do something different?”

*Conventions Described In TeachMeet Wikis.* Conventions visible include a mixture of exploitation of growing connectivity (the open sign up, the random running order), and some very social aspects (raffled prizes, an ‘after’ event - this is the ‘TeachEat’ mentioned above). Each event page stores the consecutive lists of people who had self-nominated to speak, to help out in some way, to sponsor, to join the audience. At many of these early
TeachMeets people are invited to sign up to join remotely via Flashmeeting (flashmeeting.open.ac.uk), and asked to “Tag your photos, videos and blog posts”; “Use the following tag for all posts, images, tweets and presentations to do with TeachMeet BETT 2010: TMBETT2010”. Using social media during the event was encouraged “We would like all Twitterers to add their names”, showing a growing awareness of the power of connecting online “When you are mentioning TeachMeet BETT2010 whilst using Twitter please just add #TMBETT2010 somewhere in the tweet - that way it will be picked up by a Twitter search”. The random nature of the running order is stated “There will be no strict running order, speakers will be chosen at random, using the electronic fruit machine” (Random Name Picker, classtools.net, nd). Another key feature of these wiki pages is that users have hyperlinked out to many blog posts written pre- or post-event, anticipating or reflecting on the event, or expanding on a nanopresentation they have made there.

Websites. There is no global ‘official’ website for TeachMeet, but many regional sites exist on the World Wide Web e.g. New South Wales, Australia (teachmeetnsw.net) and South Wales, United Kingdom (teachmeetsouthwales.com). A search shows more than 50 groups worldwide using Facebook as a hosting site (TeachMeet Tally, nd). There is a Facebook page (TeachMeet, 2011) offering a form that organisers can fill to advertise their event on the page. It has links to many events, and to commentaries in blog posts written after these events by attendees.

Ticket Booking Engines. Some booking engines such as Eventbrite (www.eventbrite.com) offer free use of their platform to community events have been adopted by many TeachMeet organisers, acting as both registration tool, and ‘one stop shop’ for advertising and communicating with participants. Availability of data about events organised via this site is one of the most useful features for research, as analysis evolving trends in TeachMeet events by Amond et. al has shown (2017, p. 242-243).
**Media Sharing Platforms.** An internet search returns a vast (and constantly growing) amount of material scattered across the many sites which store uploaded media files - there are recorded audio and video, photographs, multimedia slides, source code for shared resources that relate directly to TeachMeet. The list here is not exhaustive but representative of what exists.

**Image Sharing.** A search in the image sharing sites Flickr (flickr.com) and Instagram (instagram.com) returns thousands of images uploaded since 2008. Use of Flickr is mostly retrospective storage of images taken during a TeachMeet, linked to blog posts or descriptive accounts of the event e.g. TeachMeet Love Libraries (Gilmour, 2013) and TeachMeet BETT (Usher, 2010). In more recent years, Instagram users like La Forza Del Nord, teachers of Spanish in Sweden, advertise and report their events live (Spanish TM Sweden, 2021).

**Video Sharing.** There are hundreds of videos tagged as TeachMeet on the two most popular video sharing sites, YouTube and Vimeo. Many events are live-streamed (livestream.com) e.g. “TeachMeet Collaborate” (Cych, 2013). One such explanatory video is repeatedly embedded in websites (irishteachmeet.pbworks.com, www.teachertoolkit.co.uk, eic.rsc.org) to describe TeachMeet (McCormick, 2010, 03:34).

**Audio Sharing.** Audio files that reference TeachMeet include podcasts from within a TeachMeet event featuring a source of diverse interviews on a range of classroom ideas (Delaney, 2015a) and podcast interviews or monologues where TeachMeet is the topic under discussion (Johnston, 2017; Calderwood in Fryer, 2015, 00:44; Delaney, 2015b).

**Slide Sharing.** A search for TeachMeet in the most popular education slide sharing site (slideshare.net, nd) yields over 900 returns of presentations which have been used at TeachMeets all over the world, the majority in the English language with many languages are represented. They are short presentations, less than ten slides; the variety in the content is vast.
**Resource Sharing.** Git Hub is an open-source repository where users can store resources, mainly code and data. It is usually used by software developers but is increasingly used in education (education.github.com). One such example is the sharing of an on-screen timer for use at TeachMeet events (Higgins, 2015).

‘Mind The Gap’

What a searcher will not find anywhere is any of the materials or documentation that is usually part of establishing a group, a business, a charity or any official organisation for global TeachMeet. There is no charter, no list of company rules, no application process, no mission statement, no manifesto, no CEO, no Boards of directors, no staff, no legal status. Even TeachMeet’s closest relation in terms of being a ‘non-organisation’, the Open Space Technology group, has one central website curated by volunteers: “There is no overarching Open Space organization, no patent or trademark, and no global marketing budget: just lots of good people, active practice and shared stories” (openspaceworld.org/wp2). Other closely related organisations, in particular the participant driven conference Edcamp, have evolved into highly organised funded foundations (edcamp.org).

Although there is some recorded evidence of what happens during TeachMeet events, much of it is randomly scattered and without context; in many respects, to borrow a metaphor which Timperley (2007, p. 7) borrowed from Black and Wiliam (1998), much about the essence of TeachMeet is still inside a ‘black box’.

**Summary of Section Three – Review of Literature in The Domain of TeachMeet**

Although there is a small body of formal academic literature directly addressing the topics of TeachMeet, it is a growing body; references to TeachMeet in the grey literature are also sparse but on the increase. Reports on the practice of TeachMeet within conference literature are becoming more frequent. A large disparate and widely spread body of extant dynamic social media discourse on TeachMeet exists in a variety of
formats. An informal language in the literature reviewed across the four categories reveals the most common descriptors to include *learning, social, participants, professional, sharing, informal, CPD, community, open, network, development*, and *unconference*.

Aspects of the review of these sources of literature about TeachMeet and the synthesis of the ideas of their authors have helped to frame the research questions, design the methodology and methods and will be returned to in Chapter Six - Discussion.

**Summary of Literature Review**

This chapter has reviewed literature representing three domains - the ‘CPD’ domain: of the formal world of professional learning; the ‘self-organised’ domain: the developing world of non-hierarchical open networks and communities; and the domain of the emergent phenomenon TeachMeet. The literature of these three domains was examined and reviewed with a view to exploring how they could inform this research into the nature and niche of TeachMeet.

In the first domain, the discussion began with the terminology of professional development of educators, deciphering the acronyms used across the world of academia, beginning with CPD as used by Bennett (2012) to title the first academic paper to first address the topic of this research, TeachMeet; and ending with PL as used by many (Hargreaves, 2000; Webster-Wright, 2009; Evans, 2019) to suggest a more holistic view of the processes pertaining to teacher learning that have been evolving from a provision and delivery model to a more enabling and transformative model (Kennedy, 2014; Guskey 1998, 2002; Desimone, 2011). Agreed characteristics of effective PL have been discussed, including the acknowledgment of less formal fora as valid ways to echo Senge’s advice (Granville et al., 2005) to cultivate rather than drive change. The influence of the more open, agile technology-enhanced world of section two is evident as discussion takes place of the importance of PLCs and PLNs enabling education of teachers to move closer to Korthagen’s (2017) “values based, open-ended, personal PD 3.0”.

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To satisfy a stated need for evidence to underpin any change in policy or practice (Ellis, 2017; Conole, 2016; Fullan, 2003), a comparative overview of various standard models of evaluation of PL was presented (Kirkpatrick-Katzell, 1959; Guskey, 2002; Desimone, 2009; Wenger, Trayner, and de Latt, 2001), in particular the Value-Creation matrix of Wenger, Trayner and de Latt which offers an analytical framework specifically adapted from the Kirkpatrick model, designed to evaluate networks and communities. The theorising of Wenger et al. forms a bridge between the literature in the formal CPD domain and that of the informal world of open networks and communities that is visited in Section Two.

In the second domain, we left the world of education for the open world of networks and communities, using the Wenger-Trayner and de Latt (2011, p. 8) definitions - network as personal, community as interest group. They are both “integral parts of the social fabric of learning”. Early mention of ‘personal’ and ‘network’ in the pre-technology world comes from Rogers’ analysis for Diffusion in Innovations theory. As technology enables networks to network, Siemens (2004) theory of connectivism is discussed as an enabler of Wellman’s ‘network individuals’ operating in an informal, opportunistic way, using the modern social communication system dubbed The Fifth Estate (Dutton, 2007).

Parallel to the rise of networks, the story of the birth of the unconference is presented, a method of increasing democracy into the conference system which was born as Open Space Technology (OST) (Owen, 1987, 1993, 1998, 2008). This exemplified the flattening of hierarchies (Raymond, 2000; Poe, 2006; Brafman and Bergstrom, 2006; Ferguson, 2017; Weick, 1974, 2010), looking at how the ‘hive’ nature of networked organisation and communities that can survive while remaining leaderless by adopting the principles of the open-source community and the philosophy and practice of OST.

Education entered the debate again as the appearance of the personal learning network (Siemens, 2004) became part of a rhizomatic growth of educators connecting
(Cormier, 2008); as unconference format began to be adopted (TeachMeet, 2006, Edcamp, 2010) by educators, and open thinking, resource sharing and practice begins to appear as a force exemplified as the Networked Teacher (Cuoros, 2006).

In the third domain, the literature with direct reference to TeachMeet itself is examined and presented. While the finer details (the factual history and geography) have already been collated into the thick description of Chapter Two - Context, the commentary in the literature presents a picture of how the timely meeting of the technology affordances of section two above has allowed a non-formal but professional learning event format to develop and flourish in which participants set their own agenda. Scanning the mentions of TeachMeet widely scattered secondary data of online social discourse suggests it is, like network, used by some as a noun to describe a single specific event, and by others a descriptor for a way of organising a series of professional learning events. TeachMeet, whether in its original format or in some evolved format as reported in the informal literature seems to be currently occupying a space that has footholds in both the worlds described about - taking the content from the CPD world and the organisation affordances from the open world. Participants are reporting connections between their closed formal directed world of CPD and their new open self-directed world - talk of ‘best CPD ever’, ‘my pln’, ‘our CoP’ are common as reported by Amond et al. (2017). This reflects the title of the first paper Bennett (2012) which described TeachMeet as CPD that is ‘guerrilla’ in nature. More recent reports quote participants’ appreciation of how TeachMeet inspires development of skills, professionalism, culture, and community (Engeness et al., 2019; Charles, 2021). Readings in these three domains, presented in Figure 3.5, helped to focus research questions about the nature and niche of the past, present, and future of an evolving TeachMeet phenomenon. The final framing of research questions that emerged from reading and considering the literature will be discussed in Chapter Four - Research Methodology and Methods.
Figure 3.5

Main Sources in The Three Domains of Literature Reviewed, Placed in The Intersections That Reflect a Synthesis of The Ideas That Influenced The Framing of The Research
Chapter Four – Research Methodology and Methods

The purpose of this research has been to explore and analyse an emerging form of peer-organised participative professional learning, TeachMeet. The preceding three chapters have respectively outlined the overall structure of the study, described the story in context of the TeachMeet phenomenon to date and presented a review of literature pertaining to the landscape of teachers’ professional learning and the non-formal and non-hierarchical aspects within, which include TeachMeet. This chapter presents the methodological approach adopted and details the design and deployment of the methods used in this research.

The chapter has four sections. This first section discusses the four research questions in the context within which they were framed. The four research questions are presented in the order in which they evolved, framed by the temporal and conceptual focus that underpins them. They emerged slowly during my first tentative search-research steps and as I was reading the online discourse of participants and reflecting on this discourse in the light of expert knowledge I was being offered in my reviewing of the academic literature.

The second and third sections present the planning and execution of the research – the methodological approach and the methods employed, the design and deployment of the instruments for generation, collection, and analysis of data. The methodological approach adopted, which is underpinned by a Sensemaking (Weick, 1995) heuristic
operationalised by combining the strengths-seeking Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivasta, 1987) with an insider-mediated Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, 2022) is explained in detail. The methods used for primary data generation – survey by observation, questionnaire, interview – were chosen to serve what Cresswell (2003, p. 44, citing Tashakkori and Teddie 2010, p. 270) classifies as convergent parallel, “generating and collecting both qualitative and quantitative data at the same time, and then integrating the information in the interpretation”. The field work schedule is presented in detail. The iterative process of designing, testing, and crafting of instruments with which to survey – by observing, by indirect questioning and direct questioning - TeachMeet events and participants is presented, as is the complexity of the interplay between the research questions, my positionality, the ethics, and the wisdom from academic literature, which all underpinned the process.

The fourth section is a brief retrospective summary of the research process which concludes the chapter.

Research Questions

The research questions evolved during the searching and scoping phase of this research, during which I undertook a comprehensive search for information about TeachMeet, as much as possible of what was already ‘out there.’ The sources I drew on here were the online informal documents and websites referenced in the Chapter Three - Literature Review and Chapter Two - Context. The more information that became known about how quickly TeachMeet had established itself globally, the more my curiosity grew about its essence, appeal, and impact; what was valued by those engaging, what was of value to the system because of this, and whether and how participants had shaped the growth of TeachMeet to date. During the early days of search and research of the online data and the review of the academic literature, this
curiosity slowly crystallised into four research questions about the nature and niche of TeachMeet. These are listed in Table 4.1 in the order in which they emerged, framed on one side by the temporal focus on establishing the storyline of TeachMeet and on the other by the conceptual focus underpinning this exploration of TeachMeet.

**Table 4.1**

**Framing the Research Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temporal Focus</th>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Conceptual Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>RQ1. What are the characteristic elements of TeachMeet?</td>
<td>Essence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RQ2. What motivates participants to engage with TeachMeet?</td>
<td>Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RQ3. What is the situation of TeachMeet in participants’ professional learning?</td>
<td>Perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RQ4. What is the relationship between evolution, impact, and sustainability in the context of TeachMeet?</td>
<td>Niche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Future</td>
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</table>

**RQ 1: What are the Characteristic Elements of TeachMeet?**

The first research question addresses the concrete ‘nuts and bolts’ of TeachMeet. Even though I had been involved in this world for ten years before deciding to research it, and had a solid working knowledge of it, a lot of it was tacit and situated knowledge. This is a phenomenon whose definition had yet to be agreed upon and whose story had not yet been recorded in any systematic fashion. The answers to this compound question would serve the dual purpose of providing a comprehensive documentary synopsis of what constitutes TeachMeet. To find answers to this question necessitated a wide-ranging online document search, followed by a field survey involving direct observation and questioning of participants by questionnaire and interview.

**RQ 2: What Motivates Participants to Engage with TeachMeet?**

The second research question arose early from a deep curiosity experienced by me, when attending or reflecting on TeachMeet events, as to what motivates those who
organise and participate in these events for and with their peers. Given that TeachMeet is a voluntary venture, what makes one person decide to take action and organise an event; what drives a teacher to decide to attend and partake? The COM-B Model for interpreting behaviour change (Michie et. al, 2011, 2014) claims that the three catalysts in behaviour change in humans are capability, opportunity, motivation; given that most teachers could be deemed to have (more or less) equal capability and opportunity, I am curious about the motivation of the TeachMeet participant - attendees, presenters, organisers – and what it is that motivates one and not another to take action? To find out, this question was asked directly and indirectly of a wide selection of participants.

**RQ 3: What is the Situation of TeachMeet in Participants’ Professional Learning?**

As increasing levels of social discourse among participants came to light during my early searches online, the third research question, and a guiding framework within which to set the answers to it, materialised. Reported by Amond et al. (2017, p. 3), patterns in the terminology of the conversations participants were using when they discussed their involvement freely online leads to a fairly warrantable assertion that TeachMeet participants were beginning to categorise this experience as either (i) part of their continuing professional development (CPD), (ii) part of their activity in a community of practice (CoP), or as (iii) part of their own personal learning network (PLN); and for many it seemed to reside in the intersections between the three. Combining my own ‘noticing’ of themes and trends in participant discourse with thoughts and trends emerging in the literature as outlined in the Literature Review, prompted the construction of a guiding framework (Figure 4.1) set within the “professional learning landscape” of Connelly and Clandinin (1990) as described by Webster-Wright (2010, p. 715). This question of ‘what is it and where does it fit?’ is the most complex and multi layered of the four questions; given that each individual’s perspective will be so personal and that CPD, PLN, and CoP are more dynamic than
fixed entities. To answer this question, perspectives were sought from as many experienced TeachMeet participants as was possible.

**Figure 4.1**

*Prototype of Participant Perspective Framework Incorporating Participants’ Categorisation of TeachMeet as Professed in Online Social Discourse*

**RQ 4: What is the Relationship Between Evolution, Impact, and Sustainability in the Context of TeachMeet?**

This question also grew, albeit more slowly than the previous one, from the search and review of informal online documentation pertaining to TeachMeet. Discussion and critical conversations encountered online suggested that experienced TeachMeet participants have been informally sharing opinions on the relationship between impact, sustainability, and viability of TeachMeet since it began. While the other three questions look mainly at the past and present of TeachMeet, this research question seeks to record and analyse participants’ ideation on the future of TeachMeet.

**Research Methodology**

In this section I explain the methodology for the research, which is underpinned by Sensemaking (Weick, 1995) incorporating principles of Appreciate Inquiry
(Cooperrider & Srivasta, 1987) and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012).

O’Leary (2017, p. 118) advises that “methodological design needs to (i) address the questions, (ii) be within your capacity and interest, and (iii) be practical and doable” in that “methods need to fall from questions”. Taking this advice and that of others (Cresswell, 2014; Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1995; Lipscomb, 2011; Nilsen, 2015; Saldana, 2011, 2016; Yardley, 2000, 2008), and in light of the scenario of conducting research with participants in a non-formal phenomenon such as TeachMeet, I adopted a Sensemaking approach, using a mix of methods, applying principles of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This allowed me the flexibility and adaptability from an operational perspective, what O’Leary (2017, p. 168) calls “using one method to build the efficacy of another”. Saldana (2011, p. 4) speaks thus of genres, elements and styles of research: “In summary, genres deal with the methodological *whys* of the study, elements deal with the *whos, whats, whens, wheres*, and the style deals with the *hows* of the representation, and presentation to its audience”, (italics mine), citing Wolcott (1994, p. 30) who says “dimensions - description, analysis, and interpretation - all three can be integrated into a single study, but description is the foundation upon which the other two rest”. Applying Saldana’s principles to this research, the genre is sensemaking; the elements prioritised are purpose, participants, representation, and presentation; the style is interpretive descriptive.
When I was reviewing academic literature for this study, reading about organisations from the works of Weick, Sutzcliffe, and Obstfeld (1995, 2004, 2005, 2010), repeatedly included and projected the growing importance of sensemaking in organisations. As I was reading, I began to take note of sensemaking as being significant on two levels – firstly as an important part of the commentary in the literature on leaderless organisations such as TeachMeet, but secondly as having a bearing on how I could approach my research into such a phenomenon. Weick et al. (2010, p. 408) described a sensemaking exercise as having a genesis in disruptive ambiguity, beginnings in active noticing and bracketing, mixture of retrospect and prospect”, and is manifest in “continued redrafting of an emerging story”, which results in “retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing”. All of this resonated strongly, as I read it, with what I was reading in the informal discourse among TeachMeet participants in the scoping stages of this research, and it reflected what I found myself doing. And so it was that what was a central part of the literature review on the phenomenon became the research methodology adopted.

Making Sense of Sensemaking. Not only is it difficult to define sensemaking, but one must also careful when naming it. In the literature there is sensemaking (Weick 1988, 1993, 1995), Sense-Making (Dervin, 1992, 2010), and sense-making (Kurtz and Snowden, 2003). Urquhart et al.’s review of “the historical origins, philosophical assumptions, and methodological roots of five major research approaches” (2019, p. 1) characterise what Snowden (nd, cynefin.io) refers to as “the five schools of sensemaking”: Dervin’s Sense-Making centred on individuals and information; Weick’s sensemaking in organizations; Snowden’s sense-making in knowledge management; Russell’s sensemaking in human-computer interactions; and Klein’s sensemaking in cognitive systems engineering. While each of the five has a different focus, Kolko’s framing of the five schools (2010, p. 3)
highlights the thing they all have in common is a dependence on “participant’s perspective and interpretation”. The sensemaking of this research is that of the Weick school, crystallised in the twin questions “What’s the story? Now what?” (Weick, 2003, in Marshall, 2011, p. 6). The definition with which I decided to proceed is that sensemaking is "the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing” (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 409).

Sensemaking in Organisations. Weick et al.’s (2010, p. 409) definition above describes a process that is “ongoing, instrumental, subtle … easily taken for granted”; they speak also of “articulation as a social process by which tacit knowledge is made more explicit or usable” and of a “shared understanding which ‘lifts equivocal knowledge out of the tacit, private, complex, random, and past to make it explicit, public, simpler, ordered, and relevant to the situation at hand’” (citing Obstfeld, 2004). They speak thus of dimensions of sensemaking that include those I had already begun to use in exploring the online world of TeachMeet: “social relations,” “identities,” “cues,” “retrospective meanings” (2010, p. 418). Describing Weick’s perspective, Dervin (2003, p. 116) says “there is no such thing as organization. There is only organizing”. Gioia (2006, p. 1711) refers to the “Weickian view,” which in common with Dervin’s Sense-Making methodology, stresses verb over nouns, being about the “process of becoming rather than the state of being”.

Sensemaking as the Emergent Criterion for Deciding on Research Methods. From my point of view as researcher, this Weickian Sensemaking immediately sat comfortably with both the initial work I had done searching for existing data - the “noticing and bracketing (p. 411)” of extant data collected and collated for Chapter Two - Context; and in my review of literature, particularly the informal social discourse of TeachMeet participants. It guided my decision to adopt an appreciative approach to inquiry in the field and an interpretative phenomenological approach to analysis. The sensemaking approach
narrows the focus of inquiry to “what’s the story?” the focussing on the past and present that are dealt with in Research Question 1, Research Question 2, and Research Question 3, and the “now what?” ideation about the future which is invited by Research Question 4. By adopting and adapting the Appreciative Inquiry approach (Cooperrider & Srivasta, 1987), I could channel the compound realist question of Pawson and Tilley (2004, p. 2): “what works for whom, in what circumstances, and in what respect?” by directly asking participants to describe the strengths as they have experienced them.

The stress placed by Weick et al. on process over structure in an organisation, and the primacy of _those who do the organising_ (2005, p. 410, italics mine) resonate when describing TeachMeet. This type of ‘unorganisation’, in Weick’s terms, “is enacted through the interpreted meaning of individual interactions” and which over time may “find a balance between stability and flexibility.” Weick speaks of people who are "loosely connected" and have a large latitude for action, working with trial and error, chance, and retrospective sense-making. These descriptions matched what I knew about TeachMeet well enough to suggest the appropriateness of adopting a sensemaking stance within the research design. The seven dimensions that characterise the ‘Weickian view’ of sensemaking - identity construction, retrospection, enaction, ongoing, social, focus on extracted cues, plausibility - were borne in mind when developing the research instruments. The participants would be those who Pawson and Tilly (2004, p. 4) describe as “fallible experts” in the TeachMeet organisation, those possessing what Anderson calls the “situated knowledge” (2000, 2020, p. 1) needed for sensemaking. McInerney (2015, p. 1) offers first an overview of sensemaking as “nothing more than a scholarly articulation of something that comes quite naturally to us: we recognize, act upon, create, recall, and apply patterns from the material of our lived experience to impose order on that lived experience”, carried out to serve “the construction of a coherent account” and follows on with a reminder of Weick’s own
recursive advice to “think of sensemaking as a ‘frame of mind about frames of mind’”. Weick et al. (2005, p. 415) expound a forgiving fluidity for sensemaking which also sits well with the flexibility of a ‘mix of methods’ approach:

“sense making is not about truth and getting it right. Instead, it is about continued redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporates more of the observed data, and is more resilient in the face of criticism.”

Given this view, and the fact that Weickian sensemaking is more heuristic than algorithm, I chose to operationalise the approach to my sensemaking exploration among TeachMeet participants by adopting and adapting the process of Appreciative Inquiry.

**Appreciative Inquiry**

In this section on Appreciative Inquiry, I outline the aims of the methodology, explain the reasons I chose to adopt and adapt it, and summarise the principles I chose to integrate into the research methods.

Appreciative Inquiry is a strengths-seeking method of data generation whose central aim is to “seek to identify the core features that give a system life when it is vital, effective, and successful” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 3). That definition mirrored my exact thoughts when deciding to undertake the research, during a long journey home from a TeachMeet event: what is it that can make TeachMeet such a rich experience? Appreciative Inquiry was originally devised and crafted by Cooperrider and Srivasta (1987, p. 24) as a method to achieve a “research perspective that is uniquely intended for discovering, understanding, and fostering innovations in social-organizational arrangements and processes”. In 2007, Moore described Appreciative Inquiry as ‘a new science’ (INSIGHT, 2007, p. 1). By 2020 it has become a business enterprise (champlain.edu/appreciativeinquiry) as well as an academic field of inquiry. A full Appreciative Inquiry with intent to bring about positive change is an
intensive organisation-wide exercise built on five principles and carried out in a cycle of five steps; planning for this individual research took inspiration from these principles and steps.

**The Principles of Appreciative Inquiry.** Of the five principles that guide Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999, p. 49-53: Constructionist, Simultaneity, Poetic, Anticipatory, Positive), the two that influence this research are the Poetic and the Positive. In the Poetic principle, “Appreciative Inquiry sees organisations more as a story than a state” (Seel, 2008, p. 1) in which we choose to “describe ... the world as we know it” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999, p. 51). The Positive principle is “expressed in action by always adopting appreciative language” (Seel, 2008, p. 1), “generating momentum by positive questions that amplify the positive core” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999, p. 53).

**The Cycle of Appreciative Inquiry.** The starting point for any Appreciative Inquiry is that “research into the potential of organizational life should begin with appreciation”. The original ‘4D’ cycle of appreciative inquiry – sequential stages called Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny - is now presented as a ‘5D’ model into which Definition has been added as a preparatory step (Cooperrider, appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu). This recent insertion of a definition step into the 5D process consolidated my decision to adopt and adapt Appreciative Inquiry in my research; one of the features to date of the TeachMeet phenomenon is the lack of any agreed definition. TeachMeet as a format is based loosely but firmly on the Open Space Technology (OST) describes previously in the Literature Review. The existence of a close alignment between Appreciative Inquiry and OST became evident when a 2004 edition of an Appreciative Inquiry journal edition (ed. Holman) was devoted completely to discussing and celebrating OST. In this journal, Holman (p. 2) calls Appreciative Inquiry “a laser through the heart of darkness, making visible the power of affirming questions to connect us with ourselves, the other, and the
whole, discovering the universal in our stories,” and highlights Watkins and Mohr’s structure of Appreciative Inquiry as having roots in the soil of social constructionism and the complexity theory of self-organised systems. Owen (1993 p. 5), the founder of OST, speaks of the “‘magic’ that comes from the power of self-organisation manifesting in complex adaptive systems”, and suggests that “one could conclude that the phenomenon of appreciation is actually a natural concomitant to the ongoing process of self-organisation”.

Whitney (2004, p. 6) speaks of Appreciative Inquiry “tapping into and making known the positive core”. Realising this alignment between Open Space Technology and Appreciative Inquiry was the prompt to me to consider using the Appreciate Inquiry model approach as a guide to develop research instruments to generate data among participants of TeachMeet.

**Adopting and adapting the 5D Cycle of Appreciative Inquiry.** One temporary hesitation in the decision to adopt the Appreciative Inquiry approach was whether it would be possible to carrying out only a partial use of Appreciative Inquiry cycle, using it as a compass to guide design of data generation protocols without adopting the entire framework? In reading others’ project reports I learned that Michael (2005, p. 223) had carried out research using the 4D model in which logistics had limited their study to only the Discovery phase; their ‘verdict’ on this was: “I could, however, conceive of my interviews as a mini version of the discovery phase of the appreciative framework. Seen in this light, the questions I included in my interview protocol should be centred on the key element of that phase: appreciating ‘the best of what is’”. And so I decided in this research plan to include the first three stages of the 5D model cycle: Definition and Discovery were used in the design of Research Question 1 (discovering the defining characteristics of an evolving TeachMeet), Research Question 2 (discovering the motivation of those who participate in TeachMeets), and Research Question 3 (discovering where participants consider TeachMeet to be situated in their learning landscape). The third stage, Dream, influenced the design of the semi-structured qualitative interviews carried out with
TeachMeet organisers to address Research Question 4 (inviting ideation on impact, viability, and sustainability).

**Stages of Appreciative Inquiry used to inform the research methods.** There are five stages in a full Appreciative Inquiry (carried out if in search of determining changes needed) – Definition, Discovery, Dream, Design, Destiny. The first three of the five, those which have been adopted as guiding principles for this inquiry into what makes TeachMeet work, are outlined here.

**Definition.** Steenbarger (2015, p. 1) reminds that Appreciative Inquiry has two important elements: “becoming mindful of the questions we ask and directing those questions toward strengths and positive outcomes”; although answers are sought to contribute towards a defining of TeachMeet, the Definition stage refers more to the questions than to the answers. Hammond (2013, p. 30) advises that “Since AI is a generative process, you create the questions to explore your topic; there is no ‘stock’ list”. In a large group Appreciative Inquiry, several people might be involved in this stage, choosing what Hammond (2013, p. 28) calls “a clear topic definition ... helps to formulate the questions necessary to find out what you want to know”. For me as lone researcher in this preparatory stage, Definition involved being mindful of clarity and purpose during the crafting of both ‘big’ Research Question and direct questions / prompts to be offered to participants within the research schedule.

(One question in the participant survey invited respondents to offer their personal definition of TeachMeet; an agreed definition is something that has not existed up to this, and the research offered an opportunity to find out how the combined wisdom of the voices of experience would define it. To avoid confusion, I use title case ‘Definition’ in reference to Appreciative Inquiry, and lower case ‘definition’ in reference to the survey returns.)

**Discover.** This is the stage of inquiry which diffuses every part of the active research process – my own discoveries in the observation stages, those offered by each
individual respondent to a set of questions, and those that emerge from conversations between me and the invited interviewees. This will guide the questions asking participants to identify the “core factors” that “give life to a” [TeachMeet] (Moore, 2008 p. 216) and to describe their “peak experiences” and “the systemic factors that made success possible” (Hammond, 2013, p 28, 29). Hammond also advises the researcher “to record the ‘quotable quotes’ of the person” (p. 30); in the technique of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Smith (2017, p. 1) articulates this as “the value of eliciting the gem” and Wagstaff et al. (2014, p. 11) refer to “illuminating metaphors”.

**Dream.** This stage is what Hammond (2013, p. 31) suggests as a “best outcome” question, and Moore (2008, p. 26) suggests as a prompt to “describe your vision”. In the interviews with experienced TeachMeet organisers, each was invited to comment on the future of TeachMeet as they foresee it or intend to proceed in it; in the questionnaire, the final question was an invite to contribute their opinions in the space provided for open comment.

Having chosen the principles of Appreciative Inquiry to thus underpin the methods used to generate and collect primary data among TeachMeet participants, I needed a complementary methodology to uncover findings from these data; for this I turned to another sensemaking process, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

**IPA: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

In this section I introduce Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) from its recent origins, and in the context of where it is situated in qualitative research; explain the theoretical underpinnings and practical operation; and state my reasons for choosing to use IPA to analyse the qualitative data from my exploration of TeachMeet.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is a sensemaking research method which seeks to interpret the reported lived experience of individuals. Described by Powell et al. (2010, p. 11) as a “a hybrid of systematic and naturalistic inquiry”,
founder Smith (1996, p. 262) defined it as a “qualitative approach developed within psychology for the examination of personal lived experience”. Smith (2017, p. 1) speaks of developing IPA as an approach that “is rigorous and systematic but which also has an important role for exploration and creativity”.

Choosing IPA. Braun and Clarke (2021, p. 39) class IPA as one of the several cross-case approaches (alongside Grounded Theory and Discourse Analysis) that are “theoretically informed delimited frameworks”, best described as methodologies rather than techniques. In a comparison with Thematic Analysis (TA) (in which themes are developed across cases following the coding of the entire set with the aim of achieving actionable outcomes), Braun and Clarke remind that in both “the researcher subjectivity is a fundamental resource” and “notes are descriptive ... outputs can be similar” (p. 40), and refer to McCleod (2011) who describes both IPA and TA as “variants of Grounded Theory”. In contrast, Braun and Clark find that “some authors suggest IPA produces depth while TA produces breadth” (p. 41), highlighting that “IPA involves a detailed focus on the analysis of each case for developing themes across cases”, in terms of operation,

“IPA goes analytically much deeper with each data item before taking an overall schematic orientation to develop themes across the set; each transcript is analysed in full, sequentially, and analytic notes are ideally recorded on the transcripts themselves” (p. 41).

IPA aims at “identifying the essential components of a phenomenon” (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012, p. 361), in an interpretative analysis which “retains the voice of the participants” (p. 369). According to Noon (2018, p. 75), “the two complementary commitments of IPA are ‘giving voice’ and ‘making sense’”. Smith et al. (2009, p. 21) characterise the process as an “inductive, data driven” procedure combining “strong data … purposive sample … interpretative commentary … convergence and divergence”, leading to the “unfurling of perspectives and meanings”. Described by Smith and Osborn (2003, p. 56) as an exploration of how participants are
making sense of their world, and the meanings particular experiences and events hold, this approach is concerned with an individual’s personal perception or account of an object or event. All the characteristics described above, combined with a clear systematic algorithm for analysis, contributed to my decision to choose IPA.

I chose to do an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis on the qualitative data generated in observing and questioning TeachMeet participants because it allowed me to pay respect to both TeachMeet and those who take part, including myself. At a literal level, if phenomenology combines as *phenomenon* and *logos*, in this research it means my interpretative analysis making some sense of TeachMeet. Getting to an “experiential significance of the thing that’s happening” is described by Smith (2019, p. 168) as “the centre of gravity for IPA ... the type of quest for meaning that is almost always present”.

Farrell (2020, p. 6) advises that “applying the same degree of thoughtfulness to the method as to the phenomenon itself ensures the researcher can clearly demonstrate the trustworthiness of their research”. IPA is a method in which joint primacy is given to the voice of the participant and the positionality of the researcher, emphasising that “the research exercise is a dynamic process with an active role for the researcher in that process, trying to get close to the participant’s ‘insider’s perspective.’ Access ... depends on, and is complicated by, the researcher’s own conceptions; indeed, these are required in order to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 58).

Oxley (2016, p. 56) states that the “pre-existing knowledge and preconceptions of the researcher are always brought to the encounter with the phenomenon”. This underlines the value of the ‘double hermeneutic cycle’ which Smith et al. (2012, p. 21) explain as “the phenomenon is hidden within the participants’ accounts until interpreted by the researcher’s own experience”. In this research, I the researcher am experienced in the
world of TeachMeet. Noon (2018, p. 80) suggests Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as “a particularly useful methodology for researching those whose voices may otherwise go unheard”; the voices of TeachMeet participants are a good fit for this, being an informal event, which has to date been subject to almost no academic scrutiny.

**IPA: Theoretical Underpinnings.** Smith (2017, p. 1), the acknowledged originator of IPA, summarises the interweaving of the three pillars upon which it rests thus:

“It has three primary theoretical underpinnings: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography. Following from Husserl’s phenomenology, IPA is concerned with examining experience, as far as possible, in its own terms as opposed to for example being overly influenced by prior psychological theorizing or by personal proclivities of the researcher. At the same time, consonant with Heidegger, IPA recognizes the exploration of the meaning of personal experience as an interpretative endeavor on the part of both participant and researcher. Hence IPA operates with a double hermeneutic, as ‘the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world’ (Smith & Osborn, 2015, p. 26). One of the skills in IPA then, is producing an interpretative analysis which is tied closely to the account coming from the participant. A distinctive feature of IPA is its idiographic commitment to the detailed analysis of personal experience case-by-case so that, in the final report, the experience of each individual still has a presence and there is an articulation of both convergence and divergence within the study sample”.

**Phenomenology in IPA.** Phenomenology is about understanding things as they appear to us, and our lived experience of them. Phenomenology is commonly presented in research literature as two philosophies - the transcendental school of Husserl and the hermeneutic school of Heidegger.

Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, also called descriptive, centers on the search for the elemental essence, the ‘eidos’, of a phenomenon in order to describe it; Husserl called this the “science of essences. Bracketing, putting aside previous
understandings and assumptions is central here, a process called ‘epoché’, “going back to the things themselves” (Husserl, in Farrell 2020, p. 3).

Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology, also called interpretative, centers on ‘dasein’ - being in the world – in which meaning is inherent with lived experience. In this case, instead of bracketing out assumptions, they are examined with a hermeneutic cycle of analysis (Heidegger, in Farrell 2020, p. 3).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis within the practical paradigm of this research into the TeachMeet phenomenon draws from both philosophies, as it weaves back and forth between the descriptive and the interpretative. The research questions (on essence, motivation, situation, ideation) call from both camps – seeking to document the characteristic elements of TeachMeet and to explore the perspectives of TeachMeet participants. The ‘noticing and bracketing’ so central to the Weickian principles of Sensemaking, which was key to formative analysis of the grey and secondary data found in the preliminary stages of the research are echoed here in approaching the analysis of data generated in the TeachMeet field; bracketing was key to ensuring integrity in the interview schedule. As an insider researcher I was attracted to the operationalised approach of Van Manen’s (1990, p. 30) “descriptive study of lived experience …and … the interpretive study of expressions of lived experience,” which offers six signposts for a hermeneutic phenomenological study, signposts I recognised as summing up a significant part of the story of this PhD research:

1. Turn to a phenomenon that really is of interest
2. Investigate the lived experience of it
3. Reflect on the essential characteristics
4. Describe it in writing
5. Maintain a pedagogical relationship with it
6. Balance the whole and the part in the research.
Hermeneutics in IPA. This is the science and methodology of interpretation, interpretation of text in particular. Guba and Lincoln (1986, p. 111) place hermeneutics in the constructivist paradigm, suggesting “that individual constructions can be elicited and refined only through interaction between and among investigator and respondents …The final aim is to distill a consensus construction that is more informed and sophisticated than any of the predecessor constructions”. Smith (1995 – 2022) speaks repeatedly of the art and practice of interpretation - which needs a reflexive attitude and which acknowledges positionality - in the process of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as moving step by step from the painstaking examination of descriptions, language, and context in elemental experiences to the presentation of generated themes.

Idiography in IPA. This is the examination of discrete events: the specifics and details pertaining to the experience of an individual. Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011, p. 756, citing Warnock (1987), say “it can be argued that ideographic qualitative research has much to contribute to our understanding of phenomena as it can complement actuarial claims derived from quantitative studies through a focus on the particular which can help illuminate the universal”. My applied practice of IPA, reading and analysing of many individual accounts of experience from participants, weaving constantly between the whole and the part, building a hierarchy of themes, is so that I can “understand the part to illustrate the whole,” moving towards the goal of theoretical generalisability (Smith & Osborn 2003 p. 58), and help me towards the goal of making sense of the TeachMeet phenomenon by combining the many perspectives of its participants.

“Doing IPA”. “Doing IPA” is how Biggarstaff and Thompson (2008, p. 8) describe the classic approach to an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in practice: “The usual approach adopted by the researcher is to collect data from (very loosely) semi-
structured interviews where the interviewer has developed a prompt sheet with a few main themes for discussion with the participants”. However, they advise that as IPA has evolved and matured, “data need not be confined to interviews … other useful sources are … personal accounts … documenting their thoughts and experiences … returns from questionnaires”. Braun and Clarke (2021, p. 41) acknowledge “increasing variation around data collection methods have evolved”.

Although the largest volume of data for analysis in this study was to be generated in the aforementioned ‘usual approach’ - the transcripts of interviews – I decided to use Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis with the considerable amount of short text answers to questionnaires, as well as the text notes taken by me in observing TeachMeets. My rationale for this being that all text from data collected being subject to the same Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis technique by the same researcher should offer an opportunity for rich comparisons across datasets containing information from participants of varying latitude and longitude of experience. Powell et al., (2008, p. 73) describe the characterization by themes floating to the top as “capturing the essence of the transcripts’ meanings”; it is then up to the researcher (me) to provide “sufficient elaboration of themes “… and … “interpretative commentary” all of which adds to the trustworthiness of a good IPA.

“Good IPA”. Nizza, Farr, and Smith (2021, p. 2) present and discuss “four markers of high quality” in IPA, based on: qualities of trustworthiness, focus and depth, strong data and interpretation, engaging and enlightening the reader. They seek convergence and divergence that entail “a hermeneutic cycling between the part and the whole in analysis” (p. 9), and advise “a close focus on the specific words spoken by participants, on their linguistic choices and tone, and the imagery they evoke” (p. 15), citing two pointers from Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009):
- “Good IPA is almost always about things of importance to people and those circumstances where they are prompted … to reflect on what has happened in order to make sense of its meaning”
- “The best IPA studies aim to strike a balance between commonality and individuality”.

IPA is a methodology, but also a very systematic method – the system I used is explained in the next section, Research Methods, alongside the mix of methods used in the research.

**Research Methods**

In this section I describe the data sought in the research, the methods chosen to seek and analyse those data, and present details of the design and deployment of research instruments for use within those methods.

**Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Data**

In this research I follow the advice of Cresswell (2014, p. 39) and “use both quantitative and qualitative data because they work to provide the best understanding of a research problem”. The data sought is summarised in Table 4.2 is more qualitative than quantitative in volume, but both data sets are critical to research documenting and telling the story of TeachMeet.

**Table 4.2**

**Qualitative and Quantitative Data Sources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative Data</th>
<th>Primary Data Sources</th>
<th>Secondary Data Sources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observation notes (n = 15)</td>
<td>Social Media feeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questionnaire returns (n = 302)</td>
<td>Blog posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview transcripts (n = 15)</td>
<td>Wiki entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Media feeds</td>
<td>Online videos</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Quantitative Data**

| Observation notes (n = 15)                     | Social Media feeds |
| Questionnaire returns (n = 302)                | Event Management sites |
| Wiki entries                                   |                    |
| Online videos                                  |                    |

**Qualitative Data in This Research.** These are the stories, words, descriptions, the ‘participatory worldview’ of Cresswell and Plano Clark (2011), generated and collected
with the application of Yardley’s (2008, p. 239) four criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research - sensitivity to context, rigour and commitment, transparency and coherence, impact and importance. In this research the primary qualitative data are the text from interview transcripts (n = 15), questionnaire returns (n = 302) and observation notes (n = 15); the secondary qualitative data are from a variety of informal online sources.

**Quantitative Data in This Research.** These are what Cresswell (2014, p. 143) calls the “relationships among variables” – numbers, context, temporal, spatial, evolution, geography, history, transects. In this research project the primary quantitative data are numbers, dates, times from observation notes (n = 15) and questionnaire returns (n = 302); the secondary quantitative data are the numbers, dates, time, and locations from event management sites and other online sources.

**On Choosing to Use a Mix of Methods**

Lipscomb (2011, p. 1) moots that mixed inquiry, although not universally accepted, is now embedded in and accepted by many disciplines. Referring to Cresswell and Plano Clark’s (2011) work on designing and conducting research in which they “present pragmatism as what they term empowerment or issue-oriented ‘participatory worldview’”, Lipscomb offers a forgiving view that in everyday speech pragmatism is, often, little more than a synonym for ‘sensibleness’ and adds that “pragmatism is not one thing ... there are as many pragmatisms as there are pragmatists” (p. 3). Lipscomb also lectures about the dangers of overindulging in the flexibility that a pragmatic paradigm offers: “consistency is important; practicing researchers need to explicitly detail the forms of pragmatism that they are writing about or using, to avoid a conceptual muddle” (p. 7). This view of the ‘sensibleness’ of a pragmatic approach is echoed by Nilsen (2015, p. 9) who speaks of the acceptability of common sense (defining it as ‘a group’s shared tacit knowledge concerning a phenomenon’) as informal theory, albeit a non-codified one, inclusion of which may help the researcher. I take guidance also from Cresswell’s (2014, p. 39) pointer
that being pragmatic in design means not committed to one method only, but allows freedom of choice, stating “truth is whatever works at the time”. O’Leary’s (2017, p. 171) advice on adopting a mix of methods is to “ensure each method will add insightful data to the research”.

**Choosing Which Methods for Mixing.** Methods are the “micro-level techniques used to collect and analyse data” (O’Leary, ibid. p. 119). A ‘mix of methods’ approach “supports the articulation of different techniques to deepen the study of some dimensions while making triangulation of data possible” (Farrow et al., 2020 p. 52). In this research I decided that for the optimum gathering of data about TeachMeet, I would use what Bryman (2012 p. 59) calls cross-sectional sampling incorporating participant survey (online questionnaire followed by semi-structured interview), alongside structured observation.

**Planning for Field Work**

The plan for the field work was to be both purposive and opportunistic, taking a very practical approach in a convergent parallel plan for surveying via observation, questionnaire, and interview. Within a week of ethics approval being granted (January 23rd, 2020), the field work diary was opened for the first observation at a TeachMeet event. Many of the event I planned to attend in person on the island of Ireland (where I live) or in the UK, and others I planned to join as an online observer online occurred across the world (Europe, Australia, and the USA) over a period of six months from January to June of 2020. Within those months I would also prepare and release a detailed anonymous questionnaire, open to any TeachMeet participant who could access it online; and while that questionnaire was running in the background online, I would arrange and record interviews with a range of individuals experienced in organising TeachMeets.

The field work was carried out during 2020 in an overlapping sequence of observation, survey, and interview, with one intense period where all three were
concurrent. Decisions on dates and times were mostly opportunistic, subject to availability of the participants.

**Designing and Building the Research Instruments.** The design stage of the research process involved the systematic combining of elements from the literature consulted and the methods chosen to design instruments best fit to glean data relating to my research questions. The field work kit needed four bespoke builds, furnishing me with instruments to survey efficiently in both passive and active mode – two of which were designed to observe and record TeachMeet events unobtrusively, a third to collect anonymous data from any TeachMeet participant who might wish to offer them, and a fourth to gather in-person data from chosen individuals - all of which are detailed in the next section.

**Methods Used for Collection of Data**

Three survey methods were chosen to generate and collect primary data for analysis – observation, questionnaire, and interview. The rationale, design, and deployment of each is detailed below.

**Survey by Observation**

The working definition of ‘observation’ adopted for this study combines elements of the various explanations from experts (Bryman, 2008, p. 269; Cresswell 2012, p. 213; de Walt and de Walt 2011, p. 1; Marshall and Rossman, 1989, p. 79; Mullings, 1984, p. 1; O’Leary, 2017, p. 46; Smart, Paggs, & Burridge, 2013, p. xxv), is observation as “a systematic method of collecting first-hand information by observing and describing events in a specific social setting”. In terms of purpose, observation is “one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects” of “routines ... culture” of a group (de Walt & de Walt, 2011, p. 1) which “allows the inquirer to see the world as the subjects see it, to live in their time frames” (Guba & Lincoln, 1986, p. 273). Mullings (1984, p. 8) cites the suggestion of Kunz et al., (1977, p. 28) who suggest observation as a method when “behaviour is of primary
interest ahead of statements on attitudes, opinions, feelings”. Kawulich (2005, p. 4) cites the advice of Schmuck (1997) on the usefulness of observation in providing the researcher with “ways to check non-verbal expression of feelings, interaction and communications between participants, how much time is spent on various activities”.

