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Professional collaboration to improve educational outcomes in Scottish schools: Developing a conceptual framework

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Professional collaboration to improve educational outcomes in Scottish schools: Developing a conceptual framework

Abstract

Within Scotland's education system, professional collaboration is extolled as a mechanism to improve consistency within and across schools and local authorities, and as a vehicle for teachers and education leaders to conceptualise and manage the demands and tensions within Scotland's complex education policy context. This conceptual analysis interrogates current research literature around collaboration and positions it in the context of current Scottish education policy, to identify and synthesise the personal, political, situational and structural variables that can support or undermine the practice and impact of collaboration between education professionals in Scotland. The researcher's experience as a current school leader in Scotland has motivated the research aims and influenced the selection of research literature, adding currency and relevance to the conceptual framework that is developed through the analysis.

The conceptual framework is offered to educational professionals as a tool for iterative use to explore professional collaboration within their own contexts. Its aim is to provide practical coherence and clarity around the contextual variables, professional actions and defining factors of successful collaborative practice to maximise the impact of collaboration across the system. The conclusion reflects on the strengths and limitations of the conceptual analysis process, suggesting application and refinement of the emergent framework and indicating avenues for further research to support the strengthening of professional collaboration in schools across Scotland and beyond.

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List of Abbreviations

ADES	Association of Directors of Education in Scotland
ASF	Attainment Scotland Fund
CfE	Curriculum for Excellence
GIRFEC	Getting It Right For Every Child
GTCS	General Teaching Council for Scotland
HGIOS4	How Good Is Our School (4th Edition)
ICEA	International Council of Education Advisers
ICP	Interprofessional Collaborative Practice
ICPS	Interprofessional Collaborative Practice Survey
ICSEI	International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement
LA	Local Authority
NIF	National Improvement Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PEF	Pupil Equity Fund
QI	Quality Indicator
RIC	Regional Improvement Collaborative
SIMD	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
TES	Times Education Supplement
TLC	Teacher Learning Community

Professional collaboration to improve educational outcomes in Scottish schools: Developing a conceptual framework

1. Introduction

> No profession can serve people effectively if its members do not share and exchange knowledge about their expertise or about the…students they have in common (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a, p.4).

Education in Scotland is complex, shaped by continuous reform and defined by tensions and dilemmas associated with issues of governance, performativity, accountability, and cultural, structural and socio-economic diversities and inequities. Education policy is underpinned by a framework that aspires, as a moral imperative, to close the poverty related attainment gap. The aspiration to reduce the impact of poverty on attainment and outcomes of young people in Scotland is also a political imperative, defined by Scotland's Deputy First Minister, Mr John Swinney, as a critical component for Scotland's future success on the world stage (Scottish Government, 2017, p5). There is renewed and redefined discourse around collaboration as the mechanism to address inequities and inconsistencies within and across classrooms, schools and local authorities, and as the vehicle for teachers and school or local authority leaders to navigate the challenges and tensions surrounding the educational policy landscape in Scotland.

As a concept and a practice, collaboration is complex. We can assume that actors engaged in professional collaboration are united by a common moral purpose: a shared commitment to improve the educational experience and outcomes of all children and young people in Scotland. However in any collaborative relationship, the variables presented through professional identities, hierarchies, local context, reputation, performance measures, working conditions, positionality and agency can adversely impact the aims,

quality and result of the collaboration. The challenges presented by these variables can only be fully understood through the perspective of the actors in their enactment of their professional roles; roles that are enhanced or undermined by the challenges and opportunities presented by their particular contexts. So while this qualitative research is underpinned by the assumption that effective professional 'collaboration is key' (General Teaching Council for Scotland, 2018) to improving educational outcomes for children and young people in Scotland, it analyses in some depth, via an emerging conceptual framework, the personal, political, situational and structural variables that can positively or adversely impact the engagement in and the outcome of professional collaboration. The starting point to the framework for research into the factors supporting or undermining the transformational potential of professional collaboration in Scottish education is illustrated in **Figure 1** and is based on the *Conceptual framework for interprofessional collaborative practice*, (Stutsky & Spence Laschinger, 2014)**,** derived to guide research in order to build a systematic body of knowledge of ICP (Interprofessional Collaborative Practice) in the health professions to strengthen ICP and improve patient safety and quality.

Figure 1

Framework for professional collaboration in education in Scotland: A starting point

1.1 Research Questions

The overarching research question being analysed through construction of a conceptual framework is:

In the current educational context in Scotland, what is the impact of personal, political, situational and structural factors on effective collaboration between educational professionals?

The key research question is explored through two sub-questions:

i) *What are the key concepts underpinning effective and impactful collaboration to improve equity in educational contexts, as defined in current research and discourse?*

ii) *How do contextual factors support or undermine effective and impactful collaborative practice between and across schools and local authorities in Scotland?*

1.2 Structure

The dissertation is structured in seven sections, as follows:

1. **Introduction.**

2. **Context.** This provides an overview of the current educational landscape in Scotland; the policy, structures and influences that currently support or challenge the potential for impactful professional collaboration within and across schools and local authorities in Scotland.

3. **Methodology.** The methodology section provides explanation and justification for the researcher's methodology, a *Conceptual*

Analysis, to provide conceptual clarity around the complex phenomenon of collaboration: the defining characteristics and the variables undermining and enhancing the potential for professional collaboration to improve equity and excellence in schools in Scotland. It justifies the use of a *Conceptual Framework* as the organising device to align the research process and methods with the key questions and to provide coherence to the concept of educational collaboration from current research, policy and collaborative practice. It also acknowledges that the conceptual framework has evolved and developed throughout the research process in response to emergent findings. The methodology section positions the researcher in context as a practitioner, a Head Teacher currently working in a dual role between a secondary school and a local authority in Scotland, and it explores the significance of the researcher's experiential knowledge, beliefs, commitment and values on the research process.

4. **Policy Analysis.** The policy analysis reviews the presence and expectation of professional collaboration between individuals, schools and local authorities within pertinent Scottish education policy texts.

5. **Literature review.** The literature review offers a critical summary and synthesis of significant research literature contributing to the concept of collaboration in education in the context of what is mandated by current education policy. It justifies the choice of literature, explores the interrelatedness between the identified texts, and summarises common themes relating to personal, political, structural and situational influences on the practice and outcomes of professional collaboration in educational contexts.

6. **Refining the conceptual framework.** The conceptual analysis organises the key concepts influencing collaborative practice within the emerging conceptual framework and offers critical interrogation of the significance of each theme to the construction, engagement and impact of professional collaboration in the context of education in Scotland.

7. **Conclusion.** The conclusion provides reflection on the research process and revisits the conceptual framework in light of data produced through the interrogation and analysis of the common themes influencing the practice and impact of collaboration. It then proposes refinements and application of the conceptual framework to inform practice and support the strengthening of professional collaboration between teachers and education leaders.

1.3   Ethics

While the research within this dissertation does not involve human subjects or data and does not therefore require formal ethical approval, there are ethical implications associated with research designs and methodologies in the context of educational and social research (Burgess, 2005) that have been considered by the researcher to ensure integrity of the process and authenticity of the conclusions, in compliance with appropriate ethical standards. Specific and detailed consideration has been given to the ethical implications of the *practitioner as researcher* role:

Identification: While the researcher explicitly positions herself as a practitioner in the field being analysed, she has considered the potential for unintentional identification of individual teachers, schools or local authorities. As such, the findings of the research are specific to concepts and structures influencing the phenomenon of collaboration, with no requirement to provide specifics in terms of individual practitioners, schools, local

authorities or locations. The conceptual framework offered is a generic tool to challenge and support collaborative practice nationally, to be interpreted by individual schools, teachers or local authorities as appropriate to their context.

Professional bias: The nature of the *practitioner as researcher* role can produce conflicts of interest and professional biases informed by contextual knowledge and experience of the researcher. While the researcher is ostensibly knowledgeable about the research field of educational collaboration, preconceived notions based on experience can unintentionally contaminate the integrity and objectivity of the research process. The researcher has therefore adopted a reflexive approach, explicitly locating herself and her professional values in context and acknowledging her aspiration to maximise the potential for professional collaboration to improve education in schools in Scotland. Further, she has acknowledged where her professional experience and perspective are contributing to the research process in order to provide a more comprehensive exploration and understanding of the complexities of professional collaboration in education. While openness about revealing an opinion or stance about the research field is not advised by Mercer (2007) in that it may leave the researcher open to accusations about contamination of data, it is the researcher's belief that her contribution as a current practitioner has added value to the validity of the research and the credibility of the conceptual framework that has evolved throughout the research process.

2. Context: *Education in Scotland*

When exploring the potential for collaboration between educational professionals to strengthen practice and outcomes, it is important to understand the structures and influences governing and defining education in

Scotland. This section provides an overview of four important aspects of the context of the research field:

> 2.1 The National Improvement Framework
>
> 2.2 The Scottish Attainment Challenge
>
> 2.3 Educational Policy and Governance
>
> 2.4 Existing collaborative structures

2.1 The National Improvement Framework

The National Improvement Framework (NIF) for Scottish Education (Scottish Government, 2016a) highlights six key drivers [1] to enable continuous improvement that will deliver the twin aims of Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education. The six NIF drivers were largely informed by the developments, challenges and recommendations contained within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) *Improving Schools in Scotland* report (OECD, 2015) that was commissioned by the Scottish Government to provide an independent review of the emerging impact in excellence and equity of the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Government, 2008a) and to inform the ongoing development of education policy, practice and leadership in Scotland. Following the 2015 OECD report, the Scottish Government produced a

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[1] **NIF: Six drivers for improvement (Scottish Government, 2016a)**

1. School leadership
2. Teacher professionalism
3. Parental engagement
4. Assessment of children's progress
5. School improvement
6. Performance information

statement for practitioners outlining streamlined guidance and support to refocus the planning and delivery of Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Government, 2016b) to meet the aims of the NIF (Scottish Government, 2016a). Educational governance in Scotland is influenced by an increasing significance of international research and performance measures. The First Minister, in outlining the priorities that would guide the Scottish Government during the parliamentary term of 2016-2021 (Scottish Government, 2016c), was explicit that she wished the government to be defined by the quality of education in Scotland and that improvements in education would be guided by credible research and evidence from around the world via an International Council of Education Advisers (ICEA). The recommendations from the ICEA inform aspects of the education policy review.

