

**The Struggle for Plurality and Politics in School Leadership Practice:
Exploring the Importance of Thoughtful Action in Conditions of Uncertainty.**

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Abstract

This thesis draws upon relational explanations of human action to understand the author's experiences of school leadership in conditions of uncertainty. The central arguments arrived at in this inquiry recognise the importance and inevitability of plurality (Arendt, 1958) in organisational life, the co-constructed nature of shared responsibility for political action (ibid) within this plurality, and the importance of a professional community of inquiry (Peirce, 1955) for helping school leaders to engage in thoughtful action (Arendt, 2005) in uncertain times. This involves a paradoxical understanding of time, with the thesis concluding by stressing the importance of the human capacity to make promises and forgive as crucial to the emergent ethics of school leadership.

These insights emerged from the author's critical engagement with taken-for-granted insights about leadership in education. The research for this thesis involved 'taking experience seriously' (Mowles & Stacey, 2016), with the author inquiring into narratives of unexpected and disturbing events in his practice of school leadership with others. Taking an autoethnographic approach supported by other members of the DMan academic community of inquiry, the author has gained reflexive insights about his practice as a headteacher. In making sense of the disturbances, the author has revisited and critiqued theories that previously shaped his practice as a headteacher of an English secondary school. This thesis shows how theories of 'distributed leadership' (Gronn, 2002; Harris, 2003, 2004) and 'relational trust' (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 1997, 2000, 2009, 2014) make claims which do not appear to explain the experiences of headship described in the empirical narrative material. As a result of these findings, the author questions the assumptions of transformational leadership; the dominant managerial paradigm in education.

It is argued that transformational leadership discourses offer magico-mythical thinking (Elias, 1956) that creates myths to solve the mystery (Stacey, 2007) of routinely conflictual and contingent experiences of organisational life in school leadership. The three myths of distributed leadership and relational trust theories are identified as 'enduring harmony', 'complexity reduction' and 'positional authority'. In deconstructing the mythological assumptions of transformational leadership, this thesis concludes with reconstructive counterarguments. Rather than expect enduring harmony, a community of inquiry is conflictual. Instead of seeking reduced complexity through idealised values, thoughtful action involves the unpredictable functionalisation of those values with others (Mead, 1923). Rather than rely on the sovereignty of the headteacher's positional authority, thoughtful action in a community of inquiry offers a social process of human relating in pursuit of school improvement. The human ability to forgive and be forgiven, and to

make promises and try to keep them (Arendt, 1958), are integral to the counterarguments presented in this thesis.

This thesis makes a number of interrelated claims for a contribution to knowledge presenting, from the perspective of a headteacher, a nuanced critique of some of the myths underpinning transformational school leadership theories. This thesis offers a phenomenological understanding of the implications of these myths for practitioners and suggests that thoughtful action within a plurality, seen as a community of inquiry, represents an ethical practice of school leadership for headteachers and other managers.

Keywords: Plurality; Politics; Thoughtful Action; Community of Inquiry; Uncertainty; Distributed Leadership; Relational Trust; Transformational Leadership; Autoethnography; Narratives; Magico-Mythical Thinking; Harmony; Conflict; Complexity; Authority; Ethics.

Contents

Abstract	2
Contents.....	4
Introduction	8
Context: Being a Headteacher in Conditions of Uncertainty	8
The Project-Based, Portfolio Nature of this Thesis	9
The Ongoing Review of Literature Rather than a Literature Review	10
The Importance of the Synopsis as a Provisional and Fallible Conclusion to the Thesis	11
The Methodology of my Research and the Ongoing Contribution to my Practice.....	13
A Signpost: What to Expect from my Evolving Research.....	14
Project One	16
A Search for Belonging	16
A Snowflake in Search of an Avalanche	17
A Sequence of Public Indignities	18
An Open Refusal to Comply	19
An Invisible Barrier.....	20
A Poacher Turned Gamekeeper?.....	21
A Difficult ‘Difficult Conversation’	22
An Idea Sufficient to Explain Everything	23
A Challenge to the Public Transcript.....	25
An Emergent Sense of the Organic.....	26
A Danger of Loneliness	29
Conclusion – A Tale of Belonging, and not Belonging, to Two Tribes	30
Project Two: <i>The Man of the House: Responsibility and Emotion in School Leadership.</i> ..	33
Introduction.....	33
Scene One – Mr. Ethics at Work	34
Scene Two – Choosing Between People	35
Scene Three – Twist in the Tale.....	38
Reflections on the Narrative	40
A Paradox of Thinking and Not Thinking.....	40
The Absorption of Responsibility	41
An Emotional Tennis Ball?	42
The Sociogenesis of Responsibility.....	43