It is a method in which “the main instrument is the observer” (O’Leary, 2017, p. 46; O’Loughlin & O’Loughlin, 2015, p. 19). Bryman (2008, p. 269) describes the “ detachment” of the “complete observer” whose field notes need to “specify key dimensions of whatever is seen or heard”. Smart et al., (2013, p. 293) cite Dingwall’s “where interviews construct data, observers find it”; Fawcett (1996, p. 3, in O’Loughlin and O’Loughlin) suggests an “informed way of looking … to notice what might otherwise be overlooked”. Guba and Lincoln (1986, p. 273) point out an advantage that whereas interviews go back and forth in time, observation is about the “here and now”; they also suggest that in the big picture of inquiry, observation used as triangulation in an audit trail lends credibility, trustworthiness, internal validity (p. 77).

In this research, operational advice from experts that was adopted in planning the observation schedule included Popper’s idea of having a checklist made from expectations (in Smart et al., 2013, p. xxxvii); Mulling’s (1984) suggestion to include time sampling; de Walt and de Walt’s (2011) stress on details - “note interactions and placement”, “count things”; and Kawulich’s (2005, p. 19) reminder to “shift focus” while “keeping a running account”. The observation schedule involved overt non-participative observation by me at a number of TeachMeets. Two broad sets of data were being sought – a quantitative ‘stocktake’ of elements in current events using a binary checklist of the presence or absence of elements listed in an inventory compiled by me in the early days of the research (Amond, 2017b), invoking Popper’s “checklist from expectation”; and documentary notes on activity visible to me as the event was taking place, a Guba and Lincoln “chronolog”.
Decision making about selecting which TeachMeet events to target for the observation schedule had to be pragmatic, especially in terms of geographical reach; I needed the process to be opportunistic while remaining purposive. Opportunistic in that my knowledge of past events meant I could predict dates of some events with reasonable certainty (e.g., fringe event attached to annual conference); but as the nature of TeachMeet meant that some events are announced only shortly before they occur, I would have to be agile and reactive in my planning. Purposive in that I aimed for the observation schedule to include as wide a range of events as opportunity would allow.

**Design of the Observation Instruments.** I needed real world data to triangulate with the observations of my own experience in ten years of TeachMeets and the secondary data encountered in the literature search, in order to build a concrete answer to the research questions seeking to document the elements and evolution of TeachMeet and inform the structure of a question cycle for interviews. As O’Leary reminds, there can be “a gulf between what people say they do and what they do” (p. 251); one way to see what people actually do is to observe it first-hand. To do this as respectfully and efficiently as possible, I decided on a lo-tech approach: pencil and paper clipboard notes taken while being present as a candid but passive attendee at a series of events: “persistent naturalistic observation” (O’Leary 2107, p. 144). Each event would contribute both quantitative data and qualitative data and would be considered as one unit of observation for the purpose of analysis. Taking systematic note of the data required the building of two blank pro forma documents, one to note presence or absence of elements at each event, and one to note details of the event as it played out. All recorded details were anonymised – instances and descriptions were noted, not the contributions of individuals. The quantitative data were fed into a spreadsheet for descriptive statistics analysis, and the qualitative notes were subject to an interpretative analysis complementing that of the interview transcripts.
**Design of a bespoke observation binary checklist.** This observation sheet listed the elements that might typically be included in a TeachMeet, based on a design of a Periodic Table Of TeachMeets (Amond, 2017b) devised in the early days of the research. For the purpose of my observation at a TeachMeet event, the elements were listed vertically on an A4 paper sheet to approximate the chronological order in which they would usually appear (Appendix A). Characteristic elements of a TeachMeet one might expect to see before the event: adoption of a hashtag, publishing the event details with an open call, seeking support of sponsors and volunteer helpers. During the event one would take a record of technical infrastructure, social infrastructure (MC, seating arrangements, house rules); content (nano-presentations, breakouts, conversations, refreshments or ‘TeachEat’). After the event one might observe ‘thank you’s’ and encouragement of others, sharing online, sharing with teaching colleagues, sharing with students. As each event played out, I ticked a box to denote the presence of each of the thirty elements listed. In transferring the data to a master spreadsheet after the event, X and 0 would be used as indicators of presence and absence of each element.

**Design of a bespoke transect pro forma.** The design of this instrument is an adaptation of the transect recording sheet used in ecological studies to record a cross section through a habitat but replacing the fixed variable of distance with time, based on what Guba and Lincoln elegantly call “a chronolog” (1986, p. 273). Time is recorded in the first column, observations at that time are noted in the other columns; this gives the reader a longitudinal cross section of the event. In this design, the focus of the observation was on three spaces at the same time – the ‘stage’ area where the organisers and the presenters are, the ‘audience’ area where the attendees are, and the ‘other’ area (anything else that might occur). I systematically took notes sequentially or concurrently about what I observed in each space (see Appendix B). This allowed for comparison and triangulation.
of these data with those collected directly from attendees, presenters, and organisers via questionnaire and interview.

**Deploying as an observer in the field.** The sequence of action before, during and after the event was

- identify a target event → applying for consent to attend and observe as a researcher → attend and take observation notes → return home → convert notes to digital format → secure the data for analysis.

**Before each observed event.** First steps involved scanning social media and identifying events to target for observation that were within my ability to be present at the event either in person or as a virtual guest.

Once targeted, consent was sought from the gatekeepers of the event. Although TeachMeet is a non-hierarchical organisation, for each event that I could be aware of there was an identified steward with whom to engage. All participants are educators partaking as individuals, on an equal standing with their peers who have organised the event; however, the organising participants could be considered as gatekeepers, albeit within a relationship that is professional and collegiate. The approved ethics protocol involved a ‘communitarian’ (Bell 2016, p. 1) agreement in which a gatekeeper consent was granted on behalf of attendees who are reflected in the data collection as an anonymous participating collective (Appendix C). Once this was granted, I arranged to attend.

**During each observed event.** Shortly before the event was due to begin, I arrived, introduced myself, and took up a position in a visible but unobtrusive space. At the start of the event, the MC let the audience know of my presence, my purpose, and stated that I would not be identifying any details of the event; I stood and showed myself and my clipboard. (A variety of methods were chosen by the event organisers for this – some pointed me out, some used a slide I provided [see Appendix D], some asked me to explain
it myself). I took my anonymised notes throughout the event; if space allowed, I sometimes moved to view events from a different angle.

**After each observed event.** Having thanked the organisers, I returned home, recorded some reflective notes, and typed up the written data to be stored securely until analysis.

**Survey by Questionnaire**

To ensure as many global TeachMeet participants as possible could contribute to the research, a questionnaire was opened online for a three-month period. It was brief and anonymous, generating both quantitative data about participants’ temporal and experiential involvement in both education and in TeachMeet and qualitative data pertaining to their motivations, perspectives, and opinions.

**Design of the Online Questionnaire.** With a view to enabling the inclusion of as many TeachMeet participants as possible in the research, an open, anonymous, and short questionnaire was built using Qualtrics software (Qualtrics.XM©2020). The questions were crafted to generate data both rich and granular, while causing minimum intrusion for respondents. Intentionally adopted was a Principle of Least Privilege (Zhu, 2020, p. 1), keeping private data mining to the absolute minimum. Applying a mass customisation attitude, short answer text answers were sought to gather participants’ perspectives alongside check box answers indicating participants’ involvement and experience. With the tenet of ‘nothing about us without us’ in mind, as wide a sample as possible was sought by making the questionnaire available online, posted to the social media platform Twitter with an invitation to any TeachMeet participant to respond, using strategic ‘hashtag’ targeting e.g., #edchat, #teachmeet, #teachmeets and requesting amplification among TeachMeet participants.

**Designing the survey questions.** This involved a complex and challenging task of working within a matrix of appreciative inquiry principles, the principles of user
experience (UX), and knowledge gained from the review of literature to the four research questions. The UX design principles strongly underpinning the design decisions were those I myself value when I am a respondent to an online questionnaire. Table 4.3 contains an outline of the main influences applied.

The survey offered 12 questions of increasing complexity, arranged in a vague homage to the TeachMeet format of mixing nano-presentations, micro-presentations, and ‘soap box’ or breakout session: a series of ‘nano-questions’ requiring context-establishing ‘tick box’ answers; then some ‘micro-questions’ seeking short text based answers about respondent’s motivation and experience in TeachMeet; and more complex questions seeking participants’ perspective on the situation and role of TeachMeet in their professional learning life. A final question offered a space for the respondent to use or ignore as they wished (see Appendix E).

Table 4.3

User Experience Design Principles Applied in the Design of the Survey Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UX Principle</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>As it was applied in this design</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robustness Principle, Postel's Law</td>
<td>‘Be liberal in what you accept, and conservative in what you send; accept variable input from users.’ This can lead to rich and often unexpected data.</td>
<td>In practice it meant (i) overruling the Qualtrics machine analysis advice to not invite text-based answers, and (ii) offering an ‘other’ category as a choice of answer in as many instances as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In practice this meant reflecting the TeachMeet aesthetic in choosing the language used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeigernik Effect, Kurosu et al. (1995)</td>
<td>The flow is in small steps, and the links are graceful.</td>
<td>In practice this meant offering a clear overview at the start, presenting in short sections with a progress bar always visible, and allowing respondents to interrupt their progress but go back to it later.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hick-Hymn Law (1952)</td>
<td>Time taken to make a decision increases with the number and complexity of choices. Universally referred to as KISS (‘Keep It Simple, Sweetie’).</td>
<td>In practice this was particularly important in the framing of the questions which addressed how participants viewed TeachMeet in the landscape of professional learning. I had to apply reflexive application of the Appreciative Inquiry principle of Definition to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ‘nano-questions’ sought to establish the respondent’s profile of experience as a teacher and as a TeachMeet participant. In an attempt at ‘crowdsourcing’ a definition for the as-yet-undefined phenomenon of TeachMeet, respondents were asked to offer theirs, reflecting Torvalds’s advice that “many eyes make all bugs shallow” (in Raymond, 1999, p. 21). Analysis of these data fed into the answering of the first research question addressing the characteristics and evolution of TeachMeet.

In the ‘micro-questions’, each respondent was asked to describe the motivations that drive them as attendees, presenters, or organisers of TeachMeets. Analysis of these data fed into the answering of the second research questions addressing motivation to engage, and in the case of organisers, can be used to compare with the same data from interviews.

The third section of questions offers (i) a matrix of features set on a sliding scale and (ii) an ‘x marks the spot’ exercise, both seeking insight into where participants perceive the niche of TeachMeet to be in their personal, communal, and professional learning landscape. Generating these questions, based on a framework which evolved from the discourse noticed among TeachMeet participants, involved a return to the literature review of both academic and informal treatments of the three ‘categories’ into which participants informally place TeachMeet - CPD, CoP, and PLN. In a complex reduction exercise a set of three indicative distinguishing features of each was chosen, and a working definition for each decided upon (Appendix F). Analysis of these data was to give some indication of an ‘answer’ to the third research question addressing the situation of TeachMeet.

The last ‘free of text’ question, in Postel mode, offered a free choice to respond or ignore. Analysis of any data that might be offered here may offer insights into the
fourth research question addressing the future. The relative brevity and personalisation of the questionnaire up to this point might prompt respondents to avail of this opportunity to add their ‘tuppence worth’.

**Testing the survey questions.** When the content and format of each question was complete, the testing phase involved analysis and audit involving both humans and machine. The in-built Qualtrics software analysis audit, albeit a system more pointed towards commercial market research, could be continually applied, offering alternatives at each stage of the build. Human colleagues carried out an accessibility audit which resulted in designing and offering an alternative version to a question format which had presumed visual capacity that not everyone possesses. Pilot runs of the survey with a mixture of those who were acquainted with TeachMeet and those not acquainted were undertaken to get feedback on both a contextual and a technical level. This returned some suggestions for improvement which were acted upon (see Appendix G), and also provided a general assurance that the survey was both professionally acceptable, user friendly, and ready to deploy.

**Deploying the questionnaire in the field.** The sequence of action before, during and after the questionnaire event:

- Publish the questionnaire → advertise online and invite submissions → receive summary updates as submissions are attempted and completed → monitor responses → amplify link periodically → close access to the survey → download reports → secure data for analysis.

**Before the questionnaire live period.** Set the parameters within the Qualtrics software. Decide on the online platforms (social media, mailing lists) in which to place the link to the questionnaire. Post the invitations online with the live link and invite those who respond to also ‘amplify’ the survey.
During the questionnaire live period. This is a passive time for the researcher, an oasis of calm watching the tally counter tick over as automated updates are received from the software system that is busy capturing the digital responses on the Qualtrics server. Occasional reminders and nudges were posted by me online.

After the questionnaire live period. At the end of the scheduled time online, I closed the survey by breaking the link. Reports were downloaded and the data were secured for analysis.

Survey by Interview

The centrality of the participant interview as a method in Sensemaking research is clear (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005; Cooperrider and Srivasta, 1987; Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2012; Smith and Nizza, 2021; Kvale, 1983; Cresswell, 2014; O’Leary, 2017), particularly in IPA. “The usual approach adopted by the IPA researcher is to collect data from (very loosely) semi-structured interviews” (Biggarstaff and Thompson, 2008, p. 8). From the outset of the research, it was clear from the literature that I should plan to carry out interviews with those who know TeachMeet best, key informed insiders, and record their experiences first-hand.

In defining the qualitative research interview, deMarrais (2004, p. 51) states “in which researchers learn from participants in long, focused conversations”, the aim being “to gain in-depth knowledge from participants about particular phenomena or experiences” and “to construct as complete a picture as possible from the words and experiences of the participant”. Moser and Kortstjens (2018, p. 12) say it “seeks to describe the meanings of central themes in the life world of the participants. The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what participants say”. Kvale (1983, pp. 171-174) discusses the paradox of qualitative interviews as being “complex interpersonal interactions” ... having “no binding rules or method ... being more art than science.” Kvale (p. 193) points out advantages of “getting beyond surface level, deeper than conventional wisdom,” citing
three gains (from Habermas, 1971) - “understanding, knowledge of technical interest, knowledge of emancipatory interest”.

**Sampling and selection for invitation to interview.** Moser and Korstjens (2018, p. 10) advise having a broadly devised sampling plan, “a formal plan specifying a sampling method, a sample size, and procedure for recruiting participants”. Key features of a qualitative sampling plan are firstly that participants are always sampled deliberately, secondly that the sample size differs for each study, depending on “how many are needed to ensure rich data”, and finally that the sample is “determined by conceptual requirements rather than representativeness”. Palinkas et al. (2013, p. 2) define non-probability sampling as “a sampling technique in which the researcher selects a sample based on the subjective judgement of the researcher rather than random selection”. In detailing the principles of purposive sampling, they cite Cresswell and Plano Clank (2011) who say it involves identifying and selecting individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with the phenomenon of interest; and they cite Patton (2002) who says it is for “identification and selection of information-rich cases for most effective use of limited resources”. Moser and Korstjens also advise (p. 11) recruiting “those who can provide the richest information - knowledgeable, can articulate and reflect, motivated to communicate at length and in depth”. They describe purposive sampling of “key informants who are most knowledgeable about a culture and are able and willing to act as representative in revealing and interpreting the culture” and criterion sampling as “selection of participants who meet predetermined criteria of importance ... the most prominent criterion is the participant’s experience with the phenomenon under study ... participants who have shared an experience but vary in characteristics and in their individual experiences”.

Following the combined advice of these experts, I devised a plan for sampling and selection. The sampling method was both purposive and criterion based. Purposive to provide the “homogenous, purposive sample” (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 41; Smith,
2017, p. 01) that would provide the opportunity for me to glean rich data from a combination of each individuals’ account of their experience. Criteria upon which selection was to be based were set as follows:

- **primary criterion** - the interviewees selected must all be experienced TeachMeet organisers;
- **secondary criteria** - selected interviewees could include being founders, pioneers, early adopters, including those who introduced TeachMeet to new territory.

The selected sample of participants was drawn from the cohort of organisers, founders, and early adopters, some of whom were known to me personally, others I was aware of by reputation and position within the TeachMeet community. A target sample size of one dozen was decided upon, along with two pilot interviews and one bracketing interview in which I myself was the subject; this meant arranging fifteen interviews in total. The procedure for recruitment was to make an initial direct approach to each individual either in person or via email and if the invitation was accepted to follow up via email. Informed consent was sought and received in accordance with the ethics of the research.

**On the non-anonymisation of interviews.** Although the questionnaire returns were anonymous, and the observation data were anonymised by me, the interviews were not anonymised. Ethics approval granted (Appendix K) was for a purposive selection chosen from within the population of experienced TeachMeet organisers. The very reason that these particular key informants were invited to be interviewed - experienced as organisers of TeachMeet and as such well known by name in the TeachMeet universe - would in reality erase or cancel any anonymisation applied. Kvale list two of the main aspects in understanding qualitative research interviews as being “1) centred on the interviewees life world, and 2) seeks to understand the meaning of phenomena in this life world” (1983, p. 174); these key informants were being invited to
bring their TeachMeet life world, and the meaning they make of it. In the agreement to be interviewed, the intention was clearly stated in that “in agreeing to be interviewed as a key informant, you will be reminded that your identity will be shared as part of this study” (Appendix I - Participant Information Leaflet). Before the interviews were recorded, each signed the consent form stating “I understand that my identity as a key informant will be shared as part of this study” (Appendix J - Consent Form). Table 4.4 contains the list of interviewees, and the criteria for their inclusion, with whom the series of individual semi-structured interviews was conducted.

**Table 4.4**

**List of Key Informants Interviewed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Criteria for Inclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ciara Reilly</td>
<td>Organiser and co-host for teachers and principals in primary sector in Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conor Galvin</td>
<td>Organiser and co-host in Ireland; mentor to postgraduate student participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daithí Mhúirí</td>
<td>Organiser and co-host Northern Ireland; e-Twinning, EdCampNI, EdChatNI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawn Hallybone</td>
<td>Organiser and co-host at BETT, UK; mentor to presenters and organisers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew Buddie</td>
<td>Organiser and host, mentor at BETT and NAACE, active in UK, Europe, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewan McIntosh</td>
<td>Co-founder, original host, pioneer, global champion, and MC role model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Heffernan</td>
<td>Organiser and co-host in Ireland, in-person and online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathleen Byrne</td>
<td>Organiser and co-host for teachers and principals in primary sector in Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle Calderwood</td>
<td>Organiser and co-host of New Jersey and ISTE in USA, in-person and online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leanne Lynch</td>
<td>Organiser and co-host in Ireland, partnered with local Education Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mags Amond</td>
<td>Organiser and co-host in Ireland, mentor to presenters and organisers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Linehan</td>
<td>Organiser and co-host in Ireland, developed partnership with industry sponsor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah-Jayne Carey</td>
<td>Organiser and co-host in Ireland; adopter / adapter for in-school staff training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Howell</td>
<td>Organiser, co-host, and support provider in Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Kolber</td>
<td>Organiser and co-host in Australia, in-person and online</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Design of the Interview Schedule.** Bryman (2012, p. 212, p. 470) suggests the use of qualitative interviews that are “flexibly structured or semi-structured, which although being less easily coded in analysis than quantitative interviews, will generate rich detailed answers if carried out with key informants whose roles result in them having relevant knowledge or information they may be willing to share with a researcher”. I decided to plan an interview cycle with this semi-structured flexibility, to be used in a series of
interviews that would be scheduled to be conducted either in-person or online as opportunity allowed.

Deciding the semi-structured interview cycle of questions and prompts. The framing of the interview in order to ask questions and prompt the interviewee, was an iterative exercise. The research questions had to be addressed in an Appreciate Inquiry structure while keeping in mind that the data generated would be put through an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. This meant asking broadly the same sweep of questions of all, but also looking for the individual stories in each interviewee’s context. I also wanted to ensure the light touch approach of the narrative inquiry interviews of Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p. 4): “it is important that the researcher listen first to the practitioner’s story, and that it is the practitioner who first tells his or her story. This does not mean that the researcher is silenced in the process of narrative inquiry. It does mean that the practitioner … is given the time and space to tell his or her story so that it gains the authority and validity that the research story has long had.”

The cycle of questioning was divided into four stages, each with a series of prompts corresponding to one research question area and working in a vaguely chronological order from past to future and weaving between the interviewee’s personal experience and their broader perspectives and knowledge of the TeachMeet phenomenon. There was some crossover with the questions included in the online survey. The first cycle centred on the interviewee’s personal introduction to TeachMeet and their motivation to organise events for others. The second cycle probed into what from past experiences of TeachMeets they considered to be the elements that make TeachMeet work – its essence. The third cycle prompts a discussion on the professional learning landscape as they view it, and wherein they perceive to be the current situation of TeachMeet, and how they define it. The final cycle was a series of gentle probes about the future of TeachMeet, and any other ideas the interviewee wished to raise. (Appendix H).
Testing the interview cycle. I carried out three layers of testing – a technical test of the machinery and protocols, a pilot test of the question cycle, and a bracketing test of myself as the interviewee. The technical test was to (i) check my own competence with the recording process, and to increase my competence and fluency so that personal inadequacies would not diminish the process, and (ii) practice the protocols of securing the data. This test was carried out with a technically adept colleague researcher and repeated several times until I achieved a satisfactory level of fluency.

Two pilot interviews were arranged to provide a practical and authentic ‘walk thru’ check on the sequence and timing of the planned question cycle. A bracketing interview was also included in the piloting phase, in which I was interviewed by my supervisor using the same schedule as prepared for the invited informants.

The Framework For Open And Reproducible Research glossary (https://forrt.org/glossary, 2021) offers the following explanation:

“Bracketing interviews are commonly used within qualitative approaches. During these interviews researchers explore their personal subjectivities and assumptions surrounding their ongoing research. This allows researchers to be aware of their own interests and helps them to become both more reflective and critical about their research, considering how their own experiences may impact the research process. Bracketing interviews can also be subject to qualitative analysis.” (italics mine).

Sorsa et al., (2015, p. 9) “use the term bracketing for the methods that researchers use to try to fully disclose their past or to consciously use their background as a research tool”, and claim that bracketing adds scientific rigour and validity to any qualitative study. They also remind, (citing Gearing 2004) that bracketing acknowledges the researcher’s personal history. Corbyn Dwyer et al., (2009, p. 57), in discussing ‘insiderness’ posit that
“being a member of the group under investigation does not unduly influence the process in a negative way. Disciplined bracketing and detailed reflection on the subjective research process, with a close awareness of one’s own personal biases and perspectives, might well reduce the potential concerns associated with insider membership”.

Traditionally a bracketing interview may be carried out to mitigate any possibility of bias interviewer bias. Finlay (2008, p. 1) speaks of the researcher’s apparent “contradictory stances … the need to … bracket pre-understandings but at the same time use them as a source of insight … be distanced and detached but at the same time open and fully involved”. According to Rolls and Relf (2006, p. 286) a bracketing interview “enabled the researcher to hold the tension of the dialectic process … at the same time as holding her own experience … enabled the researcher’s experience to be used in the service of the research”. Thomas (2021, p. 486) invokes Merleau-Ponty in arguing that the bracketing interview “inculcates researcher humility before initiating a study”.

I adopted and adapted the stance from Cruz (2016, p. 7) that becoming an interviewee in a cycle of questions devised for research among experienced TeachMeet participants would, as Cruz states

i. “explore my own response to (the phenomenon - in my case, TeachMeet);

ii. bring into awareness my subjectivity, assumptions, and vested interests in undertaking this research and consider how these may impact on my interviews with participants;

iii. make transparent my reflexive practice as a check that I am lending rigour and credibility to the research.”

After the pilot phase of three interviews was reviewed, no changes were deemed necessary, and the data, including that of my own interview, was to be included for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis with the subsequent twelve interviews. This decision not to exclude my own data was influenced by the fact that my insider
experience more than satisfied the criteria set for invitation of the other key informants. I was also influenced by the advantages outlined by the most cited scholars in this field, Rolls and Relf (2006, p. 303):

“Bracketing interviews both puts aside and, at the same time, foregrounds the researcher and, in holding this tension, neither privileges nor ignores the role of researcher in the social construction of knowledge… … a textual form that can be analysed and made available, as part of the audit trail, lending authenticity and credibility to the social construction process and to the knowledge generated through it.”

The research literature did not offer much advice in terms of detailed operationalisation of this; however Rolls & Relf outlined clearly enough how they carried their sequence of reverse interviewing and analysis of the bracketing interview transcript data, and this was the sequence I adopted.

**Carrying out interviews.** The order in which the interviews took place was mostly dictated by the availability of the participants. Once it was agreed and arranged (see Appendix I, Appendix J), this is the sequence of action before, during and after each interview:

Invite targeted participant → receive consent → arrange time, date, and venue for interview → carry out recorded interview → upload video file of interview → transform audio track to text transcript → secure the data and format for analysis.

**Before each interview.** Several over and back emails to arrange, and in some case, re-arrange meeting times took place. I set up a dedicated interview channel with the Trinity College Dublin School of Education Microsoft Teams platform. I sent a private link to the interviewee who entered the space.

**During each interview.** We did some technical assurance checks at the start (‘Can you hear me OK?’ ‘Will I leave the camera on?’ ‘Can you unmute yourself?’) and from
then onwards the conversation was video recorded. I had the question cycle and a pencil on my desk and used it as a compass thru the interview.

*After each interview.* As soon as the interviewee left the space, after their interview was over, I uploaded the video file to my University’s MS Stream server. Within this environment the audio track was converted to a timestamped text transcript which was then harvested and formatted by me and moved to storage in advance of analysis. In outlining the stages of the interview process, Kvale (1983) reminds us that although the interview involved the interviewee describes their “life world” (p. 174), the final stage is when “this is interpreted by interviewer alone” ... “enriching and enlightening by drawing on an insider knowledge of the topic” and “getting to the spirit of what was said” (p. 180).

**Methods Used for Analysis of Data**

The primary and secondary quantitative data were analysed with Descriptive Statistics within the spreadsheets which housed them. For the secondary qualitative data, the method used was an informal content analysis; for the primary qualitative data the method used was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

*Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as Method for Primary Qualitative Data*

The procedure followed in the IPA of the interview transcripts follows very closely that outlined by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). This was the most intense and time-consuming period of both the analysis period and the research as a whole; as the researcher is the instrument of interpretation, it requires repeated periods of immersion in both single case and cross case examination of the original transcripts followed by the same examination of the analyst’s notes. It was a hybrid process, alternating between use digital (word processing, spreadsheet software) and manual (pencil, paper, scissors) tools.

The process was streamlined by strict adherence to the IPA procedural stages outlined by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, a methodical cycle of reading, taking exploratory notes, developing themes, making connections between themes, looking for cross-case
patterns, and identifying the most potent themes. The iterative generation of themes and search for clarity in the complex connections within and across experiences requires a strict audit trail. Presentation of the analysis requires a delicate descriptive-interpretive balance between the narrative voice of the interpreter, who is in turn representing the voices of both the individual and the collective as they narrate their lived experiences of TeachMeet.

The procedure followed as laid out in Table 4.5, and photographic representation of the process as it was carried out is detailed in Appendix M. This process was also applied to identify themes in the text answers in questionnaire responses, and my written observation notes.
Table 4.5

Procedure Used in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Interview Transcripts – a Summary of Procedure Devised by Smith, Flowers, Larkin (2009, p. 75; 2022, p. 75)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Procedure for Analyst</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Read</td>
<td>Read (and re-read) the first transcript, ensuring participant experience is the focus of analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2. Explore | Initial notes: open-ended and complex in nature  
- Initial comments about things which matter to them (relationships, processes, places, events, values, principles) and meanings of those things  
- Concurrently and subsequently - more interpretative notes to help understand the how and why of these concerns: context - their world; concepts occurring |
| Exploratory notes: keep a strict audit trail - focus on three areas:  
- Descriptive comments: clear phenomenological focus, close to participant’s explicit meaning. Describe content - key words, phrases, or explanations. Face value, highlight objects which structure the participant’s experiences.  
- Linguistic comments - specific language used to convey context. Note how content and meaning were presented. Look at pronoun use, pauses, laughter, repetition, tone, degree of fluency, articulate or hesitant, metaphor.  
- Conceptual comments - engaging at a more interrogative interpretative level. Focus moves away from explicit. Elements of personal reflection may occur. ‘As long as interpretation is stimulated by, and tied to, the text, it is legitimate.’ Complex use of own thoughts, feelings, experiences as a touchstone, while remembering it is about the participant. |
| 3. Develop | Development of themes (the comments will have grown the dataset considerably): This stage tries to reduce the volume while maintaining the complexity in terms of mapping interrelationships, connections and patterns between exploratory notes. This involves a shift in focus from the transcript to the exploratory notes, and from participant to analyst. It also involves breaking up the narrative flow - may seem counterintuitive but is part of the hermeneutic cycle … turning loose, open, contingent notes onto something which reflects and captures an understanding. |
| 4. Connect | Search for connections between personal experiential themes. As they sit, they are in chronological order - this step is the charting or mapping of how they might cluster together, working more from the exploratory comments than the transcript. No prescriptive way is mandated to do this; not all themes may persist. Some may get merged. Present a graphic representation of Group Experiential Themes (GETs), indicating for each the transcript source line and a typical participant statement. |
| 5. Expand | Moving to the next case. Repeat the process to this point, treating this case on its own terms. It may mean bracketing the knowledge from the first case. Allow for generation of new themes. Repeat until all cases are analysed. |
| 6. Compare | Look for patterns across cases. Lay out each table, look across the array, ask  
- Are there connections?  
- Does a theme from one illuminate another?  
- Which are the potent themes?  
- Are there unique idiosyncratic instances?  
- Are there shared higher order qualities?  
This may lead to a reconfiguring and relabelling of experiential themes. Present an overall picture in a master table for the group. |
| 7. Check | So far, this has moved ‘from part to whole;’ now take a look in the other direction. For larger samples, check occurrences of themes across samples. |
Analysis of Secondary Qualitative Data. As part of the literature review process, a large body of online documentation, factual and opinion based, pertaining to TeachMeet was searched. As part of the ‘noticing and bracketing’ process, an informal preliminary analysis of the language of this social discourse around TeachMeet (Amond et al., 2018, p. 241) was instrumental in the formulation of some of the research questions, and the framing of some questions within the research instruments. This informal content analysis was guided by both Hsieh et al. (2005, p. 1277) “flexible method for analysing text data ... analytic approaches ranging from impressionistic, intuitive, interpretative analyses to systematic, strict textual analyses” and Bowen (2009, p. 27-32) who lists a range of sources of documented text … “advertisements, agendas, programs, journals, newspapers, press release, reports” … suitable for “skimming, reading, interpretation”, to be “used with other qualitative research methods as a means of triangulation – seeking convergence from multiple sources”.

Approval for Ethics in Proposed Methods

The research proposal was submitted to The School of Education Ethics Committee, Trinity College Dublin. The submission outlined the research questions and the procedures, schedules, instruments planned for the generation, analysis, and safe storage of data collected by observation, questionnaire, and interview. The submission contained the sample templates for Participant Information Leaflets and Participant Consent forms, and correspondence to be used. These were designed based on the Trinity College Dublin School of Education general ethics code, with a double commitment to both “consider the well-being, protection and safety of participants, respecting their rights and wishes” and to “disseminate the results of research in an honest and truthful manner to all who may be affected by the research or those who should be informed about the research” (tcd.ie/Education/research/ethics, nd). I also declared my own decision of intent to stand down from any active personal role in any TeachMeets during the period of
research. Approval from the Ethics Committee was received in January 2020 (Appendix K).

**Researcher Positionality and Philosophy**

Positionality is defined by Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013, p. 71) as ‘the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study, identified by locating the researcher in relation to three areas - the subject, the participants, and the research context and process’, advising the presentation of ‘a strong positionality statement including a description of the researcher ... lenses and political influences ... predetermined position in relation to the participants … explanation as to how, where, when, and in what way the researcher may have influenced the research process’. Bourke (2014, citing Kezar, 2002, p. 96) remind that within positionality theory it is acknowledged that people have multiple overlapping identities and that people make meaning from various aspects of their identity. Delamont (2018, p. 6) places positionality “right in the nerve centre of the research as a research instrument”, borne in mind at all stages of the project, the reasoning being that the “researcher’s positionality is one way to frame questions, to choose where to observe, to decide who to spend time with, while always focusing on the reasons for the choices”. Both the Kezar ‘multiple overlapping identities’ and the Delamont ‘positionality as research instrument’ have guided my own statement of positionality, presented here alongside the philosophical positions on ontology, epistemology, and axiology which influenced decisions of methodology and methods.
Statement of Researcher Positionality and Philosophy

Positionality

My positionality is stated here as a combination of the multiple identities – Professional Teacher, ‘Teacher Teacher’, Volunteer Teacher who decided to take on the research and who are now overlapping with the emergent Researching Teacher - and acknowledgement of my unique position within the phenomenon I have chosen to research.

Professional Teacher. I have retired from a career as a teacher in a large second-level school for girls in rural Ireland. Biological, physical and computer sciences were my curricular focus, with an emphasis on laboratory and field work. In extra-curricular activities, high points included the introduction of both Transition Year (education.ie) and Gaisce, The President’s Award (gaisce.ie) - a voluntary programme for young people in Ireland – to the school, and creative involvement in school musical productions. My other responsibility was the pastoral care of a year group of 140 teenagers, based on pillars of justice, freedom, sincerity, truth, joy (loretoeducationtrust.ie). As part of this role, I helped to introduce a democratic ‘distributed leadership’ model to the school’s student prefecture.

‘Teacher Teacher.’ I spent seven years seconded out of school to the Department of Education, as part of a team designing and delivering ‘in-service’ training to peers; this led to subsequent years working with Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) designing and delivering teacher training. I spent some years attached to a university in two capacities - working as supervising mentor to trainee science teachers and facilitating a regional roll out of a national teacher professional development project. All of which immersed me in a vast range of formative projects involving assessment for learning, cooperative learning, ICTs in education, all of which entailed teachers developing and sharing their own resources.

Volunteer Teacher. In a voluntary capacity, I have been an active member in my Teacher Professional Networks (TPN) - the Irish Science Teachers Association (ista.ie) and the Computers in Education Society of Ireland (cesi.ie). In the years since 2008, when I first encountered TeachMeet (Amond, 2016a), I have been deeply involved in organising, attending, and supporting TeachMeets in Ireland and abroad. On a community level, I have volunteered as an informal teacher-mentor providing multigeneration classes in the CoderDojo movement in Ireland (coderdojo.ie). These various roles have overlapped in time - often I have been a volunteer participant at a TeachMeet on a Friday night, and professionally delivering a formal CPD course on the Saturday morning, both within the same conference event.

Researching Teacher. I am an insider in the universe I chose to investigate. And yet this research is not the ethnography, autoethnography, action research, nor case study it might have become considering the above life history. I have become an insider who is temporarily on the outside, looking in. This is a decision I took at the outset, that any sensemaking would be focussed on TeachMeet itself, through the perspectives of all the participants, of which I am only one. It does not mean I do not have a voice; I do, it is equal to that of any other participant who wishes to partake. The axiology I have adopted in the research, nothing about us without us, sits alongside a simple reminder to myself, we not me. I chose to investigate TeachMeet because, having witnessed the delight it seemed to engender in attendees, a curiosity grew as to what it was that drew teachers to it and why this unincorporated non-formal thing could grow and survive, why one event begat others. I see
myself as a researcher who is an informed responsible insider: informed by my active participation in TeachMeet, arranging many events in Ireland and abroad, active in curating the Irish TeachMeets wiki (irishteachmeet.pbworks.com); responsible for maintaining integrity as a researcher with a duty of care - to the topic, to the participants, to the reader. My ambition from the start was for an exploration underpinned by *appreciative sensemaking*, to do as one of my favourite song lyrics suggests and “accentuate the positive … latch on to the affirmative” (Arlen & Mercer, 1944). However, I have been keenly aware of, and wary of, the possibility of bias creep as I proceeded. I acknowledge what I call a *Pollyanna effect* - my own assumption / presumption that TeachMeet is a good thing, and because it has enhanced my life it will of course do the same for everyone. To mitigate this, I had to be vigilant to keep any invisible conceptual baggage at bay when building the questions for an asynchronous survey instrument, when interviewing, and when analysing and interpreting the collected data. Expert opinion of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is that “the researcher’s own conceptions … are required in order to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretative activity” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 58). This is based on a hermeneutic phenomenology centred on ‘dasein’ - being in the world – and so “instead of bracketing out assumptions, they are examined with a hermeneutic cycle of analysis” (Heidegger, in Farrell 2020, p3). I had to trust these expert views that acknowledging my insiderness in this research would be harnessed as a positive force.

**Philosophy**

My ontological and axiological stance is interpretivist; as outlined in the positionality statement, “the research is values bound, and the researcher is part of what is being researched” (Saunders et al., 2009, p.119). My epistemology is also broadly interpretivist (focus on subjective meanings of social phenomena), but with some shared elements of realist (focus on describing observable phenomena in context) and pragmatist (both observable phenomena and subjective meanings can provide acceptable knowledge). This acknowledgement of both realism and pragmatism within interpretivism has influenced the decision mix of methods: in-depth qualitative and structured quantitative data collection and analysis techniques were chosen, as realistically and practically the “methods chosen must fit the subject matter”.

**Covid-19 Impact Statement**

On March 12th, 2020, in response to the World Health Organisation formal declaration of the spread of novel coronavirus pandemic, the Irish government announced that “schools, colleges … will close from tomorrow” (Covid-19 statement). My response to this was to remain in my home, working in isolation, where I was fortunate to have excellent connectivity and sufficient space and equipment. Although there was no impact on the scope, design or phasing of the research or the planned structure of the written thesis document, it necessitated some adjustment in the field work schedule and medium collection of some data. The open online questionnaire could proceed as planned. Instead of just some of the interviews taking place online, all of them took place online - my university immediately devised a protocol for using MS Teams for all research interviews and MS Stream for harvesting transcripts.
The tangible impact was on the event observation. I had at this point carried out observation at six of fifteen TeachMeet events. However, within ten days of the pandemic shut down, I noticed a TeachMeet being advertised to take place online, a spontaneous event organised in response to the pandemic. I applied to the gatekeepers who assented to my attending as an observer; I logged in and applied my observation tools as before. I carried out the observation in the same sequence as I had done to date in the TeachMeets at which I was physically present. Advertisement for other TeachMeets events began to appear, many of having been cancelled as in-person events and pivoted to online platforms. This online access brought two unexpected advantages for me. First one was the ability to observe events that otherwise would have been out of geographical reach. The second one was an extra dimension that online platforms gave to me as the observer - as the ‘chat’ windows are open to everyone logged in to that meeting, I could observe the typed conversations between participants, something I did not have access to at the in-person pre-pandemic events I observed, enriching the data collected for analysis.

Summary of Research Methodology and Methods

This chapter has outlined the Research Questions, the Methodology, and the Methods used in the exploration into the nature and niche of TeachMeet.

The four questions seek to explore the characteristic elements of TeachMeet, the motivations which drive participation in TeachMeet, the situation of TeachMeet in the landscape of teacher learning, and the balance between evolution and sustainability in the future of TeachMeet. The methodology is underpinned by Weickian Sensemaking using principles of Appreciative Inquiry for gathering data which will be examined with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The plan for mix of methods - observation, questionnaire, and interview – for gathering qualitative and quantitative data was outlined. The chapter concludes with a statement of the influence of researcher positionality and philosophy on the research design, and a brief statement outlining how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted on the field work.

The research yielded a substantial set of descriptive and contextual data concerning TeachMeet events and participants, securely stored and ready for descriptive statistics and interpretative analysis. The outcomes of these analyses are presented in Chapter Five – Findings.
Chapter Five – Findings

This chapter is a presentation of findings from the analysis of data generated in 2020 during my field research into TeachMeet. The data were collected by observation, interview, and questionnaire. As detailed in the Methodology chapter, I generated both quantitative and qualitative data using three methods (i) overt non-participative observation of TeachMeet events, (ii) semi-structured interviews with TeachMeet organisers, and (iii) a questionnaire offered for TeachMeet participants to complete online. The quantitative data were analysed using spreadsheets in Google Sheets™ and Microsoft® Excel®. For the qualitative data I employed the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis method devised and revised by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009, 2012, 2022). Table 5.1 contains a summary of these data and the processes chosen for analysis of them.

Table 5.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generated By</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Collected As</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Checklist</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Descriptive Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Transcripts Of Field Notes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
<td>Transcripts Of Recordings</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Text Answers</td>
<td>302</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Numerical Answers</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>Descriptive Statistics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section One of the chapter presents the findings from the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data collected during observation of fifteen TeachMeets; Section Two presents the findings from the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data collected in the 302 questionnaire returns; and Section Three presents the findings from the analysis of the qualitative data in the transcripts of fifteen interviews, and Section Four presents an overview summary of the key findings.

**Section One - Findings From Analysis Of Teachmeet Event Observation Data**

This section presents findings from the analysis of data gathered during observation by me at a series of fifteen TeachMeets events hosted from the UK, Ireland, the USA, Europe, and Australia. The first six were observed in person in the period between January 2020 and March 2020; due to global travel restrictions imposed by a pandemic (Irish Government Covid-19 Statement, 2020), the remainder took place online between March 2020 and March 2021; I connected from home via computer as did all other participants.

As detailed in the Methods section of Chapter Four the purpose of the observation was twofold (i) the first purpose was to collect quantitative data detailing what elements were visible across a representative range of TeachMeets; (ii) the second purpose was to provide qualitative data, in continuous descriptive notes focussed on the actions and interactions within ‘the room,’ for each TeachMeet observed. My stance as observer-researcher was to be passive but overt; although I was visible in the room, my presence was acknowledged to be that of a non-participant. The observation schedule I followed has been outlined in the Methods section of Chapter Four, using the two pro-forma instruments reproduced in Appendix A and Appendix B.

**The Events Observed**

The event data for the fifteen TeachMeets observed is presented in Table 5.2. The choice of events for observation was pragmatic, both purposive and opportunistic,
targeting events that would be representative of TeachMeet, but also within my capability
to attend. I attended each of the fifteen TeachMeet events with the permission of the
organisers; my presence and the reason for it were announced in advance of each event.
The numerical data for the events was analysed in three sets - one for the in-person
TeachMeets, one for the online TeachMeets, and a third for the two extended hybrid
events which merged TeachMeet style with other formats (BrewEd and EdCamp, both
variants of TeachMeet described in Chapter Two - Context).

Table 5.2

Event Data for Fifteen TeachMeets Observed in 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Attendees</th>
<th>MC</th>
<th>Presenters</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-Person events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T01</td>
<td>1 Hr 45 Min</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Thur</td>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Conference Fringe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T02</td>
<td>1 Hr 55 Min</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Fri</td>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Conference Fringe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T03</td>
<td>3 Hr</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Fri</td>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>Course Related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T04</td>
<td>2 Hr</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Fri</td>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Conference Fringe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T05</td>
<td>3 Hr</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Thur</td>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T06</td>
<td>2 Hr 30 Min</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Tues</td>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 Hr 20 Min</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T07</td>
<td>1 Hr</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Fri</td>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T08</td>
<td>0 Hr 30 Min</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Wed</td>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T09</td>
<td>1 Hr 30 Min</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Fri</td>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T10</td>
<td>2 Hr 30 Min</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Wed</td>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T11</td>
<td>1 Hr 55 Min</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Fri</td>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Conference Fringe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T14</td>
<td>1 Hr</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Wed</td>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T15</td>
<td>1 Hr 30 Min</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Thur</td>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Course Related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Hr 25 Min</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extended Online* |
| T12  | 8 Hr         | 330       | 2  | 22         | Sat  | All Day| Independent             |
| T13  | 3 Hr 30 Min  | 100       | 1  | 13         | Fri  | Morning| Independent             |

Note. The TeachMeet-style extended events not included in calculation of averages.

Context Of Events Observed. Thirteen of the fifteen events were independent of
any official organisation, although four of these were fringe events organised to coincide
with an established conference; the other two were organised in connection with a
university education course, although attendance was open to anyone. Three were focussed
on a single subject (science, geography, language); twelve had no subject focus - participants were free to decide the focus of their own presentation.

**Duration Of Events Observed.** For in-person TeachMeets, meetings lasted between 1 hour 45 minutes and 3 hours, but averaged (mean) at 2 hours 20 minutes. For online TeachMeets, meetings lasted from 30 minutes to 2 hours and 30 minutes but averaged (mean) at 1 hour 25 minutes. The two extended events were of 4 hours and 8 hours duration, respectively.

**Attendance At Events Observed.** For in-person TeachMeets I carried out a visual headcount - attendance ranged from 26 to 130, an average of 79 people per event. For online TeachMeets I took note of the number of people logged in - attendance ranged from 23 to 240, an average of 130 people per event. The two extended online events had an average attendance across the day of 330 and 100, respectively.

**MC(s) Hosting The Events Observed.** At all the in-person events the role of MC was shared by two people working in relay, taking turns with the microphone; the online events were hosted in some cases by two people but more commonly by a single MC. My notes record that almost every pairing there was a male-female mix; all of the single hosts were male.

**Presenters During Events Observed.** At the in-person TeachMeets, the number of presenters ranged from 9 to 16, making an average (mean) of 11 presenters. At the online TeachMeets, the number of presenters ranged from 4 to 15, making an average of 10 presenters. The two extended events, which featured longer designated presentation times, had 22 and 13 presenters, respectively.

**Day And Time The Events Observed Occurred.** Half of the events observed were during the weekend - Friday evening or Saturday. With only the exception of one early afternoon meet, all TeachMeets observed, either in-person or online, had been arranged for evening time. (I have noted that Teachmeets not included in this study have occasionally
occurred in schools in the late afternoons almost immediately after school closes, but as all of this type of event were cancelled due to pandemic restrictions I could not include them in the sample). The two extended events each began early in the morning and continued until lunchtime or early evening, respectively.

**Observations Carried Out Within the Timeline of Each Event**

For the candid observation I carried out at each event I used a pencil and clipboard loaded with the two *pro forma* documents, each described in the Methods section of the Chapter Four, for notation of both quantitative and qualitative data.

**Collection Of Quantitative Data During Each Event.** The quantitative data were recorded in Pro-forma A (see Appendix A), comprising a binary tick-box of 30 elements either observed or not. A summary version of the checklist is presented in Table 5.3. The data for each event were combined in a single spreadsheet, one column per event.

**Table 5.3**

*Checklist to Record Which Elements are Present Over the Timeline of a Teachmeet Event*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before the event</th>
<th>During the event</th>
<th>End of / after the event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>❑ date/time/venue</td>
<td>❑ mc / bean a’ tí</td>
<td>❑ thanks to all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❑ a hashtag used</td>
<td>❑ social setting</td>
<td>❑ encourage others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❑ open call online</td>
<td>❑ round tables</td>
<td>❑ sharing online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❑ online sign up</td>
<td>❑ house rules explicit</td>
<td>❑ sharing in staffroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❑ topic / theme</td>
<td>❑ connectivity offered</td>
<td>❑ sharing in classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❑ social media presence</td>
<td>❑ technical backup</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❑ support team</td>
<td>❑ randomised order</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>❑ volunteers</td>
<td>❑ nanopresentations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❑ no extended ppt.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❑ social media display</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❑ ‘law of mobility’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❑ online backchannel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❑ audience chat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❑ challenge or activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❑ breakout sessions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❑ refreshments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>❑ absence of sales pitch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Collection Of Qualitative Data During Each Event.** Pro-forma B, the chronolog, comprised blank sheets divided into columns into which I could write notes as an observer at a TeachMeet event (Appendix B). A blank sample is presented at Table 5.4, and an
extract from one of the data sheets is pictured in Figure 5.1. The columns represent the physical spaces where my attention was focussed - noting the time as it progressed, the actions and interactions in the audience space, the actions and interactions in the presentation space. An ‘other’ column was included, to facilitate recording of other things I might notice. Each set of handwritten notes were subsequently typed verbatim by me into a series of documents, one per event.