2.2   The Scottish Attainment Challenge

The NIF underpins the Scottish Attainment Challenge (Scottish Government, 2018a) that aspires to close the attainment gap between the least and most deprived children and young people in primary and secondary schools in Scotland. It prioritises improvements in literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing and has been supported since 2015 by the £750 million Attainment Scotland Fund (ASF) that is targeted to those local authorities and schools in Scotland with the highest concentrations of deprivation, as defined by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (Scottish Government, 2016d). There are several strands of funding within the ASF, aimed at supporting individual schools and local authorities to work with partners to reduce the poverty related attainment gap as appropriate to their own contexts. These strands are summarised in **Table 1**, based on *Education Scotland* Scottish Attainment Challenge update (Education Scotland 2019a). Additionally, the Scottish Government introduced *The Care Experienced Children and Young People Fund* from session 2018-2019 to support "targeted initiatives, activities, and resources, that will improve the educational outcomes of this group of disadvantaged young people" (Scottish Government, 2018a).

Table 1

Strands of Attainment Scotland Funding (Education Scotland, 2019a)

1	**Challenge Authorities**	Targeted funding to Glasgow, Dundee, Inverclyde, West Dunbartonshire, North Ayrshire, Clackmannanshire, North Lanarkshire, East Ayrshire and Renfrewshire. Of the 32 local authorities in Scotland, these 9 local authorities have the highest concentration of pupils living in the 20% most deprived areas (Scottish Government 2016c).
2	**Schools Programme**	Supports mainly primary and some secondary schools outwith the Challenge Authorities that are identified on the basis of deprivation.
3	**Innovation Fund**	Funds available to all local authorities to support innovative projects to improve literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing for children adversely impacted by poverty.
4	**Pupil Equity Funding (PEF)**	Additional funding allocated directly to schools (via local authorities) on the basis of the number of Primary 1 to S3 pupils eligible for free school meals).

Empowerment and collaboration are essential within an education system "where everyone's contribution is heard and valued, and improving children and young people's outcomes is at the heart of everything we do" (Scottish Government, 2018b). However, the *Scottish Government and Attainment Scotland Fund Evaluation: Headteacher Survey* (Scottish Government, 2018c) highlighted significant variation across funding strands in the extent to which ASF support has led to an increase in collaborative working:

> Schools Programme respondents are more likely than others to have seen an increase in collaborative working as a result of funding (98% have done so), while PEF-only schools are least likely to have seen such a change (66%). (Scottish Government, 2018c, p.21).

Contextual factors contributing to the success or otherwise of collaborative practices are explored further in this dissertation to inform a refined

conceptual framework intended to support the strengthening of professional collaboration to fulfil the aims of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.

2.3   Education Policy and Governance

The turbulent and dynamic nature of the Scottish education policy environment has implications for schools' and local authorities' accountability, empowerment and agency that can undermine effective and impactful collaborative practice between and across schools and local authorities in Scotland.

2.3.1   Local authorities in Scotland

There are thirty-two local authorities in Scotland, diverse in their socio-economic and geographical characteristics and with heterogeneity in perspectives. The thirty-two local authorities have been divided into six Regional Improvement Collaboratives, whose function is to collaborate in the provision of evidence-based practical support, expertise and challenge needed to enable schools and local authorities to fulfill the aims of the NIF. However, the diversity between local authorities' contexts and governance – many with a largely hegemonic hierarchical model that currently mitigates against individual schools' autonomy - means there is variance in scope for Headteachers and schools to engage in authentic and meaningful collaboration outwith their locality due to the situational and structural factors impeding impactful collaboration. Some of this variance was highlighted in the published responses to the Empowering Schools: A consultation on the provisions of the Education (Scotland) Bill (Scottish Government, 2018d) and will be explored further in the policy analysis and literature review.

2.3.2 Education policy

The policy drivers currently underpinning education in Scotland are outlined by Education Scotland (Education Scotland, 2019b) and provide a framework and a context for significant collaborative practice between teachers, schools and local authorities. The key drivers navigated by education professionals and which collaborative practice attempts to make sense of are summarised in **Table 2**:

Table 2

Policy drivers underpinning education in Scotland (Education Scotland, 2019b)

1	**Curriculum for Excellence (CFE) (Scottish Government, 2008a)**	CFE is the national curriculum intended to help children and young people from aged 3-18 gain the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for life in the 21st century, including skills for learning, life and work.
2	**Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) (Scottish Government, 2014)**	The DYW programme builds on CFE and aims to better prepare children and young people aged 3–18 for the world of work in order to reduce youth unemployment in Scotland by 40% by 2021.
3	**Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) (Scottish Government, 2008b)**	GIRFEC is the national approach to improving the wellbeing of children and young people with a practice model that is legislated through the Children and Young People's Act 2014 (UK Government, 2014).
4	**Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education - A Delivery Plan for Scotland (Scottish Government, 2016e)**	The **Delivery Plan** outlines the steps the Scottish Government will take to achieve key improvements in education, building on the work contained in the NIF, and addresses recommendations of the OECD review (OECD, 2015).

2.3.3 Teachers' standards and conditions

Table 3 lists four key frameworks that define current professional expectations of teachers and school leaders in Scotland and the conditions within which they operate:

Table 3

Four key frameworks defining current professional expectations of teachers and school leaders in Scotland

1	**The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) Professional Standards (GTCS, 2012)**	The GTCS Professional Standards are underpinned by professional values, sustainability and leadership, and are integral to all professional relationships and practices (GTCS, 2012).
2	**A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century (Scottish Government, 2001)**	This agreement outlines professional conditions of service and pay for teachers to support the objectives of the profession to be a "world class education service which will fit our children well for the 21st century" (Scottish Government, 2001).
3	**An *Empowered System* Resource (Education Scotland, 2019c)**	The Education Scotland *Empowered System* resource encourages collaboration and collegiality, and includes: - A self-evaluation framework for local authorities and regional improvement collaboratives - Empowering School Leaders guidance - Headteachers' Charter - An evaluation strategy for an empowered system
4	**National Model of Professional Learning (Education Scotland, 2019d)**	The national model of professional learning is a new model for partnership working to "build capacity… promote collaborative practices and [it] outlines the kinds of learning that will empower and enable you to best meet the needs of learners" (Education Scotland, 2019d).

A selection of the policy texts and frameworks in **Table 2** and **Table 3** are referenced further in this dissertation in response to the research question that explores the extent to which they promote, enhance or undermine what is defined as effective and impactful collaboration between education professionals in Scotland.

2.4 Existing collaborative structures

There is an abundance of structures and resources within the Scottish education system that promote, prescribe or support collaborative activity to pursue the aspirations of the NIF; to close the poverty related attainment gap and to improve excellence and equity. Collaboration is also recognised as an important component of effective teacher leadership, (GTCS, 2012).

Professional Collaboration in Education in Scotland			
Individuals collaborating	Collaboration within schools	Local authority collaboration	National and international collaboration
Mainly informal and voluntary, as a result of networking, social media or previous work study / conference connections. Can lead to more formal collaborative projects and partnerships. Social media is an increasingly strong feature of individual collaborations.	Mainly prescriptive, structured meetings. Teacher Learning Communities (TLCs) and working groups - increasingly involving parents, carers and communities the schools serve. Action research and social media is a strong feature of school collaboration.	Structured and prescriptive clusters and Improvement Groups (organised by area, subject or SIMD). Networks, forums and informal collaboration between schools or individuals and in response to data. Increasingly strong social media activity.	Formal or structured opportunities provided nationally by governing bodies e.g. Education Scotland. Attendance and participation in national / international conferences instigated by the individual. Powerful presence and influence of social media

Figure 2

Structures and opportunities for professional collaboration in Scottish education (from the perspective and experience of the researcher)

The researcher's perspective of collaborative structures and opportunities, categorised in **Figure 2** is based on her professional experience of 28 years teaching in secondary education in Scotland, including nine years as a school headteacher. The conceptual framework is informed by critical interrogation of the structures and opportunities for professional collaboration in Scottish education, and synthesis of significant research contributing to the concept of educational collaboration. In addition, the perspective of the researcher is implicit within the framework because her professional values and identity, and her experience of the complexities of collaborative contexts, have contributed to the research process.

3. Methodology and Methods

This section explains and justifies the methodology and methods used to answer the research question and sub-questions:

In the current educational context in Scotland, what is the impact of personal, political, situational and structural factors on effective collaboration between educational professionals?

    i)   *What are the key concepts underpinning effective and impactful collaboration to improve equity in educational contexts, as defined in current research and discourse?*

    ii)   *How do contextual factors support or undermine effective and impactful collaborative practice between and across schools and local authorities in Scotland?*

The explanation and justification of method and methodology is explored in three sections:

    3.1 Theoretical position
    3.2 Methodology

3.3 Methods

3.1 Theoretical Position

This research is underpinned by a constructivist paradigm. Interpretations of constructivism are varied, and shaped by the experiences, values and aims of the researcher. In the case of this research, the constructivist approach is based on the researcher's belief that to understand phenomena such as the experience, potential and impact of collaboration, one must investigate, interpret and reconstruct.

> It is the accounts and observations of the world that provide indirect indications of phenomena, and thus knowledge is developed through a process of interpretation (Waring, 2012, p.16).

The philosophical rationale is explained in relation to the questions of ontology and epistemology, acknowledging that in research underpinned by a constructivist paradigm, "conventional distinction between ontology and epistemology disappears" as the research findings are constructed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.111).

3.1.1 Ontology

It is the researcher's position that reality is socially and experientially based, alterable and dependent on constructions of the actors experiencing the phenomenon. In the case of professional collaboration in educational contexts, differing knowledge and experiences coexist and are dependent on the personal, political, situational or structural factors that differentiate the actors participating in the collaboration. There is no objective truth to be discovered. The aim of the research is to analyse and understand many factors within the current context of education in Scotland that support or undermine what is defined as effective collaboration between education

professionals in order to construct a conceptual framework that can inform practice and support the strengthening of professional collaboration.

3.1.2   Epistemology

In a constructivist paradigm the individual knower and the process of knowing cannot be separated: the researcher and the object of the research are interactively linked and with no single objective truth to be discovered, findings have been interpreted and reconstructed throughout the research process. While the research has generated multiple perspectives that are distinctive and cannot be generalised, the findings created have allowed the researcher to construct a contextualised understanding of the data produced and organise this within a conceptual framework that has evolved via the hermeneutical process.

3.1.3   Values

Values are intrinsic to the constructivist paradigm and ineluctable in shaping outcomes, with the researcher as "orchestrator and facilitator of the process" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.114). Consideration has been given earlier in this dissertation to the ethical implications of the *practitioner as researcher* role and the paper acknowledges where the researcher's professional values and experiences have informed or influenced interpretation of the data.

3.1.4   Authenticity of research

> Authenticity [in constructivist research] involves a set of criteria (i.e., fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity), which commits the constructivist researcher to a set of actions (e.g., balance of perspectives, learning by the researcher and respondents, shared knowledge, and social action). If the researcher fails to meet these commitments, the quality of the research (e.g., meaningfulness, usefulness, ability to enact social change) is questionable. (Manning, 1997, p.94).

With appropriate methodology and methods, and a strong regard for fairness, balance, and capacity of the findings to support and inform change and improvement, this research has generated a conceptual framework with a high level of authenticity and reliability. Further, by utilising a constructivist theoretical perspective, broader relevant themes have emerged that both address the central research question and give light to improved understanding of the factors that enhance or undermine what is defined as effective and impactful collaboration between education professionals in the current Scottish educational context.

3.2 Methodology

Conceptual Analysis was selected as the primary research methodology, to provide conceptual clarity around the complex phenomenon of collaboration: the defining characteristics and the variables undermining and enhancing the potential for professional collaboration to improve equity and excellence in schools in Scotland. Essentially, a conceptual analysis, defined by Nuopponen, (2010, p.4) as "an activity where concepts, their characteristics and relations to other concepts are clarified" was chosen to allow the researcher to acquire knowledge and understanding of the concept of collaboration and the interrelatedness between themes and ideas within the concept in order to answer the research questions. The researcher is a practitioner, bringing experience and knowledge to the research process as a Headteacher currently working in a dual role between a secondary school and a local authority in Scotland. Walker (2012, P.77) highlighted the importance of the researcher's personal experience and stories as a key aspect of naturalistic research where the researcher "is intimately involved and in many cases the questions they choose to pursue derive from personal experience". However, in this case while the questions have been selected as a critical concern of the researcher's professional practice, and the researcher's experiences could inform or influence interpretation of the data, the aim was to elicit authentic data around collaboration from defining attributes identified within research

literature and policy texts rather than the researcher's lived experience. Methods were chosen to facilitate this aim.

3.3 Methods

This section explains the methods the researcher undertook to gather and clarify the key concepts, their characteristics and their relationship to other concepts in order to answer the research questions. Three stages inform and refine a conceptual framework as an organising device.

i) Policy Analysis

The researcher provides a critical review of aspects of current Scottish Education Policy texts that promote collaboration and articulate expectations of education professionals in Scotland to engage in collaboration to improve excellence and equity.

ii) Literature Review

The researcher engaged in critical analysis of current and significant[2] research literature on collaboration, identifying and synthesising selected concepts that offer insight into the efficacy and characteristics of collaboration in a dialogue with what is dictated by Scottish education policy. Concepts explored in the analysis are organised in a framework adapted and refined from **Figure 1.**

iii) Analysis of variables and refinement of conceptual framework

The researcher analysed the relationship between policy expectation and assumptions around collaborative structures and opportunities, and the complex construct of variables relating to personal, political, structural

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[2] Justification of the researcher's perspective on what is 'significant' literature is explicit in the literature review.

and situational influences that can support or undermine the synergy, practice and outcomes of professional collaboration in education.

The significant themes and variables identified were aligned and organised in a refined *Conceptual Framework* intended as a device to provide coherence and conceptual distinctions to the complex phenomenon of educational collaboration from current research and policy in a method that is accessible and applicable to the education profession. Ravitch and Carl (2015) posit that a conceptual framework should be viewed as an evolving process; it is simply the current version of the researcher's understanding of the concept and the multiple, intersecting components being researched. As an organising device it became increasingly sophisticated as the research progressed with "deeper, and more integrative understanding of the topic and concepts central to the study" (Ravitch & Carl, 2015, p.38). It is important therefore to reemphasise the researcher's position as a practitioner in the field being researched. While data has been produced predominantly from research literature and policy texts, with no human subjects, the researcher's experience, bias and assumptions have underpinned the research questions and undoubtedly influenced the construction of the framework that illustrated the researcher's understanding of the concept. Further, while this dissertation was designed to produce a conceptual framework, as an organiser of the generic concepts influencing and impacting collaborative educational practice in Scotland, the framework should be seen as a dynamic tool to be interpreted, interrogated, applied and refined by the reader as appropriate to their context, experience and aims in relation to educational collaboration. The limitations and potential for application of the framework are explicit within the conclusion.

4. Policy Analysis

The policy analysis interrogates the articulation and currency of collaboration within current Scottish education policy and the burden of expectation on individuals, schools and local authorities to engage in collaborative practice to improve educational outcomes across Scotland.

HM Chief Inspector of Education and Chief Executive at Education Scotland has identified "creating and supporting collaborative learning communities" as a key theme to revitalising and reinvigorating Education Scotland[3] to support the teaching profession: "It's important that we create and support the formation and extension of local, national and regional networks" (General Teaching Council for Scotland, 2018). Collaboration is a concept that features widely in current education policy texts: the concept is exhorted as a critical area of practice for every teacher and school leader as a means to support current priorities in education, to close the poverty related attainment gap, raise attainment and improve consistency in learning and teaching. The promotion of collaboration within current policy discourse is underpinned by Scottish Government commissioned national and international insights such as conclusions from the OECD review (OECD, 2015) that are specific about the need to establish cultures of professional collaboration to impact on student achievement:

> We suggest that collaboration in improving teaching, assessing CfE, and connecting schools to take collective responsibility for each other's improvement and results, should be top priorities…. the Standards Frameworks could emphasise even more the importance of and expectations for collaborative professionalism and leadership. (OECD, 2015, p.140)

Similarly, the advocacy of professional collaborative practice in education has been directly influenced by The International Council of Education Advisers

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[3] Education Scotland is the Executive Agency of the Scottish Government, tasked with improving the quality of the country's education system.

(ICEA)[4]. Their specific recommendations around strengthening collaboration as a future approach assert that educational improvement in Scotland's schools can be achieved by:

> The collaborative approach that has achieved the progress to date, rather than pursuing a legislative approach… Scotland's strong track record of collaboration and consensus in implementing education policy [should remain] the central focus of system improvement (ICEA, 2017).

Achieving system improvement in Scottish education needs focused and sustained collaborative effort by all professionals and partners that contribute to the systems. However, while we can assume that education professionals share a common moral imperative to achieve excellence and equity, we cannot ignore the variables presented through personal, political, situational or structural factors that can limit trust and prohibit meaningful collaboration. These factors feature through the interrogation of a key selection of current Scottish policy texts and are subsequently explored in more detail through the research literature in Section 5. If we accept the definition of Olssen, et al. (2004) that policy is "… any course of action (or inaction) relating to the selection of goals, the definition of values or the allocation of resources" (2004, p.71), then what constitutes education policy is infinite and could not be covered in the scope of this research. While the policies on e.g. *Curriculum for Excellence* and *Getting it Right for every Child* and others highlighted in **Table 2** and **Table 3** are key documents underpinning ethical and effective practice, the policy analysis in this dissertation has focused on exploration of three significant and current policy areas that:

a) Highlight a renewed impetus for collaboration in Scottish Education.
b) Predominantly inform current and future collaborative practice (from the perspective of the researcher).

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[4] The ICEA was established in 2016 and draws upon the knowledge and experience of leading education and business experts to advise educators and the Scottish government on education leadership, school improvement and reform, to meet the aims of the NIF.

c) Are clearly applicable to the research questions as they necessitate a focus on professional collaboration as course of action to meet educational goals.

d) Articulate expectations of collaboration across the learning system, within and across schools, and from individual practitioners.

These policy areas are:

4.1 *An Empowered System* (Education Scotland, 2019c)

Analysis focuses primarily on the function of Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) in system collaboration.

4.2 *How Good is Our School: 4th Edition (HGIOS4)*

(Scottish Government, 2015)

Analysis focuses on the themes within the HGIOS4 framework that promote collaborative practices within and across schools.

4.3 *National Model of Professional Learning*

(Education Scotland, 2019d)

Analysis focuses on the *Learning is Collaborative* theme within the new model of professional learning for practitioners.

4.1 An Empowered System: Expectations from the system

Figure 3 (Education Scotland, 2019c) illustrates eight key partners that should work collaboratively to improve outcomes for all learners in an empowered system.

Figure 3

*Collaborative Partners in an **Empowered System** (Education Scotland 2019c)*

The *Empowered System* resource provides an evaluative strategy to be used by schools and local authorities to ensure that empowerment and collaboration for improvement are happening at all levels in the system where "headteachers and Local Authorities are partners, each contributing and supporting each other and respecting the different role each plays" (Education Scotland, 2019c). A key new development to empowerment and collaboration was the establishment of the six Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) in 2017, during a Scottish Government consultation on education governance and reform. The intention of the RICs was to:

> Bring together local authorities and Education Scotland to develop
> different ways of working, build capacity across a region and add
> value through collective efforts (Scottish Government, 2019).

However, the Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs): Interim Review (Scottish Government, 2019), (a qualitative research study exploring

practitioners' and stakeholders' experiences and views nine months after inception of the RICs), reported a number of challenges and tensions in the perceptions and experiences of the purpose, practice and impact of the RICs. While stakeholders and practitioners were positive about the potential of the RICs and welcomed collaboration as an important means to support current priorities in education, they communicated concerns. The researcher, in her experience thus far of her local RIC, shares many of these sentiments.

- A longer timescale for the establishment of the RICs would have allowed for fuller consultation and wider engagement of stakeholders and practitioners in shaping priorities and planning collaborative activity.

- Schools would welcome better engagement in the decision-making and activity planning of each workstream, so that the logistics of collaboration (sufficient time, space, resourcing and personnel) could be fully considered, especially in the current climate of financial austerity facing all local authorities.

- That was a perception that "too much influence over RIC development from senior national political figures… a political requirement to be seen to make progress" (Scottish Government, 2019, p.39) was driving tight timescales for planning, and impacting on the capacity for fuller consultation and genuine engagement of stakeholders.

- The existing collaborative activity and experiences of empowerment varied significantly between local authorities. Consideration of structural and contextual diversities and inequity of resourcing between local authorities could have reduced the challenges to planning and undertaking collaborative activity.

- The purpose and role of the RIC could be communicated more clearly – avoiding confusion where some practitioners and stakeholders view the RIC as an entity rather than a collaborative.

- The nurturing of collaboration could effectively use a 'bottom-up' approach to improve communication, engagement, relevance and impact on schools and class teachers.

There is significant work to be done if Scotland is to maximise the transformative potential of a truly empowered education system where a genuine commitment to professional collaboration across boundaries is embedded at all levels. The diversity across Scotland's 32 local authorities, each with heterogeneity amongst perspectives and experiences of constructs such as autonomy, agency, empowerment and accountability, presents challenges to engagement in meaningful collaboration where participants voluntarily cede (e.g. structural control, resources or expertise) for the greater good of the system. Without a shared understanding of the factors that support or undermine collaboration, there is a danger that the collaborative practice of the RICs will continue to be, at best, inconsistent and somewhat superficial. Ideally, any future government review of the RICs will reflect improved collaborative practice underpinned by structures and expectations that demonstrate a deeper understanding of the key concepts and contextual factors underpinning effective collaboration, thus addressing the concerns within the 2018 review.