**Table 5.4**

*Blank Chronolog Prepared for Observer Note-Taking During a TeachMeet Event*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Audience space</th>
<th>‘Stage’ presentation space</th>
<th>Elsewhere / other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5.1**

*Image of Extract from Chronolog - Researcher’s Observation Notes*

Note: My use of LOTF denotes the Law of Two Feet / Law of Mobility (Owen, 2007, p. 95), which denotes people moving quietly about the room to speak with others or visit the refreshments area.
Findings Yielded By Analysis Of Quantitative Data From Observation

The data collection schedule was divided into three stages, referred to here as ‘before the event,’ ‘during the event,’ and ‘after the event.’ The schedule proceeded as outlined here:

Data Recorded Before Each Events Observed. Data recording began when I found out about the event, either heard about it directly from another person or saw it advertised online; all events were advertised in advance on social media sites by the organisers, using a designated hashtag (e.g., #tmCESI denotes a TeachMeet organised by CESI, the Computers in Education Society of Ireland); most events also posted an invitation for volunteers to sign up to present and attend. Data recorded before the event were contextual - times, dates, and situational details.

Data Recorded During Each Event Observed. This was the densest stage of data recording, inside the event venue. All the events were facilitated by MC(s), all used technology and had support for participants to use it including internet connectivity openly available. In all of the in-person events there were refreshments on offer. None of the events observed had any explicit ‘sales pitch’ from sponsors. In most events the house rules were made explicit at the outset, setting out the social informality which encouraged participants to converse, to move about, to post their reactions online using the meeting hashtag. Most of the event presentations were nanopresentations (between two and seven minutes long); many used slideshows but they were short and skilfully used in all but a few cases. Some of the events used a display of social media during the event, and some had a group activity between presentations. Notable items on the checklist of possible elements which were least visible across the events were breakout sessions (n = 5), random name picker (n = 3), and round tables (n = 2).

Data Recorded After Each Event Observed. This included both the ending of the event in the designated venue but also retrospective social media posting, using the
hashtag, referencing the event. In every instance the MCs both thanked participants and encouraged discussion and dissemination of what had been shared. In the cases where an event used a Twitter hashtag, I could see instances of participants posting about taking ideas back to their school colleagues and students.

Table 5.5 shows the prevalence of these elements recorded before, during, and after the fifteen events observed.

**Table 5.5**

*Elements Observed at a Series of Fifteen TeachMeets in 2020*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements observed</th>
<th>Before the event</th>
<th>During the event</th>
<th>After the event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>At all events</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date/time/venue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Date/time/venue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Hashtag used</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td># Hashtag used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Support team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Date/time/venue</td>
<td></td>
<td>Date/time/venue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td># Hashtag used</td>
<td></td>
<td># Hashtag used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social media</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support team</td>
<td></td>
<td>Support team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Date/time/venue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td># Hashtag used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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As the observer who completed the checklist at each event, I offer the following descriptive interpretation of the quantitative data:

- in every instance there is adept use of reliable technology and connectivity, in a space arranged to ensure an informal social setting, all events being overseen by one or two MCs;
- in almost every instance there is explicit declaration of house rules that encourage a ‘Law of Mobility’ (freedom to roam about the room) and the posting of updates on social media during the event. There is a continuous quiet buzz of ‘chatter’ among the audience members; this did not disturb the presenting and listening. In the case where this latter was not present, I note that it had not been made explicit at the start of the
event, nor did the rigid layout of the room furniture lend itself to informality;

- visible but less prevalent were other elements on the checklist – the time spent on an active team challenge, breakout sessions wherein a choice of learning conversations is offered, the random selection of speakers;
- there is one notable item on the chart which refers to the absence of an element (‘no extended use of PowerPoint’). This ‘no PowerPoint’ rule is often listed as one of features of early TeachMeets (see Chapter Three – Literature Review, or Chapter Two - Context). In approximately half of the events observed, use was made of PowerPoint as a presentation tool.

**Summary Of Findings From The Analysis Of Quantitative Data In Observation Notes**

Analysis of the quantitative data yielded findings that attribute the following profile to TeachMeet events:

- TeachMeets are mostly ‘afterhours’ events taking place on evening or weekends, organised and populated in a voluntary capacity;
- TeachMeets participation is by open invitation to attend, present, or organise;
- TeachMeet events are characterised by a combination of the human and technical elements. The technical elements - reliable infrastructure and connectivity, and the human elements - explicitly relaxed rules which encourage freedom of movement and communication both within the room and on social media - are overseen by the MC(s) who facilitate the flow of nanopresentations and other activities during the event.

**Findings Yielded By Analysis Of The Qualitative Data In The Observation Notes**

Analysis of the qualitative data in the observation notes was by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, an inductive process in which the researcher (whose knowledge and experience of the phenomenon they research is a factor that is
acknowledged) is the instrument. In the analysis of the transcripts of the observation notes I have written, I applied the iterative process of IPA as outlined in Chapter Four - Methods, interpreting patterns and cues in the data in the transcripts as I read them individually and considered them as a whole. This allowed me to identify the potent factors that vitalise a TeachMeet event.

**The Application Of IPA To Event Observation Transcripts.** In this exercise I was interpreting my own descriptions of what I saw and sensed in the room; I realise now that the interpretation had already begun during the event as part of the observation process, when I saw my use of one word or phrase to describe a whole room of people rather than specific actions - examples of this are notes about an audience, such as

‘delighted’ … ‘listless’ … ‘appreciative’ … ‘fun, fun, fun!’.

As I worked my way through the fifteen transcripts, I took note of definite patterns I detected. Figure 5.3 shows an extract from the analysis-in-progress.

**Figure 5.3**

*Image Shows Interpretative Notes Made During IPA of Observation Notes Transcript*

*Note.* A snapshot of the IPA process is shown in the photograph which shows an extract from one of the transcripts during analysis - the columns on the left of the black vertical divider are the typed notes from a TeachMeet observed, the column on the right contains my interpretative analysis notation, written iteratively as I read back through the observation transcript several times, highlighting, marking, connecting cause and effect, ticking things as I went along. In this snapshot, I ask myself (in red ink, ‘is this a theme’) if I am seeing a pattern of something I have noted here as ‘appreciation for authenticity’ by the audience at this TeachMeet.

Over and over, from the notes I had written, it seemed to me that there was a definite set of factors that seemed to have the potential to affect the demeanour of those in the room and
combine to contribute to the flow of the event. Across the range of events these included hospitality, random speaker order (although not often seen the effect was strong when it was there), the hosts’ agility with the technology, diversity in the attendees, the dexterity of the MC(s), the content and context of the presentations, the freedom to move about and to converse at will. Of those factors that were at play within the events, three were identifiable as what an IPA identifies as superordinate. I used the term potent to denote the powerful effect I could see them having. In my interpretation, the three most potent factors at play across the range of events observed were: the role of the MC as catalyst, the power of the nanopresentation, and the social dynamics in the room. Figure 5.4 presents a summary of their contributing features.

**Figure 5.4**

*Three Most Potent Factors Affecting the TeachMeet Events Observed*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. The catalytic influence and impact of the MC</th>
<th>setting the tone; light touch steering; genial control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. The power of the nanopresentation</td>
<td>authenticity is appreciated; connected to classroom; no keynote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. The social dynamics in the room</td>
<td>conviviality; hospitality; invitation to participate; lack of hierarchy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Finding The Catalytic Influence and Impact of The MC.** This was the single most potent factor across all fifteen events. In each case the MC was the factor that mattered most; my notes mention them as active right throughout the event; some working alone, some in tandem as a team. In almost every instance, my live notes (see extract in Table 5.6) are peppered with words describing the MCs as I watched them:


In only two instances did I record what might be called a deficit - one MC who lost the run of the timekeeping, and another whose lack of clarity caused some confusion; neither
instance seemed very detrimental to the overall experience of the attendees, but both instances confirmed for me my interpretation that the most influential person at the TeachMeet is the MC.

Table 5.6

Extracts From Analysis of Notes Describing Demeanour of MC(s) at TeachMeets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Live observation notes</th>
<th>Interpretative remarks during analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tm01</td>
<td>MCs both noticeably light touch</td>
<td>MC demeanour influential?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tm03</td>
<td>MC gives the context; good timekeeping antics [nice proximity control!]; light touch</td>
<td>all of these traits shown by an MC are appreciated if used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tm05</td>
<td>poor time keeping; runs way over time but everyone still here; teachers are so polite</td>
<td>no visible strategy for timekeeping by MCs - proof of concept?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tm06</td>
<td>MCs introducing everything; setting up the randomness of speakers; outlining proceedings</td>
<td>this is the heart of it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tm09</td>
<td>MC is a poor speaker, not distinct [online]</td>
<td>causes confusion - proof of concept?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tm08</td>
<td>agile at switching from speaker to speaker; very efficient at tech support in background</td>
<td>is this the agility of the online MC! I wonder?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tm13</td>
<td>masterly timekeeping reminders from the host</td>
<td>we only notice timekeeping when it goes astray!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finding The Power In The Nanopresentations. One of the three areas of focus in my field notes was the ‘stage’ or presentation space, my attention being on the demeanour of the presenter and the format of their presentation. I observed 167 presenters during the fifteen events; most of the presentations were of the short type referred to as micropresentations or, almost uniquely to TeachMeet, nanopresentations. There was no presentation designated as ‘keynote.’ The power of nanopresentation to affect the atmosphere of the room was evident right across the events observed. This was a factor that could cause discernible changes in the atmosphere of the room, in most cases in a very positive way - my live notes have repeated instances of descriptions with words such as ‘delight’ … ‘spontaneous applause’ … ‘laughter’ … ‘riveted’ … ‘heartfelt’ … ‘dynamic’
but also a few instances of describing the demeanour of the audience with words such as ‘slumped’ … ‘listless.’

The presenters that caused the audience to show greatest delight and appreciation were those who brought a story from their own classroom experience to the attention of the audience. The authenticity of a first-hand account of another’s classroom experience commanded attention; in my notes these are where the many instances of ‘spontaneous applause’ are jotted. One of the common threads through the memorable presentation was the speakers’ striving to make the classroom a better place to help their students be successful; in the event notes I write

‘so many speakers passionate about wanting to make learning easier for their students,’

and in my interpretative notes I respond to this

‘in my memory - almost every speaker mentions that the thing they are showing is one that helps their students understand best, and helps them face exams more confidently - practical honesty?’

The use of PowerPoint, or not, contributed to these nanopresentation emerging as a key factor - it was notable when completely absent,

‘no powerpoint at this teachmeet! … the most dynamic one to date’

appreciated when it was well used to illustrate the story being told,

‘image rich’ … ‘lots of visuals made by students,’

and could have a palpably negative effect when not used well - I took note of the audience reaction in the very few instances when a presenter slipped into reading text heavy bullet points from the screen

‘polite silence, passive applause in reaction to the lecture-based presentations.’

Recurring patterns recorded in my interpretative notes based on my observation notes (see Table 5.7) attest to the nanopresentation being a potent factor affecting participants’ experience of TeachMeets.
### Table 5.7

*Extracts From Analysis of Notes Describing Nanopresentations at TeachMeets Observed*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Live observation notes</th>
<th>Interpretative remarks during analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tm01</td>
<td>audience delight in some students presenting with their teacher</td>
<td>authenticity is appreciated?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tm02</td>
<td>delight, laughter, applause; image rich .pptx</td>
<td>appreciation for authenticity / honesty?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tm03</td>
<td>presentations with lots of visuals made by students</td>
<td>authentic classroom material gets the best reaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tm05</td>
<td>most speakers are from classroom or sharing resources for school - roving mic allows for questions from audience</td>
<td>connection with classroom seems so important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tm01</td>
<td>audience engaged in speaker; very personal tales from classroom</td>
<td>good story tellers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tm10</td>
<td>no powerpoint at this teachmeet! [could be a first for me]; the most dynamic one to date</td>
<td>this seems like the most dynamic one to date - with no “bullets”!!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tm09</td>
<td>lots of superb presentations, easy to watch ppts; but the only one with LOADS of bullet points and the presenter reading it was NOT good</td>
<td>Hamilton lyrics came into my mind “take the bullets out yo’ gun”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tm01</td>
<td>polite silence, passive applause in reaction to the lecture-based presentations</td>
<td>teachers are polite folk!?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tm06</td>
<td>so many speakers passionate about wanting to make learning easier for their students</td>
<td>in my memory - almost every speaker mentions that the thing they are showing is one that helps their students understand best, and helps them face exams more confidently - practical honesty?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Finding That Social Dynamics in The Room Matter.** This is a complex combination of several factors that I noticed working in an interconnected way to enrich the experience of being at the event: the conviviality encouraged by the explicit house rules; hospitality of the food and beverage type (at the in-person events); occasional invitations to partake in a breakout session or a group challenge or activity; a lack of hierarchy in the agenda. One comment I wrote in my notes (see Table 5.8) the end of the observation schedule:

‘I’ve observed over 160 presentations across the 15 events - no keynotes’.  

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Table 5.8

Extracts from Analysis of Observation Notes Describing the Dynamic Nature of TeachMeet Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Live observation notes</th>
<th>Interpretative remarks during analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tm11</td>
<td>the chat space is very interesting to me, I can read what people are thinking as they type it; really effective use of the side bar chat; names are visible in the chat space!</td>
<td>the online chat spaces are enhancing the cross-communication channels - we know each other's names there and can converse with many at a time - very dynamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tm09</td>
<td>MC points out a # for twitter, and where the chat space is in the VLE - online chat window has loads going on there; chat typing is non-stop; see tweets</td>
<td>provide the space and people will connect and converse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tm04</td>
<td>breakout soap boxes announced and their presenters invited to give a pitch, three totally absorbed groups form</td>
<td>trust in the audience ability to use the law of mobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tm10</td>
<td>there are identifiers on the chat, people can address each other directly; all the speakers are referring to the chat; by the end everyone is involved in a huge chat in the chat space</td>
<td>really dynamic experience considering this is remote presence, esp. for within the first month of lockdown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tm06</td>
<td>refreshments are to hand all evening; people getting cake and coffee at will throughout evening</td>
<td>chaordic* atmosphere can be successful if law of mobility is accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tm13</td>
<td>no official break built in but people coming and going as they need to; there was a 5 min comfort / chat break built in to every 30-minute section</td>
<td>importance of having breaks - and freedom to take them - democracy and Law of Mobility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Chaordic - a word coined by Hock (1999, p. 1) to describe a harmonious blend of chaos and order

Conviviality was very dependent on the lead of the MC and how the ‘house rules’ were outlined and embraced; in the events where conversation was encouraged and the Law of Mobility was invoked, the very social atmosphere of an Open Space event developed early in the proceedings, even when using the slightly sterile environment of an online platform. If allowed to, participants took it upon themselves to find a way to move about and to connect with others; the chat window became the ad hoc conversation space in online platforms. And this convivial atmosphere was enhanced in any cases where there was an invitation to participate in activities or breakout sessions. My descriptions of the
social dynamics pace I observed during the events include the words such as

‘dynamic’ … ‘busy’ … ‘breakouts’ … ‘laughter’ … ‘connecting’ … ‘trust’ …
‘good sidebar’ … ‘busy chat space’.

Summary Of Findings From Analysis Of Qualitative Data In Observation Notes

My interpretation of the textual descriptions I had written while observing the actions and interactions at TeachMeets yields a finding that three factors were strongly influential across all the events. These three factors are

- the catalytic role of the MC(s)
- the impact of the nanopresentation
- the Open Space social dynamic of the event.

Combined Summary Of Findings From Analysis Of The Observation Survey Data

The twofold purpose of the observation carried out was to survey the elements, and to provide an interpretative description of the actions and interactions characteristic of a TeachMeet.

This series of observations (n = 15) yielded quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data was in the form of a binary list of the presence or absence of some thirty characteristic elements, and statistics enumerating details of each event. The qualitative data comprised one continuous document for each event comprising a handwritten timestamped description of actions and interactions observed over the course of the event.

The analysis of the quantitative was by Descriptive Statistics and the written observation notes were analysed with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in which the researcher employed a ‘double hermeneutic’ cycle of interpreting the notes she has written about the descriptive notes taken during the observation of each event, in order to provide a cross-case interpretative description of the elements that give life to a TeachMeet event.
Combining these analyses yielded the following findings pertaining to the characteristics of TeachMeet events

- TeachMeets are events taking place on out-of-hours evening or weekends, organised and attended in a voluntary capacity, with an open invitation for participation;

- TeachMeet events are characterised by a signature combination of elements. The technical elements of reliable infrastructure and connectivity combined with the human elements of explicitly relaxed rules which encourage freedom of movement and communication both within the room and on social media, all overseen by the MCs who facilitate the flow of nanopresentations and other activities during the event;

- TeachMeet events are shaped by the interplay of three potent factors:
  - the catalytic role of the MC
  - the power of the nanopresentation
  - the Open Space dynamics of the event.
Section Two - Findings from Questionnaire Responses by Teachmeet Participants

TeachMeet participants were invited to respond to an anonymous survey by questionnaire. A purposive self-selecting sampling of experienced participants was sought by publishing a link to the questionnaire, and an invitation to partake, on social media platforms in Summer 2020. 302 responses were recorded. The output was generated using Qualtrics XM™ software for analysis and representation of the quantitative data. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was applied to the short text answers. The twelve questions included in the questionnaire, and the context within which each is situated within the research, are summarised in Table 5.9. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected, secured, and analysed.

For questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, and 11, the Qualtrics internal analytical tools - word cloud and heat map generators - were used to represent patterns in the data in situ. Data were transferred to spreadsheets for further analysis and representation in tables and charts presented in this chapter and discussed in the next chapter. For questions 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 12 the procedures of IPA, as outlined in Chapter Four – Methods, were applied to analyse patterns and identify matters of concern in the short text answers. My descriptive interpretation is presented as paraphrased narrative interspersed with apposite quotes from responses.

Questionnaire Responses

The responses were grouped for analysis according to their purpose in the Definition, Discovery, and Dream stages of Appreciative Inquiry:

Questions 1-4 for demographics in the Definition stage;
Questions 5 and 6 for meanings in both the Definition and Discovery stages;
Questions 7-9 for motivations in the Discovery stage;
Questions 10 and 11 for perspectives in the Discovery stage;
Question 12 for finding out matters of concern to the Dream stage.
Table 5.9

Summary of Survey Questions and Their Intended Role in the Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question offered</th>
<th>Format of responses sought</th>
<th>Appreciative Inquiry addressed</th>
<th>Research Question(s) addressed</th>
<th>Analysis method</th>
<th>Presentation of findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What year did you first attend a TeachMeet?</td>
<td>From 2006 to 2020</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>RQ1, RQ4</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics</td>
<td>Descriptive bar chart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What was your primary role at this first TeachMeet?</td>
<td>Multiple choice</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>RQ1, RQ4</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics</td>
<td>Descriptive bar chart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How did you find out about this first TeachMeet?</td>
<td>Multiple choice</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>RQ1, RQ4</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics</td>
<td>Descriptive bar chart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. At the time of this first TeachMeet, which of these best describes your situation?</td>
<td>Multiple choice</td>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>RQ1, RQ4</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics</td>
<td>Descriptive bar chart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What is your personal definition of TeachMeet?</td>
<td>Text entry</td>
<td>Discovery</td>
<td>RQ1, RQ4</td>
<td>IPA*</td>
<td>Descriptive graphic / text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What are three words you would use to describe TeachMeet?</td>
<td>Text entry</td>
<td>Discovery</td>
<td>RQ1, RQ4</td>
<td>IPA</td>
<td>Descriptive graphic / text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What made you decide to ATTEND a TeachMeet for the first time?</td>
<td>Text entry</td>
<td>Discovery</td>
<td>RQ2</td>
<td>IPA</td>
<td>Descriptive graphic / text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What made you decide to PRESENT at a TeachMeet for the first time?</td>
<td>Text entry</td>
<td>Discovery</td>
<td>RQ2</td>
<td>IPA</td>
<td>Descriptive graphic / text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. What made you decide to ORGANISE a TeachMeet for the first time?</td>
<td>Text entry</td>
<td>Discovery</td>
<td>RQ2</td>
<td>IPA</td>
<td>Descriptive graphic / text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Based on your experience and perspective of TeachMeet, indicate your level of agreement with each of nine statements* about the nature of TeachMeet events. [slider]</td>
<td>Sliding indicator</td>
<td>Discovery</td>
<td>RQ1, RQ3, RQ4</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics</td>
<td>Descriptive bar chart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. In online discussions, TeachMeet is often referred to as Continuing Professional Development, as Personal Learning Network, as Community of Practice. Based on your experience and perspective of TeachMeet, place a mark to indicate where you would situate it.</td>
<td>Place a mark on a 3-Venn graphic</td>
<td>Discovery</td>
<td>RQ1, RQ3, RQ4</td>
<td>Qualtrics screen input analysis</td>
<td>Heat map plot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. If there is anything you wish to add, please use this space.</td>
<td>Text entry</td>
<td>Dream</td>
<td>RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4</td>
<td>IPA</td>
<td>Descriptive graphic / text</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. The nine statements offered in Question 10 are detailed in Appendix E

*Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of text
Analysis Of Quantitative Data In Responses To Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 10, & 11

*Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4*

These questions sought minimum demographic information from the respondents, enough to provide a basis to check that those who have self-selected to respond are sufficiently representative of the wider population in education to lend validity and reliability to the data.

**Responses To Question 1. What year did you first attend a TeachMeet?** A choice list of years between 2006 and 2020 was presented. As the first TeachMeet was not held until mid-2006 and the survey was opened in June 2020, the returns for the years 2006 and 2020 each represent less than one full year. 244 responses were submitted. Figure 5.5 shows the distribution in the responses.

**Figure 5.5**

*The Year in Which Respondents First Attended a Teachmeet (n = 244)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analysis Of Responses To Question 1.** The respondents range from those who first attended a TeachMeet event very recently to those whose first attendance dates back to the original TeachMeets. I take this to mean that the answers offered to the survey questions
will be based on a wide range of experience both of teaching in general, and of TeachMeet in particular.

**Responses To Question 2.** *What was your primary role at this first TeachMeet?* A choice list of attendee, presenter or organiser was offered. 227 responses were submitted. Figure 5.6 shows the distribution in the responses.

**Figure 5.6**

*Respondents’ Primary Role at Their First TeachMeet (n = 227)*

![Bar chart showing the distribution of primary roles at first TeachMeet.]

**Analysis Of Responses to Question 2.** The returns show that the majority of respondents attended their first TeachMeet as members of the audience, although there was a small number of respondents whose first TeachMeet was one they had organised themselves and a larger cohort who had made a presentation at the first TeachMeet they attended. This ratio of numbers across the three typical roles is a fair representation of that encountered at a TeachMeet event - a few organisers, several presenters, and a larger number in the audience.

**Responses To Question 3.** *How did you find out about this first TeachMeet?* A choice of six answers encompassing personal, online, professional scenarios was offered,
and an invitation to record other avenues of discovery. 241 responses were submitted.

Figure 5.7 shows the distribution in the responses.

**Figure 5.7**

*How Respondents Found Out about the First TeachMeet They Attended (n= 241)*

**Analysis Of Responses To Question 3.** The most common way that respondents
found out about the first TeachMeet they attended was by ‘discovering it online’. Next it was word of mouth (either via a friend or at an event), with fewer instances of invitation from the organisers, and a very small number who found out on their school staffroom noticeboard. It is notable that the more common ways to find out were at the more informal end of the spectrum - the friend or colleague, the social media post. Of those who chose ‘other’, some answers were not clear as to their meaning and were discarded (n = 3). The ‘other’ ways reported were as part of a college course (n = 3), as a pilot programme by the school Principal (n = 1), and via their trade union (n = 1).

**Responses To Question 4. At the time of this first TeachMeet, which of these best describes your situation?** A choice list of four was offered, covering pre-service and the
three ‘levels’ of education; an invitation to record other answers was offered. 247 responses were recorded. Figure 5.8 shows the distribution in the responses.

**Figure 5.8**

*Education Sectors as Represented by Respondents (n = 247)*

Analysis Of Responses To Question 4. Second level teachers are a majority in the respondent cohort, followed by primary teachers. A smaller number identified as third level. The proportions of these respondents match closely with the global teacher numbers for 2020 published by UNESCO ([data.uis.unesco.org](http://data.uis.unesco.org)), which lists first, second, and third level teachers at 32.6 million, 36.5 million, and 13.1 million, respectively.

A small number of student teachers responded. This may reflect two things mentioned in other areas of both the primary and secondary data (i) the introduction of TeachMeets as part of initial teacher training cycles and (ii) the importance placed on this informal interaction with more experienced teachers which is discussed in interviews and survey responses; both of these matters are discussed as they arise as emergent findings.
Those who identified as ‘other’ included some whose role was in a school but at what level was unclear (n=4). The rest of those whose reported role was not at any particular level or in a school included those engaged in provision of training (n=12), those who described their role as consultant, designer, or maker (n=5), those connected with books or a library (n=3).

In these numbers can be seen quite an array of levels and sectors in the educators and trainers attending TeachMeets. I interpret the ‘designer’ as being involved in the provision of educational materials, and having seen several MakerMeet events taking place in recent times (www.makermeet.ie), I am presuming those identifying as ‘maker’ to be those involved in this informal community education sector.

**Questions 10 and 11**

These questions sought opinion from respondents on the role and place, if any, that TeachMeet might take in their professional learning.

**Responses To Question 10. Based on your experience and perspective of TeachMeet, indicate your level of agreement with each statement about the nature of TeachMeet events.** A series of nine statements was presented (see screenshot in Figure 5.9), each with a slider with which the respondent could indicate their level of agreement as a percentage.

The nine statements presented in this question comprised three sets of three; each set of descriptors referring to aspects of TeachMeet events that might situate them as, respectively, Community of Practice (CoP), Personal Learning Network (PLN), and Continuous Professional Development (CPD), as presented in Table 5.10; this relationship was not visible to the respondent. The nine statements were displayed in random order on the questionnaire screen. 227 responses were submitted. Figure 5.10 shows the distribution in these responses.
Figure 5.9

Screenshot of Nine Statements About Teachmeet as Presented to Survey Respondents

TeachMeet Participant Survey

10. Based on your experience and perspective of TeachMeet events, use the sliders to indicate your level of agreement with each of these statements as a percentage

0  20  40  60  80  100

They may be an event where those attending set the agenda and agree on plans for the future.

They may be part of an accredited course undertaken e.g. diploma, certificate, masters.

They may be an event where practitioners share and discuss ideas, resources, or skills with each other.

They may be an unconference or fringe event attached to a conference.

They may be an INSET, in-career, or in-service event.

They may be used in-house as staff development meetings.

They may be organised by peers sharing a common identity or goal.

They may be attended for the opportunity to meet new people with whom to connect.

They need not be attended in person, but can be followed and experienced via social media.
Table 5.10

Aspects of Teachmeet Events that Might Situate Them as Community of Practice (CoP), Personal Learning Network (PLN), and Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects Of Teachmeet Events That Might Situate Them As Being CoP, PLN, CPD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CoP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.10

Comparison of Respondents’ Agreement with Nine Statements About TeachMeet (n = 227)

Analysis Of Responses to Question 10. I analysed these data from two perspectives. Firstly, a direct comparison of the responses for each statement from the respondents taken as a group; secondly, a comparison of the responses for each triad of statements corresponding to CoP, PLN, and CPD.
Comparison Of Responses to Each Of the Nine Statements. Each response represents a level of agreement with the respective statement. The statements with the highest levels of agreement were at the more personal and social end of the spectrum - over 90% for each of the ‘share and discuss’ and ‘peers sharing’ as descriptors for TeachMeet events. Strong agreement, over 80% for each, was also expressed on the ‘connect with new people’, and the ‘fringe’ nature of the event. The least supported statement was about accreditation. The other four statements - about attending via social media, about using as staff development, about using as professional development, and about using as a strategic continuous series of meetings - each respectively decreasing but still significant support among respondents. I interpret this as an indication that the respondents' perspectives on TeachMeet, while not dismissive of any of the statements offered which refer to formal and long-term objectives, are more focussed more strongly on the informal short-term peer-to-peer and face-to-face sharing.

Comparison Of Responses For The Statement Triplets Corresponding To Community of Practice, Personal Learning Network, Continuing Professional Development. Sorting the results to place the responses to questions in triplets corresponding to Community of Practice, Personal Learning Network, Continuing Professional Development respectively gives the profile presented in Figure 5.11.

Looking at the levels of agreement here suggests the nature of the TeachMeets that these respondents have experienced is more accurately depicted in the statements that describe Community of Practice and Personal Learning Network, with CoP very slightly ahead of PLN; and there is less agreement with those statements that describe Continued Professional Development.
Responses To Question 11. In online discussions, TeachMeet is often referred to as Continuing Professional Development, as Personal Learning Network, as Community of Practice. Based on your experience and perspective of TeachMeet, place a mark on the map to indicate where you would situate it. This question was presented in two formats. One was an on-screen map which recorded where the respondent placed their mark in a 3-Venn diagram; the alternative, offered for those using screen readers, presented a tick list corresponding to the eight areas on the screen-map. There were 207 responses in total - 173 responses to the screen-map version, 34 to the screen reader version.

Analysis Of Responses to Question 11. The heat map generated by the 173 screen taps is depicted in Figure 5.12, where the more concentrated the screen-taps show as the red end of the spectrum. (I have added the percentages to the map as presented).
In total, 89% of the ‘taps’ indicate that TeachMeet is fulfilling more than one brief for participants. Two thirds of the respondents consider TeachMeet to be situated in the central intersection between CoP, PLN, and CPD; this suggests to me that TeachMeet is in some way fulfilling all three briefs for these participants (bearing in mind that the response was not invited against any stated definition of the three choices, merely the acronyms alongside the names).

**Summary Of Findings From Analysis Of Quantitative Data In Questionnaire**

Findings from the analysis of responses to the demographic Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 suggests this group of respondents is from a diverse range of educational settings, with a wide variety in the length and breadth of their experience of TeachMeet, representative of the profile of the global teacher population. The route that has taken them into TeachMeet has been mainly an informal one, found via the internet or a colleague. The variety of perspectives informed by experience reflected in these responses lends confidence to the analysis of the responses to the remaining Questions 5 - 12.

Findings from the analysis of responses to the opinion-seeking Questions 10 and 11 indicate that many participants in TeachMeet consider it to be fulfilling to varying extents the briefs of CoP, PLN, and CPD in their professional learning. There is less agreement
with statements that align with formal CPD than there is with statement that align with PLN and CoP – there is with almost universal consensus that TeachMeet is perceived as more of a social event for informal sharing among peers than as a formal professional development.

Analysis of The Qualitative Data In Responses to Questions 5, 6, 7, 8 9, and 12

Questions 5 And 6

These questions focus on the meaning of TeachMeet to participants, as part of both the Definition and Discovery stages of Appreciative Inquiry. Respondents wrote the words or sentences they choose to use when they reflect on, describe, or define TeachMeet. I took an IPA approach to the analysis of both of these sets of short text answers. This involved iterative reading, taking note of patterns in the descriptions, in the language used, and the images these evoked.

Responses To Question 5. What is your personal definition of TeachMeet? A short text box was offered for responses. 234 responses, mostly one sentence in length, were submitted. The longest definition offered has sixty-seven words across three sentences, while the shortest has just two words.

Analysis Of Responses To Question 5. Some respondents used metaphors (‘Curate's egg, good in parts’ … ‘speed-dating’), contemporary ‘buzz’ words (‘CPD in bite-size chunks’ … ‘CPD unlocked’ … micro-learning’ … showcase), or slightly enigmatic aphorisms (‘nobody knows everything but everybody knows something’) to offer their visualisation of TeachMeet.

The language in other responses was more descriptive than definitive, matching the pictures painted both in their collective answers to the following questions about motivations and aligning with the themes that emerge from the conversations with the participants interviewed (see analysis in Section Three). In reading the answers, I interpret that this question, which asked respondents for their personal definition of TeachMeet, has
been received by most as a request for a specific sentence to define a TeachMeet event; but some may have interpreted it as their chance to explain what TeachMeet could mean in broader terms. They speak in terms of purpose and practicalities (bringing educators together … exchange of tech tips … and … effective practice … what works for them in their classroom) and use words evocative of the structure and atmosphere not only inside the event (convivial … conversation) but also before and after it takes place (bottom-up … open … democratic … network). One response uses a word from the Irish language to sum up what TeachMeet means to them, suggesting that among a school staff it can be integrated into a way of being:

‘An Irish *meitheal*¹ exchanging best practices - an extension of staff room chatter on good practices, but in an organised way.’

That longest response reflects that some participants regard TeachMeet not merely as a finite event (space, share, social setting), but also as part of the ‘big picture’ development of their profession (increased knowledge, awareness, impact … in the classroom)

‘TeachMeet is a space where educators can share thoughts, reflections, ideas, strategies, resources and lived experiences with one another in a short space of time, in different social settings (school/ Education Centre/ pre-conference event). This can lead to increased knowledge and awareness among participants which may positively impact learners’ outcomes and experiences in the classroom. TeachMeets also provide wonderful networking opportunities with inspiring and like-minded educators.’

Taking an overall view of the responses I could see a large body of convergent patterns and similarities across the definitions and descriptions offered, and a smaller body of responses with more divergent and idiographic description. The convergent patterns emerging formed in terms of *what is happening, with whom, and why*? The organisation

____________________

¹ Meitheal is an Irish word for how neighbours come together to assist in tasks (definitions.net)
and disposition of the TeachMeet events (‘informal’ … ‘gathering’ … ‘opportunity’ … ‘meeting’) followed by the words used to say who attended (‘teachers’ … ‘educators’) and ending with the descriptions of the reasons for the TeachMeet (‘share’ … ‘learning’ … ‘classroom’ … ‘experience’ … ‘practice’). No one definition could be declared by me to be more correct or worthy than any other. Instead of trying to shoehorn over 200 responses into one, I found myself pooling the most common elements offered into a placeholder, working towards an interactive “DIY (define it yourself)” represented in Figure 5.13, from which one can build a sentence using an array of the most frequently occurring nouns, adjectives and verbs in the responses.

**Figure 5.13**

*Most Common Suggestions Offered as Definition for ‘TeachMeet’*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>informal</th>
<th>meeting</th>
<th>teachers</th>
<th>share</th>
<th>ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>peer-organised</td>
<td>opportunity</td>
<td>for</td>
<td>to</td>
<td>discuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social</td>
<td>event</td>
<td>peers</td>
<td>exchange</td>
<td>practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Responses To Question 6. What are three words you use to describe TeachMeet?**

Three text boxes were offered for responses. 238 responses were submitted, containing a total of 714 words. Of this total, many occurred more than once.

The number of discrete words was 168; of those 168 words, 72 were used by more than one respondent, and 50 were used by several respondents. Figure 5.14 shows a ‘word cloud’ generated from the data, presenting an image where the size of the text used for a word reflects the frequency of occurrence of that word. The frequency of the top ten of these words is: informative (60), fun (49), collaborative (48), sharing (42), inspiring (35), learning (35), informal (28), engaging (25), friendly (24), valuable (22).
Analysis Of Responses to Question 6. Sorting these frequent descriptors by parsing them into word classes results in the selection presented in Table 5.11. The nouns chosen suggest a mode of doing things together, the adjectives evoke conviviality and appreciation, the verbs suggest things are being done together for improvement.

Table 5.11

The Most Common Words Used to Describe Teachmeet, Sorted into Classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word class</th>
<th>Words most frequently offered as descriptors of TeachMeet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noun</td>
<td>community, practice, ideas, energy, CPD, grassroots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjective</td>
<td>fun, friendly, engaging, informal, valuable, exciting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb</td>
<td>informing, collaborating, sharing, inspiring, learning, networking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Looking at patterns in the body of words offered to describe TeachMeet, I can see the words forming into categories that describe different facets of TeachMeet: what is happening within the event; the atmosphere experienced; relational factors; the effect on the attendee; and descriptions of the presentations witnessed. The most common descriptors for each category are listed in order in Table 5.12

**Table 5.12**

*Words Used by Participants as They Apply to Various Aspects of TeachMeet Events*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What happens in the event</th>
<th>The atmosphere experienced</th>
<th>Relational factors</th>
<th>The effects on the attendee</th>
<th>The presentations witnessed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>informative</td>
<td>fun</td>
<td>collaborative</td>
<td>inspiring</td>
<td>innovative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sharing</td>
<td>informal</td>
<td>peers</td>
<td>valuable</td>
<td>interesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning</td>
<td>friendly</td>
<td>engaging</td>
<td>empowering</td>
<td>practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>variety</td>
<td>exciting</td>
<td>networking</td>
<td>thought-provoking</td>
<td>ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cpd</td>
<td>open</td>
<td>community</td>
<td>enlightening</td>
<td>brief</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whether taking either the direct parsing route or the more interpretative route in analysing this bank of descriptive words offered by questionnaire respondents, it is clear that TeachMeet has provided these respondents with memories of a dynamic and affecting experience. There is a large overlap with the phrasing offered in answer to the previous question, which was asking for a definition after all - especially when describing practical aspects - sharing, cpd, networking, community, practice, ideas. Asking for descriptive words, up to three, seems to have invited a more expansive emotive response, increasing the richness of the collective description of TeachMeet which is being described in more intangible words e.g. fun, friendly, exciting; and the more affective words e.g. inspiring, valuable, empowering suggest an experience which had lasting effects for some.

**Questions 7, 8, And 9**

These questions sought the reasons for participation, asking respondents to state the reason for their decision to become involved in their first TeachMeet as an attendee, a presenter, or an organiser.
Responses To Question 7. What made you decide to ATTEND TeachMeet for the first time? A short text box was offered for responses. 232 responses were submitted, with either one or two sentences in each.

Interpretative Analysis Of Responses To Question 7. These respondents outlined the reason(s) that caused them to go to a TeachMeet. My interpretative analysis of these responses suggests a cohort whose superordinate disposition is that they are seeking - both out of curiosity, and with intent. I call this cohort the ‘seekers’. The constantly repeated words in these responses were iterations of interest, curious, learn, and want. The objects of concern to these people attending their first TeachMeet fall into one major and two minor categories, seeking, respectively,

(i) improvement in themselves and in their classrooms
(ii) connections with others
(iii) TeachMeet itself.

Seeking improvement. There was an honesty and humility to these responses - given that the questionnaire was anonymous the honesty was not surprising, but the humble tone of many of the answers was marked. The idea of coming to TeachMeet looking for practical ways to improve their classrooms was wrapped around a desire also to improve themselves as individuals:

‘… as a student teacher I wanted to gain ideas for my classroom’
‘… looking for new ideas for my class’
‘… wanted to improve my own practice’
‘… to discover new approaches and ideas’
‘… curiosity and desire to get ideas’
‘… wanted to develop my understanding’
‘… wanted to expand my knowledge’
‘Interest in learning more’
‘I wanted to learn.’
Seeking connections. Some saw TeachMeet as an occasion at which to meet new people within the wider circles of the profession, and stated their reasons, some quite starkly:

‘… feeling isolated.’
‘… wanting to meet teachers outside my school.’
‘… heard it was really sociable.’
‘… needed to build professional connections.’

Seeking TeachMeet itself. There were two sides to this coin. Many of the responses had a matter of fact ‘just curious’ tone

‘I’d seen them ‘happening’ on social media and that got my interest.’
‘Interested in the concept of TeachMeet.’
‘I can’t remember. Think it was an excuse for me to do something for me.’
‘Sounded useful.’

while others spoke sharply of looking to TeachMeet as an alternative form of CPD

‘… lack of quality CPD locally.’
‘… crap official CPD.’
‘… looked like a good CPD opportunity.’

As well as the active seeking that was the convergent pattern in most of the responses about attending TeachMeet for the first time, there was divergence in the small number of the responses from those who describe the happenstance of accidental finding as a result of ‘tagging along’ with colleagues to a TeachMeet, because it was part of a conference they all happened to be attending

‘I was attending a conference, many others were also attending the TeachMeet so I wanted to go along with them.’

‘It was organised as part of a conference I was attending and I liked the idea of getting to know people in an informal setting while also using the opportunity to learn new ideas.’
Responses To Question 8. What made you decide to PRESENT at a TeachMeet for the first time? A short text box was offered for responses. 177 responses were submitted, with either one or two sentences in each.

Analysis Of Responses To Question 8. These respondents outlined their reason for volunteering to make a presentation at a TeachMeet. My interpretative analysis of these responses reflects a cohort whose superordinate collective disposition is a desire to share what they have with others. I call this cohort the ‘sharers’. This desire to share is enacted by a combination of factors - the confidence that ‘Teachmeets are a safe space to share’, and the catalysis of an encouraging nod from an organiser or a colleague. The ‘sharing’ that was common across many responses ranged from non-specific statements about it being the ‘right thing’ to do,

‘… wanted to support the concept’
‘… desire to do my bit’
‘… felt it was the right thing to do’
‘In order to contribute to the community’
‘I'd benefited from the experiences of others and I was keen to pay some of that back’

through more specific pointers to ‘classroom practice’, ‘ideas’, ‘knowledge’, ‘innovation’

‘I wanted to share something that I had found useful in my teaching and thought it could help others’
‘I have 30 years’ experience - methodologies are not always new inventions’

to the most personal admissions of seeking a reaction from peers

‘… love teaching and getting positive feedback from peers’
‘To be seen in a new light.’

The sources of the inviting ‘nod’ were the organisers as well as colleagues who acted as mentors and encouraged respondents to be presenters; some explain who this person was

‘… encouragement from an organiser. Belief that I had something worth sharing! (after persuasion)’
'I was encouraged by a brilliant and fearless educator - this encouragement made all the difference'

One answer, the shortest, was also the simplest

‘I was asked!’

**Responses To Question 9. What made you decide to ORGANISE a TeachMeet for the first time?** A short text box was offered for responses. 110 responses were recorded, with either one or two sentences in each.

*Analysis Of Responses To Question 9.* These respondents outlined the reason why they took the decision and the action of organising a TeachMeet. My interpretative analysis of these responses speaks to me of a cohort whose superordinate collective disposition is a determination to provide fellow teachers with opportunities to share knowledge and ideas with each other at a TeachMeet event. I call this cohort the ‘bringers’.

Reading the responses I see a strong thread of desire, in those who having experienced a TeachMeet, to introduce it to new places and new people. Some answers are almost frivolous in tone

‘… because I knew it would be fun’
‘… desire to spread the love’

and others recalled the effects they had observed at events

‘… seeing the power of the approach to invigorate and engage practitioners’
‘… inspired by the format’
‘… this was much more interactive’
‘I saw the transformational power of teachers sharing practice.’

Many decided to bring the TeachMeet experience to their locality and their own school, citing reasons of determination and inspiration

‘… determination to try to bring something so valuable to my school.’
‘I wanted teachers in my own school and in our local area to experience a TeachMeet and to have it closer to their home and in a familiar space. I felt there was a demand for one’
‘Having travelled to a few events, I'd been inspired by the format to try to put one together locally.’
Those who gave more explicit reasons pointed to the organisation of a TeachMeet as an opportunity for themselves and their colleagues to become more active in determining their own professional learning

‘… wanted to facilitate professional learning opportunities’
‘… a good non-threatening way to promote good practice at school’
‘… reframing conversation of PD to focus on staff strengths’
‘I believed the school should be more proactive and progressive in our own cpd.’

A large number of the responses suggested aspirations for further integrating these opportunities into a ‘remix’ of their professional learning, at two levels

(i) the nurturing of both communities of practice at local and regional level

‘To develop a community of practitioners to share good practice around.’
‘I wanted to develop a community of practice among the teachers in the schools I work with.’
‘We had an audience of teachers, but there was no organised community. This was a way to bring them into the same room and let connections happen organically.’
‘… to develop a community of practitioners, to share good practice;’

(ii) peer-led professional development and training at school level

‘I thought it was the ideal way to introduce the staff in my school to new tools which we would use for digital learning. We had never used the teachmeet format before, where different teachers present what works for them … this was interactive, and we used the expertise already in the building. It is a really valuable form of CPD and one we regularly use now.’

Comparative Analysis of Responses to Questions 7, 8, And 9. Having analysed the individual replies to questions 7, 8, and 9, and gleaned some collective motivations for attending (curiosity and desire to improve; the seekers), presenting at (generosity and willingness to share; the sharers), and organising (determination to provide opportunities; the bringers) TeachMeets respectively, I looked across the data in each questionnaire submission to see if there was evidence of participants progressing from peripheral passive participation to more active roles.
Of the 302 questionnaire replies, there were 91 respondents who answered all three of questions 7, 8, and 9, stating their motivation the first time they attended, presented at, and organised a TeachMeet. I referred to these as ‘triplet’ answers. To glean if there were any common threads in the progression through levels of participation, I analysed these data using principles of IPA, reading through parallel columns of each individual’s triplet of answers in turn, looking for both commonalities and singularities of experience.

Reading each triplet of answers in parallel was like viewing 91 profiles of TeachMeet participants. Three striking experiential themes detected here were proximity of events, adaptation to needs, and progression in participation; highlighted within and between these were some individual but interconnected views about isolation, inclusion, agency, and inspiration.

**Proximity Of Events.** Proximity of events to teachers was repeatedly mentioned as important in that it was both a reason for first attending, and a reason for organising an event for others. Descriptions describing deficit - of feeling ‘frustrated’ that ‘my area was lacking’ … ‘there’s none in [named place]’ … ‘it's hard to access where I'm located’ - were balanced by the optimism of a determination ‘to bring the same fantastic experience I had to my local area’ … ‘wanted to bring new ideas to my school and local authority’. One respondent sums this up, in a ‘build it and they will come’ way, in this their series of answers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why did you …</th>
<th>attend a TeachMeet?</th>
<th>present at TeachMeet?</th>
<th>organise a TeachMeet?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answers from</td>
<td>‘it was being held close</td>
<td>‘I was asked to’</td>
<td>‘lack of teachmeet in our county.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 159</td>
<td>to where I live’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Adaptation To Need.** Adaptation to their own needs, taking the TeachMeet format to their school’s staff professional development, was described by those who ‘wanted to bring the energy to my own school’, convinced that ‘it would suit our school context’ if ‘incorporated in staff meetings’ in order to ‘use the expertise already in the building’,
‘share ideas in our own school’, to be ‘more proactive and progressive in our own CPD’, as captured in series of replies from this respondent:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why did you …</th>
<th>attend a TeachMeet?</th>
<th>present at TeachMeet?</th>
<th>organise a TeachMeet?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answers from</td>
<td>‘wanted to improve my</td>
<td>‘wanted to support the</td>
<td>‘wanted to bring it to my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 138</td>
<td>own practice’</td>
<td>concept’</td>
<td>own school.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Progression In The Level Of Participation. Progression in the level of participation was evident in many of the answers which were like mini career stories, some beginning when the respondents were students whose initial attendance ‘assisted in developing as a student teacher’ lead to them organising events ‘to give students an opportunity to share research’. Others who went along ‘to learn’, had ‘something to share,’ and eventually ‘saw it as an opportunity to get more staff sharing,’ as encapsulated in the progression shown by this respondent:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why did you …</th>
<th>attend a TeachMeet?</th>
<th>present at TeachMeet?</th>
<th>organise a TeachMeet?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answers from</td>
<td>‘learn top tips from</td>
<td>‘to share top tips as a</td>
<td>‘to develop a community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 254</td>
<td>real classroom practitioners’</td>
<td>classroom practitioner’</td>
<td>to share good practice’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some respondents’ answers stood out for singularly compelling answers. One sees TeachMeet as a foil for isolation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why did you …</th>
<th>attend a TeachMeet?</th>
<th>present at TeachMeet?</th>
<th>organise a TeachMeet?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answers from</td>
<td>‘feeling isolated’</td>
<td>‘encouraged by others’</td>
<td>‘I wanted to encourage people in my area to share and feel less isolated.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 182</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Others see it as an antidote to the ennui and annoyance of those decrying CPD as ‘boring irrelevant presentations that didn’t take account of the audience,’ as with this valiant optimist who sees it as an opportunity:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why did you …</th>
<th>attend a TeachMeet?</th>
<th>present at TeachMeet?</th>
<th>organise a TeachMeet?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answers from</td>
<td>‘sounded interesting’</td>
<td>‘wanted to share a project we’d been involved in’</td>
<td>‘wanted to encourage teachers to share some of their experiences rather than moaning about blockers and barriers.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 242</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One sees it as a way for those who wish ‘to be part of something’ to take direct local action on being inclusive, being very specific on how to go about it ‘facilitate sharing and networking teachers, and wanting one in a pub where every staff member felt welcome not just teachers i.e. support staff.’ Several see TeachMeet as part of developing teachers’ agency in their own professional development, (and indeed ideas for developing TeachMeet itself … ‘I had ideas how to make it a great occasion to those who’d come’), speaking in proactive terms of their ambition

… ‘to take the leap and organise my first event’
… ‘take the next step and continue the idea of sharing’
… empower students and teachers
… to be more proactive and progressive in our own CPD.