4.2 How Good is Our School? 4th Edition (HGIOS4): Expectations from schools

How good is our school? 4th EDITION (HGIOS4), (Education Scotland, 2015) is a self-evaluation framework for schools in Scotland that highlights "partnership and collaboration as significant features of a highly-effective school and a high-performing learning system" (Education Scotland, 2015, p.7). The framework consists of 15 Quality Indicators (QIs) with a six-point scale ranging from 1 (unsatisfactory) to 6 (excellent) to grade the QIs. Collaboration is a key theme to support continuous improvement in the majority of the QIs, with specific reference made to collaborative activity throughout the framework:

- *Collaborative approaches to self-evaluation*
- *Professional engagement and collegiate working*
- *Collaborative leadership at all levels*
- *Collaborative planning and delivery*
- *Collaborative learning and improvement*

(Education Scotland, 2015)

Figure 4 prescribes collaborative approaches to self-evaluation as a key means of increasing innovation and continuous improvement across classroom, school and local authority boundaries.

Figure 4

Collaborative approaches to self-evaluation (Education Scotland, 2015, p.10)

Also explicit within the text are themes of management, governance and accountability. This can produce conflicting loyalties and competing agendas, both of which can impede the integration of the vision of collaboration into practice in a schooling system where individual schools are rated on a six-

point scale and are crudely ranked in league tables e.g. *Revealed: The top 50 state schools in Scotland 2019* (Denholm, 2019) that use narrow attainment measures with scant consideration of schools' contexts. Freeth (2001) argues that motivation is required to empower professionals to collaborate and the issue of who benefits from the interprofessional collaboration can undermine incentive and engagement in the collaborative process where "if partners in an interprofessional collaboration benefit unequally from the collaboration, it is likely that those gaining least will become dissatisfied" (Freeth, 2001, p.40). While HGIO4 is a framework designed to evaluate all aspects of school activity, narrow attainment measures that define a school or local authority within a culture of performativity can limit schooling purpose to activity that contributes only to countable measures, inhibiting innovation, openness and the development of authentic, trusting collaborative relationships across the system. For collaborative practice within and across schools to be strengthened rather than undermined, schools and local authorities need to create conditions for collaboration that mitigate against factors that threaten the solidity and authenticity of the collaborative activity.

4.3   National Model of Professional Learning: Expectations from individual practitioners

The national model of professional learning (Education Scotland, 2019d) summarised in **Figure 5** promotes collaborative practices to empower individuals to best meet the needs of learners.
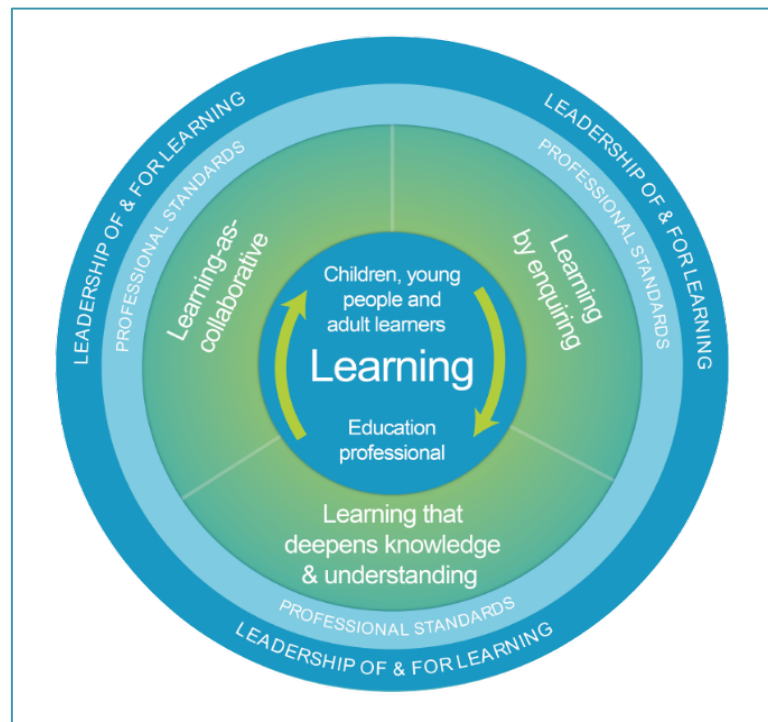
Figure 5

National Model of Professional Learning (Education Scotland, 2019d)

It highlights *learning-as-collaborative* as a key principle of effective professional learning that is defined by the individual's:

- Engagement with colleagues, partners and learners
- Professional reflection, self-evaluation and self-awareness
- Openness to sharing and developing knowledge through collaboration

It is the researcher's view that the model is aspirational and has potential to shape meaningful professional learning as an entitlement that will promote teacher voice, agency and professionalism for the benefit of learners. For the potential to be realised in practice, the framework should by supported by learning and guidance from research into the key enabling and inhibiting factors within collaborative structures and activities. Individual practitioners' values, beliefs and previous experiences of collaboration are variables that can be significant in determining the goals, engagement and impact of a future collaborative activity, as can the professional culture and context

within which the collaboration takes place. The research literature analysed in section 5 explores these concepts and variables underpinning practitioners' experience of collaboration. The literature has been interrogated and synthesised to make sense of the relationship between policy expectation and assumptions around collaboration and the complex construct of variables relating to personal, political, structural and situational influences.

4.4 Variables identified within selected education policy texts

The aim of this dissertation is to contribute to the field of knowledge that will support improved understanding of collaboration. At this stage the variables impacting effectiveness of collaboration identified from selected policy texts can be categorised within the emerging conceptual framework, illustrated in **Figure 6.**

Personal & political factors

- *Professional values*
- *Assumptions around collaboration*
- *Previous experience of collaboration*
- *Motivation / incentive*
- *Openness to sharing / ceding*
- *Teacher voice and agency*
- *Empowerment*
- *Management and governance*
- *Accountability and performativity*
- *Resourcing*
- *Political motivation*
- *Influence of the media*
- *Trust and relationships*

Situational & structural factors

- *Professional culture and context*
- *Advocacy and support for activity*
- *Empowerment*
- *Management and governance*
- *Time, space, resourcing and personnel*
- *Engagement at all levels*
- *Heterogeneity amongst perspectives*
- *Trust and relationships*

influencing →

Professional Collaboration

↓ *resulting in*

Outcomes
(local & national)

Figure 6

Framework for professional collaboration in education in Scotland: variables identified through analysis of policy texts

5. Literature Review

Renewed and redefined commitment to collaboration as the mechanism to improve educational practice and outcomes is reflected in Scottish education policy and is supported by important and recent literary contributions to the research field. The literature review interrogates seminal texts that offer critical and informative insight into selected characteristics of collaboration, to extend understanding of the variables identified through the policy analysis.

The researcher has applied stringent criteria to the selection of literature in order to illuminate key concepts underpinning or undermining effective and impactful collaboration to improve equity in educational contexts. Given the enormity of contributions to the research field, with decades of research promoting collaboration as an essential component of school improvement, the literature was filtered. To be included in this literature review, texts had to:

- Be recent. (The majority of key texts explored were published within the last ten years and several were within the last two years).
- Contribute to the field of collaboration within the specific context of school education.
- Offer relevant perspective to what is mandated by Scottish education policy.
- Be written by an author that is credible and reputable, with demonstrable authority to write on the subject of educational collaboration.
- Explore and illuminate themes relating to personal, political, structural or situational factors that support or undermine educational collaboration, in order to meet the information needs of the research questions.
- Be evidence based, unbiased and intended to support and strengthen the practice and impact of educational collaboration.

The research literature was predominantly sourced via the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI), an organisation that facilitates collaboration and innovation between researchers, practitioners and policy makers internationally; to critically engage with the educational questions that need to be addressed in order to "develop knowledge, policies, and practices focused on improving the quality and equity of education" (ICSEI, 2019). ICSEI conducts, promotes and disseminates

latest research worldwide and organises an annual conference as an international collaborative endeavour. The researcher is a member of ICSEI and contributed to the ICSEI 2019 conference in Stavanger, Norway where collaboration and networking were encouraged as key aspect of the conference theme *"Bringing together* – creating innovative educational policies and practices for diversity, equity and sustainability" (ICSEI, 2019). Many of the researchers that this analysis has referenced were sourced at the ICSEI conference where they offered credible and innovative contributions to the field of educational collaboration.

The Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) published a recent think piece (Chapman, 2019) that explores the current challenges, opportunities, concepts and messages around educational reform and the future for Scotland's education system. Identified themes such as *power of context, accountability, relational trust and collaboration,* and *leadership for improvement* highlighted the "complexity of engaging and implementing reforms designed to empower a system whilst building capacity and maintaining coherence" (Chapman, 2019, p.4). Crucially, Chapman identified the "need to develop a nuanced understanding of individual contexts, their strengths and weaknesses and most importantly their capacity for self-improvement" (2019, p.5), to support the implementation of reform. So, without nuanced understanding of the diversity and variables presented by individual practitioners', schools' and local authorities' contexts, the aims, quality and impact of professional educational collaboration will be less meaningful and less productive. Chapman has identified a number of variables termed as "symptoms and signs of the dark side of collaboration" (2019, p.7) that impact effectiveness of educational collaboration. This, along with concepts identified in research literature informs the thematic structure of this section of the literature review. Each concept is analysed through interrogation of research literature contributing to the field in order to provide conceptual clarity around the role that teachers, schools and local authorities have in enhancing the potential for professional collaboration to improve equity and excellence in schools in Scotland.

The four interrelated concepts framing this analysis are:

5.1 The dimension of context

5.2 Professional capital

5.3 Collaborative professionalism

5.4 The emotions of collaboration

Section 5.5 then elucidates the variables emerging through analysis of the research literature.

5.5 Identification and analysis of variables within the research literature

5.1 The dimension of context

The notion of context is multi-layered, encompassing many factors such as geographical location, socio-economic characteristics defining a geographical area or organisation (such as a school, a local authority or a RIC), and roles, structures and hierarchies within the organisation. It also relates to the context of educational reform and the structures and influences governing and defining education in Scotland, that were explored in Section 2. All of the contextual layers present opportunities and constraints that contribute to the complexity of collaborative relationships between educational practitioners and across organisations.

Geographical and socio-economic context

The disparities in size and scale of the RICs, illustrated in Figure 7, present practical challenges to professional collaboration between local authorities (LAs) in each RIC. These challenges are significant in the Northern Alliance that covers 58.4% of the landmass of Scotland and most of the islands, yet it

represents a small percentage of the Scottish population (Northern Alliance, 2018), whereas the West Partnership serves the greatest number of children, with 34% of Scotland's school population attending schools in Glasgow City Region. The West Partnership has a uniquely diverse demographic, ranging from extreme poverty to high affluence, with multiple ethnic groups and with a "fairly compact geography [that] gives the West a high capacity for collaboration and learning" (West Partnership RIC, 2019). While there will always be disparity in the capacity for collaboration due to the geographical and socio-economics inequalities and the percentage of the education profession contributing to the collaboration in each RIC, the geographical challenges are being addressed somewhat by increased digital technology that will support communication, networking and sharing of resources.
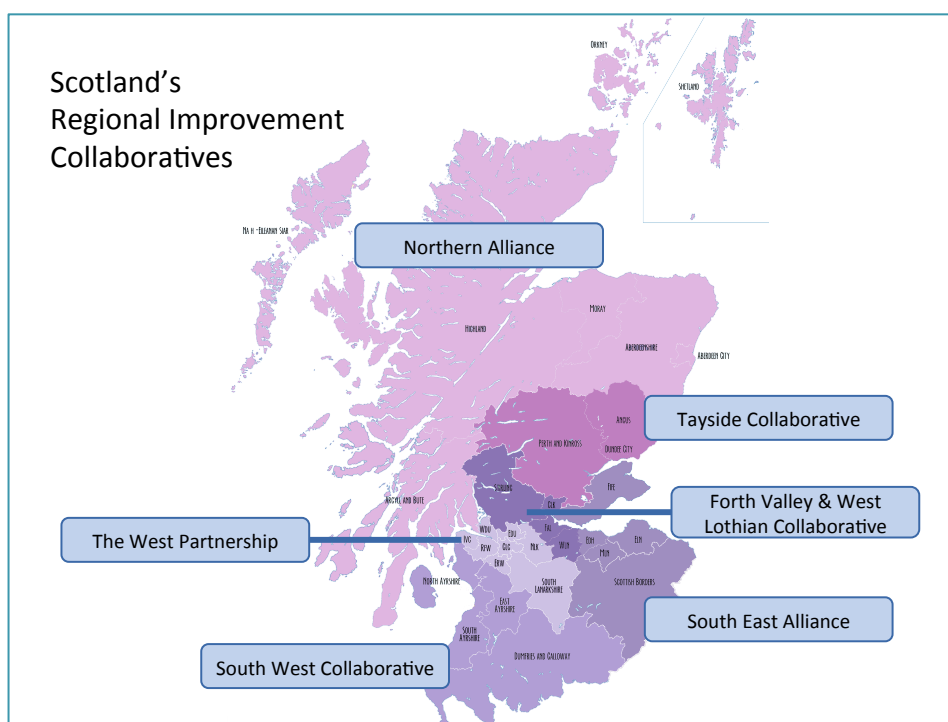
Figure 7

Map of Scotland's Regional Improvement Collaboratives (Education Scotland, 2019e)

With regards to the socio-economic challenges, RICs have a high degree of operational flexibility to support their contexts. This flexibility must be utilised to plan appropriately and with deep understanding of their defining

characteristics, in order that the collaborative practice will meet the diverse needs and challenges in schools and local authorities they serve:

> An understanding of these [contextual] factors will support individual LAs and the system's improvement agents (LAs themselves, RICs etc.) to accurately diagnose key issues and develop appropriate context-specific rather than one-size-fits-all packages of support to stimulate improvements. (Chapman, 2019, p.5).

National context of educational reform

The aspiration within the NIF to deliver the twin aims of Excellence and Equity in Scottish education has informed improvement planning at every level (in school, LAs and RICs) and has provided an "integrating or coherence-making lever [for collaboration] … having a national agenda as a rallying point" (Chapman & Fullan, 2007, p.209). This supports collaborative practice to remain focussed on the whole system and the national drivers of improvement: to make sense of the ambiguities and challenges within the NIF and to collectively direct efforts to finding viable, innovative solutions that will result in systems improvement.

Mowat's (2018) synthesis of the literature on systems leadership provides a critical analysis of the current convergence of major policy initiatives in Scotland to improve excellence and equity. She identifies "collaboration between different levels of the system" (2018, p.65) as a common element to support improvement. However, she acknowledges a number of contextual variables regarding the structure and objectives that should be considered in the organisation of such collaboration. Mowat suggests:

> A bottom-up emancipatory approach in which teachers are able to exercise agency and autonomy… under the auspices of a systems-level approach which sets a clear direction for improvement and provides the infra-structure and supports to enable collaboration

and networking within and between different levels of the system
(Mowat, 2018, p.66).

An emancipatory approach to collaboration within a structured framework
that offers high support and direction is an aspirational objective that could
promote high levels of motivation, engagement and impact. The challenges of
achieving this in practice and the leadership characteristics that can support
improved agency and autonomy are analysed in the next section: an
exploration of the concept of *professional capital* as a variable impacting on
the effectiveness of educational collaboration.

5.2   Professional capital

Hargreaves and Fullan (2013) outline a vision of professional capital that is
synthesised in Table 4:

Table 4
Vision of professional capital – synthesised by the researcher (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013, p.37)

Professional Capital	
Human capital	**The talent of individuals** Their qualities, qualifications and competencies.
Social capital	**The collaborative power of the group** The extent to which education professionals work in a trusting, collaborative way to improve learning and teaching and student outcomes.
Decisional capital	**Sound judgements about learning** The wisdom and expertise to make sound, evidence based judgments about learners that are cultivated over many years.

They propose *social capital*, the collaborative power, collective potential,
communication, common purpose, challenge and support within the group, as

the most impactful method of enacting school improvement and improving consistency in and across schools:

> Use the group to change the group. This means developing how teachers as a team or group can best identify and respond to the needs of individual students (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013, p.37).

They also suggest that the potential for innovation is maximised when *social capital* is supported with strong *human capital* i.e. those collaborating are talented and highly capable professionals, and that fostering *decisional capital* will enhance the quality and impact of the collaborative process.

It is incumbent upon school and local authority leaders to create the conditions for high professional capital to thrive, for maximum teacher effectiveness. This necessitates a culture of trust between and across all levels of the system, with high support and challenge, to fulfil Mowat's (2018) aspiration of an emancipatory approach to collaboration. The concept of *time* presents a challenge to achieving this. Hargreaves and Fullan (2013) explore the notion that social and decisional capital develop over time and attribute the high effectiveness of Finland's education system to:

> the amount of time teachers spend in their day outside of the classroom. They spend less time in the classroom per day than any other country, which gives them time to reflect, discuss, and develop judgment (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013, p.38).

Countries vary considerably in their annual statutory teaching time and consequently the amount of time allowed for non-teaching activities such as preparation, professional learning and collaboration. In 2017, the average statutory contact time in lower secondary OECD schools with available data was 700 hours per year. Of the 37 countries listed in descending order of teaching hours per year, Scotland was seventh highest with 850 teaching hours, and Finland had the fifth lowest number of statutory teaching time, with under 600 hours (OECD, 2018, p.380). The conditions of service outlined in *A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century* (Scottish Government, 2001)

stipulate a working week of 35 hours with maximum class contact time of 22.5 hours (1350 minutes) per week (2001, p.7). In the experience of the researcher, this has been utilised in the most efficient way by having an asymmetric week encompassing 33 x 50 minute periods, in order that teachers can be timetabled for the maximum 27 periods (1350 minutes) of teaching or cover.

There is no short-term prospect of a reduction in teaching hours in Scotland, particularly in light of the recent pay award, amounting to a total increase of 13.51% over three years, (TES, Scotland, 2019). If school and authority leaders are to fulfill their professional imperative to nurture human, social and decisional capital, they must cultivate an environment that "not only attracts the best teachers available, but one that also retains and develops them throughout their career" (Watkins, 2005, p.86). To do this they must maximise the non-teaching time available, by galvanising teams into meaningful collaborative activity that is:

- *Focused,* aligned with school vision and priorities, and of immediate relevance to learning and teaching.
- *Inclusive,* with genuine respect for the strengths, journeys, contributions and multiple perspectives of participants.
- *Supported,* with protected space and time, created by reducing unnecessary bureaucracy, and managing conflicting priorities to cease activity that does not lead to improved outcomes for learners.
- *Valued,* as an authentic process that promotes relational trust, professional growth, reflection and innovation, and creative, shared solutions to the current issues that are most troubling for practitioners.

Chapman (2019) recognises that high levels of social capital, defined as "trust plus reciprocity" (2019, p.6) will strengthen collaboration, and acknowledges relational trust as an imperative for sophisticated levels of collaboration as it supports the "development of challenging conversations which are key to

developing authentic collaboration" (2019. p.6). Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018b) offer the concept of *Solidarity with Solidity,* as a case for *collaborative professionalism*:

> Collaborative professional relationships that positively influence student learning need better tools and deeper trust, clearer structures and stronger cultures, expertise and enthusiasm, knowing what to do and how to be with each other — both solidity and solidarity (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018b, p.21).

The characteristics of *solidarity* and *solidity* are summarised in **Table 5** and are considered through interrogation of the concept of collaborative professionalism in section 5.3.

Table 5

Solidarity and solidity - synthesised by the researcher (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018b)

Solidarity Relational (being)	Solidity Operational (doing)
common moral purpose connection / reciprocity development / learning / challenge Grounded in mutual trust and relationships Caring as much about each other as the task	structures coaching / mentoring protocols / systems / design Clarity around roles and task Grounded in research and experience

5.3 Collaborative Professionalism

Collaboration is the subject of a wealth of research literature. Its merit as a tenet of innovation, problem solving, professional growth and educational improvement is well established. There is also significant and increasing

research that focuses on why collaborative endeavours don't work and suggests redefinitions and new approaches to the concept.

Almost 20 years ago, Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) defined the difference between *collaborative cultures* that foster professional growth and cultures of *contrived collegiality* that perpetuate hegemonic top-down leadership.

> Collaborative cultures comprise evolutionary relationships of openness, trust and support among teachers where they define and develop their own purposes as a community. Contrived collegiality consists of administratively contrived interactions amongst teachers to implement strategies developed by others (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990, p.227).

The notion of contrived collaborations as a means to inflate the status of school leaders in hierarchical structures is revisited by Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018b) in their suggestion that:

> Many school administrators are quick to exploit the idea of teamwork, requiring contrived collaborations that serve no purpose other than to burnish their own reputation for forward-thinking leadership (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018b, p.24).

Datnow (2011) repositions Hargreaves' (2001) notion of collaborative culture versus contrived collegiality, locating it in a new "age of accountability" (2011, p.147) where:

> data-driven decision making…. the process by which administrators and teachers collect and analyze data to help *inform* educational decisions… is now inextricably connected with accountability (Datnow, 2011, p.148).

Having explored the role and prevalence of collaborative cultures versus contrived collegiality within this new context of accountability, Datnow (2011) aptly proposes a number of leadership actions to foster a culture where collaboration is meaningful and valued, given the time-intensive nature of collaboration around data. She recommends that school leaders offer

flexibility of time and space to implement strategies agreed through the collaborative process and that they seek feedback and learn from teachers about what is impacting on student progress and outcomes. She concludes with the imperative that we must continually evaluate collaborative efforts "lest they move to the dark side of contrived collegiality" (Datnow, 2011, p.248). Chapman (2019) also recognised contrived collegiality as a symptom of the "dark side of collaboration" that is "particularly prevalent where [there are] unequal power relationships in bureaucratic hierarchies" (2019, p.7). He cautions us to be aware of the manifestations of the dark side and emphasises the need for leadership behaviours and collaboration activity to be aligned with the professed aims, vision and values of the organisation, if we are to build the social capital that will support a culture whereby authentic and impactful collaboration activity is thriving as opposed to being undermined.