One respondent is building it into their professions role in teacher formation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why did you …</th>
<th>attend a TeachMeet?</th>
<th>present at TeachMeet?</th>
<th>organise a TeachMeet?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answers from Respondent 156</td>
<td>‘Sounded useful’</td>
<td>‘after my first teachmeet I now run one for student teachers annually’</td>
<td>‘introduce students to the idea that prof. learning is ultimately their responsibility.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some pinpointed the epiphany moment that moved them from passive to active involvement, speaking of encouragement that made all the difference … ‘inspired to get up out of my seat’ … ‘in the hope that someone else might be inspired’. For one, this moment came during their training as a teacher:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why did you …</th>
<th>attend a TeachMeet?</th>
<th>present at TeachMeet?</th>
<th>organise a TeachMeet?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answers from Respondent 19</td>
<td>‘As a student teacher I wanted to gain ideas for my classroom’</td>
<td>‘to share my expertise with others and to give back for what I had learnt’</td>
<td>‘it's because all the benefit myself and friends had gained from them that I wanted to expand it to others.’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Curiouser And Curiouser About The Curiosity - Analysing The Analysis.** In
the direct analysis of responses to Question 7 presented earlier, *curiosity* alongside *interest* loomed largest in the list of reasons to first attend TeachMeet. Of the respondents (n=34) who gave the single word ‘curiosity’ as their motivation to Q 7 about why they first attended a TeachMeet, some (n= 11) gave no answers to questions 8 and 9, suggesting to me that they may not have subsequently presented at nor organise a TeachMeet; some (n=5) also gave reasons for presenting, ‘… to share … support … asked… persuaded,’ but no answer about organising. The remainder (n=18) whose answer to question 7 fell into this category of the single word answer ‘curiosity’, ‘curious’, ‘interested’, and in one instance, ‘nosey’ formed past of the analysis just presented. I was curious about this curious set, and took a closer look.

Extracting and examining this cohort, whose only stated motivation for first attending TeachMeet was curiosity, and analysing each respondents three answers in parallel, reveals some marked similarity in their subsequent motivation for presenting and organising. The aspiration for sharing was diffused through all the answers - as highlighted in the previous separate analyses of questions 8 and 9; what stood out beside, or perhaps about, that sharing were two threads - for these ‘curious who continued’ it is about *value*, and it is about *doing the right thing*. These respondents report that they came out of curiosity but left inspired and willing to share themselves in future; that they recognised what is worthy of sharing; and that they determined to further the format, describing its value to them as being

‘inclusive ‘… ‘collegiate’ … ‘collaborative’ … ‘empowering.’

What is described as being valued is both the content being shared, and the context within which it is shared. The content is spoken of in terms of

‘ideas worth sharing’ … ‘something useful’ … ‘a repertoire of tips’ … ‘worth sharing’. The context within which it is shared is spoken of as ‘collegial
sharing’ … ‘format worth sharing’ … ‘a format to support’ … ‘non-threatening’ … ‘a valuable way to share’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why did you …</th>
<th>attend a TeachMeet?</th>
<th>present at TeachMeet?</th>
<th>organise a TeachMeet?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answers from</td>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>I had seen others</td>
<td>A determination to try</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 106</td>
<td></td>
<td>presenting and felt I had something just as valid to say</td>
<td>and bring something so valuable to my school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The two commonest reasons given for doing the right thing were - repayment, and serving a need. Repayment is described in terms of both paying back i.e. ‘to give back’ … ‘to support respected colleagues, and paying it forward to do my bit’ … ‘to contribute’ … ‘to share my positive experience of teachmeet with others.’

Those who felt it was the right thing to do … ‘felt it was a good thing to do’ and shared a conviction that to bring TeachMeet to others ‘filled a need.’ The needs described ranged from the practical - ‘to provide a venue at my school’ - and the aspirational - ‘facilitate sharing and networking’ … ‘promote collegial sharing’ - to the transformational - ‘reframing Professional Development’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why did you …</th>
<th>attend a TeachMeet?</th>
<th>present at TeachMeet?</th>
<th>organise a TeachMeet?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answers from</td>
<td>Curious</td>
<td>Wanted to give back</td>
<td>Wanted to share it with folk who hadn’t experienced it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answers from</td>
<td>Interested</td>
<td>Like to contribute, to give as well as receive</td>
<td>Wanted to facilitate professional learning opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 159</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answers from</td>
<td>Nosey</td>
<td>Give something back</td>
<td>Collaborate with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 128</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Question 12**

This question offered the chance for respondents to type anything they wished to into a blank text box.

**Responses To Question 12. If there is anything you wish to add, please use this space.** A short text box was offered for respondents to insert an answer. 110 responses were submitted in this space. Many of which were messages of appreciation of the research
and encouragement for the researcher. When these were set aside, the total was 67 individual additional comments, each between one and three sentences long.

*Interpreting The Additional Comments.* These comments, from those who chose to add them as voluntary offerings rather than as answers given because a question was asked, range from the ‘big picture’ observation that

‘The ‘idea’ of a TeachMeet is one that I still find remarkable in this day and age. As an event where people come freely together to support, encourage and help one another is not only an invaluable learning experience, but a remarkable way to bring people together. There are few other places or opportunities that offer this type of event’

to the confessional

‘TeachMeets changed my teaching in a way nothing else has. That might sound extreme, but to collect so many ideas in the space of an hour, and realise that I could contribute to the discussion, gave me a major confidence boost and increased my motivation in planning and delivering lessons.’

Reading through and analysing the body of comments from these 67 individual respondents, it became clear to me there were three focal points of collective concern to these respondents - the impact a TeachMeet can have matters to them, what goes on inside a TeachMeet matters to them, and the future of TeachMeet matters to them. Table 5.13 shows a summary of the experiential elements which are discussed in these comments.

**Table 5.13**

*Three Focal Points of Collective Concern for Teachmeet Participants (n = 62)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Matters highlighted</th>
<th>Significant elements cited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. impact a TeachMeet can have</td>
<td>i. impact on individuals - <em>increased confidence; friendships; beneficial, powerful</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. positive impact on CPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. inside the TeachMeet</td>
<td>i. elements for success - <em>volunteers, variety, brevity, what’s NOT there</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. the effective atmosphere - <em>inspiration, energy, passion, generosity</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. the future of TeachMeet</td>
<td>i. retain informality - <em>social, fun</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ii. wider deployment - <em>online, fresh faces, new places</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A: How The Impact Of Teachmeet Matters To These Participants. The impact on
the individual teacher both personally and professionally is described in terms of growth,
impetus, and formation of relationships

‘I think from my experience at the teachmeets, I have grown in confidence … I
lecture now and work as a tutor for CPD courses. The gentle encouragement I
received and the supportive environment of the teachmeet was the perfect
recipe for personal success for me to blossom;’

‘Teachmeets bring people together and friendships can last a lifetime’

‘… teachers who often think everyone else is above them sometimes take the
leap and present a simple idea and just own a room. So often people need just a
starting point. Webinars, conferences always seem to be filled with ideas that
are big; TeachMeets focus on the little things to get you started. And most
people are only getting started.’

‘… always come away with something new to try.’

Although there were two divergent respondents that voiced reasons to doubt the validity of
TeachMeet as ‘CPD’

‘I'm fascinated by the CPD description. To me these are important events but
they are not CPD, which should be more structured and with more expert input.
Sometimes I think people feel they have to add the CPD tag to make the events
seem worthy when what they are really after is professional social connections
and a community of practice. The social side of these events is hugely valued
but poorly understood in how it relates to people's professional responsibilities
I think.’

‘In-house Teachmeets are often at lunchtime. This both undermines their
efficacy and diminishes their value.’

there were many who welcome the advent of TeachMeet in professional learning from

initial teacher training to the school staffroom

‘I think first and foremost, TeachMeet is a Personal Learning Network’

‘… a wonderful ‘informal’ CPD … opportunity for educators of all experience
levels to share something they think worked well’

‘Should be encouraged through a teaching degree and within a staff room’
‘We have a TeachMeet at the end of each school term. It has become an integral part of our professional practice;’
‘TeachMeet is a fantastic resource and has really helped our staff. It has helped the staff bond and become more collaborative.’
‘I believe it is hard for some teachers to put their hand up to show what they are doing for fear of ‘showing off,’ nominations by colleagues, principals … might give some teachers the confidence or nudge they need to step up and present … TeachMeets would be a wonderful one way to facilitate this.’
‘Teachmeets rock … love them … best cpd ever’.

B: What Happens Inside The Teachmeet Matters To These Participants. These respondents were clear on what elements make the event a success for them, including the voluntarism and credibility of who is there
‘Maybe self-selection (i.e. voluntary attendance) is why the ones I have attended have been so exciting?’
‘… credibility of speakers is crucial … bad speakers can crumble the process’
and the brevity and variety of what is being presented
‘Excellent forum for gaining insights on a variety of topics in a short amount of time’
‘An interesting balance … diversity insights from participants … time limit for presentations to free up time for interaction.’

A strong emphasis was placed on that is NOT present -
‘… no other agenda apart from teachers sharing and learning from each other’
‘… no commercialisation … keep them small … all welcome …’
‘… peers not hierarchies’
‘… avoid sales pitches … focus on what happens in a classroom.’

There was an individual response which suggested that exclusivity might be an issue
‘They can be a little elitist. They (naturally enough) are very biased toward the interests of the organiser’
however what was described by most were the positive vibes of a convivial atmosphere
‘… affirmation of positivity … inspirational’
‘The most important part of teachmeet is fun’

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‘… a high energy event, a lot depends on the passion and personality of the organisers’

‘The social interaction with colleagues at face-to-face TeachMeets is for me an integral part of what makes a TeachMeet unique, memorable and impactful.’

and a reminder of what it was like at the first TeachMeet

‘I was at the very first Teachmeet in an Edinburgh pub. Always enjoyed every one I attended.’

**C: The Future Of Teachmeet Matters To These Participants.** There is an optimistic air in those who express desire to retain informality

‘I think if teachmeets are formalised too much it might take away the fun and social aspect of them.’

‘As a "Catch-22" - I think if TeachMeets were to become "popular" it may harm the very thing they are currently achieving. But, until that happens - let's keep going strong!’

coupled with a call for wider deployment, and getting new people involved

‘Could we get more of them organised on a greater scale, please?’

‘There are not enough organised and or they are poorly promoted’

‘They should be more widely publicised.’

‘TeachMeets start to fail when the same few faces return again and again. They are in need of some mechanism to ensure fresh faces get involved -- haven't figured that out yet.’

And given that the survey took place in the first summer of the Covid-19 pandemic, there was mention of an online future for TeachMeet

‘I haven't organised or attended an online TeachMeet yet, but I hope to. I would expect the learning element to be continued, but the community element might suffer from not having participants in the same room. However, hopefully we can do something when organising to mitigate that - I'd be interested to hear what others think about this.’

‘Lockdown has forced these events online. Personally I think this is great. I have been able to attend teachmeets in London while living in the North of England. Time efficient and cost free. The way ahead?’
Summary Of Findings From Analysis Of Qualitative Data In Questionnaire

Findings from the analysis of responses to Questions 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 12, which each invited respondents to put in words their personal experience and ideation. Individually they tell of participation seeking to improve themselves, to share with others what has worked, to bring the opportunities to new places and new voices to do the same. Collectively they see TeachMeet as an occasion with the purpose of sharing ideas in a short social gathering which they describe as informative, collaborative, and fun. Matters seen as important to reflect upon are the positive impact TeachMeets may have had on the person and the profession; the social and collegiate nature of the events; and the future.

Combined Summary of Findings from Analysis of Questionnaire Data

The purpose of the questionnaire carried out was to offer the opportunity to any TeachMeet participant who wished to do so, to have their information, opinions and ideas included in this research.

The responses to the questionnaire yielded quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were in the form of information about length and level of involvement, sector of professional experience, communication, and opinion on the situation of TeachMeet. The qualitative data comprised text answers, mostly short, to questions about definitions, descriptions, personal motivations for participating, as well as an invitation to add comments free of direction.

The analysis of quantitative data was by Descriptive Statistics. Analysis of the text-based answers followed the principles of interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in which the researcher employed the IPA ‘double hermeneutic’ of interpreting the notes she has written about the text in the respondents’ answers.
Combining these analyses of the data from the questionnaire returns yielded the following findings pertaining to TeachMeet:

- Participants have a wide range of length of experience engaging in TeachMeet, some have been involved since 2006, others joining as recently as 2020. They come from all levels and sectors of education. Finding out about events is via informal channels - the internet, or a colleague. Different levels of participation have distinct motivations - attending out of curiosity and seeking to improve oneself, presenting to share with others something that has worked in the classroom, and then getting involved in organisation to bring to others the opportunity to experience TeachMeet.

- A TeachMeet event is a place for sharing ideas in an informal social setting arranged by peers for peers. It is viewed as informative, collaborative, and fun. Many participants consider TeachMeet events to be situated in the overlapping spaces between the Communities of Practice, Personal Learning Networks, and Continuing Professional Development in the landscape of their individual professional learning. They consider TeachMeet to be fulfilling more informal roles (network, community) than formal roles (training, development) of professional learning.

- Matters of appreciation and concern expressed by participants are connected to
  - what happens (and does not happen) within the TeachMeet event: the lack of hierarchy and sales pitch, the passion and generosity of volunteers, the brevity and the variety is inspiring
  - the personal and professional impact of TeachMeet: powerful benefits of increased confidence, new friendships, and a positive effect on CPD
  - the future of TeachMeet: a wish to retain the non-formal and social atmosphere, and to extend the reach to include new places and new faces.
Section Three - Findings from Analysis of Interviews with TeachMeet Organisers

A systematic Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), as detailed in Chapter Four - Methodology and Methods was applied to each transcript in turn, applying the IPA commitment to “understanding how particular experiential phenomena (an event, process or relationship) have been understood from the perspective of particular people, in a particular context” (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2022, p. 24). This intensive and interactive process resulted in a synthesis of the experiential themes interpreted by the analyst (myself) as being of deepest concern to the interviewees, within and across cases.

In this report of findings, I use the current (revised) taxonomy and nomenclature of IPA as published by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2022, p. 75) and Nizza and Smith (2021, p. 55). The individual and group themes generated during analysis are referred to as Personal Experiential Themes and Group Experiential Themes. Extracts from transcripts are identified by their line number in square brackets thus: “quote” e.g., [111] if the interviewee is identified; if the interviewee is not identified, the extract is identified by the interview number and line number “quote” e.g., [i01, 111].

Personal Experiential Themes (PETs)

Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) refers to themes generated during the close line-by-line analysis of each individual transcript and the analyst’s notation thereon; each PET is the analyst’s interpretation of the interviewee’s Personal Experiential Statements (PES), the words and sentences that the interviewee uses to tell their story.

Group Experiential Theme (GETs)

Group Experiential Theme (GETs) refers to the most potent themes generated during a cross-case analysis of the PETs. A photographic sequence depicting this iterative process of generating the Personal Experiential Themes and Group Experiential Themes, from analysis of text in the transcripts, is detailed in Appendix M.

Presentation And Representation
The process of analysis, which generates first PETs then GETs, allowed me to represent the findings as a multi-layered story which represents both the individual and the collective experiences as described to me. Bush et al. argue that “IPA explicitly recognizes the value of subjective experience as scientific data” (2015, p. 168), and Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009, 2021) advise ‘making explicit the evidentiary base’ to ensure that “each of the claims made is supported with material from the participants”, so the presentation of these findings necessitates substantial quotes extracted directly from the interviews, presenting the reader with a longer chapter than they might expect. This foregrounding of participants’ voices in phenomenological method is stressed by Willig (2007, p. 210) who says “direct quotations … contribute greatly to invoking the emotional tone and experiential quality of an experience”, and who invokes van Manen’s (1997) maxim that it is important that we find ways of letting the emotional tone of our research participants’ narratives speak to the readers of our research texts.

My interpretative phenomenological analysis of the interview transcripts identified four potent GETs threaded through the lived experience of TeachMeet as recounted by these fifteen interviewees: the matters of concern which I discerned as common to all were condensed around themes pertaining to personal, purposeful, the practical, and political experiences. I choose the word potent as descriptor for these GETs, as they have coalesced around PETs that show the potential power of TeachMeet as actualised in the lived experience of these participants. It reminds me of how Mycroft (2020, p. 25) recalls Spinoza’s description factors that enact capacity as potential and Braidotti (2018, p. 33) describes factors of empowerment as potenti. There is no indication of hierarchy in the order in which I present them here; the presentation reflects the order in which they were generated during the iterative stages of my process of analysis. The extracts quoted here below belong to the stories of experience from individual interviewees; the analysis
presented is my interpretative representation of these stories read as a collective
representative of organisers of TeachMeet.

Table 5.14

Group Experiential Themes (GETs) & Personal Experiential Themes (PETS) from

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Interviews with Organisers of Teachmeets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Personal Experiential Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. PERSONAL</strong></td>
<td>i. Social, community, and personal networks have evolved among participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On personal, interpersonal, and social matters in TeachMeet</td>
<td>‘learning is a communal process’ Steve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘The essence is they’re your peers, people just like you’ Stephen</td>
<td>ii. Social interaction at events, skilfully mediated, is appreciated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘come along, this is how it works … come along ready to give a talk’ Drew</td>
<td>iii. Encouragement from professional mentors, colleagues, peers is formative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Social, community, and personal networks have evolved among participants</td>
<td>iv. Close Encounters of a Personal Kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘learning is a communal process’ Steve</td>
<td>‘the energy, passion in her voice definitely resonates with me now’ Leanne</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| B. PURPOSEFUL | i. Doing the Thing Right - acting to counter discontent with CPD experiences |
| On being driven to engage with TeachMeet with intent, for a purpose  | ‘a lot of CPD you go in, sit down, listen to somebody, you leave’ Kathleen |
| ‘Give something a proper name, it becomes a thing’ Ewan  | iii. Making the Path by Walking - forming and following ‘desire lines’ |
| ‘A lot of people went away, organised their own elsewhere afterwards’ Mags  | iv. Pioneers, innovators, and early adopters - don’t wait for permission |
| ‘to make people think about stuff that they don't think about’ John  | ‘to make people think about stuff that they don't think about’ John |

| C. PRACTICAL | i. ‘Spreagadh’ : the spark that ignites transformation |
| On the sharing of practice at TeachMeet  | ‘see it, like it, bring it back to the classroom’ Sarah-Jayne |
| ‘I came out buzzing - it changed how I thought about teaching’ Mary  | ii. The Bazaar - the mix: what’s there, and what’s not there |
| ‘no keynote, everybody equal, everybody's voice recognized’ Ciara  | iii. The Black Box - getting a glimpse into another’s classroom |
| to be able to say to others, look, I’m trying this, what do you reckon? Conor  | ‘to be able to say to others, look, I’m trying this, what do you reckon? Conor |

| D. POLITICAL | i. Yes please - keep it simple and keep it non-hierarchical |
| On the future for TeachMeet - political  | ‘a face to face, open process’ Daithí |
| ‘Nobody owns TeachMeet, it’s the community’ Dawn  | ii. No thanks - avoid commercialisation and appropriation |
| ‘if not for teachers by teachers, it’s not TeachMeet, it’s something else’ Drew  | iii. Perhaps, Perhaps, Perhaps - evolving a place in CPD, and evolving online |
| ‘we need to make sure that it remains as democratic as it needs to be’ Ciara  |
Generation of Experiential Themes During Interactive Interpretative Analysis

The first iteration of this IPA resulted in the generation of up to five possible themes from the first case analysis; after analysis of half the transcripts, eight possible themes had been generated; these themes persisted in the remainder of the transcripts. In the subsequent iterations of the IPA, some merging and subsumption of themes resulted in a final generation of the four Group Experiential Themes. Each of these GETs comprises several groups of Personal Experiential Themes, generated within and across the fifteen stories of experience. Table 5.14 presents an outline of the hierarchy of these themes as a ‘schematic representation ... aimed at helping the reader to get a broad sense of the whole’ (Smith et al., 2012, p. 109). Details of each of the four Group Experiential Themes - labelled A to D - and their PETs - labelled A(i) to D(iii) – generated are presented in this section of the chapter. Each GET is introduced in overview, then the PETs which comprise it are presented in turn.

A. Group Experiential Theme: TeachMeet is Personal

‘The Essence Is That They’re Your Peers’

Personal, Interpersonal, And Social Relational Experience of TeachMeet Matters

One of the first compelling issues to be generated from the first transcript, and one which persisted as a thread running through all of the interviews, was continued reference to personal matters referring to the self and the other people involved. For all of the interviewees, TeachMeet was as much about the people involved as it was about the events organised and the happenings within those events:

Leanne … the social element and the meeting of people...is wonderful. I feel like TeachMeet helps to harness positive connections between people [266];
Conor … in one sense ... it's more ‘people meet’ than ‘content meet’; the power of the thing is in the people [115].

This first GET encompasses four PETs, each represents an increasingly personal layer of interactions described in the experience of the interviewees - interacting among the
TeachMeet community using social media Twitter; interacting within a group at a TeachMeet event; interacting with a peer; and individual personal experiences.

**Personal Experiential Theme A(i)**

‘Learning Is a Communal Process’

**Social, Community, And Personal Networks as Evolved Among Participants**

In listening to and reading the Personal Experiential Statements of the interviewees, I interpreted three intertwined elements that matter at this social level of TeachMeet - an appreciation of TeachMeet as community; connections formed via personal learning networks within TeachMeet; and a close relationship between TeachMeet and Twitter.

**An Appreciation of Teachmeet as Community.** Leanne observes that when teachers hear each other’s stories it can foster “a sense of community [216]” which co-founder Ewan reminds us is “super important … you need a community of people who laugh, cry and clap at that moment [197]”. Once people have been drawn into the community, the trust that builds is seen as important for staying involved:

Stephen … and people come up and say, great to see you again, they remember who you are, and you realise you are part of a community [53];
Steve … they trust me as the organiser and I trust them as the participant. So it's mutual trust, maybe [214].

The effect of growing a community is perceived as having a positive effect on competence of participants, fostering self-determined habits of sourcing or providing their own CPD:

Daithí … it's been a great avenue and vehicle for teacher collaboration, for seeing what's out there, for competence building, and for giving teachers an opportunity to realize that they're not on their own, that there's a community of willing and welcoming fellow professionals out there [07];
Kathleen … the TeachMeet community is kind of self-generating isn't it, you want it to be independent, it shouldn't need that much hand holding, just one person looking after it all ... a case of ‘I've inspired you now off you go into this, spread the word’ [200].
Dawn recounts a backstage conversation with the late Sir Ken Robinson before a brief address he gave at a 2016 TeachMeet in London, in which he stressed the importance of the effect of such a community …

… [our conversation] was about making sure that we carried on a community, and being creative in any way that we could regardless of what the government wanted to do with testing and timetabling and exams and all the pressures … [he said] “remember why you went into teaching, and make that sing for you and the students” [60].

**Connecting Via Personal Learning Networks Within Teachmeet.** The effect of the mutual support that is to be found in a PLN, and being a connector within the network, is a factor in how individuals develop a sense of worth:

John … basically (TeachMeet) is helping develop a network because like with PLNs, you show up and that's how you support people because if you're doing something new, you kind of hope that people turn up to give you the ability to think that this is worthwhile’ [29];

Daithí … I remember trying to harness the power of Twitter to reach out and find...who else was out there… over time, I started to make little networks and connections with people that I found were having the same experience as me across different sectors [35].

The growing significance of personal networks as an avenue for professional and personal development arose in many personal experiential statements:

Kyle … it's social media really now that that's my PD [172];

Ciara … my exposure online has introduced me to so many people and so many opportunities and it has helped me to cultivate and curate and find my voice in teaching that has helped me in my classrooms [187].

**The Close Relationship Between Twitter and Teachmeet.** This was referenced by many in the interviews as being “intertwined” [Dawn 216] and “symbiotic” [Daithí 422], they “spurred each other on” [John 84]. This relationship between TeachMeet and Twitter seems to be a ‘two-way street’, with some finding Twitter via TeachMeet,
Dawn … At my first TeachMeet … I joined Twitter that day [05];
Stephen … Twitter was something I was introduced to at TeachMeet [64].

Others found TeachMeet connections via Twitter:

John … TeachMeet was the first chance you got to meet some of these (Twitter) people face to face … If you don't know anybody, going up and saying I follow you on Twitter is a very easy way to introduce … you already have a context [272].

The power of Twitter comes through very strongly:

Drew … I’ve oft been quoted for saying “Twitter is my Google” … ”I'm a Twitterholic”… as soon as I met Twitter, I knew I had found an informal - a spiritual - home! [142, 229].

Twitter is identified by some as a becoming a space for TeachMeet discourse,

Leanne … Twitter allows conversations to be extended to online space [157], and vice versa; Twitter conversations giving rise to in-person events, as Daithí explains with regard to the genesis of Northern Ireland TeachMeet events …

… one key impetus for getting TeachMeets off the ground was #NIedchat … on Wednesday night for an hour, we organised a very structured Twitter conversation, it was phenomenal [346].

Twitter seems to be accepted as a place where TeachMeet affairs can be brokered online, in the open; calls for participation are posted, and the proverbial ‘keys to the kingdom’ have been exchanged on Twitter, as witnessed by Kyle in the USA and Steve in Australia:

Kyle … Applications are open to everybody, it's posted on Twitter, on Facebook, whoever wants to ... people sign up to join and to present [104];
Steve … I contacted the people that ran the wiki, I said we want to run TeachMeet, and they said “here's the keys to the kingdom, here's the Twitter we use, here's the website we use, here's everything, take it and run with it with our blessing” [24].
Personal Experiential Theme A(ii)

‘An MC Who Can Join the Dots … Put People at Ease … Give Time Out’

Social Interaction at Events, Skillfully Mediated, Is Appreciated

This PET focussed on the group interactions experienced within TeachMeet events. These reflect the importance of the social setting, the opportunity for sharing among a group, and the role played by the event MC in facilitating both.

The Social Setting of a TeachMeet Event. Words chosen to describe the informal nature of TeachMeet included “convivial...round table, open, exciting forum” [Mags 85, 272], and “organic...like mates in the pub” [Dawn 307]. To many this was the essence of the thing which began, as Ewan describes, as …

… six or seven people around a table … face to face … all about the dialogue … all about the conversations. And it wasn't about presentations … it's about the social connection … a randomness about who's going to present … no keynotes, no set agenda … and you need elements that put people at ease, round tables, eye contact, give people time out to think, and in a social kind of setting … we didn't just have the presentations, we had the nanopresentations, but we also had round tables where people could demo something, with a bell to say 'right time's up' and then someone else at the same table would start, it was just nice because adding movement to it added energy [149 - 184].

The effect of informal flexible seating arrangement is important to allow what Mags describes as “a physical permission to sit opposite or beside each other to chat” [178].

The social setting is part of what sets TeachMeet apart from traditional CPD events:

Stephen … for me, the social aspect of the TeachMeet is most important [140]
Conor … you had to have a deeply and profoundly important social dimension to it as well; I've moved a little bit on that over the times, but I still prefer TeachMeets that take place in a social and convivial setting rather than sterile [92].

Pointed out was the importance of what is sometimes called ‘TeachEat’, in which time is allotted midway or at the end for participants to eat and drink together; what Kathleen describes as a time for “the really juicy conversations” [282]:

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Ciara … the conversation space is so untapped … the cup of tea at the back of the room is key because that's where it evolves into a conversation: "you're trying that, tell me a bit more about it"... *that's* the space. That's what TeachMeet allows you to do [220];

Mags … and when we had TeachEat afterwards...we had conversations that went on until the wee small hours [110];

Even at virtual events, this social interaction is being sought and accessed in the form of the ‘chat’ feature in the online platform being used:

Steve … makes it feel more social that the people in the chat are communicating … people are reading that chat and communicating back and forth and responding to questions [289].

**The Opportunity to Share with A Group During a Teachmeet.** Sarah-Jayne describes this sharing as a ‘huge generosity’ [280, 295], John speaks of the ‘good and kind’ [104]; the picture painted is that anyone can contribute:

Conor … teachers listening, and thinking, about points of view that are put forward by others, that pique our sense of wonder and curiosity [224].

Ewan … feeling that it's informal enough to share. And being able to make a contribution, I think it is really important. Everyone who goes feels they can make a contribution [179].

Sarah-Jayne points out how this willingness to share may have a transformational effect on others present, when what is shared is taken back to the school and the classroom:

‘… what I've found about the TeachMeet community is that people are really, really keen to help each other … so much so that it's contagious … TeachMeet is where people who are really enthusiastic get rid of all that negative "isn't it so hard" … And if you can bring that into your school, even in the staff room, it's deadly, it's really, really good’ [280 - 295].

**Joining The Dots - Role of The MC In Facilitating Social Setting.** The central role of ‘MC’, Master of Ceremonies, Bean / Fear an Tí is considered to be one of setting the scene in which sharing can happen. Some regard it as a refreshing feature of TeachMeet:
Stephen … ‘I was introduced to concepts like Bean an Tí … which I knew from the Gaeltacht², but hadn't seen in this type of setting [29].

Ewan describes one “who can join the dots” [132] in an “underestimated role” [184] which calls for the skills of what both he and others refer to in terms of connecting,

… your role as an MC is to be the connector. And that means that no matter who randomly comes up and gives their talk, you have to find the thing that connects it to the last talk that everyone just heard, and act as the glue [133].

Because of the nature of TeachMeet, there’s a need for ability to deal with the unknown:

Mags … whoever is Fear an Tí, Bean an Tí needs even more than a tolerance for chaos. It's a deep empathy. The ability to read the room is important. Because remember, you're going to something where you haven't vetted everything in advance. So you have to trust your presenters, you have to trust your audience [146];

Steve … I as organiser am definitely not the curator. I think of it as a form of radical democracy in that I don't really know who's speaking. I don't know what they're going to say. I don't know if I'm going to agree with them [202].

A good MC is exemplified as one who is allowing freedom of participation:

Mags … he sent us randomly to four corners of the room … this was the first time I met ‘the law of two feet’ or the law of mobility, I say that was a joyous moment because it's lived with me since [146];

and one whose modelling of the role can have a positive effect on teachers present:

Ewan … some people are good at it, some people are less good at it. And it's a skill that you get by practicing it. So that synthesis skill is something that is great, I think, for any teacher to take. And I would encourage any teacher, not just to think ‘I'm going to speak at a TeachMeet’, I'd encourage any teacher to say ‘I'm going to try and MC the TeachMeet’ because that's actually where I think you'll learn the most [138].

² Gaeltacht: residential Irish Language summer school for students in Ireland
Personal Experiential Theme A(iii)

‘Come Along, This Is How It Works … Come Along Ready to Give a Talk’

Encouragement from professional mentors, colleagues, and peers is formative

Professional relationships are acknowledged and appreciated as instances which helped an individual prosper - profound appreciation is expressed for the formative effect of both mentor-mentee relationships, and interaction with a professional peer, that have been experienced.

The Effect of a Mentor-Mentee Relationship. Receiving encouragement by a mentor, or being an encouraging mentor to others, was cited by many as a deciding factor in persuading self or others to become involved in TeachMeet. For Leanne as mentee it was a “conversation with a mentor of mine” [10]. For Dawn, it is important as a mentor to encourage people to get over ‘tall poppy’ insecurity by asking directly “have you thought about speaking?” [190].

The encouragement and trust of more experienced colleagues was cited as impactful by almost all – Sarah-Jayne [308], Kathleen [107], and Daithí credit their school Principals; Ewan [88] his line manager; Kyle [05, 13] credits a local experienced TeachMeet organiser – the common thread is that of being supported and encouraged to “get on with it”.

Appreciation Of Peer-To-Peer Interaction. Described by Mags as “the hunger to be together and have the chats” [439], this element was evident in the inputs from all interview participants. The key variables here were interaction with and validation from peers. The interaction with peers was described by Stephen as “the essence … they’re your peers, people just like you” [375]. If this is missing, the purpose is defeated:

Ewan … I went along to a massive teaching TeachMeet quite early on, a few hundred people, but it was just presentations; it wasn't genuinely sharing between peers. And that's still the case too often [113].
The impact of the positive effects of validation and appreciation by one’s peers was stressed:

John … people would come up and say “that's fantastic”. And that's where I used to get a kind of warm glow [161];

Ciara … if I've learned anything about being a teacher, is that teachers love validation, love being told you're doing well, you don't always get that in the classroom [161].

**Personal Experiential Theme A(iv)**

‘The Energy, The Passion in Her Voice Definitely Still Resonates with Me Now’

**Close Encounters of a Personal Kind**

This is the most intensely personal of the PETs, with experiential statements which tell of *emotional moments* and *memorable people* that had made a lasting impression on individual interviewees; and a particular focus on the affective *experience of being the TeachMeet MC*.

**Iconic Others: Memorable People.** In many of the interviews, the lasting effect of individuals encountered at TeachMeet was cited as an influential factor:

Leanne … Those who had positive, meaningful, powerful impact on my professional life as well as personal, hearing the energy and the passion in the voice, that definitely resonates with me now [88, 108].

Several memorable individuals, now deceased, who had been very active TeachMeet participants had each made deep impressions, were repeatedly mentioned by name:

Dawn … And it's tied up with Bev Evans (RIP), with Tim Rylands (RIP), with those people that I would never met if it hadn't been for TeachMeet [331];

Ciara … listening to Bianca Ní Ghrógáin (RIP) speak … the mood in the room changed - the night I describe as the pyramid stage of Glastonbury of TeachMeet events … *everyone* got something from her that night [74].

**Impactful Moments.** There were quite animated and evocative descriptions from those remembering the feelings they had after ‘first night’ TeachMeets:
Kathleen … the feeling at the end of it was relief, exhaustion, with elation and excitement and a desire to do a lot more of this. … we knew there was something here, the nugget or the spark of what we knew was going to be a good fire [44];

Daithí … When it was over? Gosh, it was *such* an emotional high. I wanted to make sure that the momentum we had tapped into that night, that we wouldn't lose that [116];

Mary … I remember the first one … I came out buzzing … I don't know how, it was just fantastic [53];

Others highlighted an appreciation of the power of these special moments, big and small, and a desire to preserve the feelings these moments engender:

Dawn … The other moment that really got me was two years ago (BETT 2019) … when (name given) a 16yo student, stood up and did his talk, and I’ve never seen a standing ovation, ever [341].

**The Personal Experience of Being a Teachmeet MC.** Many of the personal experiential statements describe the experience of being the MC of a TeachMeet event. In the lead up to being MC for a TeachMeet event, a suggestion of taking the role very seriously, and of heightened senses was evident:

Dawn … I think whoever's doing it has to have that passion. And that needs to come through so most people in the room feel it [364];

Mags … for me, I would put all my concentration on the people in the room. And their comfort, and their inclusion [217];

Kyle … I will say from a logistical standpoint, it was very nerve wracking and it was really hard work [38].

During the event, an MC is in a position of constant vigilance on behalf of others, which may be one reason so many take on the role in tandem with a colleague:

Dawn … I think two works really well because one does the technical side of it. And you need the two of you bounce off each other ... [96];

John … if you don't like what you're seeing presented, you can get up and walk away … problem is when you're Fear an Tí, you can't do that, you're stuck there … no time to relax. Every time someone is presenting. I’m getting
... ready for the next thing; so when I'm MC I remember very little of what happened that night ... [94, 179].

A summing up of the collective reflections on being a TeachMeet MC comes from Dawn, delivered with a smile “I do enjoy it, but it is quite exhausting!” [103].

B. Group Experiential Theme: TeachMeet is Purposeful
‘If You Give Something a Proper Name, It Becomes a Thing’
On Being Driven to Engage with Teachmeet for A Purpose

This GET encompasses four PETs which centre on purpose, each generated around a different reason that has compelled someone to action as an organiser of TeachMeets. Some are countering their own discontent with individual CPD experiences; some have a feeling of moral responsibility to do whatever it is they can do; some are forming and following ‘desire lines’; and in particular cases some are enacting a pioneering spirit of innovation.

Personal Experiential Theme B(i)
‘A Lot of CPD You Go In, Sit Down, Listen to Somebody, You Leave’

Doing the Thing Right, Acting to Counter Discontent with CPD Experiences

Although the interviews were carried out under the principles of Appreciative Inquiry, concentrating on the strengths of TeachMeet, it came through strongly that some of these strengths were actually a reflection of perceived weaknesses in the wider system within which it evolved, and a drive to counter them. Present across these conversations was a disappointment with past and present models of CPD encountered and a wish to establish a good ‘fit’ for TeachMeet as an alternative.

Disappointment With Past and Present Experience of CPD. This is the first of the PETs in which the thread of opinions expressed could be followed through all 15 interviews. Strongly expressed across the cohort of interviewees were feelings and reactions ranging from disappointment to annoyance about both traditional and
contemporary models of CPD which they had experienced; suggestions for remediation and how to ‘do the thing right’ were offered.

Traditional mindsets in provision and control of ‘official’ CPD delivery from both outside and within schools was presented as a barrier by many. Outside agency sessions are viewed as lagging behind, and somewhat ‘diluted’:

Kyle … I think the problem is the overall mindset of PD stuck in that old style 1980s and 90s way it used to be run … if you have to go to PD, it's all-day sessions … We can't seem to get out of that mindset. I don't know why [267];

Daithí … “Let's send teachers on courses to change the way they think”. I went to a succession of them all delivered by good people with great intentions, but you always got the feeling that there was a high concept somewhere behind the training, something that they wanted us to ‘get’, being boiled down to the attention span of the person who least wanted to be there [30].

Patience with many providers was wearing thin:

Ewan … I was getting really fed up with all the top-down stuff that was done [02];

Mary … You could go on a course … and sometimes you're in the middle of it, you realise this isn't for me at all, and you're stuck there for three or four hours [159].

Unsatisfactory CPD sessions were criticised as passive for participants, as time badly spent (to an extent that stopped attendance in some cases), with subject matter that was deemed poorly chosen:

Sarah-Jayne … you'd be there for hours, you could see nobody wants to be sitting looking at someone talking…a lot of CPD you go to, you can't really use it in your classroom the next day, you know? [33, 240];

Mary … the training days you just yawn the whole way through … you go through the same thing, the same format… show a recording of the perfect classroom … they've all been briefed on what they should say, and the buzzwords, and it's just very frustrating [241].
The criticism which highlighted negative experiences was tempered with many suggestions for remediation and improvement for CPD:

Dawn … give it a TeachMeet focus where you will share so you know that you're not gonna be sat there for two hours being spoken at, small snippets is gonna work far better [324];

Mary … They are compulsory so why can't they incorporate a bit more … innovative stuff … if the powers that be had a TeachMeet-style thing where we showed, "this is what I did, this is how I did it, these are the results", it might bring some enthusiasm … the first thing I would do is throw the PowerPoint out the window [241, 309].

**Wishing To Establish a Good ‘Fit’ For Teachmeet.** Many instances of recognising spaces and times in which TeachMeet might be incorporated were offered:

Leanne … I felt it would be great to harness a connection between local Education Centres and the world of TeachMeet [46];

Kathleen … within a lot of the CPD there are 90-minute sessions where you sit down, listen to somebody and leave. And I was thinking to myself - TeachMeet could work here [157].

There were instances of TeachMeet being deployed to fit in at a time of need:

Conor … We were at an interesting point in relation to technology usage in Ireland … IT2000 was still fresh in a lot of people's minds … a lot of disappointment out there in schools. So, the idea stayed with me that the best place to look for interesting starting points for conversations is what teachers are doing, thinking, and coming up with [32];

Mags … We’d organised a Friday conference which was cancelled by the Dept!. What were we going to do? I suggested that we could look at the TeachMeet format I'd seen at the Scottish Learning Festival [46].

There was an emphasis on the need for a better use of time at conferences and CPD sessions, calling for less of what Mary calls the “sit through stuff” [298] and more of what Sarah-Jayne calls “de-formalising”, or Ewan’s “people telling a story” [189]:

Steve … To me a TeachMeet is like, what a conference should be, but invariably isn't; teachers speaking to each other for a relatively short amount of
time, and then being able to connect afterwards (at the really best conferences, they do have those sessions) [149];

Mary … for a full day … you might get about a half an hour’s worth of good stuff … if someone went up, give you an idea, and then they're gone, five minutes, that's what works; and then the soapbox (breakout) works because you can actually talk one-to-one; even the interval works because you might have seen a presentation and you're going to go back up and ask that person a particular question [298].

A lot of the critical discussion was about how the foundation and deployment of TeachMeet is about not waiting for permission from elsewhere, and the feelings of empowerment this venture engendered in those who took such steps and encouraged others to do the same:

Ewan … A group of educators who were trying to push boundaries, but who were often preaching to the converted, below the radar of those who were making decisions and deciding what professional learning we were going to have. And that was the context that in late 2005, at the Scottish Learning Festival with David Noble and John Johnston, we had a chat about how dissatisfying it all was and how we should really organize something [412];

Conor … it fitted with the reshaping and reforming of CESI that was going on … we were looking for more and better ways to pull people forward and get them on their feet talking about their experiences, sharing experiences … cooperating and collaborating [28];

Sarah-Jayne … TeachMeet seemed like the ideal solution … a way of getting the message through that was short, snappy … and sharp … encourage teachers to take ownership and investigate themselves [71];

Ciara … providing an alternative type of leadership that teachers needed, recognizing *their* interest and expertise in this area [204];

Stephen In industry the professional learning development has moved from “You need to teach these people” to “you need to figure out what these people, your colleagues, need to learn” [322];

Daithí … it was Ken Robinson saying stop waiting on somebody else to give you permission … it was a life-changing experience for me to realise “I'm in charge of finding my own answers, I'm not gonna ask permission, I'm just
gonna do it myself”. That was such a liberation, like scales falling from your eyes. And once I found people that I knew were on the same path as me, everything else followed, nothing was ever a problem. I think it's one of those things in life, a paradigm shift [43].

**Personal Experiential Theme B(ii)**

**‘It's More An ‘I'm Doing Something Right’ Kind of Thing’**

**Do the Right Thing - Feeling A Moral Imperative to Take Action**

Many interviewees spoke about their resolve to serve in a volunteer capacity, and of their recognition of the value of opening doors for others. Kyle states it thus: “It's more an ‘I'm doing something right kind of thing” [72]. This PET is built of elements that I identified as *acting in an altruistic manner*, reflecting a recognition of *individual moral responses*, of *taking risks* (and reaping benefits), and of *everything being done voluntarily*.

**One’s Own Moral Response in Bringing Teachmeet to Professional Peers.** There is an acknowledgement that teachers giving up time to take part in TeachMeet deserve to be served with the best experience possible:

Kathleen … I left the TeachMeet full of my buzz and energy and excitement, and I felt there was a nugget there of something I could do, but definitely I needed support or guidance to really get this going, because I wanted to do it right [24].

There was acknowledgement of the need to make best use of the time of by having simple and optimistic curation that capitalises on the generosity of those who turn up:

Ewan … teachers sharing what worked for them in the hope that it works for others’ [269];

Dawn … teachers are natural sharers, really … You go into teaching to touch the lives of countless other people and learn from each other. Well, that's why I went into teaching, you definitely don't go for the money [258].

**Taking Risks and Reaping Benefits.** Taking a calculated risk, after discussion with like-minded others, in response to a perceived need or for the greater good, was a feature
of introducing TeachMeet to territories where it was a new concept, as witnessed by Daithí:

... we probably were trying to avoid doing something that was safe; we were trying to be risky ... push boundaries ... take a leap in the dark. We had no idea if this was going to work or not … everything we did, we did for free. We had founding principles: we weren't gonna form a committee, there were no leaders, we weren't gonna have a bank account … everything was going to be done on goodwill [100].

The transformative benefits within a school that has taken the step of adopting TeachMeet as the in-house CPD model for technology training was described by Sarah-Jayne:

They've got so far, and now they want to get further, which is brilliant. Because long term, it means that your team are spending less time firefighting because people are ... discovering things themselves, and it spreads the load … and feel a bit more empowered and confident and relevant ... this way people can develop themselves over the year, and they can see how technology can help their teaching [90].

**Participation In Teachmeet Is a Voluntary Action.** From audience to organisers, voluntary participation has been a central pillar from the beginning: “... it is voluntary, always is, you have to want to be there...” [Ewan, 298].

Those who are there choose to be there:

Stephen … these people are driving from all over the country just to attend to TeachMeet. And that was the most important thing. They weren't going to the conference, they were coming to the TeachMeet. So it was valuable to them to drive for hours [69].

This is seen as a vital feature:

Conor … you want it to be teachers that have ... the right attitude and the right understandings, and not in it for the greater glory of the self … but in it for what other teachers can actually get out of it [27].

The volunteer disposition comes across strongly in many of the interviews, whether it was enacted as an offer from oneself,
Dawn … I was helping out in one of the London ones … and then the big one, TeachMeet BETT … I offered to help set that up [16]; as a result of another connected voluntary activity,

Drew … volunteering - it came from Moodle volunteers; the voluntary community that started off from getting Moodle to BETT became a TeachMeet collective [103];

or as something one was compelled to do in response to a request by others,

Stephen … when I went in, I was accosted by the MC who said “Are you Stephen? Will you do a soapbox?” and I just said yes [22];

Drew … What happened was I was asked to compère them; and I did [49].

**Personal Experiential Theme B(iii)**

‘A Lot of People Went Away, Organised Their Own Elsewhere Afterwards’

*Making A Path By Walking; Forming and Following Desire Lines*

In my analysis I refer to *desire lines* - others may call them elephant paths - those direct paths worn by humans or animals between two points which bypass the ‘official’ route that has been constructed. Listening to the descriptions given of having experienced TeachMeet for the first time conjured for me the memes of both ‘see it, be it’ and ‘I Want One of Those’. There was a fervent *desire not only to have this experience again soon, to replicate it in other places, and to introduce it to others*. In practical terms, people recounted how they took the opportunity to do so again, or to carve out their own opportunity - opportunities to showcase new voices in new places, to facilitate sharing among colleagues.