Hargreaves & O'Connor (2018a) have therefore reconceptualised previous versions of professional collaboration through the transformative construct of *Collaborative Professionalism* that features more meaningful, authentic and impactful forms of collaboration, that are:

> …. more precise in their structures and methods, more pervasive in their presence… more rooted in positive and trusting relationships among the people involved (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a, p.xv).

This paper has explored the challenge and imperative of educational leaders to foster a culture where collaboration is focused, inclusive, supported and valued. Additional and integral to the dimension of culture (the solidarity) is the design of the collaboration (the solidity) where full consideration of the context, protocols, opportunities and risks leads to intentionally designed context-appropriate, principled methods of collaboration, that focus the expectations and structure the actions of those involved in the process. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) set out ten universal tenets of collaborative professionalism design (2018a, p.110) that have evolved from their research into portrayals of transformative collaboration in five diverse educational

contexts and cultures throughout the world. The tenets synthesise well-documented characteristics of effective collaboration, not least the notion of collective efficacy, the conviction that with the collective power of collaboration we can achieve agreed goals; 'the belief that, together, we can make a difference to the students we teach, no matter what" (2018a, p.111).
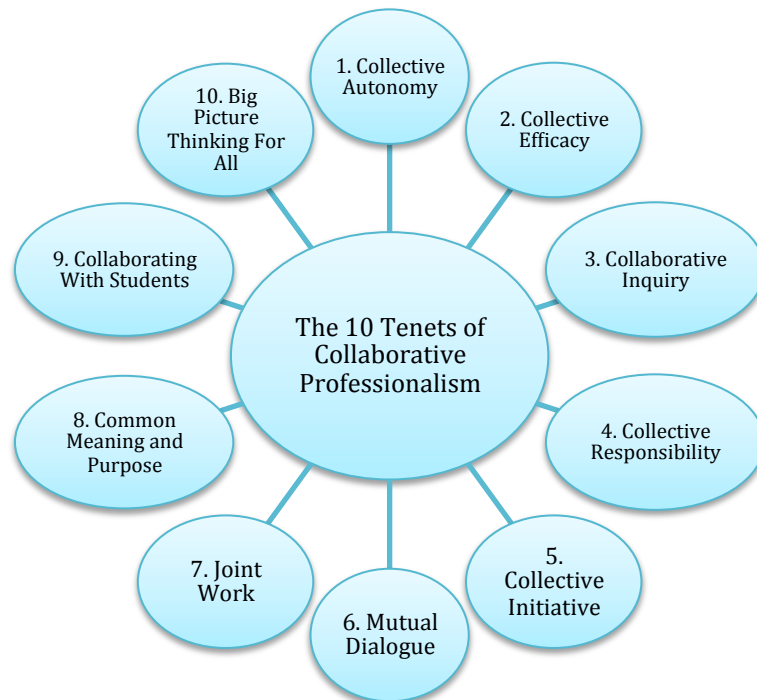
Figure 8

The ten tenets of collaborative professionalism (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a)

DeWitt (2016) posits that "ideal school climates are collaborative wherein students, teachers and families all work together to create a shared school vision" (2016, p.47) and urges collaborative leaders to reflect on the extent to which they build a inclusive school climate to foster collective efficacy, with intentional design of collaboration that facilitates genuine engagement of all stakeholders "in real dialogue around tough issues" (2016, p.66).

"Our growing understanding of collaboration is an outcome of our experiences in many varied collaborative projects" (Goulet, Krentz & Christiansen, 2003, p.338). The researcher's own experience of collaboration throughout her career has been multifarious, from enforced and contrived meetings or

working groups that filled statutory collegiate hours but were neither embedded in the school culture nor supported by appropriate design, to purposeful activities that were deliberately designed to address a context-specific area of need and through which the researcher's contribution was sought, valued and recognised. The role of headteacher demands the design of an abundance of collaborative activities across and beyond the school context, but do headteachers really take the time to evaluate the *experience* and *process* of collaboration, as opposed to measuring the output, or worse, a box-ticking approach that simply records the required activity as completed to satisfy performative or political demands?

> Collaboration can be compromised by the constraints of differing social, cultural, and political contexts and the power differentials in those contexts. At the same time, knowledge of the essential features of collaboration can alleviate some of the potential problems experienced in past collaborative projects (Goulet, Krentz & Christiansen, 2003, p.337).

In "The Four B's of Collaborative Professionalism" Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) offer an evaluative structure (*before, beside, beyond* and *betwixt*) to help us "understand [collaborative professionalism] and also activate the contexts and cultures that precede, succeed and surround it" (2018a, p.121). It is a legitimate, coherent structure that can be employed to engender deeper understanding of previous and current collaborative design and processes, and factors that have undermined their success. The structure also develops a deeper understanding of the design, protocols, assumptions and attitudes that need to be introduced or changed to improve the collaboration, and the support that can be harnessed to maximise the potential of the collaboration.

The essence of each of the four components, *before, beside, beyond* and *betwixt,* is synthesised in **Figure 9**.
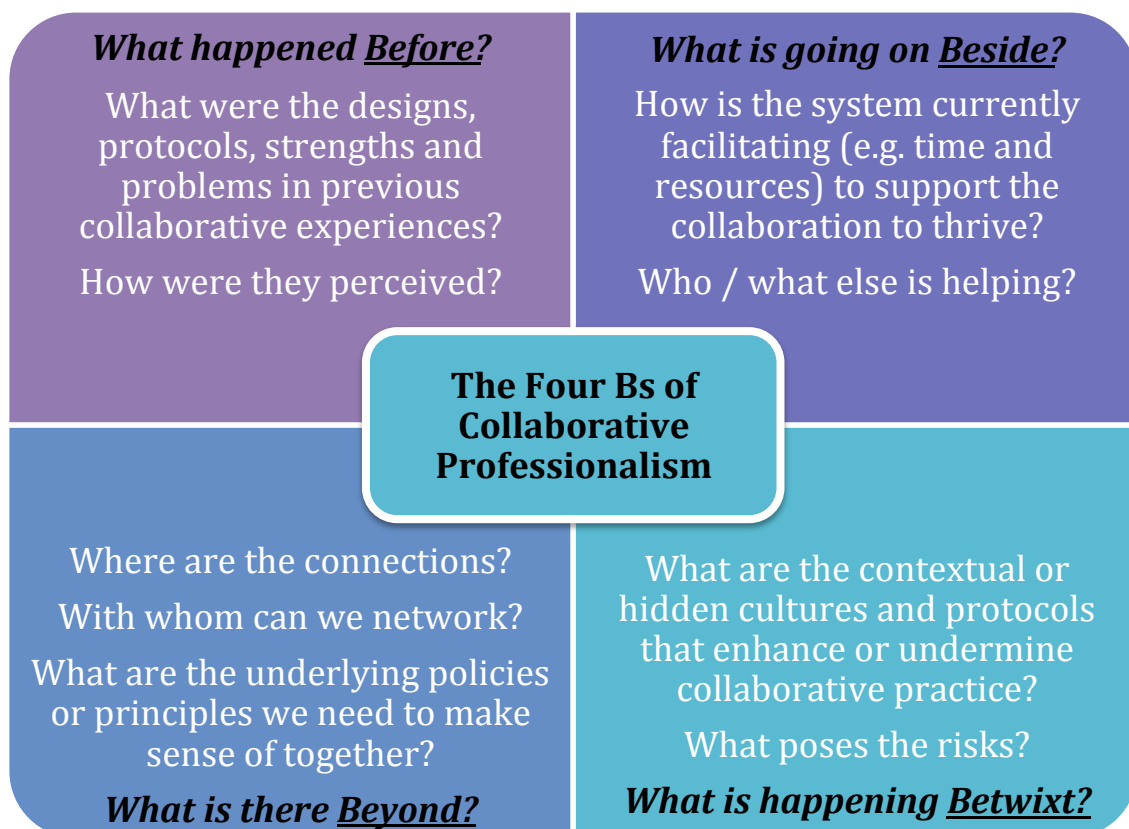
Figure 9

Synthesis of the four Bs of collaborative professionalism (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a)

The concept of *betwixt* is the most challenging to define and to address as it can encompass perceived or observable cultural traits that can undermine the authenticity of a collaborative endeavour. Within the Scottish educational context it is worth exploring whether the Scots' reputed inhibiting beliefs and attitudes, such as their predilection for mistrust, cynicism, modesty and pessimism, examined by Carol Craig (2011), are existent in collaborative contexts. Paradoxically, individuals' traits that inhibit the relational trust, openness and inter-professional challenge required for collaborative professionalism to thrive could also undermine the authenticity and openness of the participants' engagement in evaluation that is intended to improve the process. The complexities of the *betwixt* are a perpetual cultural and structural challenge that school leaders need to embrace if the aspirations of collaborative professionalism are to be realised.

5.4 The emotions of collaboration

Datnow and Park's (2018) research into teachers' experiences of collaboration used ethnographic methods underpinned by a social constructivist framework to elicit the lived experiences of how educators from different contexts strive toward the vision of professional collaboration as a vehicle for "bolder and deeper learning for school improvement" (2018, p.8) and:

> for teachers to negotiate complex environments with shifting policies, changing student populations, and new social and political realities beyond the school (2018, p.9).