‘I Want One of Those’. Coming across strongly was a sense of ‘see it, want it’ being a gut reaction by many to their ‘teachmeet zero’ experience; which made many decide they wanted to repeat the experience and replicate it for others:

Kyle … At BETT, when I got to experience a real TeachMeet and the energy in the room, just being able to see everybody and what that true
experience was … it was really a great experience and I wished somehow that I could replicate that [58];

Kathleen … that night … sitting there watching this CESImeet, getting more and more excited by the energy and positivity in the room … I vividly remember saying … why is there not something like this for primary schools?

And that was the spark [17]

John … when I saw it for the first time I thought this is pretty cool - something that could be done [32].

**Carpe Diem - If Opportunity Knocks, Seize the Day.** Many who experienced the “vividly” “exciting” “amazing” “blast” of “positive” “energy,” as described in the previous paragraph, spoke of taking the next possible opportunity to replicate it, modelling it on what they had experienced:

Daithí … because I'd seen it happening elsewhere, I had been to BETT in London … I felt that I wanted to do this, and I knew I could do this [74];

Mags … Many TeachMeets spawned from that night. It affected many people the way it had affected me … a lot of people went away and organized their own elsewhere afterwards [120];

Leanne … it's time to give this a go, … give it your best...I have to say, I took some elements from other TeachMeets [195].

This drive to find or make an opportunity to provide more TeachMeets, as expressed right across the interviews, was not just to repeat the experience for oneself, but out of a sense of responsibility that having found something ‘good’ they were morally bound to find a way to get it to others. One reason stated was providion a forum for sharing:

Ciara … [small schools] may not be exposed to new practice or new ideas every day of the week; this was giving an opportunity to cast an eye on what was happening, and to celebrate the work of others [110].

Another. Was to increase the confidence of teacher colleagues by offering, as Conor describes, a mixture of “encouragement … comfort … support … validation” [85, 115].

As well as increasing confidence, there was desire to increase agency and capacity:
Daithí … start with the end in mind, what is it we want people to achieve? An opportunity that aims to give teachers confidence in the benefits of sharing … we want to instil the agency and the capacity to share, be it in their own little ecosystems and bubbles that they live in, or maybe coming on to the next TeachMeet to stand up and share as a presenter; and to do that you’ve got to give them confidence … to show them that, I'm an ordinary teacher, I was like you last Friday sitting there, this Friday, I’m presenting, and it’s no risk and no threat and there's nobody sitting there giving you scores [274, 278].

This was sought by increasing the reach to within range of a wider cohort:

Stephen … The reason I wanted to organize one, was that sometimes you go to TeachMeets … you begin seeing the same people, the variety isn't there. And you also begin seeing that it's - a club is not the right word - but when you think about Fight Club, for example, one of the rules is “if it's your first time there, you have to fight”. And I think, to me, (jokingly), I would say, if it's your first time in the TeachMeet, you should present! [66];

Steve … The first one was a very big leap of faith …. we spent time working on how to film it and audio record it to make it available … rural and remote teachers and students (in Australia) are very disadvantaged comparatively to metropolitan teachers and students. And so it was always a need to somehow communicate what we've done to other people. Whether they're interested or not is up to them, but making it available and accessible was important [41]

There was constant striving to introduce new voices, new ideas, new places:

Ciara … We were always conscious that when we would hold an event, we would be balancing the teacher who might stand up with only a small idea … as equally as worthy as the person who's standing up talking about their PhD … that's the joy of this … whatever you're giving has value and merit to us [92];

Steve … It's ultimately my quest to find new ideas and hear new voices. That's the driver [228];

Drew … There's a lot of people there (at conference) with a lot of stories to tell and I said to the organizers couldn't we organize a TeachMeet … we encouraged people … we have “weighted” speakers so the people who have never spoken before have got a 3-in-1 times higher chance of being able to speak … we've encouraged newbies [61, 160];
Stephen … main goal with core organizers was, could we try to achieve two things? One, have it outside of the capital city … and the second thing was that we will encourage new voices at this event [66].

**Personal Experiential Theme B(iv)**

‘To Make People Think About Stuff That They Don’t Think About’

**Innovators, Pioneers, And Early Adopters Don’t Wait for Permission**

One thread that ran through some of the interviews spoke particularly of purpose as it drove the early days of TeachMeet. One particular interview sheds specific light on the vision and purpose that led to the moment that TeachMeet came into being; others speak of their experience, identifying as and taking the actions of pioneers, innovators, early adopters of TeachMeet.

**On The Origin of TeachMeet.** One of those who named and nurtured TeachMeet has a unique perspective on the purpose of bringing it into being in 2006:

Ewan … context wise, you've got a totally different world from the world we live in today where people are encouraged to feel a sense of self-worth, that they have something to offer. That didn't exist 15 years ago, we're very quick to forget it. 15 years ago, it was seen as peculiar to share your ideas on a blog, to promote that thought on Twitter to people you don't know … this kind of tall poppy syndrome … “who am I to share a piece of anything, who's going to be interested in it? And so when you create an event designed to get teachers sharing with each other, it had to feel unhaughty, unorganised, because it was a Trojan horse for getting people to share what they were doing even when they themselves maybe didn't feel it was good enough ...after all, it's only around a pub table ... with friends ... [45-104].

**Innovators, pioneers, early adopters.** A shared vision came through many of the stories, of individuals trying to advance their practice, alongside some like-minded colleagues. This is situated in the years immediately pre-YouTube and pre-social media, the first years of TeachMeet pioneers and early adopters:
Ewan … people helping each other out with bits of technology … applied for every grant going … a lot of it was just self-taught - go online, find people who can tell you. But there was no YouTube, no easy way to find thing out; we had had email lists, which were largely the way to learn how to teach differently; social media … was seen as a short-term fad … a trend. I remember presenting Twitter to heads of technology in local authorities, and being looked at like I had two heads … people who are supposed to be at the height of their game, and I’ve never seen a group of experts so bored by the idea that you could contact other people and share ideas. And it wasn't the technology that was boring them. It was the idea of “why would anyone want to share their practice?” [148, 99];

Ciara … signature people of TeachMeet … these pioneers were pushing things on [105]. 

It was also in those who sought the company and communicate with other innovators:

Steve … the people there were the ones that are reading teaching books in their holidays, reading research, writing articles, blogs, podcasts, making videos, really investing their personal and professional time in teaching. So having a TeachMeet just felt like ‘there's more of me out there’. And to get us all in one room and to share a meal afterwards was a really, really good thing [59].

Early adopters sought each other out:

John … early adopters kind of cluster together and generally they're more innovative than average in that they're more willing to take risks [300, 159]

Conor … a number of people who travelled from the four corners of Ireland to be at that particular event, because they wanted to speak with student teachers. Now I found that intriguing because the whole emphasis was interactive, ideas being chucked out, conversations going on, and there was as much happening on the tables in the background when people were speaking as there was when people stood up to do their talk [71].

There were people who were not going to wait for anyone’s permission to proceed with their plans and purpose:
Taking On a Life of Its Own - The Excitement of Diffusion. This focus on the elements driving the early days evolution of TeachMeet ends with Daithi’s story of how forging ahead with a purpose in mind can be acknowledged in time, causing excitement and delight:

Daithi … One of the tropes that exist in education systems is that "the Minister and policymakers are incredibly detached from practitioners" … I think we undersell the policymakers, I think there *is* a willingness to listen, where they can see benefit, to enquire and to engage and to develop. One of the curious things that happened during the early days of TeachMeet was that policymakers from the education and training Inspectorate, were coming along to TeachMeets … the Department of Education published their framework for teacher professional learning for the next 10 years in the Northern Ireland. One of the things was that it had to be ground up and not top down; … TeachMeets are referenced in this policy document … I'm very proud of the fact that our little playin’ about on a Friday night was now starting to have an impact on policy direction … And that to me is really reassuring and really exciting. It kind of permeated the thinking that has happened at policy level … something that happened based on a conversation in a coffee shop back in October 2010. [128, 358, 390-397].

C. Group Experiential Theme C: TeachMeet is Practical

‘I Came Out Buzzing - It Changed How I Thought About Teaching’

On Teachmeet as A Forum for Exchange of Practice

The universal regard placed on the primacy of the practical elements of TeachMeet is prominent in the experiences recounted by all interview participants. Included were descriptions of the catalytic and transformational effect of encounters in the marketplace-like events attended and organised; the sharing of ideas, resources, ways of teaching; the
appreciation of a chance to glimpse into the black box of another classroom. This generated three PETs which I named the spreagadh (spark; phonetically: ‘spragu’), the bazaar or marketplace, and the black box.

**Personal Experiential Theme C(i)**

‘See It, Like It, Bring It Back To The Classroom’

*The Spreagadh (Spark) That Ignites Transformation*

The Irish word spreagadh translates as ‘urging, incitement; incentive, encouragement; excitation, stimulus (Teanglann.ie nd.). This PET had as wide a reach across the interviews as the theme of remediating or ‘fixing’ CPD had in the previous Group Experiential Theme focussed on purpose.

In speaking of the effects of introducing TeachMeets to the school teaching staff, Sarah-Jayne used this term several times, and I adopted the term spreagadh to cover interviewees descriptions of the practical and concrete *immediate and long-term effects* they had experienced - from the immediacy of what Kathleen calls “the aha moment” to the lasting “changed how I teach” declared in several cases speaking both of themselves and their colleagues.

**The spark igniting an immediate effect.** Here was a vein rich with tales of appreciation for these practical experiences:

Kathleen … when the audience has an *aha moment* … you see the whole room leaning forward on their seats. And there was this ... electricity in the room … like, “oh my goodness, I want to know more about this, this is amazing … oh, my goodness, *I* want to grab this” [58].

In many cases, brevity cases is highlighted as a key element:

Kyle … Here's how I explain it: speed dating for education. You sit down, you get what you want for a few minutes, and then you're on to the next one ... instead of giving you an hour of something you may not use, it gives you the hook of a presentation, then you're off to the next ... getting an idea, or introduced to a new topic [183];
Steve … to me at TeachMeet it's not “Here's everything I know about this topic”. It's “here is a topic I'm very passionate about and afterwards you should come and talk to me about it” [157].

It is very much about how these brief encounters act as a spark to ignite or inspire a passion:

Sarah-Jayne … They don't want to be sitting down for three hours learning something, they want the basic introduction, a *spreagadh* … it inspires them, makes them feel more comfortable… gives them an avenue in; they've seen it, they like it, they’ll bring it into their classroom [236];

Mary TeachMeet doesn't teach you how to do that new app or whatever, but you write down the name of it and you can go off and research it, try it out yourself [163];

John … my rule of thumb is a good TeachMeet has me in bed that night tossing, turning, thinking about the stuff I'd seen [416].

At the most basic level of practicality, the immediacy of what I called in my own story the “something for Monday” experience was strongly represented:

Ewan … talk about the amazing stuff …of that week, “I'm going to try that next week” [83];

Mags … I realized I was meeting the same teacher for the fourth time, maybe fifth time. They had their TeachMeet copy book, and they would say "I'm gonna to do this with my students on Monday". And I realized that this was professional development for this teacher who would get into the car on a Friday evening after school, and come to wherever it was, and learn and laugh and enjoy; the realization that this copybook was coming each time and there'd be something new on a Monday. I just love that idea that it was working for teachers that way [156];

Kyle … And I always tell everybody that comes if you come out of there with two or three things that you can use for the school year, then we've done what we need to [188];

Daithí … looking for one little bit of spark of inspiration that can keep you going for the rest of the term [ 301].
It was noted that although TeachMeet encounters were brief in terms of time and content, their importance could bely this:

Dawn … it was about little wins that you could have in the classroom … different ways of using resources; if it's the first time you've heard it, and you've used it, it *is* brilliant’ [27];

Ciara … this idea of packaging the little things - but they aren't little at all [87].

There was a stress on the fact it is not just ‘show and tell’ that matters at a TeachMeet, it is a down-to-earth demonstration of something by one teacher for colleagues, followed by a discussion of possibilities and merits:

Ewan … this is beyond tips and tricks … “this is something that's transformed my classroom ... take a look” ... you had demos and then discussion about what it could do … a teacher, passionate, would demonstrate that tech hook, but very quickly go into the difference it made to his students and circumstances [51-57].

**Transformation - a lasting effect.** The long-term effects outlined ranged from change in individual practice and thinking:

Mary … My first TeachMeets? I came out of there buzzing with 100 different ideas. I just thought they were brilliant; they changed how I thought about teaching… the amount of ideas and resources that I was able to bring into my own teaching, which was the whole point of the exercise in the first place. And every year, I still see something that I incorporate back into my own teaching [16, 34];

Dawn … at the first TeachMeet and listening to Ewan talk about this thing called Twitter sent me off on a journey. Professionally, it probably changed me [34];

Sarah-Jayne … I learned more in those five-minute slots at a TeachMeet you know; I might have disregarded half of it, but I got three five-minute things that really changed my practice [28]

to change in demeanour of colleagues incorporating TeachMeet into their professional development. This might be something they seek out and attend:
Kathleen … there was a cohort of people who came to every TeachMeet [264];
Dawn … I also brought a lot of my staff along, and they still come to the
TeachMeets at BETT, not just teachers, but the TAs [34].

Or it might be, in one case spotlighted here, that colleagues having initially adopted a TeachMeet approach to technology training, have increasingly incorporated it into their collective in-school CPD

Sarah-Jayne … and so I organized TeachMeet for school … I got seven or eight teachers who I knew were doing great things in their class to volunteer … and we did exactly like the CESI TeachMeets I’d seen… the feedback from that was unbelievable … the teachers were really invigorated and excited. From them on all of our tech CPD has been modelled on some form of a TeachMeet … our CPD has changed because of that … TeachMeet sparked something in them. They've got so far, and now they want to get further, which is brilliant … since doing all the various forms of TeachMeet that we have had, they have gone on to do their own to seek out their own courses and professional development from this … so I think the experience of having TeachMeet has led to our staff being open to that kind of learning … from all the TeachMeet experiences… it totally transformed my idea of what CPD can be and should be [28-322].

The appreciation that although the TeachMeet experience, as experienced in the lives of the interviewees, has a deep personal and emotional appeal, it also incorporates a very practical pedagogical focus summed up thus by Conor …

… you can learn as much, more perhaps, sitting back and listening to a TeachMeet than you would in engaging in sometimes six or seven formal conferences … it's about pedagogy. It's about learning, it's about teaching, it's about kids [127].
**Personal Experiential Theme C(ii)**

‘No Keynote, Everybody Is Equal, Everybody's Voice Is Recognized’

*The Bazaar, The Mix, What's There and What’s Not There*

Interviewees spoke with enthusiasm about the unique feel of a TeachMeet event as being the result of certain elements - the atmosphere, the mix, and the variety of what is there, and (conversely) the naming of what is not there.

**The Atmosphere.** The atmosphere, already credited to the actions of MC, was described in terms of the welcome it proffered, the dynamic and supportive space it offered, and was listed as something important for organisers to work towards:

Leanne … a warm welcome because it helps to create an atmosphere where people feel they are safe to contribute amongst colleagues who were there to learn and who were there to support them [133];

Mary … I remember the first one, I came out buzzing, and even I remember we were arranged differently … it was just fantastic [53];

Kathleen … key to any good TeachMeet is the energy of the room … for people who are not used to standing up and talking about what they're passionate about, you want to create a safe zone [133-229];

Sarah-Jayne … it's a place where you will be made feel comfortable, and there's no such thing as stupid questions [16].

Although the importance of the role of the MC has been highlighted already, it is noted as being vital to creating and nurturing this atmosphere:

Conor … it's not casual, but you need it to be open, warm, welcoming. And part of that is to have a good, call it MC, Fear an Tí, Bean an Tí, someone who goes down through the tables, shakes the hands, asks who and how are you, thanks you for coming along, whatever, that little bit of a human touch. And it sounds artificial, but it's not. It's profoundly important. It's welcoming people into the space and making them feel that they're not only there, but that they're welcome [110].
The Mix. Listening to the conversations, many aspects of a TeachMeet event were described in terms of their ‘mix’ [Conor 84, Mary 35, Kyle 200] in the room: the career experience of those participating; the range of schools represented in the room; the variety of content and method in the presentations; the positions of authority or influence of those attending - were offered as the signature elements of a TeachMeet event.

The variety, labelled ‘mishmash’ by Sarah-Jayne [35] and an ‘unexpected spectacle’ by Drew [174] is key:

Stephen … the thing that impacted on me was the variety. And the fact that there were many new things; not everything was amazingly impressive, but just they were different’ [53];
Sarah-Jayne … You hear from people from different backgrounds, different schools, different settings, even different industries sometimes [141].

The variety, including a mix in length and breadth of experience of experience, is critical:

Conor … the most important thing … you need the mix of the new, the less experienced but also the old heads … a good mix of people with a range of experiences [84, 96];
Mary … and I myself was torn because as a secondary school teacher, I'm just interested in secondary school stuff but some of my ideas came from primary teachers. So I could see both sides, both sides of the argument … what I liked about it was there was a mixture of people presenting wasn't all primary or secondary or third level [35].

This opportunity to meet the others who are of the same mindset at a TeachMeet is perceived as fundamental and essential:

Kyle … At the ISTE TeachMeet I always love to hear and see what everybody else is doing elsewhere just to see what their experiences are … it's a very interesting mix from all over the place, from high level administrators to pre-service teachers who are not even in classrooms yet [200];
Stephen … there are other people interested in the learning process as much as I am, even though they are different levels and different backgrounds and different interests, they are interested in how people learn. And that's the essence to me’ [385].
It is also of good value especially when reminded that all this comes at no cost

Drew … you've not paid to be there, you're not sure what you're going to see. You've got something for everyone usually [174].

**What’s Not There!** Stating clearly what is NOT to be seen in a TeachMeet setting is declared by some to be important; the list, though short, was made quite clear, some adding reasons. It came down to three things - “no keynotes” (Dawn, 182), “no vested interest” (Drew, 262), no set agenda or sequence:

Ewan … You need a randomness about who's going to present; no keynotes, no set agenda ... you need elements that put people at ease - round tables, eye contact, give people time out to think, and in a social kind of setting [184].

[Reader: this matter returns as an ideation in the final Group Experiential Theme].

**Personal Experiential Theme C(iii)**

‘To Be Able to Say to Others, Look, I'm Trying This, What Do You Reckon?’

**A Glimpse into The Black Box of Another’s Classroom**

Repeatedly described are the concrete active elements that give TeachMeet life for participants: the exchange of ideas, the modelling for each other of ways of teaching, and what I named the ‘black box’ effect - the glimpse into another teacher’s classroom.

**Exchange Of Ideas.** This was stressed as a two-way thing, without prejudice or commitment, “non-judgemental” (Dawn 167) like the barter at a market, each contributing and benefitting, and was repeatedly described as a very dynamic characteristic element:

Ciara … and it's not just about who's in front of you ... I'm sitting beside you, so I can turn to you and ... it's the informal ... [213, 290];

Mags … the atmosphere that I had experienced at the first TeachMeet … this intense listening to each other [112];

Conor … you chuck out there two or three of the kind of the big conundrums or problems or issues or ideas that you're struggling with or, having success with, but far enough down the road to be able to say to others, hey, look, I'm trying this, what do you reckon? And it's those kinds of conversation starter ideas that I think are really the guts of a good TeachMeet [47].
Sharing By Modelling. Seeing someone else describe or demonstrate what they do, and learning from that, is appreciated as a generous gift to others at the TeachMeet, and is valued on several levels, from the effect it has had on seasoned teachers to the potential it has for future teachers:

Leanne … a platform and a voice to share … willing to share knowledge, expertise, ideas, resources, experiences that they've had in their classrooms that may help colleagues [68, 103];

Steve … Teachers talking, teachers sharing, meal afterwards, time limit, and that's about all. It's pretty bare bones; that's it. You need to have teachers that care enough about teaching to give up time to talk about it [120];

Mary … [when asked whether it was the way it was presented, or the content] I think probably both … because I have taken some of the way he presented into my own teaching. So it has to be both [63];

John … it's great for getting young teachers into thinking differently [127].

Seeing Inside the Black Box. The confessional nature ascribed across the interviews to the nanopresentations and conversations typical of TeachMeet, suggests that getting serial random glimpses into other teachers’ classrooms is one of the most universal deeply satisfying elements of being there; and in some cases the chance for a teacher to open their black box for viewing was reciprocally appreciated:

Conor … giving a platform to teachers to share work in progress, not finished polished stuff, ideas about what's actually going on in their classroom, what they've come up with in terms of interesting ways of involving kids in and through technologies [38];

Stephen … sharing hard-won knowledge of what actually works in the classroom with peers in a non-official setting, no academic paper to back it up. It's just them sharing their lived experience of what works with their peers and colleagues. And that's the essence of TeachMeet for me’ [365];

Ciara … so with TeachMeet for primary … the magical effect that a picture of their classroom was being then exposed to other people because of TeachMeet [102, 114].
D. Group Experiential Theme: TeachMeet is Political

‘Nobody Owns Teachmeet, It’s The Community’

On the Future for Teachmeet - Wishful Thinking of The Political Sort

This GET encompasses some strongly expressed opinions about what TeachMeet is (and is not) and considered ideation about how things ought to, might, and ought not to play out in the future; they generated three very definite common themes - the ‘Yes please’, these things belong in TeachMeet; the ‘No thanks’, these things have no place in TeachMeet; and the ‘Perhaps’, these are things that may evolve in the future of TeachMeet. The word political is used in this interpretation for the most primitive equivalence the word offers to convey the concerns of community, of citizenry.

Personal Experiential Theme D(i)

‘A Face to Face, Open Process’

Yes Please - Keep It Simple and Keep It Non-Hierarchical

This PET embraces the characteristics the interviewees consider fundamental to the nature and practice of TeachMeet, all of which they agree must be maintained in a “keep it simple” way - the non-hierarchical nature of TeachMeet, the unconference values of being open, inviting, inclusive.

Maintaining The Non-Hierarchical Structure. That TeachMeet would remain as democratic and ground-level an entity as it has been from the start, is expressed both in reminders of the non-complicated steps that were taken to get it off the ground in the first place, and the primacy of keeping the organisational structures as flat as possible:

Drew … because it is not based on me, it is based on everybody [349];
Steve … no one's the leader … This is a group of people sharing ideas. I think that's a really interesting view on democracy, leadership, community, all sorts of things… TeachMeet equals democratic teacher voice, distributed leadership, equality of voices [66, 164];
Dawn … it shouldn't be about who is hosting or who is presenting. It's about a community of teachers that are sharing from each other … nobody owns TeachMeet, it's the community [23, 295].

Unconference values - open, inviting, inclusive. This element was evident to me in the many calls to maintain the unconference fringe nature that typifies the TeachMeets organised and experienced by the interviewees themselves - open invitation, inclusion of new voices:

Steve … the whole point of it is that it's an open space technology in the non-technological sense … a face to face, open process [223, 238]
Dawn … it should be that everybody has an equal chance to talk. And if people haven't spoken before, then it should be weighted to give them the chance … as soon as you have a keynote, you're saying that that person is better that they're more up the rank than anyone else [79, 227];
Conor … it should be an open call … have a good look at what comes in, accommodate as many as you possibly can. Because anyone that puts themselves forward to speak, in my book, deserves a hearing at the minimum [98];
Drew … a lot of people at conferences either had their presentations not approved or didn't put themselves forward because they didn't think they had anything to say … but I thought “Wait a minute, what would be really cool would be to have a TeachMeet where anyone who's at the conference could actually get their five or ten minutes?” That's how that came about as the alternate like a mini-conference [334].

Keep it simple. Above all, interviewees’ advice and preference from experience and personal preference was for keeping TeachMeet smaller, more simple:

Drew … some TeachMeets were in the bigger arena, people weren't attentive, it could have been alcohol, it could been its vast space that meant there was a gulf between the speaker (and people) [153];
Kyle … if you get 10 to 15 people together that want to be there, then it's going to be more beneficial for everybody than having 200 people there that are just there for a PD cert [226];
John … the smaller they are, I think, the better they are [392].
**Personal Experiential Theme D(ii)**

*‘If It's Not for Teachers by Teachers, It’s Not Teachmeet, It's Something Else’*  

**Avoid Commercialisation and Appropriation**

In this PET three matters are of concern are evident, the first two elements being contrasting sides of the same wish - a TeachMeet *free of both commercial interests and appropriation*, and a third being a depth of feeling for *protecting the integrity of TeachMeet.*

**Beware Of Commercial Interests.** There is a collective resistance to any idea of what Steve calls “counter to concept” [122] commercialisation, to monetisation or to product placement in TeachMeet of sponsorship; the stated exception being the altruistic “values based” corporate support described by Stephen [427] which may be an intrinsic element in making a TeachMeet possible:

Dawn … sponsors shouldn't be allowed to pitch. They can chat to the other teachers but there shouldn't be any pitching [82];

Kyle … absolutely never let a sponsor or some sort of large corporation or whatever be a presenter, because I do not want anyone to walk into a sales pitch ... a lot of consultants they're out of touch with things and maybe they're doing research but they're not actually in the classroom ... [92];

Stephen … TeachMeet should be about teaching, and you should see some form of education there. I think that's in danger, because commercial companies who see it as an opportunity to sell will attempt to sell. I work in a commercial company now, and I make a point of not selling or presenting products, but I've been at a lot of TeachMeets where people are presenting products. I don't think that is right [130].

The difficulty of negotiating this road is acknowledged in quite colourful terms:

Daithí … we were trying to keep it uncontaminated by sponsorship … but once sponsors, educational companies, people who have stuff to flog to teachers, found that they were going to have a willing audience on a Friday afternoon in a room where they could flog their stuff; we suddenly become under mammoth pressure [162];
Steve  the hard part is controlling, keeping capitalism out of it more than anything. That's the main thing that you have to try and do. You know, because it's easy to have 200 consultants ready to present at the drop of a hat and they'll all just be selling their wares or their ideas or whatever it is. But that's counter to the concept of TeachMeets [122];

Kyle  ... we had sponsors do tables outside, they never were in a session, they were never allowed to present it. And I still to this day deny any consultant or anybody trying to sneak in [47].

The positive effects of successfully negotiated in order to enhance their TeachMeet, whether by engaging in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) partnerships or direct sponsorships, is outlined by those with experience of it working for mutual benefit:

Drew  … the best sponsors are ones who backed off and just their names associated with the event is good enough … they were glad to be associated with it and they knew that you knew that they were getting something out of it [55, 267];

Mary  … it's never a sales pitch because from the beginning that the essence of TeachMeet, we said you can have a presentation but there won't be a sales pitch … our host is our sponsor and they row in fantastically - the venue, tea and nibbles, the recordings, infrastructure [110, 118];

Stephen  … companies that want to sponsor should understand what they are sponsoring is and the essence of why it's valuable. And you may get to pitch but you should pitch the values of your company, rather than the features of your products [427].

**Resistance To Appropriation.** This was a vital element in discussion, starting with statements feeling that there are values to be safeguarded:

Steve  … The good thing about TeachMeet is there's no hidden agenda [63];

Daithí  … we didn't own this ... we were loaned this concept by others … you've got to keep resisting commercialisation to be true to the founding principles of what TeachMeet is [160, 420].

This segued to some annoyance being voiced at what is seen as appropriation of the name and concept of TeachMeet:
Dawn … I think TeachMeet has been changed by others, with companies saying "we're gonna have a TeachMeet and this keynote is speaking" … key characters saying that they're hosting TeachMeet, not necessarily been true to the values [174];

John … the more mainstream the more it becomes something that people will replicate … we've seen more than one instance of that including where corporate companies have tried to take it over as something that they're trying to do themselves [385];

Drew … Why do they need to do that, why call it TeachMeet? Whatever when it is not a TeachMeet; the person who came up with the idea - why not call it something inventive? … be creative, and be more inventive than calling it something someone else came up with. And it's not even derivative. It's like using the brand to then not have to do the hard work of branding yourself. It should stand on its own two feet [301].

There was a blunt wariness of ‘officialdom’ getting involved:

Dawn … they can just stay far away as possible. I think the more it gets an official badge on it, that's a great thing for turning most people away [277].

“That’s no’ Teachmeet”. These three words were an emphatic declaration by Drew [253], but the sentiment was the same in many other statements, starting with a rationale that the TeachMeet format by its nature is open to being taken and repurposed by anyone:

Ewan … folk have set up other versions, have different names for the same thing. I've never understood that but maybe talking it through here, you realize that they're doing it because the name TeachMeet feels something different to different people [300];

Drew … one of the problems that comes with anything that's like open-source or Creative Commons, or with no ownership, is that someone will try to come along and take it [300].

It is the keeping of the name while changing the format, and moving away from first principles, that causes both a general unease:

Daithí … Once it becomes too slick, too organized, you're diluting it straight away, and therefore I don't know if it deserves the title of TeachMeet, it's just another conference. The line was always "for teachers, by teachers". Once you
move away from those four words, it's not for teachers and it's not by teachers, then what is it? It’s not a TeachMeet, it's something else [184];

and a particular unease about occasions when intentions are not aligned with values:

Conor … when TeachMeet is organized by people who've not done much TeachMeeting ... they tend to be more stage shows than curated conversations [320-321];

Drew … people have started seeing things like the TeachMeets where it's free to go but you sign up for transcripts for five pounds? No, sorry, that's no’ TeachMeet - having guaranteed speakers, keynote speakers is as bad as having the companies in the past trying to muscle and organise their version of TeachMeet. All of those diminish the value [253].

*Personal Experiential Theme D(iii)*

‘*We Need to Make Sure That It Remains as Democratic as It Needs to Be’*

*Perhaps, Perhaps, Perhaps - Evolving A Place In CPD, And Online*

As might be expected, almost every interview invited observations about how TeachMeet is and might continue evolving. The thoughts shared were concerned with the present and future direction of TeachMeet, the possible deployment of TeachMeet within CPD, and reactions to the recent move to online TeachMeets due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Thoughts On the Present and Future Direction of Teachmeet.** Everyone was agreed that evolution was inevitable, indeed that it was well under way, and that this was to be welcomed as a good thing as long as the “Yes to these” criteria outlined above were ticked.

There were observations on how TeachMeet has evolved, is still evolving or being evolved by participants:

Conor … There's now more than one type of TeachMeet … what started as a kind of a very loosely connected international organization has gradually split into several camps or strands, not in any hostile way, just different ways of doing, thinking, and being [233];
Steve … So it's very much up to the wisdom of the crowd to decide what is next [180].

There were suggestions that there is a need to let more people know about it:

Mary … when I saw TeachMeet, I couldn't believe people didn't know about these things. Sometimes you just need ideas. It's not about an official training thing. It's just about getting things in a different way [154].

There were practical ideas of how and where this could be of benefit:

Ciara … Teachers, lecturers, professors and academics work in isolation … they present content they have produced, super content that they have worked on their own, they go into class, they deliver it; and we don't have a space of sharing and collaborating … if we had a more collaborative space, it would benefit all [317];

Kyle … One of the things that I've been trying to do, and I'm kind of passionate about, is I wanted to run a TeachMeet for pre-service teachers, for students who are just about to graduate. I wanted to give them the experience of teachers to find out what it's going to be like, what's going on in the current classrooms that they should know about [79].

Ideation About Possible Deployment of Teachmeet Within CPD. It was evident that many had considered whether and how TeachMeet might be deployed within CPD. Discussion ranged from whether or not TeachMeet qualified to be called CPD, to its inclusion within professional training across the continuum from national level through initial teacher training courses to ground level within schools, and individual learning. The caveat repeatedly declared in the previous PET appeared again - a caution that, wherever it was to be used, it be deployed ‘as TeachMeet’.

Support, borne of experience, was declared for inclusion of TeachMeet as valid CPD:

Ciara … the magic of CPD is that it can be anything … the watercooler moment that allows people to dip in and dip out of things as presented to them by their colleagues; that sandpit space, throwing ideas out there … teachers generally want that [45];
Kathleen … TeachMeet is a funny type of CPD. It's like throwing the candy shop at you, but you have to decide which candy you're going to have; it's up to you and your professionalism to follow up on that afterwards … it's not that deep a level of CPD but to me CPD is a spectrum … I would feel TeachMeet definitely fits, it ignites and keeps that hunger for learning going [78, 128];

There was advice for those who might consider deployment, from those with central responsibility for provision - Department of Education training bodies, regional Education Centres:

Kathleen … providers who are delivering should consider it as a style, whether it's an Education Center or a national organization; CPD should never be a one size fits all - you have to adapt CPD for the type of learner, for the content its addressing, for the needs of a school [242];

Leanne … an hour set aside perhaps as part of Croke Park hours … dedicated to teachers sharing their practices, be they positive or ones that have been challenging and how they will overcome them with their own colleagues; … the role of the Education Center, maybe that is a space that could be tapped into in the Irish context [107, 249].

There was advice for those working at ground level in schools:

Mary … Why not bring in this idea of TeachMeet and have five or six teachers from that school presenting to the school on what they do? [277]

Leanne … it would be nice to see more TeachMeet integrated into the school day or at the end of the school day, to allow for teachers to come together … share these nuggets with their own colleagues [224, 184].

There was advice for those working individual level, echoing the personal matters in focus at the start of these findings, the teachers who access TeachMeet as part of their PLN or as part of their activities in a Teacher Professional network:

Sarah-Jayne … For teachers who are teaching a long time, and who still have a long time left to teach, TeachMeet shows them that it (‘tech’) is not actually this big, bad, horrific thing that only the young PME student coming in can do. It's like ‘I can actually do that, I've introduced this into my class,
nobody laughed at me and it actually worked. Oh my, have you any more of that? [232];

Ciara … contrary to what you will often read in media reports, teachers are always trying to better themselves, "ancora imparo", I'm always learning [ 343]

Mary … [speaking of a named TPN3] we meet a few times in the school year, and we meet over a morning, Saturday morning from 10 til 1, do presentations within one or two hours. Then we do TeachMeet-style for an hour [177].

But the universal caveat alongside any idea of adapting it to take place within the realm of CPD was that a stress would be laid on keeping ‘TeachMeet as we know it’: 

Ciara … we tried to be as flexible as we could whilst also being true to what TeachMeet is, but we tried to be flexible to make it work for the people around us; there's so much merit to the informality … I'm worried as they move into a more formal planning space [e.g. conferences] that it might exclude people going forward; … we just need to make sure that it remains as democratic as it needs to be in order to be as influential as it was … the idea of how to run it, how to equip yourself to host one, that's what we need to get out there to other people … who have never been there [119-265].

Reaction to the Unexpected Appearance of Online TeachMeets. The final matter of concern which became evident was the recent move of TeachMeet events to online platforms due of the prohibition of face-to-face gatherings that followed the March 2020 declaration of a global Covid-19 pandemic in (W.H.O. 2020). The first wave of Covid-19 pandemic was global news during the interviews, and some interviewees, and I myself, had experience of TeachMeets online. It arose in one third of the conversations as an

3 Teacher Professional Network - in Ireland, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) supplementary funding scheme supporting the work of Teachers’ Groups and Associations which afford Continuing Professional Development and professional peer support to Post Primary teachers.

http://www.tpnetworks.ie/
experience which had given a new perspective. Features of note - missing the geniality of social contact, possibility of a wider reach, the affordances of the online platforms used - were described in terms of how they might enhance or detract from the participant’s experience. In some cases the same factor could be both a plus and a minus:

John … the vibe of a good TeachMeet is drinking and having conversations with people afterwards; you can't really do that as effectively online. But then online gives you the ability to pull in people from all over the world! [359];
Kyle … maybe if we can do a mix, maybe you know, you still offer that face to face, but for those who can't make it, you record everything and you live stream as much as you can [224].

Success was seen as depending on how the online platform is used, with some features, e.g., chat spaces, being surprisingly more realistic than expected:

Mags … I actually got way more access to the chats than I would have If I'd been sitting in the room. So that's an unexpected emerging thing ... And that's really weird. If you told me or asked me that in 2010 I'd have said nah, couldn't happen. There's an inclusiveness and democracy in some of the online world of TeachMeet that is tangible. I had an hour and a half of listening to teachers on another continent teach each other, but also talk in the back channel [442].

In one case, outlined by Sarah-Jayne, the sudden switch to remote teaching in schools in March 2020 was made easier by having already embraced TeachMeet ‘teach each other’ culture:

… We were very lucky that we had had a TeachMeet in school two weeks beforehand, on using the webcam in Teams and recordings, and so on the day we had to break up (DES, 2020), all the teachers are ready for me to beam into the classroom to show students what it might look like [300].

There was acknowledgement of current uncertainties necessitating adaptation; and recognition that this may not be able to sufficiently replicate what makes TeachMeet what it is:

Kyle … I definitely feel that we need to adapt. And I think this year was definitely a kickstart for that with everything that's going on. I think maybe
online is the way to go. I personally miss face to face, I miss the interaction with the audience, being able to read your audience … the ease of access, I think that's going to be a lot easier now with online [216]; Conor … Even with the best will in the world, it's heads on screens … even breakout rooms and so on … it's an approximation of community. And for my money it will take a lot to trump that real world sense of community and the real-world social element, that relaxed vibe so typical of the early TeachMeets … that'd be really difficult to replicate online. Now that said, if online proves to be the only way for teachers to congregate and share ... then so be it; but for my money it will always be a holding action against our return to something more human, hands across the table [301].

Whether be it online or face to face, this ‘maybe’ wish for TeachMeet future was offered by Ewan …

‘I'd like people to start seeing TeachMeet as something you organise and take part in on a regular basis as part of a regular diet of your online time. There's no reason why you can't every two weeks get together with the same group of people over a couple of months at a time and share what you're doing, then have a break… it's a habit, it’s getting into the habit of doing it [303].
Summary Of Findings from Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Interview Transcripts

This section of the findings represents my interpretative phenomenological analysis of the fifteen interviews, which generated four potent Group Experiential Themes (GET) representing the matters of greatest concern in their lived experience as organisers of TeachMeet. Each comprises several interconnected Personal Experientials Themes (PET).

**Group Experiential Theme A: Personal Matters.** Group Experiential Theme A shows the central object of concern to be the *person*, and how the person has been affected on different levels by their experience of TeachMeet. This GET comprises the four Personal Experiential Themes of how TeachMeet has had profound and lasting effects on social and group relationships, interpersonal and internal relationships between and within participants. The four PETs are

i. Social – community and personal networks evolving, often via social media;

ii. Group – convivial interaction at events, skilfully mediated, is appreciated;

iii. Interpersonal - Encouragement from mentors, colleagues, peers is formative;


**Group Experiential Theme B: Matters of Purpose.** In Group Experiential Theme B the central object of concern is the *purpose*, the compelling forces that drive participants to organise a TeachMeet. This GET encompasses four Personal Experiential Themes which centre on purpose, each generated around a different reason that has compelled someone to action as an organiser of TeachMeets. Many are countering their own discontent with individual CPD experiences; others have a feeling of moral responsibility to do whatever it is they can do; some are forming and following ‘desire lines’; and in particular cases some are enacting a pioneering spirit of innovation. The four PETs are

i. Do the Thing Right - acting to counter discontent with CPD experience;
ii. Do the Right Thing - feeling a moral imperative to take action;

iii. Making the Path by Walking - forming and following ‘desire lines’;

iv. Don’t Wait for Permission – being pioneers, innovators, and early adopters.

**Group Experiential Theme C: Practical Matters.** Group Experiential Theme C is about the practical matters of TeachMeet, the universal regard placed on the primacy of the practical elements of TeachMeet prominent in the experiences recounted by all interview participants. Their descriptions generated three Personal Experiential Themes – that of the catalytic and transformational effect of what is encountered, of encounters in the marketplace-like events attended and organised; the sharing of ideas, resources, ways of teaching; the humble appreciation of a chance to glimpse into the ‘black box’ of another classroom. The three practical PETs are

i. The *Spreagadh*: the spark that ignites and may transform;

ii. The Marketplace - the mix, the exchange - what’s there (and what’s not there);

iii. The Black Box - getting a glimpse into another’s classroom.

**Group Experiential Theme D: Political Matters.** Group Experiential Theme D has as its focus matters political, encompassing opinions, born of experience, about what TeachMeet is (and is not) and ideation about how the future ought to, might, and ought not to play out. The analysis generated three definite Personal Experiential Themes – what should be preserved in TeachMeet; what should be prevented in TeachMeet; and what might evolve in the future of TeachMeet.

i. Yes Please - keep it simple and keep it non-hierarchical;

ii. No Thanks - avoid commercialisation and appropriation;

iii. Perhaps, Perhaps, Perhaps - evolving a place in CPD, and evolving online.
Summary of Key Findings

Each section of this chapter presented findings of analysis of data pertaining to the TeachMeet phenomenon collected by observation, questionnaire, and interview. Each section concluded with a summary of the respective findings pertaining to TeachMeet events; the profiles, dispositions, and perspectives of Teachmeet participants; and the matters that are most important to them. The chapter now concludes with a combined summary detailing Key Findings from the research.

F1. Findings Pertaining to TeachMeet events

A. TeachMeet events are arranged by teachers for teachers with a view to sharing classroom experience in an informal, convivial setting. They usually take place out-of-hours, are organised and attended by individuals in a voluntary capacity, with an open invitation for free-of-charge participation. Use of online communication tools is central to the element of connectivity during and between events.

B. What gives life to a TeachMeet event is the interplay between three signature elements:

i. The catalytic role of the MC. This is the ‘master of ceremonies’, the ‘mic controller’, the Fear or Bean an Ti, the one (or two) whose role is to facilitate the flow of nanopresentations and other activities during the event;

ii. The nanopresentation. This is the story told by the presenter who has volunteered to share. Each nanopresentation is brief, just long enough to outline the resource, idea, or classroom experience being shared and to also act as a stimulus or spreagadh for those who wish to find out more;

iii. The Open Space dynamic of the event. This is seen in the lack of hierarchy among participants, and the explicit adoption of relaxed rules which encourage freedom of movement and communication.
**F2. Findings Pertaining to TeachMeet Participants**

A. **Profile Of Participants.** Findings show participants from all levels and sectors of education, with a breadth of experience from pre-service to post-service. Many participants progress through a continuum of involvement – attending, presenting, organising. Each level of participation - attending, presenting, organising - shows a distinct disposition:

i. Attending out of curiosity and *seeking to improve* oneself;

ii. Presenting to *share with others* something that has worked in the classroom;

iii. Organising to *bring opportunity to others* to experience TeachMeet.

B. **Perspectives Of Participants.** Participants describe TeachMeet as being informative, *collaborative*, and *fun*. It is widely viewed as capable of fulfilling many of the functions of Community of Practice, Personal Learning Network, and Continuing Professional Development. Most participants consider TeachMeet to be *situated in the intersections between CoP, PLN, and CPD* in their personal professional practice, with more leaning towards a perspective that TeachMeet is more informal (network and community) than formal (professional development).

**F3. Findings pertaining to what matters in TeachMeet**

Findings from the lived experience of participants show that it is *personal*, *purposeful*, *practical*, and *political*. Each of these experiential themes represents matters and objects of concern to TeachMeet participants.

A. **TeachMeet Is Personal.** The first object of concern is the *person* and how they have been affected on distinct levels by their experience of TeachMeet.

i. At social and group level interaction at events, relationships lead to community and personal networks evolving, often via social media;

ii. At the interpersonal level, encouragement from mentors, colleagues, peers is formative in inviting participation;
iii. At a personal level, TeachMeet experiences have had profound lasting effect.

B. **TeachMeet Is Purposeful.** The second object of concern is the *purpose*, the forces that compel those who organise TeachMeet events.

   i. Early TeachMeets were driven by early adopters of technology enacting a pioneering spirit of innovation, in order to share knowledge;
   
   ii. Others have a feeling of moral responsibility to do whatever it is they can do, not waiting for permission;
   
   iii. Others are countering discontent with individual CPD experiences.

C. **TeachMeet Is Practical.** The third matter is the appreciation for the *practical* elements of TeachMeet, and the immediate or lasting effect they have on participants. These elements include

   i. The brief glimpse into the ‘black box’ of another teacher’s classroom;
   
   ii. The exchange between peers of ideas, resources, ways of teaching;
   
   iii. The transformational effect of something encountered - a spark or *spreagadh* that leads to future development of an individual or group.

D. **TeachMeet Is Political.** The final matter of concern to participants is the *political* aspect of TeachMeet, encompassing opinions about what TeachMeet is (and is not) and ideation about how things ought to, might, and ought not to play out in the future. These are

   i. A desire to keep TeachMeet simple, and keep it non-hierarchical;
   
   ii. A resistance to any commercialisation or appropriation;
   
   iii. Acknowledgement of risks and benefits of an evolving role in professional learning, both in-person and online, in the future of TeachMeet.

In the next chapter, these findings will be discussed in the light of literature reviewed, how they respond to the Research Questions, and how they may suggest further questions.
Chapter Six - Discussion

This chapter is a discussion of how the findings bring some answers to the research questions, as well as how they pose further questions. Each research question was framed to elicit data whose analysis would contribute to sensemaking of the TeachMeet phenomenon, and get closer to finding out what gives it life and sustains it. The findings from analysis of these data are discussed in the light of the literature reviewed in Chapter Three. There are two sections to the discussion. Section One is a discussion of findings that offer responses to, and substantiate, each of the four research questions in turn. Section Two is a discussion of findings that raise other issues, give pause for thought, and pose further questions.

Section One – Discussion of Answers to Research Questions

Analysis of the data collected by observation of TeachMeet events, and survey of TeachMeet participants by questionnaire and interview, generated findings that offer insights into the research questions posed in order to shed light on the essence, nature, and niche of the TeachMeet phenomenon:

RQ1. What are the characteristic elements of TeachMeet?
RQ2. What motivates TeachMeet participants to engage with TeachMeet?
RQ3. What is the situation of TeachMeet in participants’ professional learning?
RQ4. What is the relationship between evolution, impact, and sustainability in the context of TeachMeet?
This section discusses how these findings contribute to resolving each of the four research questions in turn.

**Discussion on RQ1: On Finding The Characteristic Elements Of TeachMeet**

Analysis of observation notes, of responses to questions (Q.1, Q.2, Q.3, Q. 4, Q.5 and Q.12 in the questionnaire), of the interview transcripts all yielded findings which evidence the elements currently characteristic of TeachMeet. The findings indicate that TeachMeet events exhibit several characteristic elements, some to be put in place before a TeachMeet event, some that characterise the TeachMeet event itself, and the elements of connectivity discernible within and between events.

**Elements In Place Before The Teachmeet Event.** The preparatory elements are those that mark a TeachMeet as an informal event - it is arranged by peers for peers to take place ‘out of hours’; this is the ‘untraditional learning experience’, the unconference in professional development as described by Carpenter et al., (2016, 2018) in the studies of EdCamp in which they found that ‘autonomy’ and ‘choice’ was important to participants. Signing up to attend is done informally online; there is an invitation to be a presenter as well as an attendee; it is free, and attended in a voluntary capacity. Although there is a variety of settings for events - standalone, on the fringe of a conference or course of study, or after school in a school - most are structured to provide participants an unconference experience combining the elements of variety and rapid PechaKucha-type presentations with the relaxed conversational pace of Open Space Technology (Owen 1987, 1993, 1997). All of this reflects the declaration of the Australian Community Review (TeachMeet[AUS], 2014, p. 8) that TeachMeet is ‘voluntary … open … free of charge’. Holme et al. (2020) call this “grassroots level,” as do respondents to the 2016 Participant Impact Survey reported by Amond et. al (2020, p. 487), a survey initiated by co-founder McIntosh, to mark the first ten years of TeachMeet. Findings from this participant survey report participants referring to TeachMeet as “doing it for ourselves”, echoing McIntosh’s
own ‘DIY’ tag of 2010 (McIntosh, 2010, p. 1). This aligns with Bennett’s early scholarly reflections on TeachMeet which described it as ‘guerrilla’ (2012, p. 1).