They outline four mindsets for purposeful professional collaboration, (Datnow & Park,2018, p.20), shown in **Figure 10:**
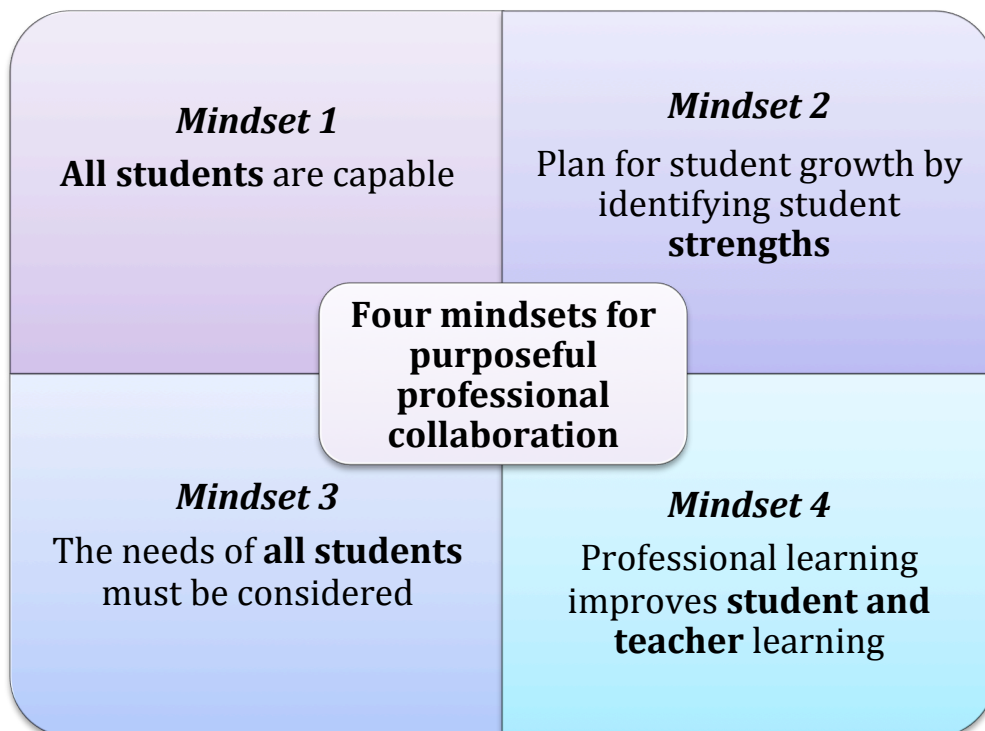
Figure 10

Four mindsets for purposeful professional collaboration (Datnow & Park, 2018).

Datnow and Park posit that these four mindsets should be "consciously and explicitly shaped" (2018, p.21) and cultivated by school leaders to provide

coherence and guide practice around the vision for professional collaboration to meet the needs of all students and to result in powerful learning for teachers and students alike.

Professional collaboration is an *emotional endeavour* (Datnow & Park, 2018) for teachers:

> Emotions tend not to be examined in conceptions of teacher collaboration and yet, as we argue, emotions shape teacher collaboration and collaboration shapes teachers' emotions. While many positive benefits can be accrued, there is emotional work involved as well (Datnow & Park, 2018, p.17).

Understanding of the concept of emotions in collaboration is critical given its connectedness with many variables that can undermine the effectiveness of teacher collaboration. Factors such as balance of power, pace of reform, time for collaboration, cultures and structures, collaboration design and unrealistic expectations of what can be accomplished through collaboration, are identified as such variables in Datnow's (2018) exploration of the intersection of teacher emotions, teacher collaboration and educational reform. They are factors that impact teachers' sensemaking of school leaders' expectations and their subsequent attitudes to educational change; where teachers associate positive emotions with a task, the approach, assumptions and engagement will be more fruitful and collective efficacy will be strengthened. For professional capital to flourish and for collaboration to be impactful, school leaders and researchers must place importance on evaluation of the collaborative experience in terms of teachers' emotions.

> Given that emotions are core to teaching and to the process of change, it is important to continue to conduct rigorous research that explores the connections between teacher emotions and the professional capital they build in collaboration with each other (Datnow, 2018, p.170).

Policy makers must also consider the expectations they place on schools and local authorities in the context of current education resourcing and teachers'

conditions. Increased workload and lack of protected time produces emotions such as anxiety, frustration, low confidence, stress, shame and even anger that are disempowering for teachers and can be a destructive factor that will reduce collective efficacy in collaborative endeavours. Datnow (2018) highlights the importance of investigation into emotions produced by top-down reforms that impact teacher collaboration time (2018, p.161). She also observes:

> In working toward a more realistic sense of what might be accomplished in the course of collaboration over the long term, it is also important to uncover productive strategies for helping teachers work through the emotions associated with reform challenges collectively in the short term (2018, p.170).

Hargreaves (2019) insists on the importance of teacher empowerment in establishing collaborative cultures and referenced his previous study of teachers' emotional responses to educational reform (Hargreaves, 2004) that evidenced the connectedness between mandated educational reform and low empowerment, with teachers "critical of changes that had been imposed from the district or the government above" (Hargreaves, 2019, p.7). He contends that it is a leadership imperative and challenge to motivate and empower teachers, seeing "colleagues with dissident perspectives as professionals holding views that should be actively solicited" (2019, p.15) in the pursuit of strengthened collaborative capital, and suggests that while many leaders organise collaborative activities for strategic improvement they fail to empower and motivate teachers through the collaborative process, and "others want to colonize collaborative efforts with purposes and activities other than ones teachers might initiate themselves" (2019, p.8).

Deep respect for teachers' voices and teachers' time are proposed by Datnow and Park (2018) as key prerequisites for empowerment of teachers, to maximise the positive emotions that can stem from collaboration, such as joy, relief, confidence and excitement through "teachers' positive regard for what they are able to produce together" (2018, p.103). To maximise the potential

for professional collaboration to cultivate emotions that are motivating and empowering for participants, school leaders must ensure that time for collaboration is protected and that manageable expectations of what can be achieved by the collaboration are collectively agreed through a process of genuine consultation with all teachers involved.

5.5 Identification and analysis of variables within the research literature

At this stage the key variables impacting effectiveness of collaboration identified from the selected research literature have been added to the variables from the policy analysis (**Figure 11**) to support the continued development of a comprehensive conceptual framework. Concepts identified through the research literature that weren't previously identified through the policy analysis are emboldened in **Figure 11**.

If we consider the two research sub-questions:

i)   **What** *are the key concepts underpinning effective and impactful collaboration to improve equity in educational contexts, as defined in current research and discourse?*

ii)   **How** *do contextual factors support or undermine effective and impactful collaborative practice between and across schools and local authorities in Scotland?*

Analysis and findings from the research literature offer clarity, not only with regards to the sub-question i), the *what* in terms of the concepts, but importantly to sub-question ii) – the *how*, a key component of the main research question and the purpose of the emerging framework. Section 6 elucidates the *how* – through analysis of the relationship between the concepts identified in the policy and research literature and suggested professional behaviour and actions, and alignment of the themes in a refined conceptual framework.
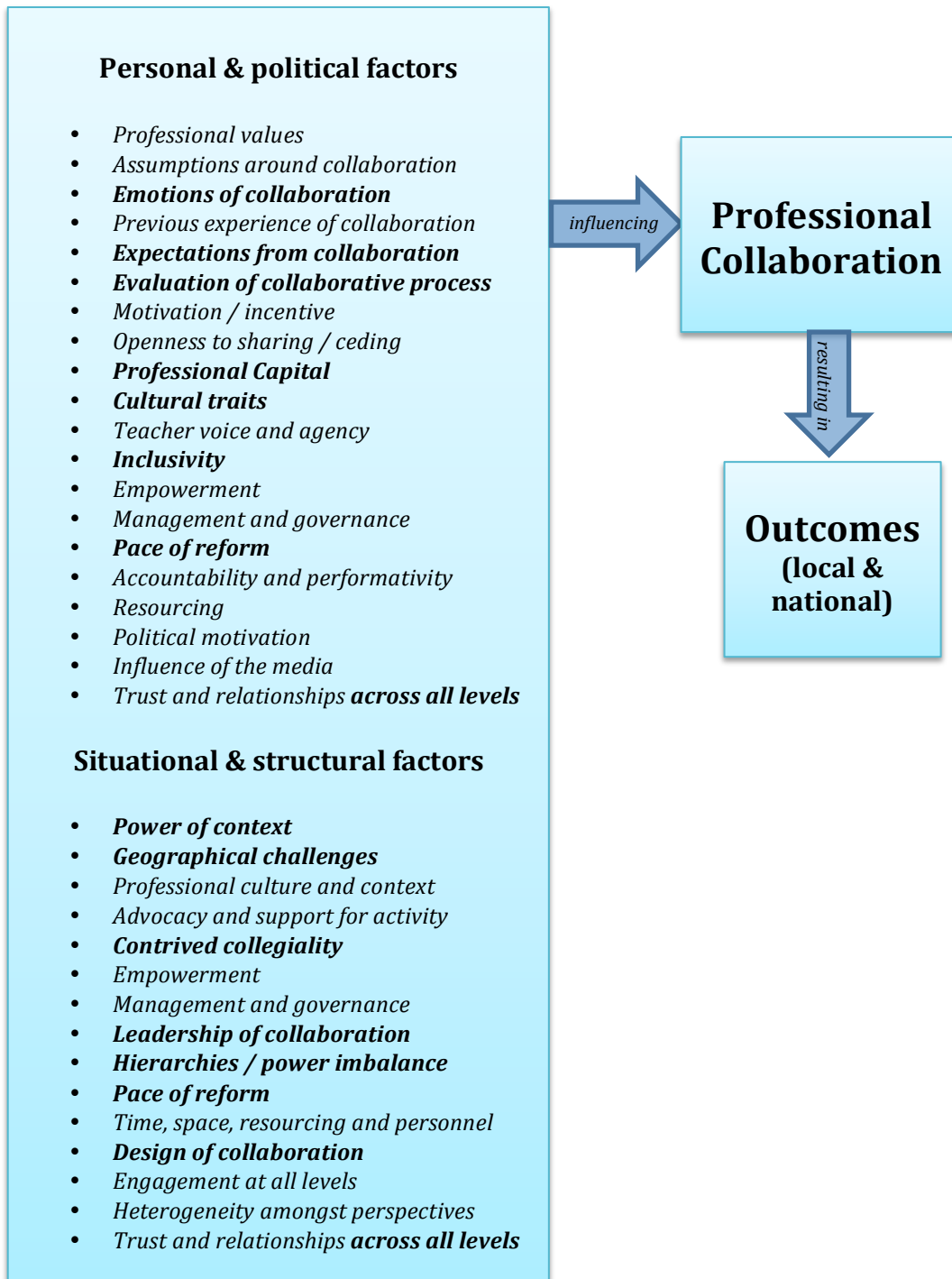
Figure 11

*Framework for professional collaboration in education in Scotland: variables identified in policy and additional concepts (**in bold**) identified in research literature that weren't previously listed*

The variables supporting or undermining the practice and outcomes of professional collaboration are numerous and complex, and determined by the personal, political, structural and situational:

- The experience, assumptions and beliefs that participants bring to the collaborative activity.
- The challenges, tensions and demands that Scotland's dynamic educational policy context presents.
- The design, organisation and support of the collaborative endeavour.
- Circumstantial characteristics that define the levels of motivation, trust, symbiosis and synergy between individuals and organisations involved in the collaboration.

All of these factors are interrelated and need to be keenly understood and intentionally managed by education professionals engaged in designing or participating in collaboration. As policy interpretation, and assumptions and attitudes to professional collaboration are context dictated, the challenge is to distinguish, interrogate and acknowledge the circumstantial variables, to promote rational connectivity between the expectations of policy and the diverse realities of practice, if collaboration is to be contextually relevant, applicable and impactful.