The Signature Elements Of A TeachMeet Event. The three elements described in the Findings as the ‘most potent factors’ that emerged from analysis of the data from my observation notes also feature strongly in the findings from responses to questionnaire and interview questions. These three elements, the central signature elements of a TeachMeet, are: the MC, the nanopresentation, and the Open Space dynamic. I will discuss each in turn, and discuss how the interplay between them is the essence of what gives life to a TeachMeet.

The MC. The two-letter acronym, MC, traditionally denotes the term ‘master of ceremonies’; nowadays it also refers to the ‘mic controller’ of modern urban rap culture. In Ireland we refer to the host as the Fear an Tí or Bean an Tí. The acronym MC has appeared many times to date in this thesis - it has featured strongly in the findings both as a key factor influencing participants appreciation of TeachMeet events, and in discovery of first-person views of taking the role of MC. In the context of TeachMeet, the MC is taking the role of coordinator that is spoken of as necessary in what Torvalds calls “the bazaar” of the open-source world (in Raymond, 2000, p. 21), in what Owen calls the marketplace of the Open Space Technology world (2007, p. 5), and in what Ferguson (2017, p. 425) calls the square in the modern world of flattened hierarchies (all discussed in Section Two of the Literature Review); this is the person with the skills to keep everything flowing. The original TeachMeet MC, Ewan McIntosh, uses a metaphor of ‘sesh’ or seisiún, the social gathering of traditional musicians at which tunes are played, solo and together: “TeachMeet is folk … It's not a concert with a score. It's folk music … the same idea going to a session to listen to the music” [i09 146]. He describes the MC as one who must “be the connector … make the segue … act as the glue” [i09 133]. As well as coordinating, the MC in the TeachMeets I observed (and in many cases this was two MCs working in
tandem) acted as what Gladwell (2000, p. 34) calls a ‘connector’ or what Brafman and Beckstrom (2006, p. 91) call the ‘catalyst’. These MCs were tending to both the chaordic activity and the convivial atmosphere of the event. In the findings I speak of “setting the tone; light touch steering; genial control” - the role of MC is a central element in the most personal Group Experiential Theme that was generated from the interviews with TeachMeet organisers. In the experiential statements that feed into this theme, they shed light on one finding of my observation notes analysis - I use ‘dexterity and “active right throughout the event” to describe the MC’s role: among the descriptions of the role of MC given by those who have done it, is acknowledgement that the energy expended takes a toll on them.

*The Nanopresentation.* In using the term nanopresentation, I am referring to the short (2-, 5-, or 7-minute) presentations that are characteristic of TeachMeet. Findings from analysis of my observation notes, the questionnaire responses and the interviews suggest that the nanopresentation, the brief and authentic stories from the classroom, is the quantum of TeachMeet events. The brevity is appreciated both for what it is in the moment - a glimpse into the reality of another teacher’s classroom, and what it might lead to - it acts as a *spreagadh* (spark) for further action. The practice of forgoing a privileged keynote and instead “encouraging teachers to tell stories” (Yeomans, in Anderson, 2013) is a key unconference element formulated in 2006 as Winer’s Fundamental Law of Conventional Conferences: “The sum of the expertise of the people in the audience is greater than the sum of expertise of the people on stage”. Wenger (SCoTENS, 2015) advises us not to discard this level of “sharp interesting storytelling” and the sharing of “tips and tricks"; this echoes the Hargreaves and Fullan (2012, p. 112) citing of Little’s (1982) “reaction of participants in non-formal professional learning - storytelling, exchanging ideas, anecdotes, gossip, and sharing materials and teaching strategies”. The
findings show this level of sharing in the nanopresentation to be a practice deeply appreciated by TeachMeet participants.

**The Open Space Dynamic.** This is a complex element generated by the diffusion of the conventions of Owen’s Open Space Technology (Owen 1987, 1993, 1997, 2007) into TeachMeet; I use the title Open Space here with intent, and with respect to the original OST. It is a difficult element to define, being about atmosphere, and it is entangled with the catalytic role of the MC as discussed already.

The findings from analysis of my observation notes taken at TeachMeet events show the TeachMeet arena to have hallmarks of OST unconference events - in particular the ‘marketplace’ (Owen, 2007, p. 5) and the Law Of Mobility (Owen, 2007, p. 95). While the audience is typically attentive to whoever is presenting or leading a session, there is a relaxed vibe of tacit permission to converse with the person in the next seat, or move from one area of the space to another. The findings from analysis of the questionnaire and interview data all reveal that this atmosphere of social interaction, with its ‘energy, passion, generosity’ within which the TeachMeet is appreciated. One word used by many is ‘buzz’, referring to the exchange-of-practice that happens; evocative of Torvalds’s open-source “babbling bazaar” (in Raymond, 2000, p. 21). In the top ten single-word descriptors of Teachmeet offered by participants in their questionnaire returns, alongside the words describing activity, were words denoting atmosphere - *fun, informal, engaging, friendly.*

The findings of this study show that participants in TeachMeet very much appreciate an Open Space dynamic that combines what Hock (1999, p. 1) calls a “chaordic” pace with the “playfulness” of Price’s (2013, p. 1) social learning. These echo the 2016 Participant Impact Survey (reported by Amond et al., 2020, p. 487) that impact from events lies in the ‘relaxed atmosphere’ that is ‘opposite of conference’ and allows for ‘in-between’ conversations, and for ‘testing ideas in the in-between debates’. The
Australian Community Review (TeachMeet[AUS], 2014, p. 8) described the ‘safe, positive, fun’ traits as being part of ‘TeachMeet’s DNA’.

Findings also show that the vibe of Open Space in TeachMeet, making room in space and time for ‘unforced spaces’ has been there with intent from the very start, as explained by co-founder Ewan McIntosh …

‘… and so when you create an event, designed to get teachers sharing with each other, it had to feel as unhaughty, as unorganised … because it was a Trojan horse for getting people to share what they were doing, even when they themselves maybe didn't feel it was good enough to share because after all, it's only around a pub table. It's only, you know, with friends.’ (104)

**The Element Of Connectivity.** Findings suggests an element of connectivity that operates in two capacities within the TeachMeet universe - within an event itself, and beyond and between events. In both cases, the close connection between the 2006-born twins TeachMeet and Twitter, suggested in the review of the informal literature, is confirmed. Findings from observations, questionnaires, and interviews, as well as online reports researched for the literature review show that in-person TeachMeet events all name the social media platform Twitter as a medium of communication, source of information, and means of connecting. *Intertwined … symbiotic … shared context … spurred each other on* are examples of the type of descriptors chosen to describe the connection between TeachMeet and Twitter.

**Connectivity within a TeachMeet event.** At the event level, the observation findings show an immediate and real-time informal connection with the outside world as attendees post tweets to a designated hashtag (e.g. #tmCESI, #tmBETT22). Some events may be livestreamed or recorded for later broadcast. This exploitation of available technology was built in from the start - not surprising, the founders were already operating at what Cormier (2008, p. 3) calls ‘the bleeding edge’ of connectivity - as early events offered online attendance via Skype (McIntosh, 2006, p. 1) for those who could not be there in-person.
Connectivity beyond and between TeachMeet events. Given that there is no formal infrastructure scaffolding TeachMeet as an organisation, individuals connecting beyond and between events using online communications (Twitter, Facebook, Eventbrite) is what is scaffolding TeachMeet. Findings from both questionnaire and interview responses indicate that this is the most influential factor in how people find out about TeachMeet, become a participant, and continue that participation; it was one of the early themes to arise in interviews: “Twitter allows for TeachMeet conversations to be extended to online” [i01, 157]. This 5th Estate connectivity (Dutton, 2008, p. 21) enables a growing connectivism within a socially constructed ‘interconnected estate’ as described by Schmidt and Cohen (in Ferguson, 2017, p. 306), or as envisaged in Poe’s ‘hive’ metaphor (2006, p. 1). It mirrors the rapid formation of complex connections referred to in the plant kingdom as guerrilla growth, or rhizomatic growth as used by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) as their metaphor for growth in education, discussed in Section Two of the Literature Review.

One unexpected finding that confirms the strength of connectivity within TeachMeet was the remarkable speed with which TeachMeet events were pivoted to online platforms as virtual events when global travel was suddenly halted in mid-March 2022. My observation notes show that it took only eight days until the first ‘pandemic’ TeachMeet took place online, followed in quick succession by many more. This suggests that what Kop and Hill (2008, p. 11) refer to as an “accelerating vector of connectivism” was being exploited in this rapid response. It reflects what Wheeler (2015, p. 42) says about the importance of the rhizome theory being “not invested in individual components but rather in the direction and speed of motion the entire organism can adopt at any given time”.

Putting these elements together like jigsaw pieces presents a picture of TeachMeet events which is populated by people who are there by choice (as decreed by Owen, 1997, p. 41, “whoever comes is the right people”) to contribute to an event that is humble and yet which, according to those who have experienced it, provides learning opportunities of a
practical nature. The organisation of these events, in the open, online, exploits the growing connectivity afforded by the constantly improving contemporary social media technology.

**Discussion on RQ2: On Finding What Motivates Participants To Engage in Teachmeet**

This research question was mapped directly onto both the questionnaire and interview inquiry schedules in order to discover what drives participation in TeachMeet. All the answers were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The responses to the three questions about motivation to attend, present, and organise were analysed separately and in sequence, and triangulated with the responses to the answers in the interviews. Two key findings will be discussed here - what motivates participants to be involved at distinct levels, and how participant progression through experience is evidenced.

**On Finding Dispositions In Those Who Participate.** In the questionnaire the reason for participation was asked three times, once each asking what had prompted participation as (i) an attendee, (ii) a presenter, (iii) an organiser of TeachMeet. Findings from the questionnaire analysis showed each of the three levels of participation to have distinct drivers - respectively (i) curiosity and a desire to improve, (ii) a desire to share with others, and (iii) a desire to bring this opportunity further. This last contributed to the generation of the Group Experiential Themes of *purpose* in the IPA of interviews with organisers. There is a keen sense of individuals taking what Guskey (2000) calls ‘intentional’ steps into what Touraine (cited in Hargreaves, 2000) calls “social movement of committed people”. Bennett (2012, p. 25) suggests it could be an example of the participative learning of Davidson and Goldberg (2009) in which people are enabled ‘to develop themselves, propelled by their own motivation’.

Borrowing from Garland’s (2020, p. 2) ‘dispositions of volunteers’ framework, in which community volunteers were grouped according to their observed dispositions, I used
the themes generated in analysis to frame the findings according to the disposition I detected in the data from each group - the *seekers*, the *sharers*, and the *bringers*.

**On Finding Reasons for Attending a TeachMeet: The Seekers.** The findings from the questionnaire returns showed the two main reasons given for attending a TeachMeet for the first time were (i) curiosity and (ii) a desire to improve. Some sought to satisfy curiosity about this phenomenon that they had heard about - the findings state that “heard about it online” was the most common means of discovering TeachMeet. Some went seeking the company of other teachers, either as an antidote to being isolated in the ‘silO’ classroom of Lortie (1975, p. 144), or in the spirit of homophily (Ferguson, 2017, p. 366; Rogers, 2003, p. 306) - or as Davitt (2008, p. 1) describes them, wandering off to join in something that makes a conference ‘come alive’. The isolation of teachers, each in their own classroom or lecture hall, also arose as an experiential theme in interviews, suggesting “if we had a more collaborative space, it would benefit all [i11, 317]. Others attended with serious professional and personal intent; my reading of these answers for the first time were some of the most enlightening moments during analysis e.g. “I wanted to improve my teaching and had seen about teachmeets on twitter”. They reminded me of a word Ewan McIntosh had used in interview … *unhaughty* (104). This desire to improve was also to the fore as an aim of TeachMeet in the report from the Australian Community Review (TeachMeet[AUS, 2014, p. 6]: ‘seek to improve own teaching and the quality of teaching practices on an ongoing basis’; ‘seek a safe and social environment’. As well as reflecting the Maslow (1943, p. 394) fundamental need for safety as a motivation, this reminds of the findings of McMillan et al., (2014, p. 157) discussed in the Literature Review, that teachers in Ireland are motivated “to seek out and to pursue CPD that they valued for their own personal reasons and in response to their own personal and professional needs”. That report was focussed on formal CDP; it seems the same may be true of motivation to seek out and pursue informal professional learning.
**On Finding Reasons for Presenting at A TeachMeet: The Sharers.** The findings from the questionnaire returns showed the main reason given for presenting at a TeachMeet for the first time was a desire to share. The word share was by far the most frequent in the sentences used to explain the answers to this question, typically “I wanted to share something that I had found useful in my teaching and thought it could help others” and “to be able to say to others, look, I'm trying this, what do you reckon?”. It suggests that participants appreciate Bransford’s “learning by interacting with other teachers” (1999, p. 190) and are willing to “push and pull peers” as advised by Little (highlighted in Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012, p. 159).

**On Finding Reasons for Organising a TeachMeet: The Bringers.** The findings from the questionnaire returns showed the main reason given for organising a TeachMeet for the first time was a desire to bring TeachMeet opportunities to other places and people, and to bring new faces and new voices into TeachMeet. This finding was also imbued in the personal experiential themes from the interviews, alongside the desire to innovate and bring new ideas to peers, to bring a self-directed model of professional development to peers without waiting for permission or provision from others, and to bring about improvements in current provision of CPD. In the responses to the 2016 Participant Impact Survey (reported in Amond et al., 2020, p. 487), this domino effect theme was presented as having an impact on the respondents’ teaching community - having experienced a TeachMeet, the reaction of many was to “organise more TeachMeets”. The importance of “giving back” was listed in the Australian Community Review (TeachMeet[AUS], 2014, p. 7) as one of the long-term consequences of involvement in TeachMeets.

For each response that recounted that their experience of CPD had been negative - Guskey’s ‘rotten things’ (2000, p. 5) - there were others explaining how they felt a responsibility to reverse this by bringing about an opportunity for a better experience. These teachers are who Hattie (2015, p. 16, citing Reeves) describes as fuelled by a
passion “which may be the only natural renewable resource that we have”. This recalls both the ‘freedom and responsibility’ that Paquette (1979, p. 19) calls for in open pedagogy, and what Owen (2007, p. 83) says are the two drivers of OST - ‘passion and responsibility’. The finding of motivations to act by organising of a TeachMeet for and with peers evokes the self-determination of groups described by Poe (2006) as a *hive* (2006) or Brafman and Beckstrom’s (2006) as a *starfish*, setting up their stalls in spaces that Ferguson (2017) calls the *square* or Torvalds (in Raymond, 2000) calls the *bazaar*.

Online Twitter conversations (see Table 3.7) contains suggestions that TeachMeet as professional development is “about agency, choice, method, context” (Reilly, 2011, Twitter). Though the responses in the primary data did not use the term agency, the findings from all the analyses point towards the “ecological teacher agency” as conceptualised by Priestly, Biesta, and Robinson (2015, p. 19), which they introduce as “an emergent phenomenon, achieved by individuals through interplay of personal capacity and the resources, affordances, constraints of the environment in which individuals act’.

The findings show that two main motivations which prompted organisers to arrange more TeachMeets were: the countering of disappointment with current CPD provision, and a desire to provide opportunities for others to have the experience they had themselves. This ‘do something about it’ attitude suggests the “agency of enactment” which Barad (2007, p. 235) ascribes to those taking action to translate ideas into reality.

**On Finding Patterns Of Progression in Participation.** Findings from a comparative analysis of responses from those who gave their reasons for first attending, first presenting at, and first organising a TeachMeet generated a theme I named *progression in participation*. There was a profile of participants who first went along out to see what would happen, then became more actively involved by presenting their own story, and then became the person who arranged opportunities for others to do the same.

The progression of these individuals reminded me of the legitimate peripheral
participation (LPP) described in Lave and Wenger’s Situated Learning (1991); moving along the pathway from “bumbling beginner to master” (Wenger, 2016); progressing from the peripheral to core Levels of Participation in the framework of Wenger and Trayner (wenger-trayner.com, nd, accessed Feb 14th 2022); these hallmarks would designate TeachMeet participants as a Community of Practice (CoP). Hallmarks such as the “self-directed, focus on developing communities, teachers as leaders” called for in the ‘new’ paradigm of Stein, Smith, and Silver (1999, in Borko et al. 2010, p. 550); the “sense of ownership” and “planning and providing PD for peers” as discussed by Murchan et al. (2005, p. 9); the “open-ended” and “personal” features of Korthagen’s PD 3.0 (2017, p. 399). The progression suggests agency enacted in stages as experiences motivate the next move - the temporal agency of Priestly et al. (2015, p. 20) which has its “roots in past experience, oriented to the future, and located in the contingencies of the present”.

This agentic self-determination reflects the preferences of teachers surveyed by the McMillan et al. (2016, p. 156-157) in a cross-border study in Ireland, who “expressed a preference both to seek out and to pursue CPD that they valued for their own personal reasons and in response to their own personal and professional needs”. Although this survey was centred on CPD that is provided for rather than self-organised by teachers, in findings reported (O’Sullivan et al., 2011, p. 55) to the Standing Committee on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS) the personal motivators for take-up of CPD in their 2011 cohort was out of “personal choice” and “rooted in the willingness of professional adults to engage with passion and enthusiasm in the improvement of their own practice. The investment of the self in the time and processes that such learning implies is closely linked to issues of personal values, personal interest and personal autonomy” (italics mine). Although there is almost ten years between this SCoTENS survey and the surveys of this research which address a more informal professional
learning, there is a striking similarity in reasons given by participants as their motivation to engage.

**Discussion on RQ3: On Finding Where Participants Situate Teachmeet In Professional Learning**

The findings which substantiate this question inform the *Discovery* stage of Appreciative Inquiry, finding out where and what participants consider to be the niche of TeachMeet for them. The findings combined analysis of answers to one direct question (mark a location on a map) and their grading of a list of nine attributions.

**On Finding Out Where ‘X Marks The Spot’.** Given the discussion in the Literature Review (Guest’s 2019 “conflation and confusion of “slippery terms”, Evans’s 2019 warnings about meanings being “unclear”, Wenger’s 2010 warning about misunderstands across the “career of a concept”) about what the terms and acronyms of professional learning - in this case PLN, CoP, CPD - mean to each participant, asking participants to locate TeachMeet on a map was perhaps naive and risked confusion.

**Figure 6.1**

*Heat Map Representing Participants' Situation of TeachMeet in Professional Learning*

However, the simplicity of the visual representation of the returns, in Figure 6.1, indicates that whatever each term means to each participant, TeachMeet for most participants is situated in more than one of the domains represented.
The findings show that when asked to ‘grade’ nine specific attributes - three each aligned with PLN, CoP, and CPD - as to how they are experienced in TeachMeet, while offering answers that were indicative rather than definitive, helped me towards discovering the ‘where’ or ‘what’ of how participants consider TeachMeet to be, and to discuss these here in the light of the literature reviewed and in the light of Group Experiential Themes generated from questionnaire and interview texts.

**On Finding TeachMeet Situated as Community of Practice (CoP).** The attributes of TeachMeet for which questionnaire respondents assigned the highest levels of agreement, 97% and 91% respectively, referred to *practitioners sharing* and *common identity*. These are two of the features that indicate an alignment with CoP. Woven through the findings is the same tacit designation of TeachMeet as *community*, as *sharing of practice*. Both emerged in two of the four Group Experiential Themes from the interviews. In the GET that TeachMeet is personal, learning is seen as “a *communal* process” and in the GET that TeachMeet is Practical there is the exchange of ideas for improving classroom practice. Published in the Australian Community Review (TeachMeet[AUS], 2014, p. 8), the agreed set of principles describing TeachMeet’s ‘DNA’ leads with “voluntary *community*”; the 2016 Participant Impact Survey responses (reported by Amond et al., 2020, p. 487) speak of “building a *community*” of “real teachers *sharing real experiences*”.

Does this evidence of regard for community and practice in TeachMeet participants add up to permission to apply the label of Community of Practice? The definition of CoP regularly used by Wenger is “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2006, 2009; Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The findings could suggest that participants view TeachMeet as a community of teachers, concerned with improving their individual and collective practice, that use TeachMeet as the event at which they interact to that end.
On Finding TeachMeet Situated As Personal Learning Network (PLN). Three features of a PLN, the opportunity to connect with new people at a fringe or unconference events or by following an event online, were presented to participants for their consideration as attributes of TeachMeet in their experience. The findings show high agreement with the first two features, and slightly less for the third (89%, 85%, and 73% respectively); suggesting that appreciation for making new connections is almost universal, with a slight preference for meeting ‘in real life’ but also a strong appreciation of attending and connecting online. There is also a strong appreciation of these human-human connections in findings from the fifteen interviews with personal, learning, and network all featuring separately, and in combination, as experiential themes of what matters at both Personal and Political levels.

In the findings from the analysis of interviews with event organisers, the first Group Experiential Theme generated showed TeachMeet to matter at personal levels:

“I started to make little networks and other connections with people that I found were having the same experience as me across different sectors” [i13, 35]

“For me, it opened up my classroom and my school. So it meant that I had connections across the globe, which meant that I could bring those people into my classroom and I could also share ideas” [i14, 34].

In the findings arising from the questionnaire returns, learning is named in the top ten of the 714 words offered by participants to describe TeachMeet.

The network is visible in the findings from the questionnaire, the interviews, and the observations - the participants in this research into TeachMeet certainly resemble the Networked Teacher as presented by Cuoros (2006, discussed already as Figure 3.2 in Chapter Three). Within and between events they are combining use of solid-state technology with Fifth Estate and social media channels for communication and connecting. Each ‘networked individual’ (Wellman 2002, p. 10) is part of the “connectivist” culture
(Downes 2008, p. 2) in which “know where” (Siemens 2004, p. 2) is important to them. They are suggesting that TeachMeet is a reciprocal part of the “my PLN” that participants were referring to in the questionnaire findings around motivations to attend. One respondent stated it as their ‘any other comment’ that “I think first and foremost, TeachMeet is a Personal Learning Network”.

Checking in with three successive definitions from the reviewed Literature (Tobin 1998; Downes 2009; Richardson 2014), and looking at them in the light of the findings, confirms this. Tobin (1998, p. 1) may have been the first to define PLN, albeit as a learning strategy for the business world - the key being that it is something you build yourself - finding people who “can point you to learning opportunities” and that importantly, “you do not even need to know the people personally”. Downes (2009, p. 1) reminds that the PLN is an extension of the PLE, personal learning environment, the key still being the individual building their network for themselves. Richardson (2014, 1:11) points towards making connections and interacting with people who “share passions or interests, who will push your thinking, ask and answer questions”. In the findings from interviews, the experiential theme of the importance of the personal encouragement by peers and mentors, be it offered in person or online, echoes Tobin’s thesis. Revisiting Tobin’s 1998 definition also substantiates my interpretation of the disposition of the organisers as bringers whose intent is to offer learning opportunities to those who might wish to connect with them. Downes’s more complex view that being in the environment begets the building of the network echoes many respondents’ stories and personal experience of TeachMeet leading to engagement on Twitter - it seems to be a 50:50 split between those who found TeachMeet via Twitter or vice versa. Richardson’s definition with its hint of the PLN as transformative - the “as it will push your thinking” - resonates with the experiential themes of the practical effects of TeachMeet, the exchange of ideas, the “changed the way I thought about teaching”; the spreagadh or spark.
On Finding TeachMeet Situated As Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Participants were asked to denote their agreement with three attributes that might characterise TeachMeets as CPD - used as in-house staff development, take place as INSET, take place as part of an accredited course. Findings show that the more formal the attribute under consideration seemed, the less they agreed with it. And yet, in the informal analysis of online commentosphere discourse that framed the early stages, “best CPD ever” was a frequent remark noted as a participant’s reaction to a TeachMeet experience (Amond et al., 2018, p. 242).

A potent experiential theme in the findings was participants’ motivation to escape the format of the CPD provision they were experiencing. This need formed part of ground level discussion in many of the blog posts examined in the Literature Review (Barrett, 2009; Connell, 2009; Anderson, 2013). Also in the literature reviewed is the thread of reports from librarians in the UK and the USA who adopted the format early and have referred to their TeachMeets as “PD” since 2010 (Walsh, 2011; Tumelty, 2012; Charles, 2021). Policy documents reviewed were suggesting that informal events such as TeachMeet should be investigated and considered as CPD/TPL (NESTA 2013; DERA 2015; Cosán 2016). Formal CPD providers (Teaching Council, BETT, ISTA, NAACE, Froebel MU) are including TeachMeet in their flagship events.

Within the findings and in the literature reviewed there is some appreciation that TeachMeet has a place in CPD, as found by Carpenter et. al (2018, p. 80) in their research among EdCamp participants: “existing mental models of PD might need to be challenged so that they allow for informal, spontaneous, and more intimate professional conversations”. Avalos (2001, p. 17) reflected on teacher PD becoming more discursive that “teachers naturally talk to each other, and that such talk can take on an educational purpose”. Looking to Guskey’s (2000, p. 5) advice, the only way to evidence the difference between “the rotten” and “the good” PD is by evaluating. On the cautionary
side, as it is informal in nature, there is no evidence of either the continuing or the development of CPD in TeachMeet. On one key finding of this study, that attendance and participation are both voluntary, TeachMeet immediately fails the test of Webster-Wright (2009, p. 26) that states authentic PL needs to be “obligatory”. On the appreciative side, experiential themes in the findings suggest participants with a deep professional approach. In 2014 the Australian Community Review (TeachMeet[AUS], p. 7) projected long term consequences to include provision of “ongoing and relevant professional development”, “stronger professional networks”, and “opportunity to celebrate the profession”. Findings from the 2016 Participant Impact Survey findings (reported by Amond et al., 2020, pp. 487, 488) study include effects of “made me research a masters … did a PhD … changed my professional life … it transformed my attitude to what CPD could be in the hands of teachers”. The findings from analysis of the questionnaire returns in this research included “the professional impact of TeachMeet … a positive effect on CPD”, with participants reporting “It has become an integral part of our professional practice … needed to build professional connections … to facilitate professional learning opportunities”. The analysis of the interviews with organisers generated Personal Experiential Statements that reflect an innate regard for TeachMeet as professional - it was deeply embedded in the stories of their experiences …

“… encouragement of professional mentors and colleagues;
… a community of willing and welcoming fellow professionals;
… an avenue for professional and personal development;
… Positive, meaningful, powerful impact – professional as well as personal;
… investing their personal and professional time;
… this was really serious professional development;
… Professionally, it probably changed me;
… level of interaction is the experience, at professional peer-to-peer”.

And though it was not an objective of this research to make judgement, I found it interesting to look at the findings from analysis of the participant questionnaire and
interviews in the light of the experts on evaluation of CPD reviewed in Chapter Three - the continuum of Kennedy (2005, 2014) and the evaluation models of Katzell-Kirkpatrick 1959; Guskey 2002; Desimone 2009; and Wenger-Trayner et. al 2011.

If findings from this study were measured on Kennedy’s continuum it might ‘score’ TeachMeet highly on autonomy but score low on accountability, and somewhere in-between on development of collective. The experiential theme of ‘the spark’, the spreagadh that “just inspires … gives them an avenue in; they've seen it, they like it, they’ll bring it into their classroom” [i03, 236] that emerged from the analysis of interviews, would have TeachMeet resonating strongly with Kennedy’s highest level attainment by a CPD, the transformative.

As for evaluation using any of the four models reviewed, the findings reported in this research show only self-reported effects on the teachers involved, mostly at the first order effect that Kirkpatrick calls ‘Reaction’, and some suggestions of the second and third order effects that Guskey calls ‘Learning’ and Desimone calls ‘Change’ (in attitude, skills, beliefs). The first order effects can be seen in the words people choose to describe their initial experience of TeachMeet. In the 2016 Participant Impact Survey findings (reported by Amond et al., 2020, p. 487), many participants chose “inspiring … revitalised … enthused … left feeling different … excited to get back to the classroom the next day”. Aspects of the second and third order effects are clearly embedded in the aspirations recorded in the community workshop (TeachMeet[AUS], 2014, p. 7), wherein ambition for long term consequences and impact of TeachMeet include “opportunity to give back to the sector”, “students have better quality teachers … improved educational outcomes … perception of teachers is positively influenced across the sector and teaching standards are raised”. This research shows a cohort concerned with improving not just themselves but their profession, as seen in findings from both questionnaire, which revealed having a “positive impact on CPD” as a matter of concern to those wishing to be “more proactive
and progressive in our own CPD; and in the interviews, which revealed experiential themes of desire to ‘do the thing right’ and counter the “mindset of PD still stuck in that old style 1980s and 90s way”.

The highest order measure of success in the Wenger-Trayner de Latt Value Creation Model, which goes one degree beyond the Kirkpatrick-Katzell, Guskey, and Desimone models, has the emergence of new frameworks as the final goal. In terms of emergence, I see in the informal literature and the stories from participants the evidence of TeachMeet experiences leading to the development of other unconference models - e.g., Pedagoo (pedagoo.org); BrewEd (brewed.pbworks.com); Gasta (gasta.me); CampEd (facebook.com/campedsite) - by those who are building on experiences they have had with TeachMeet.

The experiential theme of transformation in the findings of this research, reminds me of one comment from the analysis of the 2016 Participant Impact Survey findings (reported by Amond et al., 2020, p. 488), carried out after its first ten years - that of the participant who reported that the event had given them ‘a new zest for teaching’. In an analysis of delight, Millwood (2007, p. 1) places conviviality, the love of company, alongside zest, the love of action (defined by Heron, 1992, as ‘the emotions involved in the fulfilment of free choice and effective action’). I see this ‘zest’ aligning with the experiential theme of ‘spreagadh’ (spark) and transformation in these findings.

To confirm whether TeachMeet ‘officially’ fulfils the ‘organisational change’ remit of CPD as it is currently defined in the four models referenced above and by most academic experts, it would take the application of a formal model of evaluation. As exploration by appreciative sensemaking in order to decipher the phenomenon and what gives it life and attracts participants to it is the focus of this research, any formal evaluation process is beyond its scope. However the findings of this research, as reported in Chapter
Five, offer an authentic starting point to those who might decide to carry out such an evaluation in the future.

In the meantime, the findings of this research would seem to substantiate the Bennett (2012, pp. 23-27) interpretation of TeachMeet which prompted the coining of an apt description for it: ‘guerrilla CPD’. This was Bennett’s reflective report on having used TeachMeet with students within an accredited course of study. For me, as a researcher into TeachMeet, significant prompts were found in this paper - the name, the content, and the concepts discussed all provided signposts to follow for relevant literature to review and research questions to ask.

The descriptor in the name, guerrilla, which at first reading is suggestive of irregular activity grounded in conflict, turned out to have other meanings - one is guerrilla growth, the horizontal growth of plant stem and root systems that allows new plants to grow quickly as spurs from the original plant. Bennett calls TeachMeet “low key”, “bottom up”, “with no central locus of control”; Holme et al. (2021, p. 38) call it “grassroots level”; “the power of grassroots” is how participants of the 2016 Participant Impact Survey findings (reported by Amond et al., 2020, p. 487) describe it. Although the word guerrilla was not itself used by participants in this research, its meaning of grassroots or ground level growth is embedded across all the findings. In my analysis of observation notes taken at TeachMeets I found that events are both voluntary and ‘out of hours’ with a non-hierarchical dynamic. In the findings from survey by questionnaire, I found that participants became aware of TeachMeet primarily by word of mouth from peers, and that TeachMeet as a phenomenon grew when experience of one event led participants to organise more events. In the findings from the interpretative phenomenological analysis of interviews with TeachMeet organisers, Personal Experiential Themes of peer-to-peer encouragement and a desire to form their own learning path were fundamental to the purpose for their engagement with the phenomenon.
Bennett’s conceptual interpretation of TeachMeet as showing traits of *connectivism* (Siemens, 2005; Downes, 2008, 2009, 2012) and *rhizomic learning community* (Cormier, 2008), being an example of *Open Space Technology* (Owen, 2008), the description of its agile use of social media in *networked individualism* as *peer to peer, participate learning* (Wellman, 2002, Davidson and Goldberg, 2009; Heppell 2009) guided the literature review in both the domain of CPD and Self-organisation. As a starting point for research, Bennett’s suggesting it as a bridge between the informal and formal in professional learning was an influence. Bennett’s observation that TeachMeet could be an “effective fit” within CPD influenced this research question, posed to find out where TeachMeet participants situate it within their professional learning.

**On Finding TeachMeet in The Intersections.** Findings from both the questionnaire and interviews are infused with the meaning of TeachMeet as network, as community, and as professional development for participants. The findings also show that 90% of respondents placed TeachMeet in the intersections of the map showing Personal Learning Network, Community of Practice, and Continuous Professional Development. Of that 90%, two thirds point to it being all three. It is important to remind here that these terms, presented in Figure 6.2, were chosen to frame the research because they were the terms being used in ‘chatter’ about TeachMeet in the online commentsphere, as reported by Amond et. al (2018, p. 240).
It is clear to see evidence of an intersectional situation in the findings. In the findings of my observation of 15 TeachMeets in 2020, four of the events might be designated as PLN alone, while the others would have features of two if not all three of PLN, CoP, CPD. This is not to suggest they are hybrid in nature, more like a set of stacking dolls, one within the other - a teacher might experience CPD via a CoP meeting or at an event accessed as part of their PLN; attendance at a CPD event might lead to the formation of a CoP. This overlap in the designation of the events is not a surprise - it is there already in the literature reviewed. Not just in the highlighted problem with meanings of names and acronyms, but in the discussion around informal and formal professional learning. It reflects both what Evans (2019, pp. 6-7) called “the complexity … the multidimensionality, of professional learning and development” and what Webster-Wright (2010, p. 704) describes as authentic Professional Learning: “designed with proximity to practise in mind, a culture wherein learning is enabled rather than provided”. Both Bennett (2012, p. 26) and Kennedy (2014, p. 248) already count CoP as a form of CPD. In categorising CPD models according to their perceived effect on participants, Kennedy places CoP “on the cusp of the transformative level”. Bennett’s analysis includes CoP as
part of CPD, to the conclusion that “the principles of building community within formal
CPD programmes are not new, but the TeachMeet structure offers one way that they can
be organised effectively”. This reminds me of how Wenger (2010, p. 13-14) points out that
in learning communities “the key skill is transversal - to be able to negotiate between two
axes” - the vertical axis of “traditional hierarchies” and the horizontal axes of “peer
recognition and commitment to collective learning”; if CPD is on the tradition vertical
axis, and CoP is less hierarchical and more horizontal, Bennett’s concept of deployment of
TeachMeet to develop CoP as part of CPD, if done with transversal skill, could place it in a
unique intersection from the perspective of the individual, the community, and the
profession.

Discussion on RQ4: On Finding Thoughts About The Future Of Teachmeet

This is the ‘Dream’ territory of an Appreciative Inquiry - seeking to find what is of
concern to experienced participants as they, and TeachMeet, move into the future. The data
sought for this was via the interviews with organisers; it also came as part of responses
offered as a ‘free text’ invitation in the questionnaire. For a complex question which
acknowledges the delicate tensities there might be between impact, sustainability and
evolution, the analysis led to findings that are on one level simple and emphatic -
declarations about what should happen, what should not happen, but on another level are
full of ideation about what might happen.

On Finding What Participants Want For TeachMeet. Findings from analysis of
the contributions to the “free text” responses in the questionnaire, and findings from
analysis of the interviews, both present the participants’ wish lists, the ‘Dream’, showing
what they appreciate enough to want to keep and build on. The questionnaire respondents
have pragmatic wishes - to retain the social atmosphere, and to extend the reach to include
new (and nearby) places and new faces; an appreciation for conviviality, proximity,
 inclusion - the babbling bazaar of Torvalds (in Raymond, 1999, p. 21).
In the findings from the IPA of the interviews with experienced organisers, one potent experiential theme was the desire to maintain the non-hierarchical nature of TeachMeet events … the “face to face, open process” [i10, 238] that has no keynote - everyone’s contribution welcomed “as equally worthy” [i11, 92]. Alongside the elements presented in the discussion of findings for RQ1 above, this ‘lack of keynote’ features strongly as a signature factor of TeachMeets events, and its retention is strongly reflected in the findings. This desire echoes the literature on non-hierarchical organisations reviewed for Chapter Three, and cited in Chapter Two. It is a direct line back to the Open Space Technology format devised by Owen (1987, 1993, 1997) upon which TeachMeet was modelled. This is the ‘horizontal’ of Ferguson’s square (2017); the ‘trust in peers’ of Torvalds’s bazaar (in Raymond, 2000); Poe’s hive (2006); the starfish structure of Beckston and Brafman (2006); it invokes “The Fundamental Law of Conventional Conferences” (Winer, 2006, p. 1) - the sum of expertise of people in the audience is greater than the sum of expertise of people on the stage. These findings also echo the small body of literature reviewed found to discuss TeachMeet directly - McIntosh’s (in TES, 2016, p. 10) four pillars of “simple, random, human, social”; the 2014 Community Workshop (TeachMeet[AUS], p. 8) declaration that “egalitarian” be recognised as a component of TeachMeet DNA; the theme of “everybody equal … without hierarchy” that emerged from the 2016 Participant Impact Survey findings (reported by Amond et al., 2020, p. 487). The notes from my observations taken at fifteen TeachMeet events triangulate with this practice - I take note that I did not see any keynote presentation; each event had a series of practitioner nanopresentations interspersed with learning conversations among attendees.

This insistence that maintaining and safeguarding a horizontal, egalitarian structure is essential to preserve the value of TeachMeet events was an experiential theme throughout the interviews - summed up thus, with a practical suggestion - if the non-hierarchical structure is not there, “that’s not TeachMeet, call it something else” [i03, 301].
On Finding What Participants Do NOT Want For TeachMeet. The findings from analysis of the interviews with experienced organisers contained a strong experiential theme of resistance to two intertwined scenarios to be avoided - appropriation, and commercialisation. As this was an Appreciative Inquiry, focussed on making sense of what gives life to the phenomenon being explored, there was no direct request for articulation of fears or challenges. However the people interviewed were invited for their depth of experience as TeachMeet organisers; these themes were generated when discussion of present TeachMeet prompted discussion of future TeachMeet - the ideation of dreams for future TeachMeet prompting articulation of factors that might threaten those dreams - and they substantiate the inclusion of this fourth, more speculative, research question.

One experiential theme showed a disapproval of any form of appropriation or misdirection of the name TeachMeet, summarised in conclusive declarations that “Nobody owns TeachMeet, it’s the community” [i14, 295] and “if it’s not for teachers and by teachers, it’s not TeachMeet” [i05, 184], examples of many experiential statements made reference to seeing the name TeachMeet used for events that were not in the original spirit of TeachMeet. In Chapter Two - Context, about the context and origins of TeachMeet, it is confirmed that TeachMeet has no official or legal owners, it has no assets. This contrasts with most other unconference formats (BarCamp, EdCamp, PechaKucha, Ignite) which are incorporated. Thus the dilemma of ‘nobody owns it, everybody owns it’ can lead to anybody using it as they wish. This has often been the subject of public conversations on Twitter and the commentsphere. Both the Connell (2009) and Anderson (2013) blog posts, discussed in Chapter Two - Context and Chapter Three - Literature Review, sparked critical and fervent debate about “What’s the future of ‘Teachmeet’?” - the findings from this research in 2020 are part of a future that was being already considered in 2009 and 2013. In 2014, Australian TeachMeet participants decided that to “identify common understandings and values of TeachMeets in Australia” would be a key objective of their
Community Review (TeachMeet[AUS], 2014, p. 4), in which they used the starfish vs. spider model of Brafman and Beckstom (2006, p. 34) as their framework of inquiry. A key discussion point which echoes the themes in the findings from this research is the delicate balancing act between remaining as the ‘starfish’ which brings with it is risk of “misappropriation of TeachMeet branding and model by others” (p. 11), and morphing into the spider which brings it the “risk of TeachMeet being perceived as something it isn’t”, “loss of empowerment … credibility …” (p. 11). It is a debate ongoing in real time - as this chapter is being written - there is a Twitter conversation at #TeachMeet about unconference formats which includes a suggestion to “return #TeachMeets back to their grassroot origins…” (TeacherToolkit, Twitter, 2022).

About resistance to commercialisation, there were two interconnected experiential themes. One from a shared opinion that TeachMeet was not a place to advertise goods or services to attendees; the other from a practical acknowledgement that support from business partners might be necessary to cover material costs. Back in 2012 Bennett already referred to this as “the subject of heated debate in the TeachMeets community”, given that “very few rules apply to TeachMeets but originally they did not allow sponsorship or commercial activity”; but as ‘low key’ events without funding, sponsorship has often taken the form of “provision of refreshments in exchange for giving out promotional materials” (p. 23). Bennett’s “heated debate” was an apt choice of words - it continues, as reported in the previous paragraph.

The Australian Community Review (TeachMeet[AUS], 2014, p. 12) acknowledged a “nervousness” that the rapid growth of TeachMeet had wrought a balancing act between the ‘starfish’ need for “ownership and freedom” and the need to “adopt some spider characteristics to be able to achieve its aspirations”. However the final word of this Community Workshop was “we feel the risks of being a starfish are outweighed by TeachMeet potentially losing its value”. In the 2016 Participant Impact Survey findings
reported by Amond et al., 2020, p. 497), participants are brief and to the point about what they value: “doing it ourselves … on our own”.

Findings from the analysis of interviews in this research include suggestions of ways to resolve this tension in a politic and practical fashion - local decisions to accept goodwill that might be offered in the context of a company’s Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) schemes, but on condition that no platform be offered in return; for the sponsors to “understand what they are sponsoring is, and the essence of why it’s valuable” [i06, 427] and to accept that “just their names associated with the event is good enough” [i05 55].

For the record, in my observation notes there is no mention of sponsors being present at any of the fifteen events observed in any capacity other than as providers of the venue and refreshments for the in-person events, or providers of the digital platform for the online events.

On Finding What Participants Consider As Possible For TeachMeet. In the findings from the interviews and questionnaire in which participants offered their opinions, hopes, and ideas for the future, three matters of concern arose during the analysis, two of which also featured in findings from my observation analysis. The first matter is a strong wish to retain the essence of Teachmeet while increasing the reach; the second matter centres on adopting and evolving TeachMeet into professional learning; and the third is about the adaptation of TeachMeet to an online environment.

On Retaining The Essence Of Teachmeet While Increasing The Reach. On the first matter of essence and reach, participants in the questionnaire expressed their desire to retain essential elements of informality and conviviality, and to make it easier for “fresh faces” to become involved.

On Adopting And Evolving Teachmeet Into Professional Learning. On the second matter of adopting and evolving TeachMeet into professional learning, which was
one of the experiential themes generated in analysis if the interviews, there were stories of adopting TeachMeet format and practice for in-house staff development meetings and for local Community of Practice development meetings in regional Education Centres, and discussion of its usefulness in teacher pre-service training settings. In my observation of fifteen TeachMeets in 2020, most were independent or on the fringe of a conference; two events were taking place as celebratory endings to formal courses of study - one an undergraduate course for student teachers, one a postgraduate course for teachers.

Checking the open data held at the Irish TeachMeets wiki (irishteachmeet.pbworks.com, nd), an informal directory of events in Ireland, it is evident that this adopting and adapting is taking place. In 2018, 2019, and 2020, alongside the independent and conference fringe TeachMeets are four other discernible formats: as well as the in-course or end-of-course TeachMeets and in-house staff development TeachMeets already mentioned, this wiki has listings for events within conferences programmes, and adaptation of the format for use by students as StudentMeet in schools.

This discussion on adopting and adapting TeachMeet within professional learning, while expressing positivity about the effect it might have, as reflected in interviews:

“some people, particularly in the last 10 years for primarily financial reasons … weren't in a space to pursue additional study or further education. But they still want to better themselves …and TeachMeet allowed them to …. Yes, it was informal, but it was quality instruction from wonderful pedagogical instructors in their own right and experts in their own field and they still felt that they were bettering themselves and excelling … there's something very democratic about it” [i11, 366]

“it definitely is a type of CPD I think; providers who are delivering should consider it as a style…” [i08, 242]

was peppered with cautionary statements for prospective adoptees/providers to educate themselves about what TeachMeet is with before proceeding:
“... how to equip yourself to host one, that's what we need to get out there to other people … who have never been there” [i11, 265]

“Among people who have responsibility for formal CPD, there's an interest within those bodies in TeachMeet … it is open to any individual who wants to set up and run a TeachMeet; if others are going to get involved and support and develop TeachMeet models within their provision, they need to educate themselves about what it actually is about” [i03, 377]).

**On Adaptation Of Teachmeet To An Online Environment.** On the third matter of the future of TeachMeets in online spaces, this was a feature in the findings from interview analysis and findings from my observations. It is fair to say that the fact the dates of field work in this study overlapped with the global suspension of in-person events during 2020 influenced the data that is reflected in this finding. Nine of the fifteen events observed were online; all the interviews took place online with each of us in our homes; the questionnaire, which had always been planned to be released online, was live during the global isolation period of summer 2020. ‘Online’ thus was an inevitable part of the discourse.

At the core of the experiential theme of ‘TeachMeet online’, generated in analysis of the interviews, was a pragmatic “needs must” approach to taking events online. One thing from the past - discussed in Chapter Two - Context - is that ‘online’ has been a feature of many TeachMeets since 2006, via Skype, Flashmeeting, live streaming, or following the event via a Twitter hashtagged conversation. In terms of how the reviewed literature would frame it, TeachMeet was an early adopter of habits of connectivism and rhizomatic guerrilla growth. Within the pragmatism expressed in Personal Experiential Statements in interviews there were pockets of optimism, an acknowledgement that there could be benefits to online events, which were “time efficient and cost free”, especially in the cases where distance was no longer a barrier to attending. From my own observation notes stating that “the chat is where it is at!” came a finding that attending online platforms
allowed for very dynamic live chat, albeit appearing as typed text, which extended peer to peer conversations far beyond the reach that in-person attendance allows for.

Underneath the pragmatism, positivity and even optimism, the pervading mood was a little glum - the prevailing view of an online-only TeachMeet was that a certain essence, “the vibe”, could be lost ...

“Even with the best will in the world, it's heads on screens … even breakout rooms and so on … it's an approximation of community rather than community. And for my money it will take a lot to trump that real world sense of community and the real-world social element, that relaxed vibe so typical of the early TeachMeets” [i12, 301]

The experience of the pandemic-enforced online engagement of 2020 generated suggestions of a need to adapt, to augment the essence of in-person events with the additional features that online can bring; suggestions that in the future “if we can do a mix, maybe you know, you still offer that face to face, but for those who can't make it, you record everything and you live stream as much as you can” [i15, 224]; suggestions which sound something like descriptions of the earliest TeachMeets.

The discussion of findings for RQ4 thus far is of the future in general terms, reflecting the free-flowing dreams and ideation of participants' discourse. What of the relationship between impact, evolution, and sustainability as stated in the research question? Given that the third is highly dependent on the first two, I first consider each in turn, then how they relate to each other within the findings of this research.

Impact. Impact is a thread right through the story of TeachMeet - it is one of the reason cited, in the findings of this research, for attending and organising events - findings from the questionnaire showed teachers attending events to find ways to impact positively on themselves and their classroom practice; findings from the interviews showed teachers organising events to impact positively on professional development in general. Australian
teachers in 2014 recorded their desire for three levels of impact to be (i) on teachers: “empowered educators … feel part of a community … improved job prospects”; (ii) on students: “a better experience”; and (iii) on the system: “teaching in general is positively influenced” (TeachMeet[AUS], 2014, p. 7). These desired impacts sound very like the goals in the evaluative models of Kirkpatrick, Guskey, Desimone, and Wenger-Trayner that were reviewed in Chapter Three, and featured in the discussion of RQ3.

There is evidence of many such impacts in the findings of this research, carried out among the TeachMeet population in 2020, and in the literature about TeachMeet reviewed in Chapter Three which, although it is sparse it spans ten years between 2011 and 2021, reports on TeachMeet events held for librarians, in-service teachers, and pre-service teachers.

Librarians were one of the first groups to collect data on the impact of their TeachMeets. In 2011, Walsh et al. (p. 11) report a case study wherein librarians reported impact as “stimulating”; in 2012, Tumelty at al. (p. 8) report that this format “encourages first time presenters”; by 2021, a study by Charles (p. 5) on TeachMeet as professional learning for librarians in the US concludes it is “impactful, effective, sustainable, and transportable means of strengthening an … instruction program”. A case study by Jones and Edwards (2014, p. 52) with student teachers reported that TeachMeet “supported participants in further developing their own sense of professionalism”. Engeness at al. reported in 2019 (p. 6) of TeachMeet as “developing of a sharing culture among teachers”. The 2016 Participant Impact Survey findings (reported by Amond et al., 2020, p. 487) impact tell of impacts that “showed me the power of grassroots … the confidence to be daring … the chance to share is so powerful … changed my professional life”. All the impacts listed here, from the humblest “stimulating” to the most profound “changed my life”, remind me of the levels of impact sought by the formal models of professional learning evaluation of Kirkpatrick, Guskey, Desimone, Wenger-Trayner and de Latt.
These impacts are echoed and amplified in the findings of this research. The findings from questionnaire respondents speak of impacts of a personal and professional nature, with experiential statements ranging from “increased confidence” to “friendship”. The findings from the interviews are infused with the four Group Experiential Themes of impact at personal, purposeful, practical, and political levels.

*Impact at the personal level.* Impact on the personal level came for some from the feeling of being validated by one’s peers; the life long lasting effect of interaction with others who have “meaningful, powerful impact on my professional life as well as personal” [i01, 108]; the life enhancing reaction to the first TeachMeet attended or organised, “elation and excitement and a desire to do a lot more of this” [i08, 44] … “to make sure that the momentum we had tapped into that night, that we wouldn't lose that” [i13, 116].

*Impact at the purposeful level.* At the purposeful level, in almost every case, the deepest impact on those interviewed was that having experienced a TeachMeet, they went on to bring the experience to others.

*Impact at the practical level.* At the most practical level impact comes by the exchange of ideas - the nanopresentations giving a momentary glimpse into each other’s classroom, seeing how someone else does it, taking away the spark of an idea, the *spreagadh* [i02, 236], “something for Monday” [i03, 156].

*Impact at the political level.* In terms of political impact, the gradual increase in mention of TeachMeet in policy documents has been discussed in the Literature Review (Cosán 2016a, 2016b; DERA, 2015; NAPD, 2015), as has the slowly increasing appearance or inclusion of TeachMeet as a feature within and on the fringe of ‘official’ CPD conferences (BETT, eTwinning, ISTE, IPPN, INTO, SLF, NSTA).

*Evolution.* To evolve, according to Dictionary.com, is “to develop gradually”; the biological definition is to “to develop by a process of evolution to a different adaptive
The adaptation is key; evolution is adaptation to changing conditions in a current niche, in order to thrive and survive. Evolution is a dynamic process, taking place in small leaps forward. The evolution of TeachMeet is as much about its present and the future as it is about its past, which was outlined in Chapter Two, summarised for this discussion in Figure 6.3 as an approximate ‘tree of life’ showing progenitors and ‘descendants’ which have forked from it, by adapting the format to emerging needs, in recent years.

Figure 6.3

Primitive Evolutionary Tree Depicting Roots and Branches of TeachMeet and Related Unconference Models

It is evident from the findings that this evolution to date has been brought about by volunteers cooperating in an arena where nobody is the leader and everybody is the leader, part of what Bennett (2012, p. 25) calls the “social capital we build” via these “fluid, emergent types of meetings” which are “lead by participants”. Writing of a ‘big picture’ postmodern professionalism in 2000, Hargreaves (p. 167) spoke of tensions in an age in which the “teaching professional is by no means fixed”, and invoked Touraine’s (1995) “conscious movement of committed people” who work to redefine professionalism as “open, inclusive and democratic”. These tensions are what led to the
first TeachMeet in 2005, when Ewan McIntosh, “getting really fed up with all the top-down stuff that was done by grey men in grey suits”, met with some colleagues “… a group of educators who were trying to push boundaries, but who were often preaching to the converted below the radar of those who were making decisions and deciding what professional learning we were going to have. And that was the context that in late 2005, at the Scottish Learning Festival with David Noble and John Johnson, we had a chat about how dissatisfying it all was and how we should really organise something. And it was then in 2006, that we were able to cobble together an impromptu event in Edinburgh that became TeachMeet emerging” (02-12).

These tensions are part of what have propelled TeachMeet onwards to many of the thousands organised since. These tensions are palpable in the Group Experiential Themes of “Yes please” and “No thanks”, the political outlook in which participants are adamant on the difference between adaptation and appropriation.

Resolving these tensions was also one objective of the 2014 Community Workshop in Australia - it fits the question of evolution that they framed their outcomes in terms of TeachMeet DNA, the DNA being the central elements they felt should be retained despite any evolution or adaptations that might be necessary. It is interesting that their findings, although earlier in the evolutionary timeline of TeachMeet, align with those of this research - their concluding aspiration was that “The TeachMeet community continues to grow, be accessible to all, and be sustainable” (TeachMeetAUS, p. 9).

Sustainability. Looking at the growth in terms of sheer numbers of events called TeachMeet to date, one could suggest it is a thriving phenomenon … Amond et al. report in 2018 (p. 244) that “there is at least one TeachMeet occurring somewhere every day, suggesting it is in some way appreciated by teachers, suggesting a level of sustainability”. TeachMeet to date has shown its own unconscious sustainability - from one singular event in 2006 to events every day over a span of sixteen years; a random search online in June
2022 (Amond, 2022) shows that almost every day, somewhere in the world, a TeachMeet is happening. A wish for sustainability, taken to mean ability to continue, to keep going, is to be detected or interpreted in the opinions and ideas offered by individual respondents in this research. It is clear from the findings of this research that participants wish for TeachMeet to continue to flourish as they are - findings from questionnaire respondents show ardent desire for wider deployment while retaining the fun of social informality. The Group Experiential Themes interpreted in the interviews would advise that “it needs to stay as democratic as it needs to be ” [i11, 265], keeping the “democratic teacher voice … distributed leadership … equality of voices [i10, 164].

**Triangulating Relationships Between Impact, Evolution, and Sustainability**

In the preceding paragraphs, I have discussed separately impact and evolution, by looking back at how the past has become the present, and sustainability by looking forward at whether and how that present can move onwards into the future. Here I discuss briefly how they are not separate but related.

In terms of **evolution**, the genesis of TeachMeet has been discovered to have been a timely confluence of desire, with agile application of connectivism with contemporary ideas of open, informal yet convivial meeting spaces - findings of this research confirming an appreciation of “autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment” as described by Illich (1973, p. 12). Co-founder McIntosh describes it as being “as irreverent as possible … not hierarchies we’ve been used to … the reason being to generate alternative discussion” (in Hallinan, 2010, p. 1). Findings also indicate that its growth to date is because of the impact that the initial events had on those who happened upon them, and the enacted desire to reproduce that impact for others is a clear factor in the evolution of TeachMeet to what it is today; reflecting what Korthagen (2017, p. 399) has called “PD 3.0 … Values-based, Open-ended, Personal”
So, if the findings show that TeachMeet has had some of the impact on its participants that traditional CPD aims for, that it has evolved from a singular event to a global grassroots phenomenon, and those who participate are anxious to maintain a sustainability, are there pointers as to how these three are related? It is important to remember that apart from the original decisions on name and format (outlined in Chapter Two - Context) I have found little evidence of any central strategic planning involved in the maintenance or sustaining of TeachMeet to date. If there is no identifiable locus of control, no designated ‘boss’, for TeachMeet, it is difficult to identify who would be legal arbiter or even safeguard of any desire for sustainability. But the findings show a tensity between opposing themes - one an expressed desire to mine the positive impact of TeachMeet, and the other an anxiety that adopting without due care might dilute TeachMeet. This was where the strongest divergence was found in my Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of both interviews with organisers and the text responses of questionnaire respondents.

**Desire To Mine The Positive Impact Of Teachmeet.** The desire to mine the positive aspects of TeachMeet is expressed as two contrasting experiential themes within the Group Experiential Theme that interprets TeachMeet as being political. The first expression of desire is a strong wish by participants in this research, stated in the findings, to have TeachMeet sustain its existence as an independent and simple event that it is “… always ‘for teachers, by teachers’. Once you move away from those four words, it's not for teachers and it's not by teachers, then what is it? It’s not a TeachMeet, it's something else [i13, 184].

The second is an acknowledgement of how integrating aspects of TeachMeet into CPD or Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) could improve the effectiveness of CPD/TPL. This acknowledgement comes both from the findings of this research, and the Literature Reviewed in Chapter Three.
In the first instance, across the findings of this research, integration of TeachMeet into CPD/TPL is reported as part of lived experience. Instances in the findings from the questionnaire refer to integration into collective professional learning for school teaching staff, with mixed opinion:

“We have a TeachMeet at the end of each school term. It has become an integral part of our professional practice”

“In-house Teachmeets are often at lunchtime. This both undermines their efficacy and diminishes their value”

Instances from findings from interviews illuminated the potential transformative power of integrating TeachMeet into collective professional learning for school teaching staff, and offers insights into why this can be:

“... organized TeachMeet for school … got seven or eight teachers … to volunteer … the feedback from that was unbelievable … teachers were really invigorated. From then on all of our tech CPD has been modelled on some form of a TeachMeet … our CPD has changed because of that … TeachMeet sparked something in them … since doing all the various forms of TeachMeet that we have had, they have gone on to do their own to seek out their own courses and professional development from this … so I think the experience of having TeachMeet has led to our staff being open to that kind of learning … it totally transformed my idea of what CPD can be and should be.” [i02, 28-322]

“… TeachMeet is a funny type of CPD. It's like throwing the candy shop at you, but you have to decide which candy you're going to have … it's up to you then as a professional to go and follow up on that … it's not that deep a level of CPD, but to me CPD is a spectrum … you start with courses and go all the way to degrees and everything in between … I would feel TeachMeet definitely fits, it ignites and keeps that hunger for learning going.” [i08, 78, 128]

And I have evidence of this in findings from my own observations of a series of TeachMeets during 2020, which included voluntary end-of-year TeachMeets integrated into undergraduates and postgraduate courses, and TeachMeets which were subject based community of practice professional development at both primary and secondary level.
In the second instance, acknowledgement of the merits of integrating TeachMeet into CPD/TPL appears in the literature examined, as commentary in both the small body of academic papers that address it directly (Bennett, 2010; Tumelty, 2012; Amond et al, 2018, 2020; Engenesss at al., 2019; Charles, 2021) and policy documents (NESTA, 2013; AITSL, 2014; DERA, 2015; COSÁN, 2016a, 2016b; DENI, 2017) and as secondary data discovered in participant informed documents (TeachMeet[Aus], 2014; TeachMeet Collective, 2020). As reported in Chapter Three – Literature Review, as TeachMeet has evolved it has become increasingly discussed in official education agency documents, with a growing acknowledgement of the positive effect that the informal and self-directed CPD activities have on teachers’ careers.

The two key documents reporting viewpoints sourced directly within the TeachMeet community. The Australian Community Review, in 2014, (TeachMeet[AUS], p. 10) one measure of sustainability meant that no matter what the future brings, they wished “TeachMeet is easy to do" for new organisers - to have a clear set of measures that can be passed on to others. And stated in the tales of impact gathered something from participants to celebrate TeachMeet reaching ten years (TeachMeet Collective, 2020):

“… it transformed my attitude to what CPD could be in the hands of teachers”.
(Ezekiel, p. 10)
“… teaching CPD has really changed since TeachMeet's increase in popularity in the last few years.” (NicReamoinn, p. 35)

Anxiety That Adopting Without Due Care Might Dilute Teachmeet. An anxiety, in a few cases bordering on antipathy, about integrating TeachMeet into CPD/TPL, as described in the previous paragraph, is also represented in the findings. One striking finding from the questionnaire in this research is that, when asked to score how a series of examples of how TeachMeet can be used as professional learning, most participants scored it far more highly as a personal and informal activity - as sharing at peer level with the focus on participants - and scored it poorly as fulfilling the formalities of CPD centred on
training and accreditation. The key finding that shows TeachMeet as a voluntarily individual activity reflects a perspective of its situation that is unique for each participant. In most cases that perspective is that TeachMeet is intersectional. And although findings from interviews also included an acknowledgement that TeachMeet could have a role in professional learning, these were framed within a Group Experiential Theme whose primary ideation was keeping it simple, non-hierarchical, and independent. There is a fear of losing impact by a devolution of TeachMeet, that a growth into more formal space might lose the benefits - a typical statement offered by respondents being “I think if teachmeets are formalised too much it might take away the fun and social aspect of them”. Co-founder Johnston warns of a “possibility it might become too self-congratulatory” (in Hallinan, 2010, p. 1). This primacy of the informal was a finding from my observations also - although the exchange of knowledge in all events observed was of a practical nature (the appreciation of which was also in findings) it was framed by an informality more evocative of a social occasion dynamic than a CPD session. This is further entangled with findings of purpose - one strong driver for organising TeachMeet events was found to be a desire to create exactly such a forum, the opposite of formal sessions experienced which were deemed unsatisfactory:

“… it should be an open call … always put out a call and you have a good look at what comes in, and accommodate as many as you possibly can. Because anyone that puts themselves forward to speak, in my book, deserves a hearing at the minimum” [i12 98]

“… This is a group of people that is sharing ideas. I think that's a really interesting view on democracy, leadership, community, all sorts of things.” [i10 66]

No matter what altruistic desires and goodwill those advocating for ‘TeachMeet as CPD’ might strive for, there are necessities for formal CPD that could not be delivered by the opportunistic, individual, voluntary, unregulated, independent, open, and mixed TeachMeet of the findings of this research - the official oversight; a duty of care to ‘the
system’; the “intentional, ongoing, systematic” regime outlined by Guskey (2000, p. 16); the “content focus; active learning; coherence with beliefs; ongoing duration; collective participation” prescribed by Desimone (2009, p. 183). This was pointed out in questionnaire responses, eg “I’m fascinated by the CPD description. To me these are important events but they are not CPD, which should be more structured and with more expert input”.

And yet there is in the academic literature reviewed a distinct advocacy in the other direction - calling out a need for CPD/TPL to take on characteristics of informal events like TeachMeet. Webster-Wright’s (2009, p. 12) list of “four constituents that make professional learning authentic: understanding, engagement, interconnection, openness” are all characteristic of TeachMeet seen in the findings of this research. Borko, Jacobs, and Koellner (2010, p. 550) advocate the “New Models Of PD” of Stein, Smith, and Silver (1999, p. 263) - “open-ended, building capacity, co-structured agenda, relevant to practice, self-directed, focus on developing the community, teachers seen as leaders” – all of which apply to the TeachMeet characteristics seen in the findings. Korthagen’s (2017, p. 399) styling of a modern ‘PD3.0’ describes the “professional and personal intertwined” which is a strong theme in the findings. But even in these academic discussions there is caution about the risks formalising self-directed professional learning, as when Webster-Wright suggests the need to "walk a fine line between trying to demonstrate accountability and impact, without loss of agency and enquiry" (2009, p. 8).

For me, where academic literature reviewed showed the closest mirroring of the relationship between impact, evolution, and sustainability was the striking prescience of one report on professional development (reviewing provision in Ireland), released during the early years of TeachMeet. Murchan at al. (2009, p. 9) said that “renewed experience of and interest in professional learning by teachers themselves offers hitherto unavailable
opportunities to promote greater engagement by teachers in teacher learning in the coming years”. They recommend that (italics are mine) …

“teachers should continue to be involved in planning designing and providing professional development experiences for their peers … a level of choice could be afforded to schools and teachers in selecting the form and source of support that best meets their particular needs … professional development opportunities should be provided in relation to aspects of teaching and learning, not necessarily subject specific … strategies should be put in place to foster sense of ownership of professional development among teachers.”

Although Murchan et al. were speaking here to providers and policy makers, much of what they recommend (teacher involvement, sense of ownership, cross subject, choice, peer provision), aligns with what practitioners went ahead and did in those “coming years” in their TeachMeet activities. This echoes the earlier discussion of Research Question 2 on motivation - TeachMeet organisers grasping the “hitherto unavailable opportunities” as Murchan et al. suggest.

As for making any absolute statement on the current status of relationship between the evolution, impact, and sustainability of TeachMeet, more definitive answers may be hidden in what Evans (2019, p. 2) refers to as the “lacunae” of academic research into PD - those areas of informal and implicit professional learning which deserve more attention. And with what the findings have shown of the TeachMeet journey to date, it is fair to end this discussion with a common participant perspective - “it's very much up to the wisdom of the crowd to decide what is next”. [i10, 180]

Section Two – Discussion of Other Matters Arising

In Section One I discussed findings that substantiated and addressed the resolving of the four research questions. However, there are some other matters, that while not directly pointed at the research questions, warrant discussion for the clarity they lend to the inquiry and sensemaking that is the aim of the research. Three matters concerning the nature of TeachMeet which were not directly addressed in the research questions, but
which arose during analysis, will each be discussed here in Section Two. These matters concern the complex universe, the openness, and the indefinite definition of TeachMeet.

**On Finding The Complex Universe Of TeachMeet**

Of all the matters arising from the research to date, determining the structure of the TeachMeet ‘universe’ has proven the most complex to resolve. One of the objectives of the Discovery principle in Appreciative Inquiry is that it “defines the space” (Holman, 2004, p. 1). In the responses to questionnaire questions and interview prompts, participants spoke about TeachMeet as two phenomena: the first is the bounded TeachMeet event in which they participate, with a before, during, and after described in the findings from my observation; and the unbounded TeachMeet universe that exists ‘in-between’ events, described variously as network, community, grassroots movement.

As discussed at length in the Literature Review, ambiguity in the terminology of professional learning is a factor; in particular the words network and community being used interchangeably, and repeatedly so, by many. And these are two words that appear in the data collected both words over and over. The findings from the questionnaire have networking and community both featured strongly in the “three words” respondents chose as their descriptors for TeachMeet (see Figure 5.14). The 2016 Participant Impact Survey findings (reported by Amond et al., 2020, p. 487) generated a theme of the impact of TeachMeet being “connections … networks … building a community”. Findings from the interviews include experiential themes of appreciation of TeachMeet as community, connections formed via networks within TeachMeet. Ferguson (2018, p. 365) and Rogers (1962, p. 306) would both suggest that it is a homophily that prompts people to seek like-minded others to spend time together - this is borne out in interviews: “It's been a great avenue … for giving teachers an opportunity to realise that they're not on their own, that there's a community of willing and welcoming fellow professionals out there … to reach
out and find who else was out there... to make networks and connections with people that I found were having the same experience as me across different sectors [i13, 07, 35].

This appreciation of the benefits of the formation of networks and communities that is woven through the findings echoes much of what was repeatedly addressed in the global literature on CPD/TPL which was reviewed for Chapter Three - Literature Review: Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009, p. 399), in their review of the literature on teacher learning, emphasising that “building of communities” is “pivotal to success”; Fullan and Hargreaves (2012, p. 4) - arguing that “individuals get confidence from … having the right kind of people … interactions and relationships around them”; Sugrue and Merktan ((2016, p. 3) pointing out that “network is a verb and a noun: in verbal mode, one engages; as a noun, one is a node”; Ui Choistealbha (2019, p. 28) adopting the Trust et al. (2016) description of networks as “uniquely personalized, complex systems of interactions consisting of people, resources and digital tools that support ongoing learning and professional growth”, and citing Sallah (2017) and Stoll (2006) that networks hold both individual and collective capacity; and diffused through it all is an echo of so much of what Wenger, Trayner, and de Latt (2006, 2009, p. 1; 2010, p. 10; 2011, p. 9; 2015, p. 1) have written about networks - “the set of relationships, interactions, connections” - and communities - “the development of a shared identity around a topic” (2011, p. 9). In considering that “communities emphasize identity and networks emphasize connectivity”, Wenger sees identity as “the crucial factor that raises community above network as a learning force” (2010, p. 10), with the long-term benefit that “communities of practice … learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (2006, p. 1).

On Finding The Strength Of Weak Ties. If the need to commune with like-minded others can bring people of a community together at a TeachMeet event, there must be some force that holds the network together after and in between events, in the absence of any formal structure. Rogers (1962, p. 339) calls it the “weak ties that drive diffusion of
innovations”; Granovetter (1973, p. 1983) calls it “the strength of weak ties” that form bridges in “loose-knit networks” between “interpersonal networks” of networked individuals; Siemens (2005, p. 5) calls it the “weak ties between nodes in a network that are at the core of connectivism”.

Inside Granovetter’s theory of the strength of weak ties, there are two ideas that might shed light on the complexity of TeachMeet - an emotional intensity and a sense of community. Each of these had been strongly evident in both the findings from analysis of interviews with TeachMeet organisers and the online discourse of the commentsphere examined in the early stages of this research.

**Emotional Intensity.** The first is the suggestion that “emotional intensity” (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1361) strengthens the effect of these ties. The stories told by participants are often infused with emotional intensity, “maybe even quasi-religious in fervour” (Parkin, in Anderson, 2013) - people speak of “passion … people lighting up when they talk about what they do” (Amond et al., 2020, p. 4). The experiential statements in findings from the questionnaire in this research speak of the effect of the atmosphere at an event as “inspiration, energy, passion”, those from the interviews include experiential statements containing the words “buzzing … excitement and elation … spark of inspiration … emotional high … emotional feelings”.

**Sense Of Community.** The second is the suggestion that an “elaborate structure of weak ties may allow … information and ideas flow more easily … giving a “sense of community” activated at meetings … maintenance of weak ties may well be the most important consequence of such meetings” (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1336). Both ideas from the Granovetter’s “strength of weak ties” remind of the Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002, p. 947) suggestion that the “‘hard’ central core of tangible conditions necessary to guarantee the process” of teachers’ PD may be enhanced by “a ‘soft’ edge of intangible factors that may … drive engagement”. The ability to stay connected to each other using social media,
which was a central theme in the findings from analysis of my observation notes, the
questionnaire returns and interview transcripts: all of the events observed were using social
media and using hashtags before and during the event … the most common way
respondents found out about TeachMeet in the first place was “online” … the symbiotic
relationship between TeachMeet and Twitter is one of the Personal Experiential Themes
interpreted in interview analysis.

A visualisation of tweets among the TeachMeet community acting as ‘weak ties’ is
shown in Figure 6.4, which is a screen shot from a hashtag exploration software (Hawksey,
TagsExplorer, nd) which has captured the tweets to and from the account of the organiser
of a TeachMeet, before, during and after the event.

Figure 6.4

Screenshot of TagsExplorer\textsuperscript{beta} Animation Showing Tweets to and from Organiser and
Participants of a TeachMeet on the Fringe of 2017 The Scottish Learning Festival*
This open, online, ‘always on’ connectivity, via tweets acting as weak ties, might offer one explanation for the duality in what participants report as their lived experiences of a TeachMeet. For some it exist both as a singular event - a meeting at which people connect as stories are shared - and a collective universe, an “interconnected estate” of “citizens with smart technology and the skills with which to wield them” (Schmidt and Cohen, 2010 in Ferguson, 2018, p. 366). It is as if Wenger (2006, p. 6) was predicting for it, “extended the reach of our interactions beyond the geographical limitations of traditional communities … the increase in flow of information … expands the possibilities for community, and calls for new kinds of communities of shared practice”.

**On Finding The Open In Teachmeet**

Many variations on “open” have featured and been discussed in the research so far, both in the literature reviewed for the framing of the research, and in the findings of the research.

The reviewed literature of the broader world of self-organised phenomena featured *Open Space Technology* (Owen 1987, 1993, 1997; Holman 2004); *open-source* (Raymond 1999, opensource.com, nd); and *open online community* (Poe 2006).

The review of education literature included *open education* (Weller, 2014; Hendricks, 2017); *open thinking* (Couros, 2006); *open pedagogy* (Paquette, 1979); *open education resources* (OER) (Weller, 2014; Kroes, 2013) and *open education practice* (OEP) (Cronin, 2017), both of which espouse *open admission, open as free, open as libre*; the *Open University* (OU at 50, 2019) and *Massive Open Online Courses* (MOOC) (Siemens 2005; Downes 2007, 2008, 2009); and the repeated call for professional development and learning to be *open-ended* (Stein, Smith, & Silver 1999 in Borko 2010; Korthagen, 2017) and *open* (Hargreaves, 2000; Webster-Wright, 2009, 2010; Doust, 2013).
The review of literature and found secondary data on TeachMeet itself featured *open discourse* and *open access data* (Amond et al., 2018); and *open professional development* (McIntosh, 2010; TeachMeet[AUS 2014]).

Many of these manifestations of open, as framed in the literature and used to frame the research, are evident in the findings.

Findings from statistical and interpretative analysis of the data collected at fifteen TeachMeets showed all events to be *open gratis* - free of cost - and *open libre* - materials openly available, while all bar two were *open admission*, and featured an *open call for participation*. All the events I observed had the dynamic features of OST - freedom to roam, reciprocal sharing and exchange, the convivial atmosphere. The fluent and agile use of online communications evident before, during, and after all the events suggests an *open online community* or at least an open online network.

Findings from statistical and interpretative analysis of the data returned by questionnaire respondents reporting their experiences of TeachMeet showed an appreciation for the features just outlined, as well as the non-hierarchical agenda of OST: “the whole point of it is that it's an open space technology, in the non-technological sense … a face to face, open process” [i10, 233, 238]. Given that Havemann and Roberts (2021, p. 27) suggest that “openness is better understood as a continuum than as half of a binary”, it was interesting to note that many research participants, in offering their own personal definition for TeachMeet, included the word ‘open’ (“open community … open to all voices … open discussion … open sharing … open environment … open meeting”), albeit not defining what they specifically meant by ‘open’.

Findings from interpretative analysis of the fifteen interviews with TeachMeets organisers, various uses of have ‘open’ infused through the four Group Experiential Themes generated - the personal, purposeful, practical, and political matters of importance
to them from their experience of TeachMeet. The matter of open admission is woven through the first three of those Group Experiential Themes.

In the GET focussed on the personal, it is a social and interpersonal concern that “applications are open to everybody, it's posted on Twitter, on Facebook, whoever wants to present .... people sign up to join and to present” [i15, 104]. In the GET focussed on the purposeful the concern is “it should be an open call … prepared to open the door then to whoever came” [i12, 98, 115]. In the GET focussed on the practical the concern is that “you need it to be open, to be welcoming” [i12, 110]. Two of the designated values of open-source - participative collaboration and open exchange - are appreciated in the GETs focussed on the personal concern with TeachMeet as a “face-to-face, open process” [i10, 138] and the practical concern with having variety in ‘the mix’ of an event, “people from different backgrounds, different schools, different settings, even different industries sometimes” [i02, 141] to optimise the open exchange described by Torvalds (in Raymond, 2000, p. 21) as “the great babbling bazaar of open-source”. In the GET concerned with political matters in the future of TeachMeet, the experiential theme focussed on what is desirable to maintain, the point is made emphatically that “the whole point of it is that it's an open space technology (in the non-technological sense) [i10, 223].

While the use of ‘open’ in these various forms is in appreciative voice, there is an articulation of awareness that being truly ‘open’ carries an inherent risk: “one of the problems that comes with anything that's like open-source or Creative Commons, or with no ownership, is that someone will try to come along and take it” [i5, 300] but conversely the very risk is what makes the TeachMeet model so democratically open “something that is open doesn't belong to anyone … and yet - think about it - the word is out there, nobody owns it, it's not trademarked, it's not copyright … it is open to any individual who wants to set up and run a TeachMeet” [i03, 377-421]. This balancing of tension between benefit and risk prompts a thought that the three fundamental markers of open pedagogy as laid out by
Paquette (1979, p. 26) - “autonomy and interdependence; freedom and responsibility; democracy and participation” - are woven through the findings of this study as the participants’ stated aspirations. TeachMeet may not claim to be a pedagogy, open or otherwise, but these findings would suggest the central “willingness to share with others” in the findings indicate what Cronin (2017, p. 18) refers to as a state of ‘open readiness’ in TeachMeet participants to embracing an Open Educational Practice (OEP) that includes strands of “collaborative practices … employing participatory technologies, and social networks for interaction, peer-learning, knowledge creation, and empowerment of learners”.

**On Finding That The Definition Of TeachMeet Is Not Definite**

As represented in Figure 5.13 in Chapter Five, the possibility of correct definitions for TeachMeet could go on indefinitely, hence the title of this section of this brief - and final - point of discussion. The Merriam Webster online dictionary tells me a definition is either “an explanation of the meaning of a word” or “a statement expressing the essential nature of something”. In this research, applying Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to the words of participants, I was more concerned with the second of those than the first; essence over exact explanation. This reflected Weick’s Sensemaking preference for plausibility over perfection (1995, p. 409); that which Raymond calls the ability to “present a plausible promise” (1999, p. 47), and the IPA objective of "theoretical transferability rather than empirical generalisability" (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022, p. 45).

Greenhalgh (2021, Tweet) argues, in a Twitter thread titled “a short rant on definitions - invoking the contention of pragmatist Pierce that “nothing new can ever be learned by analysing definitions” - that “attempts to ‘develop a standardised definition’ may be usually futile and counterproductive” and “we won't enrich our understanding by demanding consistent definitions or ways of expressing what are essentially qualitative phenomena”.}

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While the research questions framing this exploration did not seek to decide on a definition for TeachMeet, the questionnaire and interview prompts offered to participants invited them to give their definition. The findings from analysis of those returns in this research report that the original 2006 tagline “by teachers for teachers” has been rounded out to be more descriptive of the setting and the activities - “a TeachMeet event is a place for sharing ideas in an informal social setting, arranged by peers for peers” - without making any claims for this, or any other, exact sentence to be the definition. There is a value in approximation rather than pinpointing which allows active and prospective participants to manage expectations and make decisions, applying an open adaptive ‘indefinite definition’ for a complex open adaptive practice.

Summary of Discussion

In this chapter I have discussed the research findings in light of how they serve to resolve and substantiate the research questions, how they reflect and are reflected in the literature reviewed, and how they expand knowledge and understanding of the nature, niche, and essence of the TeachMeet phenomenon.

Findings from this research that were pertinent to each question were discussed both in the light of the literature I had reviewed in framing that question, and in comparison to existing secondary data collected from TeachMeet participants in 2014 (TeachMeet[AUS] Community Workshop) and 2016 (Participant Impact Survey).

In discussion of how findings served to resolve RQ1 on the characteristic elements of TeachMeet, I highlighted how signature elements that give life to the TeachMeet event - those that resembles the Open Space Technology unconference (Bennett 2012, Carpenter et al., 2018, Ferguson 2017, Gladwell 2000, Hock 1999, Owen 1987, Torvalds in Raymond 1999) - are also those appreciated by participants for the effect they have had on their practice. In particular, the spreagadh or impetus of the nanopresentation - that brief glimpse into the practice of a peer - is highlighted as a humble example of the effect of
CPD/TPL most highly valued by global experts (Desimone, 2009; Guskey, 2000; Katzell-Kirkpatrick, 1959; Kennedy, 2014; Wenger-Trayner and de Latt 2011; Webster-Wright, 2009), that of transformation.

In discussion of how findings served to substantiate and resolve RQ2 on motivation to participate, I highlighted how the finding of three participant dispositions as seeking to improve, sharing stories, bringing opportunity to others, and how the progression of many participants from one to other reflects Levels of Participation theories (Lave & Wenger 1991, Wenger-Trayner & de Latt 2011); and how the experiential themes of innovation, moral responsibility, taking action to counter poor CPD aligns with theories and evidence in the literature reviewed (Guskey, 2000; Korthagen, 2017; McMillan et al., 2014; Murchan et al., 2009; Rogers, 1962).

The discussion of how findings addressed RQ3 on the situation of TeachMeet in their professional learning, turned out to be more about substantiating the question than fully resolving it. Findings that participants situate it in the spaces that intersect PLN, CPD - and an expressed preference for the informal and personal aspects of network and community over more formal goals of development - align with the global discussions by experts who are acknowledge the growing significance of more informal networks and communities in Teacher Professional Learning (Avalos, 2001; Bennett, 2012; Borko et al., 2010; Carpenter et al., 2018; Couros, 2006; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Desimone, 2009; Evans, 2019; Guskey, 2000; Hargreaves, 2000; Hattie, 2015; Heron in Millwood, 2001; Murchan et al., 2009; Poe, 2006; Richardson, 2014; Tobin, 1998, Trust et al in Uí Choistealbha, 2019; Wenger et al., 2006-2015, Webster-Wright, 2009).

In discussion of how findings might serve to resolve RQ4 on impact, evolution, and sustainability of TeachMeet, I considered first the findings which presented the participants’ political ideation on the future, in which they advocated strongly for retention of the simple, non-hierarchical, independent TeachMeet and rejection of any
commercialisation or appropriation while acknowledging the growing possibilities of integrating TeachMeet as professional learning both in-person and online. I then considered sustainability both in the light of how these finding reveal evident tensions between desire to optimise the positive impact from the evolution of TeachMeet to date and anxiety around any dilution or devolution of TeachMeet, and in the light of the opinions found in literature specific to TeachMeet participants (Amond et al., 2020; Bennett, 2012; Barrett, 2009; Charles et al., 2021; Connell, 2009; Engeness et al., 2019; Johnston in Hallinan, 2010; McIntosh, 2010, Parkin in Anderson, 2014; Tumelty, 2012; Walsh et al., 2011; Yeomans in Anderson, 2013) and in literature addressing global issues of organisation and professional learning (Borko at al., 2010; Brafman & Beckstrom, 2006; Desimone, 2009; Evans, 2019; Ferguson, 2019; Guskey, 2000; Hargreaves, 2000; Illich, 1973; Korthagen, 2017; Murchan et al., 2009; Owen, 1987; Poe, 2006; Torvalds in Raymond, 1999; Webster-Wright, 2009).

In Section Two, three matters arising in the findings, that were not question-specific, were discussed in the light of how they might resolve the overall exploration of the essence, nature, and niche of TeachMeet.

The first matter discussed was how the findings have helped towards explaining the complex universe that is TeachMeet: a series of discrete and independent events organised by participants for peers using online channels of communication, without the scaffolding or framework of an official organisation. I considered how the findings that show participants appreciating TeachMeet as network and community (Rogers, 1962; Wenger et al., 2006-2015; Siemens, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Richardson 2009; Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012; Sugrue & Merktan, 2016, Trust at al., in Uí Choistealbha, 2019) might be interpreted within the strength of weak ties theory of Granovetter (1973).

The second matter which the findings brought forth for discussion is the many variations of open that this research has found manifested in TeachMeet: Open Space
Technology, open-source, open online community, open education, open thinking, open pedagogy, open education resources, open education practice, Open University, Massive Open Online Courses, open / open-ended PD, open discourse, open access data, open professional development, open gratis, open libre, open admission, open call for participation. (opensource.com, nd; Paquette, 1979; Owen, 1987; Raymond 1999; Stein, Smith, & Silver, 1999 in Borko, 2010; Holman, 2004; Siemens, 2005; Couros 2006; Poe, 2006; Downes 2007; Webster-Wright, 2009; McIntosh, 2010; Doust, 2013; Kroes, 2013; TeachMeet[AUS], 2014; Weller, 2014; Hendricks, 2017; Korthagen 2017; Amond, Millwood, & Johnston, 2018; OU at 50, 2019; Hargreaves, 2000). I considered how the principles of these as they are infused in the findings, places TeachMeet in a state of “open readiness” (Cronin, 2017) on the “continuum of openness” (Haveman & Roberts, 2021).

The third matter is that of a standardised definition for TeachMeet, which the findings approximated rather than resolved. I discussed how this approximation to the essential nature is deemed acceptable in a sensemaking inquiry (Weick, 1995; Raymond, 1999; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2022), and insistence on the definition may even be counterproductive (Pierce in Greenhalgh, 2022). I consider how a phenomenon that is complex and still evolving, as TeachMeet is, might best be served by description rather than definition.

This discussion of findings serves to inform the conclusions, implications, limitations, recommendations, and reflections in the final chapter.
Chapter Seven - Conclusion

This chapter has four sections, presenting the conclusions, significance, recommendations, and reflections on this research. Section One presents conclusions based on the findings of this exploration of the TeachMeet phenomenon. Sensemaking methodologies, founded on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of data collected in observation, questionnaire, and interview by Appreciative Inquiry, were used to explore the essence, nature, niche of TeachMeet and what matters to its participants. Figure 7.1 contains a summary reprise of those key findings, which were detailed in Chapter Five and discussed in detail in Chapter Six. Section Two presents the significant implications, limitations, and contributions of the research. Section Three offers recommendations, based on the conclusions, to all parties with an interest, be it active or passive, in TeachMeet. In Section Four I offer my reflection on the research journey that led to the conclusions.
Figure 7.1

Summary of Key Findings Pertaining to TeachMeet Events, TeachMeet Participants, and What Matters in TeachMeet

F1. TeachMeet Events

These are arranged by teachers for teachers in an individual voluntary capacity with a view to sharing classroom experience in a setting which is informal, convivial, out-of-hours, open, and free-of-charge. Online communication supports connectivity during and between events.

What gives life to a TeachMeet event is the interplay between three elements: the MC or host as the catalyst whose role is to facilitate the flow of nanopresentations and other activities; the nanopresentations, brief stories of the resource, idea, or classroom experience being shared which act as a spreagadh (spark) for those who wish to find out more; and the Open Space dynamic which is the explicit adoption of relaxed rules, and a lack of hierarchy among participants.

F2. TeachMeet Participants

Profile - these are from all levels and sectors of education. Many progress through a continuum of involvement, each level with a distinct disposition: those attending out of curiosity and seeking to improve themselves; those presenting to share with others something that has worked in the classroom; those organising to bring opportunity to others to experience TeachMeet.

Perspectives - participants describe TeachMeet as informative, collaborative, fun, fulfilling some of the functions of Community of Practice, Personal Learning Network, and Continuing Professional Development; most perceive it to be situated in the intersections between these in their own personal professional practice, and to be a more formal than informal activity.

F3. What Matters in TeachMeet

Analysis of the lived experience of participants finds that for them it is personal, purposeful, practical, and political. The first matter is how the person has been affected by TeachMeet - how social, group, interpersonal and personal experiences and relationships have had profound and lasting effects and lead to individuals interacting in networks and communities. The second matter is the purpose, forces that compel those who organise TeachMeets - pioneering spirit of innovation, feeling of moral responsibility to do whatever it is they can do, and countering discontent with established Continuing Professional Development. The third matter is appreciation for the practical elements of TeachMeet, and impact they have on participants - the brief glimpse into another’s classroom; exchange between peers of ideas, resources, ways of teaching; the spreagadh (spark) effect of something encountered that leads to transformation. The final matter is political - opinions and ideation about what TeachMeet is, is not, and might become - desire to keep TeachMeet simple and non-hierarchical; resistance to commercialisation or appropriation; and acknowledgement of risks and benefits of any role in professional learning, both in-person and online, that might evolve in the future of TeachMeet.
Section One - Conclusions

This research into TeachMeet posed four research questions, focussed on the characteristic elements of TeachMeet, the motivation for participation in TeachMeet, the situation of TeachMeet in participants' professional learning, and the future of TeachMeet.

The chosen methodological path of Sensemaking through Appreciative Inquiry was underpinned by the fundamental quest to find out *What's the Story? So What? What's Next?*. In the words of Weick (1995, p. 409), “Sensemaking involves the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing”. In the words of Holman (2004, p. 1), Appreciative Inquiry is “a quest for *it*”, a search through what is defined, discovered, and dreamed by participants in a shared lived experience. In this research, my quest for “it” has enabled me to clarify the essence of (*what gives it life?), the nature of (the discernible properties, descriptors of *how* it is conducted), the niche of (*where* it is perceived to ‘be’), and what matters in (*why* it is important to participants), TeachMeet.

My conclusions about the essence, nature, niche, and what matters in TeachMeet, based on the findings of this research, are that it is humble; it is open; it is social; it is a desire line of enacted agency; it is informal and intersectional; it is evolving; and it is potent in ways that are personal, purposeful, practical, political for participants.

*TeachMeet is Humble*

TeachMeet stakes no claim and makes no claims. In the TeachMeet universe there is no formal hierarchy, no locus of control, no registry of assets. The essence of TeachMeet is in the name, the event, the participant. The name TeachMeet was chosen with intent to denote exactly what will happen at the event - teachers arrange to meet and teach each other. The event is modelled on the Open Space Technology ‘marketplace’ (Owen, 1997, p. 25), a convivial chaordic affair overseen by MCs who facilitate the peer to peer sharing of each other's lived experience as nanopresentations, brief stories which may act as a
spreagadh (spark) of inspiration in others. There is no keynote, and the agenda is random, depending on who has volunteered to present. The participants at every stage - organising, hosting, presenting, attending, sponsoring, supporting - are volunteers seeking to improve, share, bring opportunity; the by-line of TeachMeet since the start has been ‘by teachers for teachers’.

*TeachMeet is Open*

There are multiple manifestations of openness in TeachMeet - in the organisation of events, among participants between events, and in the perspectives of those participants regarding TeachMeet. TeachMeet events by their nature feature an open call for participation and are open gratis - free of cost - and most events are open libre, with materials being openly shared. In essence, as the events are Open Space (Owen, 1993), there is only one rule - The Law of Mobility - which grants explicit freedom for individuals to openly roam the room during the event. There is an open online discourse evident among a network of TeachMeet participants connected by fluent and agile use of online communications before, during, and after events. Although much of this discourse takes place in the blogosphere and its appended commentsphere, the most recent conversations tend to coalesce around the #teachmeet timeline on Twitter which has become a *de facto* ‘open all hours’ meeting place. Given the lack of established authority in TeachMeet, sharing of information is modelled on the manner of the open exchange values of the *open-source* community (Torvalds in Raymond, 2000, p. 21), in which people must trust each other to take the name and the format and to use and adapt them in good faith. The closest location to a current public repository of knowledge for prospective event organisers is at wikis such as TeachMeet.scot (http://teachmeet.scot/how-do-i-organise-a-teachmeet/), and Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TeachMeet). The common perspective of participants is that TeachMeet is an open process, located somewhere on the “open continuum” of Havemann and Roberts (2021, p. 27). TeachMeet
participants enacting the “interaction, peer-learning, knowledge creation, and empowerment” with which Cronin (2017, p. 18) characterises “open readiness” suggests they may be evolving TeachMeet towards designation as an Open Educational Practice.

TeachMeet is Social

TeachMeets take place in a social setting: participants attend events for in-person social interaction with peers, or connect with peers online in a socially mediated networked community. News of forthcoming TeachMeet events is typically spread on social media, as are updates from within events, to inform interested individuals who may wish to ‘follow’ a TeachMeet remotely. The social setting, and social interaction, of TeachMeet events is a universally appreciated aspect of the experience. The out-of-hours timing, the informal seating, the freedom to roam, the random mix of people from all sectors and levels of education, the skilfully mediated relaxed atmosphere which allows attendees time and permission to talk to others around them while still respecting those presenting, all add to the chaordic and convivial vibe that participants appreciate and strongly wish to maintain, recalling the “emotional intensity” and “sense of community” that Granovetter (1973, p. 1361, 1366) posits as being the strength of weak ties. Connecting with people is considered as important a reason for attending as learning from each other.

TeachMeet is a Desire Line

Desire lines are paths without signposts (as pictured in Figure 1.1), worn by those enacting their own agency in taking a direct route from where they are to where they want to be; as Freire describes it, they “make the road by walking” (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 6).

TeachMeet began when three people decided to arrange an in-person social meeting in order to discuss their practice among themselves and others who might be interested. Since then, others have followed the same path or carved new ones. Many who experienced early TeachMeets responded by organising more for others, driven by
multiple desires - some report a desire to share innovations and practice, many desire to improve themselves as teachers, and are determined to counter disappointing professional development experiences by providing an opportunity for meeting to teach each other. As with desire lines, there is no permission needed; to hold a TeachMeet is a decision to name a time and place and invite people to meet there, bringing ideas to share, and a listening ear.

**TeachMeet is Informal and Intersectional**

The perspective of participants is that the niche of TeachMeet is in the informal and intersectional spaces of their personal professional practice. TeachMeet events are organised by teachers for teachers, and as well as attending to learn with each other, participants appreciate the informality which affords them built-in time for conversations with peers and for making new connections in a relaxed way. As there is no global organisation or formal oversight, communication about and between events is mainly in the open and online in informal channels. It is carried out in an informal community network employing modern hashtag-driven connectivity, using in particular #teachmeet on the social network Twitter.

Most participants consider the discursive and open sharing properties of TeachMeet reflect those of a Community of Practice (CoP), and the opportunities afforded in connecting with peers to reflect that of a Personal Learning Network (PLN). Many agree that TeachMeet can be used at in-house staff meetings towards continuing professional development (CPD).

When asked to pinpoint their engagement with TeachMeet, most participants place it at one of the intersections between PLN, CoP, and CPD, with more of them placing in the informal zones of network and community than the formal professional; the perspective of many is that TeachMeet is at the intersection of all three.

**TeachMeet is Evolving**
TeachMeet is not new; it was forged in 2006 by merging the evolutionary line of non-hierarchical Open Space Technology with the brevity of Pecha Kucha, in response to an urgent desire to find opportunity to share and discuss emerging practice. Its initial rapid growth was enabled by agile exploitation of recent technologies of online communication. While it still retains the central elements - brief presentations from peers, randomly chosen and facilitated in a convivial atmosphere - individual TeachMeets are operated independently of any central control system, and as a result it has not remained static.

This lack of rigidity leaves it open to adaptation by each new group that adopts it. Some change the management of support structures within events according to their context. Others are integrating it to new situations - although many TeachMeet events remain independent of or on the fringe of other events, some are successfully integrating it into in-house school staff development, education conferences, or accredited teacher education courses.

Other professions - librarians, architects - are adopting and adapting it. New branches are still evolving - Pedagoo, BrewEd, CampEd, and Gasta are all emergent unconference formats that carry the DNA of TeachMeet.

**TeachMeet Is Potent**

The findings reveal a potency in TeachMeet comes from the power of the personal, purposeful, practical, and political impact that the lived experience of TeachMeet has had on participants as individuals and as a collective to date. At a personal level, individuals experience encouragement from peers and mentors, teachers are bringing ideas back to their classrooms because of an inspiring story told by another teacher. Collectively, people who engage appreciate becoming part of the development of dynamic networks and communities. In terms of purpose, potential is being realised by taking direct action together with intent – deliberately seeking to improve oneself as a teacher, to improve professional learning, and to provide opportunities to peers to gather at an event that is
collaborative, informative, and fun where ideas on practice can be exchanged. At a practical level, facilitating the open exchange and discussion of knowledge, ideas, and resources among teachers can only be of benefit, and in some cases releases the potential of the spreagadh (spark) that ignites a transformation in practice. And in political terms, those who have become aware of the potential realised through TeachMeet have a determination to both preserve the integrity of TeachMeet as intended, and encourage others to adopt and adapt it into the future, while ensuring to keep it simple, social, and independent.