While the analysis of the policy texts highlighted the challenges and the variables, setting these within the Scottish educational context, interrogation of the research literature added insight to these, elucidating the essence of effective collaboration, and providing clarity as to how this might be realised. The perspective and experience of the researcher was also integral to the analysis and the selection of literature; as a school leader in Scotland with a strong belief in the power of collaboration but inconsistent experiences of it, she was motivated, as communicated in the main research question, to define its essential characteristics and determine how these might be achieved.

6. Refining the Conceptual Framework

The refinement of the conceptual framework in this section attempts to move beyond identification of concepts (in **Figure 6** and **Figure 11**) to a framework for implementation that will synthesise the findings from current research and policy, and provide practical coherence to the complex phenomenon of collaboration in a structure that is applicable to the education profession. As shown in **Figure 12** and **Figure 13**, the refined framework will therefore be structured as an iterative process with four *stages* illustrating:

- *Stage 1* - Context: reflecting on the current variables that threaten the success of collaboration in Scottish education.
- *Stage 2* - Professional actions: identifying actions to support meaningful collaborative practice.
- *Stage 3* - Professional collaboration: considering the defining factors of successful collaborative practice.

Leading to:

- *Stage 4* - Improved outcomes: personal, local and national outcomes of meaningful collaboration.

Figure 12

Refined framework for professional collaboration in education in Scotland: proposed structure

The rationale for developing the conceptual framework is to strengthen professional collaboration, to improve educational outcomes. Deeper understanding of the complexities characterising each stage of the process in **Figure 12** should lead to more informed, context-appropriate design, and more embedded cultures of collaboration, that ultimately improve experience and outcomes of the teaching profession. The stages of the process are underpinned by reflective questions and consideration of the defining features. These are detailed below and summarised in the final framework in **Figure 13** that includes characteristics of *stage 4*, the personal, local and national outcomes of meaningful collaboration:

Stage 1 - Context: Reflective questions about the current variables

- What challenges do the local, national and political expectations present to the education profession and what does that mean for my context?
- What has been the previous experience of the organisation in professional collaboration?
- How do stakeholders feel about engaging in collaboration?
- How is current collaborative activity designed and structured and what is the rationale for this design and structure?
- How is current collaborative activity supported and resourced?
- What are relationships like within and beyond our establishment? How does our current performance data, comparative measures or socio-economic status impact our relationships?
- What is our capacity for collaboration? How do conflicting priorities, geographical location, timetable structures or staffing levels impact our capacity for collaboration?

Stage 2 - Professional actions: What actions support meaningful collaborative practice?

- Shared reflection and deep understanding of the context of the organisation.
- Regular activity that focuses on sense-making of local and national policy expectations.
- Focussing only on activity of immediate and /or long-term relevance that addresses the issues most concerning for practitioners to lead to improved outcomes for learners.
- Respect for the strengths, journeys and professional stages of all.
- Seeking, recognising and valuing contribution and multiple perspectives of all in the design, structure and aims of the collaboration.
- Supporting with protected space and time that can be freed by reducing unnecessary activity or bureaucracy.
- Promoting a culture whereby relational trust and professional capital will thrive: collectively acknowledging and addressing the emotional and professional threats to a collaborative culture (not least the *betwixt* – **Figure 9**).
- Continually and systematically engaging staff at all levels in evaluation of the *process* of collaboration as well as measuring the outcomes.

Stage 3 – Professional Collaboration: What are the defining factors?

The increase in scholarship in collaboration over the last decade has produced a variety of changing definitions and terminology such as "Professional collaboration with purpose" (Datnow & Park, 2018), "collaborative professionalism" (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a) or "ICP" (Stutsky & Spence Laschinger, 2014), that can be conceptually confusing for professionals seeking to understand the construct of collaboration. While this framework (**Figure 13**) uses the term *Professional Collaboration*, the designation is less

crucial than the distinguishing features, and synthesis of the research literature has generated universal attributes that characterise best practice of professional collaboration in education:

- Participants feel valued and empowered regardless of stage, level of experience, skills or perception of competence.
- Activities are characterised by clear focus, trust, mutual care and respect, cooperation and strong levels of engagement and motivation.
- Participants are comfortable with genuine challenge, honest feedback and reciprocal accountability, in the pursuit of agreed common goals.
- The design and practice is inclusive and teacher-led, reflecting the voice of stakeholders.
- The activity is well structured, designed and resourced according to local needs and context.
- Collaborative activity is flexible and dynamic, adapting in response to research, ongoing evaluation of the process and strong personal and political insight into contextual influences.
- Collaboration is embedded and valued in the culture of the school.
- The activity is enjoyable and leads to improved outcomes (*stage 4*).

Conceptual Framework: Professional Collaboration in Education in Scotland

Context

Contextualised understanding of challenges
Previous experience of collaboration
Motivation and self-esteem
Design, structure, support and resources
Relationships
Current 'data' defining organisation
Capacity for Collaboration

Professional Actions

Reflection and understanding of context
Sense-making of policy
Focus only on what will improve learning
Voice and experience of all is sought & valued
Protected space and time
Promoting culture of collaboration
Addressing emotional and professional threats
Systematic evaluation of collaborative process

Professional Collaboration

Participants feel valued and empowered
Characterised by clear focus, relational trust, mutual care and cooperation
Strong levels of engagement and motivation are palpable
Participants are comfortable with genuine challenge and invite honest feedback
Reciprocal accountability is accepted in the pursuit of agreed goals
Design and practice is inclusive and teacher led
Structured, designed, and resourced according to local needs and context
Flexible and dynamic in response to evaluation of research, data and experience
Embedded in the school culture
Enjoyable for all and leads to improved outcomes

Personal Outcomes
Motivation
Positive relationships
Professional capital
Professional growth
Empowerment and agency
Job success and satisfaction

School and LA outcomes
Common moral purpose
Positive relationships
Culture of collaboration
Action appropriate to context
Collective efficacy
Attainment and achievement

National Outcomes
Engagement in national agenda
Positive relationships
Culture of collaboration
Strengthening of the system
Respect for the profession
Attainment and achievement

Figure 13

Conceptual framework for professional collaboration in education in Scotland

7. Conclusion

There is substantial scholarship that supports effective professional collaboration as a means to improved consistency in learning, teaching and student outcomes, and as a vehicle for education leaders and teachers to navigate the multiple demands and tensions inherent in education policy.

Fundamentally, the aim of this research was to support education leaders' and teachers' engagement, reflection and understanding of collaboration, by:

i) providing conceptual clarity around the complex phenomenon of professional collaboration, contextualised within current education policy enactment in Scotland; and

ii) organising the findings in a conceptual framework that would evolve through the hermeneutical process.

The researcher's own context and experience as a school leader provided motivation for the research and influenced the methodology employed, the research questions and the selection of research literature. The disparity between her absolute belief in the power of collaboration and her inconsistent experience of collaborative designs and cultures compelled her to interrogate its defining characteristics and reconstruct these in an accessible format that would support strengthening of the potential and practice of collaborative processes in education.

A strength of the methodology is that the conceptual analysis process generated coherent answers to the research questions: it illuminated, through interrogation of the policy and research literature, the key concepts underpinning effective professional collaboration and the contextual knowledge and professional actions required to support meaningful collaborative culture, design and activity. It also produced a conceptual framework that has current and specific pertinence to the Scottish education

context and is conceivably relevant to any professional collaboration, beyond Scotland and outwith the field of education.

The conceptual framework should be seen as neither prescriptive nor complete. It is purely a heuristic, grounded in literature, that illustrates a current way of thinking. It is designed to support practitioners and organisations to better understand the antecedents, characteristics and power of professional collaboration, in order that they may consider actions to improve the design, culture and practice, as appropriate to their context.

There are limitations to the scope of the research that provoke further inquiry around:

i) Continued *evolution* of the conceptual framework

ii) *Application* and *testing* of the conceptual framework.

iii) What is not explored in the literature, such as the significant scholarship in *specific collaborative structures and designs* such as *teacher learning communities*, (Vangrieken *et al.*, 2017).

iv) The emerging power of *new or recent contexts or platforms* as collaborative tools for researchers and practitioners, such as *teachmeets* or *social media*.

The framework could be further refined by differentiating the professional actions for those *promoting, leading* and *participating* in collaboration, to provide more specific relevance to practitioners at all levels as well as policy makers. The researcher's own context and experience has influenced the predominance of professional actions that are at the behest of education leaders, such is her aspiration to continually improve the collaborative designs and cultures for which she has responsibility. Further, while the framework describes the potential impact of professional collaboration, listing personal, school and LA, and national outcomes (**Figure 13**), it remains a challenge to measure constructs such as motivation, empowerment, culture or efficacy. The framework could include a reflective or analytical tool that would enable

individual and school evaluation of such constructs, and would also extend application, validity and testing of the conceptual framework.

Stutsky & Spence Laschinger, (2014, p.7) developed an "Interprofessional Collaborative Practice Survey (ICPS) to measure all constructs in the framework" (from which **Figure 1** evolved), such as work satisfaction, team effectiveness, trust and communication, and "including ICP and its antecedents and consequences". The ICPS validated the conceptual framework, producing:

> encouraging empirical support for our proposed ICP conceptual framework. Such a framework allows researchers to continue to build a sound body of evidence related to interprofessional practice… (Stutsky & Spence Laschinger, 2014, p.12).

The outcome of the conceptual analysis, i.e. the conceptual framework, could be subjected to empirical testing, through research instruments such as surveys, questionnaires or interviews, that examine the variables in operation, thus testing the frameworks' validity and consistency with reality. Further avenues of scholarship, such as comparative studies, would also support the application of the framework, adding to the body of evidence that strengthens the practice and impact of professional collaboration in education. The comparative studies could examine the extent to which the defining factors of successful collaboration offered within the framework are present within:

i)   specific collaborative structures, designs and platforms, such as teacher learning communities, or twitter;

ii)   collaboration categorised by specific contextual variables such as geographical location or school demographic; and

iii) collaboration categorised by specific characteristics of the collaborative group, such as gender, years of teaching experience, or hierarchical dimensions.

Fundamentally, the construct of collaboration is complex and context-dependent, determined by a myriad of personal, political, structural and situational factors that have been explored through the conceptual analysis and could be further researched using the conceptual framework as a catalyst. Crucially, if professional collaboration is to deliver the aims of the National Improvement Framework in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2016a), then teachers and education leaders must recognise that:

> Moving towards purposeful professional collaboration is not a reform to be implemented. Rather, it is a long-term process of rethinking teachers' professional work that requires sustained engagement on the part of leaders and teachers. (Datnow & Park, 2018, p.124).

The conceptual analysis process has provoked rethinking and informed changes to the researcher's own professional practice. Her aspiration is that the contextual relevance and conceptual clarity provided through the research will contribute to the process of moving towards purposeful and impactful professional collaboration between individual teachers and education leaders, in schools and local authorities across Scotland.

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