Section Two – Significance: Implications, Limitations and Mitigations, Contribution

This section is about the significance of this research. It outlines implications of the findings, comments on the limitations of the research, and suggests what the research can offer as a contribution to the education community.

Implications

Living Up to the Name. The most fundamental significance of the findings and conclusions is that they show TeachMeet “does exactly what it says on the tin” (Partridge et. al, p. 653) in living up to its name. Teachers meet, and in that meeting they teach each other. The name may be new, but the concept is not. Although it has been framed as ‘radical, in that their intention is to provide teachers with a forum for sharing their practices outside of the classroom without the structures of normal staff development’ (Bennett, 2012, p. 1), TeachMeet’s co-founder reminds us “that teachers have always done this … ‘… the thing itself’s quite a natural thing for teachers to do … something teachers have done for time in eternity … snuck away from professional development to go for a quick pint … the takeaway so that they can plan with some good food together … talk about amazing stuff kids achieved that week, 'I'm going to try that next week' … and they've always shared ideas. So it's nothing new in some ways, but it was legitimising it … if you give something a proper name, it becomes a thing.’ (Ewan, 77)
And the Open Space Technology unconference world within which it evolved it is not new - it merely expands the universally agreed “truly useful part, the coffee break” to become the entire event (Owen, 1997, p. 3), “to combine the level of synergy and excitement present in a good coffee break with the substantive activity and results characteristics of a good meeting”.

**The Strength of Weak Ties.** The almost invisible spread of TeachMeets, the “rhizomatic growth, central to the spread of self-organised systems” echoes that which Downes (2014, p. 1) attributes “to the power of connectivism” in Siemens’s 2004 theory in which “know where” becomes the new “know what”, exploiting the Granovetter (1973) “strength of weak ties” to form instant communications (in this case, mostly Twitter).

Although TeachMeet itself has made no claims to be a pedagogy, this connectivism, this growth of “knowledge distributed across a network of people and information – learning consists of the ability to construct and traverse those networks” might pin TeachMeet on the Millwood (2013) Learning Theories Map under Social Constructivist Theory. The simplicity of infrastructure - nothing more that the date, time, location for each event - combined with the agility and speed with which events can be organised and populated, affirms the choice of colourful descriptor (Bennett, 2012, p. 1) for the emerging TeachMeet as **Guerrilla CPD**.

**Trust and Freedom.** There is significance in the openness, informality, and freedom of TeachMeets. The very open and random nature of event, what Owen calls “the dance between chaos and order” (2004, p. 67) implies a lot of trust involved; trust that as Owen also says at the outset of all Open Space events, “whoever comes are the right people” (1997, p. 29). One implication of the informality of events is that they are free, unlike other elective Professional Learning which can be prohibitively expensive (MA, PhD etc). Although it may be fleeting, these free opportunities for shared PL may be all that a teacher, especially those starting out, can afford financially or timewise. It is
significant that many participants at TeachMeet attend as much for the company as for the content. And the success of the ‘freedom to roam’ rule during events, that is so appreciated - and that contrasts with the stated frustration with the ‘captive’ feeling used to describe memories of what Guskey (2002, p. 5) has called ‘rotten’ PD - implies that relaxing the ‘one size fits all’ approach might increase motivation and engagement in all professional learning.

**A Growing Dilemma.** Participants perceive TeachMeet to be still evolving, and to exist in the intersectional spaces in their professional learning. This leaves significant scope for all the potential within it to be realised; if tended with care and respect it can remain exactly as it is now for those who appreciate that but can also fulfil desires expressed by others to take it further. Interrogation by this research into the situation currently occupied by TeachMeet in any professional learning landscape has raised as many questions as it addressed. Although the original independent and conference-fringe models of TeachMeet have been joined by in-house, in-course, and in-conference models, the obligatory nature of the formal professional learning routes (pre-service, early career, in-service, postgraduate etc.) required by the profession or curriculum development demand a conformity that is at odds with the ‘guerrilla growth’ patterns of TeachMeet events; the very unpredictability that is their hallmark do not gel with the necessity for strict regulation which is demanded in formal professional learning. Implications for those wishing to release the evident potential of TeachMeet into teacher professional learning provision are that the effects could be equally powerfully ruinous or transformative. From the perspective of the individual – the findings suggest that the niche of TeachMeet is a dynamic one, located somewhere between (i) the “PD 3.0” of Korthagen (2017, p. 399), which is *open-ended and personal* and (ii) the “Authentic Professional Learning (APL)” of Webster-Wright (2010 p. 23), who speaks of four constituents of understanding, engagement, interconnection and openness: “as it is lived, with others, over time, designed
with proximity to practice in mind, a culture wherein learning is enabled more than provided”. This niche implies that individuals and peers involved in TeachMeet activity are following the informal desire lines of their own personal professional practice.

**Contributions**

The findings of this research offer several contributions - primarily to academic and practical knowledge in the field of teacher professional learning, but also to academic research practice.

**Contributions to Knowledge in the field of Teacher Professional Learning.**

This research offers three contributions to knowledge and practice in the field of teacher professional learning, important that given that “evidence demand increases as we move towards policy” (Ellis, SCoTENS keynote, 2017) is one of the “eight reasons to research” (Conole, 2016, p. 12). These three contributions are based on the findings summarised in Figure 7.1 (which describes the events, the participants, and ‘the matters that matter’) - the filling of the gap found in the academic literature pertaining specifically to TeachMeet events, the insights into the motivations and perspective of those teachers to engage with informal self-organised professional development, and the analysis of what are the potential and matters of concern to participants of TeachMeet.

1. The literature reviewed for this dissertation revealed a stark shortage of systematic and critical academic research into the TeachMeet phenomenon. This research’s findings address this deficiency in knowledge regarding TeachMeet itself. In documenting the story and timeline of TeachMeet, as told by those who made the story, this research outlines the guerrilla growth of a phenomenon in the open, fuelled by goodwill and generosity of volunteers whose desires are to improve themselves, and education, providing opportunities for sharing among peers. The findings of research by direct observation provide a clear documentation of the characteristic elements that give life to TeachMeet events. This contributes to the
knowledge available to the TeachMeet collective, the education community, to future scholars and providers with an interest in participant-led ventures in personal professional practice;

2. This research contributes clear insights into motivations and perspectives driving the personal professional practice of teachers who engage in TeachMeet and other informal unconference gatherings. In the findings which analysed the reported opinions of participants in TeachMeet, there is a clear indication of the dispositions of those who are agentic in seeking to improve their own practice and that of their profession by meeting peers to share or with peers at self-organised events. Furthermore there is insight into their perspectives of these events as being situated in the intersections between their Personal Learning Network and Community of Practice, and how they see it as Continuing Professional Development of a most informal nature.

3. The findings from the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the lived experience of TeachMeet reveals Group Experiential Themes reflecting what matters most to those who have, without any central control or formal funding, voluntarily conceived and evolved TeachMeet as an informal exchange of knowledge which is humble, open, and social. The powerful narrative of these themes, which show matters of concern to TeachMeet participants to be personal, purposeful, practical, and political, offers a contribution to those exploring the potential of incorporating informal and unconference gatherings into the complex world of teacher training, development, learning networks and communities.

**Contribution to Research Methods.** Arising from the implementation of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in this research, two contributions are offered to the ongoing evolution and development of IPA as a method:
1. The inclusion of myself, an insider-researcher, among the key informants in the IPA interview schedule, by way of conducting and analysing a bracketing interview, may inform others wishing to implement and develop the bracketing interview model inspired by Rolls & Relf (2006); 

2. The application of IPA in a convergent parallel process to analyse three very different data sets - descriptive observation notes (n = 15), short text questionnaire responses (n = 302), and interview transcripts (n = 15) supports the Biggerstaff & Thompson (2008) advice that IPA can and should be used to good effect in analysis of a wide variety of textual data sources.

**Limitations and Mitigations**

Factors that may have limited the efficacy of this research might be attributed to the researcher, the topic, the questions, and the methods.

_The Researcher._ Being a first-time and part-time PhD researcher, exploring a topic which is a dynamic still evolving moving target, and learning a method of analysis in which the researcher acts as the instrument, all while striving to grow from ‘bumbling beginner to master’ (Wenger, SCoTENS workshop, 2016), brings with it the risk of a research project less sophisticated than that more accomplished researchers would deliver. Mitigation of this risk involved intentionally seeking training, and ongoing engagement with experienced researchers in relevant communities of practice.

_The Topic._ Choosing to explore the space of a fairly recent phenomenon brings with it a reasonably predictable lack of academic literature; at the outset, there was only one paper with any direct critical discourse on the topic of TeachMeet, and those “parallel literatures” advised by Hall (2013, p. 4) for inclusion “where the existing knowledge is ‘thin’” were scarce. Even the closest domain of academic literature, that of professional development, although expansive, referred more to delivery and evaluation of formal systems and had little inclusion of the participant driven informal approach. Mitigation of
this risk involved taking time and opportunity to add to the literature as the research progressed.

The Questions. In translating the research questions into direct questions for the indirect medium of a remote questionnaire, the questions needed to be as unambiguous as possible while remaining brief and to the point. When the subject of the questions (in this case, the landscape of teacher professional learning) is already full of ambiguities of meaning and variety in perspectives, the risk of misunderstanding is increased no matter how much precision is put into the wording of the questions; this may place limits on the reliability of the data, and thus challenging the certainty of shared meaning. Mitigation of this risk involved investing time, in crafting my own synthesis of experts’ writings (Appendix F), in order to craft clear questions.

The Methods. Sensemaking is not a methodology of exact measures; its greatest freedom - may also pose limitations. In this case one limitation to the research was deliberately set by the researcher, for reasons of common sense and practicality; by limiting my adoption of Appreciative Inquiry to only the first three of the five stages (Definition, Discovery, Dream), in order to collect data about “what works”, with an emphasis on finding the “positive core” of what gives life to TeachMeet. A full Appreciative Inquiry would require facilitated discussion in an assembly of all participants or as many as it were possible to convene; this research was limited to self-selected questionnaire responses and interviews with a purposive selection of individuals chosen because of the length and breadth of their experience. Mitigation to this limitation was in leaving time and space for free and critical comment by participants in both questionnaire and interviews.

Another limitation, inherent in the chosen method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, whose developers and lead scholars (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, who describe it as second order sensemaking) state that it may limit the outcomes
to “theoretical transferability rather than empirical generalizability (2022, p. 56)”. As does Weick when he describes Sensemaking as “continued redrafting of an emerging story so that it becomes more comprehensive, incorporates more of the observed data and is more resilient in the face of criticism” (2010, p. 145). Mitigation of this risk was in the deliberate decision to use three parallel convergent methods for data collection, allowing for continuous cross-checking, auditing, and triangulation during analysis.

Section Three – Recommendations

These are my recommendations, based on the findings and contributions of this research into TeachMeet, to the various parties who may have an interest in TeachMeet as it advances:

1. Those who are already active participants in TeachMeet;
2. Those who might in future become participants or supporters:
   - Teachers
   - Principals
   - Teacher professional networks and communities
   - Providers of initial teacher training, professional development, accredited courses
   - Those responsible for education policy formation and implementation
   - Educational conference organisers
   - Those in the business community whose market is in education;
3. Academic researchers with an interest in the professional learning of teachers.

Recommendations To Those Already Active in TeachMeet

It is my recommendation for TeachMeet participants who have taken TeachMeet from the one meeting in 2006 to the global phenomenon it is in 2022, that each takes a moment to acknowledge that the findings of this research show that their actions in growing a humble, open, non-hierarchical event - fuelled by volunteers and based on trust in peers - is having a daily impact on the education of someone somewhere in the world.
I also recommend a continued recording of information on behalf of TeachMeet, to add to the contribution made in this research. A first practical step would be the update and upkeep of the TeachMeet entry in Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TeachMeet), which would ensure continued open provision of accurate information about the origin, history, mythos, and elements of TeachMeet to prospective participants. A second step is that individual participants might consider undertaking further research into TeachMeet. A third step is prompted by the findings that show a fierce desire to preserve the non-hierarchical, open, non-commercial nature of events, to protect the name from misappropriation, to ensure TeachMeet avoids barriers to participation: is it time to consider some strategic action to safeguard the integrity of TeachMeet into the future? The open non-hierarchical nature, that makes TeachMeet what it is, is also what makes it vulnerable to the appropriation that participants wish to avoid. The findings of this research are based on participants’ talk experience to date; perhaps it is time for the collective to take this further and look to the future of TeachMeet.

Recommendations To Those Who Might in Future Become Participants or Supporters

To the Individual Teacher. This research has found that participation in a TeachMeet is recommended by teachers who seek the company of like-minded others, who think their own expertise might help a colleague, or who are curious about what everyone else’s classroom is like. The convivial nature of the TeachMeet event offers a social occasion with colleagues one might not otherwise interact with, and those who have experienced it describe it as collaborative, informative, and fun. The only cost to the individual is the time given up to attend, present, or organise; the experience of colleagues reported in this research suggest that the personal, practical, and professional benefits may prove it to be a sound investment.
**To the Teacher Professional Networks and Communities.** This research found that many of the teacher professional networks and communities - communities of practice, subject associations, special interest groups - that are run by teachers themselves at ground level, are already using TeachMeet regularly. Those involved recommend inclusion of this practice in the sessions they organise, reporting benefits of both the professional exchange and social interaction it promotes between colleagues, and the transformational impact these can have on individual members.

**To the Principals.** I recommend that Principals (also Managers, Superintendents, Heads of Department, Team Leaders who have responsibility for/to a group of teachers) support and accommodate the teachers in your care who engage in TeachMeet either to improve themselves as individuals or to cultivate change with peers. The findings of this research reveal that what is appreciated from you is encouragement, permission, support, in any way you can, including the accommodating of a TeachMeet-style approach to in-house staff development meetings; those with experience of adopting this suggest it may have both a practical and a transformative impact.

**To the Providers of Teacher Training, Development, and Learning.** I recommend that providers of teacher training, development, and learning become aware of what the findings of this research reveals about the motivations of those who organise TeachMeets for their peers. Pre-service training, in-career training, and development, and in optional accredited postgraduate courses for teachers can benefit from the inclusion of a TeachMeet-style approach in their provision. The open space and intersectional nature of the format can promote the development of networks and communities that may continue after the delivered events or courses have finished. Some are already doing so, adopting and adapting from their own experience of attending TeachMeets. This has been welcomed as overdue by participants, but with the caveat that it must be carried out by informed
organisers so as not to become just another form of the top-down delivery that sent people to find TeachMeet in the first instance.

To Those with Responsibility for Formation and Implementation of Policy. I recommend that those involved in formation, oversight, and implementations of policy in education become aware of the findings that show an appreciation and increasing acknowledgement that events such as TeachMeet may be part of their emerging call for accepting the role of the informal in Teacher Professional Learning. I recommend them to recognise, make space for, and trust in the pioneering and adoption of ground level activities, the humble but powerful voluntary contribution and leadership that teachers are showing towards their own and their peers’ professional development.

To Educational Conference Organising Teams. TeachMeet originated on the fringe of an education conference; this research found that many TeachMeet events still take place as an ‘unconference’ alongside education conferences to this day, and that some conferences have placed a TeachMeet within the programme to beneficial effect. This hosting space is appreciated and has proven to be an enhancement of the conference experience for many. To conference organisers interested in adopting a TeachMeet approach I recommend that they inform themselves of what this research has shown is needed to ensure integrity in the curation of any TeachMeets within the frame of their conference.

To the Education Business Community who wish to Support TeachMeet. This research findings show that because TeachMeet events are either free or ask a minimal entry fee, many organisers appreciate support and sponsorship from those in the business community to subsidise costs of room, refreshments, or hire of technical equipment. To those whose business interest is in education, any offer of support for TeachMeet events as part of their ‘corporate social responsibility’ is welcomed, as long as it is offered in the spirit of TeachMeet - unconditional with no expectation of a platform. I recommend to
companies that want to sponsor TeachMeet that they should understand what they are sponsoring and the essence of why it is valuable, and pitch the values of their company rather than the features of their products.

**Recommendations To Academic Researchers with an Interest in the Professional Learning of Teachers**

The literature review for this research prompted two recommendations to academic researchers with an interest in the professional learning of teachers. The body of literature reviewed highlighted a lack to date in any breadth or depth of academic research focussed directly on TeachMeet. This prompted a recommendation that those seeking or providing opportunities within research into professional learning for teachers to use the findings of this research to include TeachMeet in future exploration of teachers’ informal and self-directed personal professional practice.

My final recommendation springs from encountering the ambiguity of acronyms and dearth of definitions for terms used in academia when discussing and writing about the professional learning of teachers. The myriad of two-, three-, and four-letter acronyms (mixing and matching from the seven letters C, D, E, L, N, P, T) denoting two-, three-, and four-word terminology (mixing and matching from the dozen words *community, continuing, continuous, development, education, learning, network, personal, practice, professional, teacher, training*) can lead to confusion, misunderstanding, frustration for the researcher. And yet each term is valid for what it describes, as long as the reader is aware of what the writer means. While a global consensus on meaning of the many terms we use may be an over-ambitious expectation, it seems advisable for each individual to check on ourselves and strive to be less presumptive, less casual, more precise, and provide clarity from the outset, on two levels - to call out early what each acronym we use stands for, and to explain the meaning of each term as it is being used in our work.
Section Four – Researcher Reflection

The focus of this research was TeachMeet; my reflections on the findings are included in discussion in the preceding chapters. This reflection is compiled from other thoughts recorded during the research, focussed on two things - the effect of unexpected detours on the research, and the effect of the research process on the researcher, me.

Dealing with Detours

Two unexpected announcements, which at first seemed to spell doom, each turned out to have advantages for the research. One specific to me was an announcement of major changes being implemented in the methodology I was using for qualitative analysis (IPA) (http://www.ipa.bbk.ac.uk/news/events, nd). This news came just as I was finishing my analysis, and meant a retrospective reworking of the categorisation and reporting of themes in the analysis. It turns out to have been a timely gift - reframing the analysis for presentation within the revised taxonomy helped me to clarify my own thinking, and the revised protocol streamlined my reporting.

The other was the sudden announcement that all gatherings were to cease worldwide, due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Irish Government Covid-19 Statement, 2020) that came during my field work in 2020. While I do not intend to minimise the damage caused by the epidemic, I am grateful that due to the patience and inventiveness of my participants, I was able to continue the research despite delays and adaptations. Extreme isolation fortuitously brought with it a lack of interruption. I was without caring responsibilities, securely cocooned in an efficient workspace. My concern that the planned event observation schedule might be in jeopardy was unfounded; the agility pivoting of TeachMeets to online saw to that. In fact, I found myself being able to attend some events in a virtual capacity, hosted from places far outside my physical reach, which I would not have been able to access otherwise. The dexterity with online platforms which we all developed in 2020 made it possible to continue with supervisory
meetings, and made it a little easier when it came to the time for interviews; having a conversation from screen to screen did not seem so alien. The final unexpected effect of having such a long period of sheltering and isolation made time and space for the process of analysis without distraction or interruption; at times I resembled a medieval monk working alone on illustrated manuscript.

From Practitioner to Pracademic

The ultimate role reversal for me was switching from teacher to student researcher. Although the arena and conventions are the same - curriculum, classroom, field work, laboratory, library - transitioning from experienced teacher to doctoral journeyman meant both learning to learn again and apply the new learning at the same time, ‘making the path by walking it’, which is simultaneously draining and energising.

Learning to operate and apply a new curriculum - reading, reviewing, writing, methodology, methods, ethics - was exciting, albeit unnerving at first. The comfort of the scaffold of approved ethics, and the strict heuristics and protocols inherent in each of the methods used, helped me reconcile my positionality as an insider-researcher.

This new classroom - supervision team meetings, seminars, conferences, doctoral round tables, summer school, online meetups with fellow students - was dramatically different in scale and variety. In terms of practice, however, it was much more alike - I realised that much of what worked in my old classroom, was still good in this one, consciously and unconsciously. Consciously applying classroom practices of Assessment for Learning was equally effective when applied here. ‘Wait time’, allowing students space to think before answering questions, became here the application of Postel’s Robustness Principle - always allowing space and time for the ‘other’ in answers - in building all data collection instruments; these ‘other’ spaces yielded rich data. Unconsciously, connecting with ‘prior knowledge’ became an advantage for me as I reaped the benefit from my previous experiences in both the Computers in Education
Society of Ireland (CESI) and CongRegation (Cong13) conferences, in which I had gained tacit and operational knowledge of many of the things I was now researching. Both groups were ‘before their time’ innovators in adopting the conventions of Open Space Technology - huddles, marketplace, law of two feet - in conferences and using online communications to foster a Community of Practice.

In this new field, the work flow resembled that which I was used to; data collection and analysis has become embedded in second-level teaching. The observation schedule especially echoed my previous practice in ecology and also kept me in physical contact with the practice I was researching (until it was suddenly disrupted; see next reflection).

Data analysis and interpretation in the new ‘laboratory’ provided both the steepest learning curve and the deepest learning, in learning to apply and adapt Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to the words of the participants. IPA is an inductive process in which I myself was the instrument, I interpreted the data, and my interpretation of the data is what generated the themes. On reflection, I see the choice of IPA as the fulcrum of the research process. The iterative double hermeneutic cycle which is vital to the systematic application of IPA, in which the analyst's role is to make sense of the sensemaking of the participants, not only acknowledged but took advantage of my insider positionality; this assured me of trust in myself as interpretative analyst.

It was in the new library – research libraries both physical and digital giving me access to a hive brain of experts when reading, discussing, thinking, re-thinking, writing - where the privilege of studentship had a profound influence on both the research and the researcher. It was from references in the literatures being reviewed for information that the methodological approach suggested itself - the writings of Weick being searched for their insight on organisation brought the Sensemaking; likewise from the writings of Owen on Open Space came Appreciative Inquiry. This immersion in literature and
academic discussion, about things I had heretofore taken at surface level only, has switched my disposition from that of practitioner towards that of pracademic, one whose “world of practice serves as the centre point of the academic compass” (Posner, 2009, p. 13). The contrast is summarised well by Hollweck et al. (2021, p. 13 - they cite Panda (2014) who says “practitioners predominantly expect ‘actionable knowledge’ … researchers expect inspirations towards the production of scientific knowledge … and publications in peer-reviewed journals”, then suggest that “pracademics have a crucial role to play in connecting the dots between scholarly and practical domains”. This all echoes Webster-Wright’s (2010, p. 704) stress on the authenticity of “proximity to practice”. For this researcher, the path of evolution from practitioner to researching journeyman to pracademic has been a circular one - the cycle of my past practice informing my present practice which will in turn inform my future practice in TeachMeet.

**Figure 7.2**

*Nanopresentation by Researcher Mags Amond at the 2017 Féilte TeachMeet, Dublin.*

(*Image used with permission of The Teaching Council of Ireland*)
I end my own reflection by tilting the glass back to a reflection from a participant interview, which gives me pause for thought each time I read it [Conor, 136]. I place it here to close both the concluding chapter, and the thesis:

“It has a more profound purpose than might initially be assumed. Because one of the biggest challenges we have as a profession, all down the years - teachers have been incredibly self-effacing … incredibly inclined to say ‘it's just what I do’. And some of them are doing magic, absolutely magic, and to get someone who is doing a really passionate piece of work about their topic of interest to stand up and share what they're doing with others … is a profoundly important professional affirmation … It's very hard to disentangle the dancer from the dance, the teacher and the teaching very often mesh; but to have the privilege of hearing others talk about their experience, and to put out to you for your consideration some of the ideas that they have been working on in their classrooms or in their projects or whatever it happens to be, that's a wonderful form of learning. Because you learn as much, you learn more perhaps, by just sitting back and listening to a TeachMeet than you would in engaging in sometimes six or seven more formal conferences because it comes from the heart, it's targeted on the heart. And it's about pedagogy, it's about learning, it's about teaching, it's about kids. And all of these things come together in a kind of a very special way in the TeachMeet setting.”
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Appendices

Appendix A

Pro-Forma TeachMeet Observation Sheet 1 - Binary Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rubric for observation of TeachMeet - to record if elements are present or absent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before</th>
<th>Technical Infrastructure</th>
<th>MC1: MC speaking to room</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Infrastructure</td>
<td>MC2: if two MCs, other speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connectivity</td>
<td>AA: Audience applause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>UA: unexpected applause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Law of Two Feet&quot;</td>
<td>(spontaneous)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agreed House Rules</td>
<td>CV: ovative applause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>NT: Now taking</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PP: Phones taking pictures of screen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>PV: phones taking videos of action</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>LOTF: Law of Two Feet evident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SMM: social media activity evident</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>QFF: Questions from floor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During Content</th>
<th>No sales pitch</th>
<th>Conf: associated with a conference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No extended PPT</td>
<td>Und: independent event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nano-, micro- pres.s</td>
<td>n = number in the room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning conversations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Random name picker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenge / activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chatter at tables</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TeachEat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>After In-Between</th>
<th>Thanks</th>
<th>Invite / encourage others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Share online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Share with colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Share with students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Signature of researcher ___________________________ Date _____________
## Appendix B

Pro-Forma TeachMeet Observation Sheet 2 - Chronolog

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME (approximation)</th>
<th>audience space</th>
<th>&quot;stage&quot; presentation space</th>
<th>elsewhere / other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Rubric for observation of TeachMeet - spare pages to record timeline observations, based on original document at [https://mapsparsanddots.files.wordpress.com/2017/04/predictableteachmeteamelementa3.pdf](https://mapsparsanddots.files.wordpress.com/2017/04/predictableteachmeteamelementa3.pdf)
Appendix C

TeachMeet Gatekeeper ‘Permission To Observe’ Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GATEKEEPER FORM :: CONSENT TEACHMEET OBSERVATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STUDY: Exploring the nature and niche of TeachMeet in Professional Learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are 2 sections in this form. Each section has a statement about your participation in this research study. Ask any questions you may have when reading each of the statements. Indicate in the Tick box if you agree with the statement. Feel free to ask questions if there is something you do not understand.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General</th>
<th>Tick box</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I confirm I have read and understood the Information Leaflet for the above study. The information has been fully explained to me and I have been able to ask questions, all of which have been answered to my satisfaction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that as gatekeeper of this TeachMeet event I am agreeing to this observation on behalf of the participants, and that no identifying details of the event will be disclosed in the study report.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that this participation is entirely voluntary, and if I decide that this event should no longer partake, I can end participation at any time without giving a reason.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that I will not be paid for taking part in this study.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to contact the research team via the details on the information sheet if I need to.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree to this TeachMeet event being part of this research study having been fully informed of the research project which is set out in full in the information which I have been provided with via email.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data processing</th>
<th>Tick box</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand that personal information about me will be protected in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation. Until the point of anonymisation I have right to access, rectify or erase my personal data.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that I can stop taking part in this study at any time without giving a reason.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GATEKEEPER NAME (BLOCK CAPITALS)</th>
<th>Gatekeeper Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mags Ammond</td>
<td>___________________________</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher Name (Block Capitals)</th>
<th>Researcher Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>___________________________</td>
<td>__________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Observation protocols, agreed with organisers:

- all observations will be reported anonymously, no identifying personal data, location data, or images will be recorded;
- the purpose of the observation of this and several other TeachMeet events is as part of an overall sensemaking exercise, taking note of activities and formats that may be similar, or not, across the series of events observed;
- data, in the form of the researcher/observer notes, will form part of the descriptive section of the research thesis, forming a context for those reading the research; further research outputs such as journal papers and conference presentations may be generated using the body of data collected within the study, but will not be used in future unrelated studies without further specific permission being obtained.
- this TeachMeet event and its participants will not be identified in the research reports;
- as the observation is not using any digital recording process, your anonymity and that of all other participants is ensured;
- data from this event will be treated in line with the Data Protection Act 2018, being stored in a secure manner with encryption and password protection; printed documentation will be stored in a secure location that only researcher and supervisors have knowledge of and access to; the designated destruction date is 2027

Go raibh maith agaibh go leir :: Thanks to you all
Appendix E

Online Questionnaire - Introduction and Questions as visible on screen (p. 1 of 4)

TeachMeet Participant Survey

About this research project:
Mags Aronc is a PhD student in the School of Education, Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland, under the supervision of Prof Keith Johnston and Dr Richard Millwood.

The research is an exploration of TeachMeet in a learning context. This survey is open to any TeachMeet participant who wishes to have their experience and perspective recorded as part of the research.

There are 12 questions, the survey may take approximately 15 minutes.

[For respondents with visual impairment: this survey is optimised for mobile phone screen readers]

Information for respondents:
- participation is voluntary – you have the right to cease participation at any time (by closing the web browser);
- participation is anonymous;
- the purpose of the survey is to generate data from TeachMeet participants about their involvement in TeachMeet;
- these data will form part of the analysis section of the research report and presented in the findings, forming a context for those reading the research, which will be disseminated within the wider education community; further research outputs such as journal papers and conference presentations may be generated using the body of data collected within the study, but will not be used in future unrelated studies;
- data from this survey will be treated in line with the Data Protection Act 2018, being stored in a secure manner with encryption and password protection; printed documentation will be stored in a secure location that only researcher and supervisors have knowledge of and access to; the designated destruction date is 2027;
- you can contact Mags (aronc@tcd.ie) with any questions.

I have read and understand the participant information and by completing the reCaptcha I consent to participating in the survey.

1. What year did you first attend a TeachMeet?

- 2006
- 2020
2. What was your primary role at this first TeachMeet?

- audience
- presenter
- organiser

3. How did you find out about this first TeachMeet?

- It was recommended to me by a colleague / friend
- I discovered it online
- I received an invitation from the organisers
- It was part of a conference I was attending
- It was posted on the staffroom noticeboard
- If none of the above, use this space to add your answer

4. At the time of this first TeachMeet, which of these best describes your situation?

- primary teacher
- secondary teacher
- third level teacher
- student teacher
- If none of the above, use this space to add your answer

5. What is your personal definition of TeachMeet?


6. What are three words you would use to describe TeachMeet?

1st word
2nd word
3rd word
7. What made you decide to ATTEND a TeachMeet for the first time?

8. What made you decide to PRESENT at a TeachMeet for the first time? If this not relevant to you, leave blank.

9. What made you decide to ORGANISE a TeachMeet for the first time? If this not relevant to you, leave blank.

10. Based on your experience and perspective of TeachMeet events, use the sliders to indicate your level of agreement with each of these statements as a percentage.

They may be an event where those attending set the agenda and agree on plans for the future.

They may be part of an accredited course undertaken e.g. diploma, certificate, masters.

They may be an event where practitioners share and discuss ideas, resources, or skills with each other.

They may be an unconference or fringe event attached to a conference.

They may be an INSET, in-career, or in-service event.

They may be used in-house as staff development meetings.

They may be organised by peers sharing a common identity or goal.

They may be attended for the opportunity to meet new people with whom to connect.

They need not be attended in person, but can be followed and experienced via social media.
11. This question is offered in two formats - respondents using a screen-reader are advised to skip to the text-based version at Question 11B.

In online discussions, TeachMeet is often referred to as Continuing Professional Development, as Personal Learning Network, as Community of Practice. Based on your experience and perspective of TeachMeet, place a mark on the map to indicate where you would situate it.

![Diagram showing PLN, CoP, and CPD]

11B. This question is for respondents using a screen-reader. Other respondents may skip to the next section.

In online discussions, TeachMeet is often referred to as Continuing Professional Development, as Personal Learning Network, as Community of Practice. Based on your experience and perspective of TeachMeet, select the appropriate option to indicate where you would situate it.

- Personal Learning Network
- Community of Practice
- Continuing Professional Development
- Intersection between Continuing Professional Development and Personal Learning Network
- Intersection between Continuing Professional Development and Community of Practice
- Intersection between Personal Learning Network and Community of Practice
- Intersection between Community of Practice, Personal Learning Network, and Continuing Professional Development
- None of the above

12. Thank you for answering the survey questions. If there is anything you wish to add, please use this space.
Appendix F

Framing Research Question 2 to be addressed within Questionnaire Q11

- **Personal Learning Network (PLN)**
  - Perspective of individual
  - Characteristics: may be an unconference or fringe event attached to a conference, need not be attended in person, but can be followed and experienced via social media, may be attended for the opportunity to meet new people with whom to connect

- **Community of Practice (CoP)**
  - Perspective of community
  - Characteristics: may be an event where practitioners share ideas, resources, crafts or skills, may be an event where those attending set the agenda and make plans for the future, may be organized by peers sharing a common identity or goal

- **Continuing Professional Development (CPD)**
  - Perspective of profession
  - Characteristics: may be used in-house staff development meetings, may be part of an accredited course undertaken eg diploma, cert, masters, may be an INSET, in-career, or in-service event

- **Set of relationships, personal interactions, and connections among individuals who have personal reasons to connect**

- **Development of a shared identity around a topic, representing a collective intention to steward a domain of knowledge**

- **Bennett, 2012**
- **Darling-Hammond, 2017**
- **Day, 1999**
- **Desimone, 2009, 2011**
- **Evans, 2019**
- **Guskey, 2002**
- **Kennedy, 2005, 2014**
- **Sugrue, 2018**
- **Templeley, 2007**
- **Webster-Wright, 2010**

- **Carpenter et al., 2016**
- **Cormier, 2008**
- **Richardson, 2013**
- **Siemens, 2004**
- **Robin, 1998**

- **Based on Twitter Advanced Search results of search for “teachmeet + CPD” returns n. = 191 “teachMeet + PLN” returns n. = 257 “teachMeet + CoP” returns n. = 111 (Amond et al., 2018)**

- **Lave & Wenger, 1991, 2011**
- **Owen, 1993, 2008**
- **Wenger-Trayner et al., 2017**
- **Wenger-Trayner, 2018**
- **Williams, 1976, 1979, 1988**

Extract from mags amond research notes, summer 2020 [this slide presented at Educational Studies Of Ireland 2022 Conference Seminar for Early Career Researchers http://esai.ie CONFERENCE 2022 2: accessibility formatting courtesy of Genevieve Smith-Nunes]
## Pilot feedback summary of 'meta-answers' (from those asked to answer AND critique the questions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>return</th>
<th>scale</th>
<th>device</th>
<th>time</th>
<th>Feedback - green = suggestions that have now been acted upon; orange = fair comments to be considered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 19/06/2020 09:27:47 | Slider | computer | 15   | nicely thought-provoking! A couple of points:  
(1) Q4 allows for multiple answers, which was great because it allowed me to show that I was a 2nd level teacher, but also that I was beginning my career as a researcher.  
(2) I found the text on the items for Q10 quite small - if it's possible to increase the font size it might be good.  
(3) For agree/disagree Likert scales, I was advised not to use the word agree in the main question, but rather to phrase it as something like "please select the response that best represents your view". Apparently the other could be leading. I think it's going a bit far, but hey, who am I to argue!  
(4) I found it hard to figure out what you meant by the first item in question 10. What do you mean by 'future plans' in this context?  
Oh, and I definitely preferred the sliders! I may use them more going forward... |
| 19/06/2020 10:51:46 | Slider | computer | 10.3 | Looking forward to the results of this research! |
| 19/06/2020 17:19:31 | Slider | computer | 20   | Clear survey that was easy to fill in. It gave opportunities to give quick answers (by choosing from a variety of answers) while also giving the opportunity to give more detailed answers in certain areas. |
| 19/06/2020 17:26:00 | Slider | computer | 10   | I should have googled "personal learning network" as it wasn't a phrase I was familiar with. I also don't know what INSET means in this context. The rest made sense though. |
| 19/06/2020 17:52:59 | Likert | computer | 25   | "The research is an exploration of TeachMeet in a learning context" ... of Teachmeets? I'm sure there is a good reason for the singular, but....  
Allow for doubt - e.g. "As far as you remember, when ..."?  
Print is pale! It was a little hard to read in poorish light.  
"Based on your experience and perspective of TeachMeet events" ... experience of and perspective on...? Am I meant only to draw on the Teachmeets I have attended ("experience of"), or include what I see as the potential also ("perspective on" - if that's what it means ....)? I have chosen the inclusive one in replying.  
Slider version - I checked for consistency with the Likert version, but probably my answers are correct only to one significant figure ... if data were for real I would have taken longer to fine-tune them. The slider version is spuriously accurate, so to speak. Do I agree this about 3% more than that? |
| 19/06/2020 20:30:13 | Slider | computer | 7.5  | Not sure if I liked the greying out |
| emailed direct feedback | Slider | chromebook | | text a bit hard to read as it was quite small and a bit faint. This may be down to the device I did it on (Acer Chromebook), but it might be something you decide to adjust if you can. |
Appendix H

Interview Flexible Desk Schedule of Prompts & Questions
Appendix I

Interview Key Informant Participation Information Leaflet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET FOR INTERVIEWEE

STUDY: Exploring the nature and niche of TeachMeet in Professional Learning

About this research project
Mags Amond is a PhD student in the School of Education, Trinity College, Dublin, researching the TeachMeet phenomenon under the supervision of Dr Keith Johnston and Dr Richard Millwood.

The research project is a sensemaking examination of the nature and niche of TeachMeet in a professional learning landscape as experienced from the perspective of participants. The research questions seek to gather participants’ views on the value and impact of TeachMeet.

The research plan has three stages – observation of TeachMeets, online survey of participants, interviews with organising participants. Today’s meeting is part of the interview stage, by agreement between researcher and interviewee, in which the researcher records the conversation between researcher and interviewee.

Information for participant
- participation is voluntary – you have the right to cease participation at any time without giving a reason and without prejudice;
- this data collection will be carried out in a sensitive and non-stressful manner as possible;
- the purpose of the interview is as part of an overall sensemaking exercise, recording the opinions and experiences of key informants from the TeachMeet community; the intention is to address the questions of motivation, value, impact, and sustainability of TeachMeet from your perspective as an experienced participant;
- in agreeing to be interviewed as a key informant, you will be reminded that your identity will be shared as a part of this study;
- the data, in the form of the interview transcript notes, will form part of the analysis section of the research report and presented in the findings, and disseminated within the wider education community; further research outputs such as journal papers and conference presentations may be generated using the body of data collected within the study, but will not be used in future unrelated studies without further specific permission being obtained;
- the interview will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher; you may withdraw your data from the study at any point or until findings have been published;
- data from this interview, in the form of digital recording and subsequent electronic files of transcripts and printed transcripts, will be treated in line with the Data Protection Act 2018, electronic files to be stored in a secure manner with encryption and password protection; printed documentation will be stored in a secure location that only researcher and supervisors have knowledge of and access to; the designated destruction date is 2027;
- you can contact Mags Amond (amondm@tcd.ie) or Keith Johnston (kjohnsto@tcd.ie) at the School of Education in Trinity College with any questions.
Appendix J

Interview Key Informant Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWEE

STUDY: Exploring the nature and niche of TeachMeet in Professional Learning

There are 2 sections in this form. Each section has a statement about your participation in this research study. Indicate in the Tick box if you agree with the statement. Feel free to ask questions if you have any. (amondm@tcd.ie)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General</th>
<th>Tick box</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I confirm I have read and understood the Participant Information Leaflet for the above study. The information has been fully explained to me and I have been able to ask questions, all of which have been answered to my satisfaction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that this study is entirely voluntary, and if I decide that I do not want to take part, I can stop taking part in this study at any time without giving a reason.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that my identity as a key informant will be shared as a part of this study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that I will not be paid for taking part in this study.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to contact the research team via the details on the information sheet if I need to.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree to take part in this research study having been fully informed of the research project which is set out in full in the information sheet which I have been provided with.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data processing                                                                 | Tick box |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I understand that personal information about me will be protected in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation. Until the point of publication of findings I have right to access, rectify or erase my personal data.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that I can stop taking part in this study at any time without giving a reason.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you for your participation in this study.

Participant Name (Block Capitals) | Participant Signature | Date

MAGS AMOND

Participant Name (Block Capitals) | Participant Signature | Date
Appendix K

Ethics Application Approval Granted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>LAST ACTIVITY</th>
<th>MARK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8-1 Ethics Submissions and Resubmissions</td>
<td>24-Jan-2020 15:56</td>
<td>Approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment</td>
<td>24-Jan-2020 15:56</td>
<td>MARKED</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix L

Pro-forma Personal Experiential Statement (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEP 1</th>
<th>read and listen; use mp3 to just listen to audio, listen as transcribing and fixing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STEP 2</td>
<td>First iteration for exploratory comments noted over x3 readings - colour coded in pencil on A3 paper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original transcript</th>
<th>Exploratory comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. interview numbered</td>
<td>- Descriptive comment, inc. idiographic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. lines, printed out onto</td>
<td>- Linguistic comment (context)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A3 paper in its column</td>
<td>- Conceptual comment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

STEP 3: Recognising emergent patterns. Highlight these in red to rhs column on raw table, with typical quote.

STEP 4a: Searching for connections between emergent themes. Moving to computer screen, copy & paste to a table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Experiential Statements</th>
<th>Analyst’s exploratory comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

STEP 4b: seeing any groupings? not yet fixed, but something to start with …

STEP 5 - transpose columns and copy / paste to temporary groupings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GET</th>
<th>PET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key words, concepts for this participant ::

STEP 5 - transfer Excel file, where this version of all data will end up tabbed together

STEP 6 - repeat with the other transcripts …

Also note things which matter, key objects of concern: - doing this in reverse order to that in the guidelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>guidelines say to look for :: what I found</th>
<th>Meanings of those things for this participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>relationships -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>processes -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>places / events -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>values / principles -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix M

Images of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Interview Transcripts (applying the schedule of Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2022, p. 75)

Stage 1  Read  Read the first transcript.

Stage 2  Explore  Making initial notes – comments about the transcript written in purple (descriptions), teal (language), lime (concepts);

Stage 3  Develop  Shift focus from the transcript to the initial notes, and from participant to analyst; exploratory notes added in red or pencil (commenting on patterns, generating themes):
Stage 4 Connect

Search for connections between personal experiential themes (PETs), mapping how they might cluster together; extract samples to build a graphic representation for this participant, indicating the source line of statement for each PET:

| interpersonal | ‘evangelism’ / mentor encouragement | 10 I just reached out to him, got in touch with him ... 12-19 And he talked to me about TeachMeet. And he said, Oh, you love that ... and he said it’s really informal and it’s a place where you will be made feel comfortable, and there’s no such thing as stupid questions, do you know, so, he reckoned I’d come away with loads and he said you should go to the CESI conference |
| generosity of spirit and enthusiasm can be contagious | 280 share and learn about things that will help them and their students with huge generosity ... 284 what I’ve found about the TeachMeet community is that people are really, really keen to help each other. They really want to help each other. And, and so much so that it’s contagious 295 TeachMeet is where people who are really enthusiastic get rid of all that negative “isn’t it so hard” ... it’s like “you should do this is brilliant”. It’s just such enthusiasm and generosity at any of the TeachMeets that I’ve gone to. And if you could bring that into your school, like, you know, even in the staff room, like it’s deadly, you know, it’s really, really good |
| transformational | transformation of self | 28-31 it totally transformed my idea of what CPD can be and should be, and I always recommend it ... I learned more in maybe three, five minute slots at a TeachMeet you know; I might have disregarded half of it but I got three five minute things that really changed my practice. |
| transformation of school culture [K-3 level 37] | 34 - 44 And so I organized TeachMeet for school, and it was huge success ... so I got seven or eight teachers who I knew were doing great things in their class to volunteer” ... and we did exactly like the CESI TeachMeets that I had seen, we had the Wheel of Fortune at the start where people’s names were pulled and they weren’t necessarily all called up, because we had time limits. And they were open to the three to five minutes and the feedback from that was unbelievable. You could see the teachers were really invigorated and really excited. And apart from the usual ‘Oh this is going to be a drudge now we’ll have to learn more things for the coming year’ there was definitely an excitement after it. From then on all of our tech CPD has been modeled on some form of a TeachMeet ... our CPD has changed because of that. |
| transforming mindset? | 322 [again re online “show&tell” staff meetings during Covid19 lockdown] so I think the experience of having TeachMeet has led to our staff being open to that kind of learning ... they’re open to that now from all the TeachMeet experiences |
| purposeful | the ‘mix’ | 14 you get so many different people from different backgrounds. Using technology in different ways in their schools, both simple and really advanced, and it’s a good place to meet them informally: 141 you hear from people from different backgrounds, different schools, different settings, different industries even sometimes ... 144 I like the mishmash ... |

Stage 5 Expand

Move to the next case, and repeat the process to this point; repeat until all cases are analysed:

- each transcript has been analysed line by line on paper
- details are transferred to these individual documents, then combined in a global spreadsheet for cross case comparison
Stage 6 Compare (i) Look for patterns, connections, potent themes across cases; this may lead to reconfiguring and relabelling of experimental themes:
Stage 6  Compare  (ii) Present an overall picture in a master table for the group:

**Group Experiential Themes (GETs) & Personal Experiential Themes (PETS) from Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Interviews with Organisers of Teachmeets**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Experiential Themes</th>
<th>Personal Experiential Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. PERSONAL</td>
<td>i. Social, community, and personal networks have evolved among participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>On personal, interpersonal, and social matters in TeachMeet</td>
<td>‘learning is a communal process’</td>
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<td>‘The essence is they’re your peers, people just like you’</td>
<td>ii. Social interaction at events, skilfully mediated, is appreciated</td>
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<td>‘come along, this is how it works ... come along ready to give a talk’</td>
<td>iii. Encouragement from professional mentors, colleagues, peers is formative</td>
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<tr>
<td>iv. Close Encounters of a Personal Kind</td>
<td>‘the energy, passion in her voice definitely resonates with me now’</td>
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<td>B. PURPOSEFUL</td>
<td>i. Doing the Thing Right - acting to counter discontent with CPD experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>On being driven to engage with TeachMeet with intent, for a purpose</td>
<td>‘a lot of CPD you go in, sit down, listen to somebody, you leave’</td>
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<td>‘Give something a proper name, it becomes a thing’</td>
<td>ii. Do the Right Thing - feeling a moral imperative to take action</td>
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<td>iii. Making the Path by Walking - forming and following ‘desire lines’</td>
<td>‘It's more an 'I'm doing something right' kind of thing’</td>
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<td>iv. Pioneers, innovators, and early adopters - don’t wait for permission</td>
<td>‘A lot of people went away, organised their own elsewhere afterwards’</td>
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<td>‘to make people think about stuff that they don't think about’</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. PRACTICAL</td>
<td>i. ‘Spreragadh’: the spark that ignites transformation</td>
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<td>On the sharing of practice at TeachMeet</td>
<td>‘see it, like it, bring it back to the classroom’</td>
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<td>‘I came out buzzing - it changed how I thought about teaching’</td>
<td>ii. The Bazaar - the mix: what’s there, and what’s not there</td>
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<td>iii. The Black Box - getting a glimpse into another’s classroom</td>
<td>‘no keynote, everybody equal, everybody's voice recognized’</td>
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<td>‘to be able to say to others, look, I'm trying this, what do you reckon?’</td>
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<td>D. POLITICAL</td>
<td>i. Yes please - keep it simple and keep it non-hierarchical</td>
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<tr>
<td>On the future for TeachMeet - political</td>
<td>‘a face to face, open process’</td>
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<td>‘Nobody owns’</td>
<td>ii. No thanks - avoid commercialisation and appropriation</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘if not for teachers by teachers, it’s not TeachMeet, it's something else’</td>
<td>iii. Perhaps, Perhaps, Perhaps - evolving a place in CPD, and evolving online community’</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘we need to make sure that it remains as democratic as it needs to be’</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Stage 7

Check

So far, this has moved from part to whole; look in the other direction - check occurrences of themes across cases:

In this research, a summary of each participant's statements in each theme is displayed as an array for a visual overview [turn page to landscape orientation for correct image view].