Responsibility and Cult Values	44
Relational Responsibility	47
Emotions, Power and Isolation	50
Emotions and Anxiety	54
Conclusions.....	57
Further Inquiry.....	58
<i>Project Three: An Analysis of how an Idealisation of Harmony in Distributed Leadership Approaches is Insufficient to Explain how Power Relations and Political Action Engender Conflict in Sharing Responsibility for School Leadership.....</i>	59
Introduction.....	59
Context for the Narrative	60
Narrative: The Elephants in the Room	60
Reflections on the Narrative	64
Sharing Responsibility by Distributing Leadership.....	65
Distributed Leadership in Theory	65
Distributed Leadership in Practice.....	69
Distributed Leadership and Power	72
Acting Together in Sharing Responsibility.....	74
Acting Together as a Double-Bind	75
The Public Realm.....	77
Acting Together in the Public Realm.....	80
Conclusions.....	82
<i>Project Four: Understanding Plural and Competing Views of Good Enough ‘Trust’ and ‘Control’ in the Context of a School Leadership Team in Conditions of Uncertainty.</i>	85
Introduction.....	85
Scene 1: The Inspection	85
Scene 2: The School Improvement Plan	87
Scene 3: The Coup	88
Reflections on the Narrative	90
Relational Trust – Bryk & Schneider	91
Multi-faceted Trust	94
Trust as a Reduction of Complexity – Luhmann	97
Summary of the Argument So Far	100
Attachment and the Politics of Uncertainty - Marris.....	100

The Public and its Problems – Dewey	103
The Competing Pluralisms of Pragmatic Thought.....	106
Conclusions.....	109
<i>Synopsis: The Struggle for Plurality and Politics in School Leadership Practice: Exploring the Importance of Thoughtful Action in Conditions of Uncertainty.....</i>	112
Introduction to the Synopsis.....	112
Summary of Project One.....	112
Responsibility: Care and Anger	113
Power: Right and Wrong.....	113
Plurality: Visibility and Invisibility	114
Summary of Project Two	116
The Narrative in Context: The Man of the House	116
The Febrile Equilibrium of Balancing Tensions in Functionalising Cult Values	117
Involvement or Detachment: Transformational Leadership and Relational Responsibility	118
Involvement and Detachment: Anxieties about Isolation and Belonging.....	119
Summary of Project Three	119
The Narrative in Context: Elephants in the Room	120
Distributed Leadership as a Contradiction not a Paradox	121
Bilateral Conversations and Political Action in the Public Realm	122
Summary of Project Four	123
The Narrative in Context: Not Good Enough	123
Multifaceted Relational Trust and Linearity	124
Planning for Trust: A Case of Autopoiesis or Attachment?.....	125
The Pluralism of Pluralisms: Deep, Shallow and Modus Vivendi	127
Critical Evaluation of my Research	128
Transformation in Schools as the Dominant Discourse for School Leadership	128
Transformational Leadership: From Political to Organisational to Educational Theory	129
The Appeal of Transformational Leadership Theories for an Aspiring Headteacher.....	131
The Contradictions of Transformative School Leadership Literature	132
Magico-Mythical Thinking.....	133
The Enduring Harmony Myth.....	133
The Complexity Reduction Myth	134
The Positional Authority Myth.....	134
The Enduring Appeal of Transformational School Leadership Myths.....	134
Arguments	136
Introduction to my Arguments	136
Argument 1: Plural views of the good are an inescapable feature of organisational life which cannot be covered over by illusions of harmony.....	136
The Presence of Conflict in my Empirical Material	136
Conflict as an Inescapable Feature of Organisational Life	137
Plural Views of the Good as an Inescapable Feature of Organisational Life.....	138
Argument 2: Responsibility for action within organisational life is co-constructed relationally.	139
Responsibility in Transformational Theories: Individualised Natality as Positional Authority	139
Responsibility as a Politically-Engaged Plurality that is Neither Relativist and Autopoietic	140

Responsibility as Political Narrativity and Enlarged Thought in the Public Realm of Action	142
Narrativity as an Ethical Form of School Leadership.....	143
Argument 3: Negotiating with others as a community of inquiry can help managers	
functionalise cult values and reduce the anxiety of uncertainty.....	144
The Problems of a Transformational Approach to Maintaining the Public Realm	144
Dewey and the Problems of the Public.....	145
Making Promises and Forgiving (and Trusting) in a Community of Inquiry	146
Research Methods on the DMan Programme	148
The DMan as a Community of Inquiry: Community Meetings.....	149
The DMan as a Community of Inquiry: The Learning Set.....	150
The Self in the Social: Writing Projects About Workplace Breakdowns	151
The Paradoxical Absence and Presence of a Literature Review	152
Taking Experience Seriously – Narrative Autoethnography and Intersubjective Reflexivity.....	155
Claims for Generalisability from my Research	157
Ethics.....	158
Contribution to Knowledge and Practice	159
A Critique of Myths in Transformational School Leadership Literature	160
A Phenomenological Understanding of School Leadership Practice	161
An Ethical View of School Leadership through Thoughtful Action	161
A Less Mythological Practice for School Leadership	162
A Future Contribution to Theory and Practice?	164
Epilogue: Diving for Pearls and Keeping Company with Others	164
<i>Acknowledgements and Dedications.....</i>	167
<i>References.....</i>	169

Introduction

Context: Being a Headteacher in Conditions of Uncertainty

The role of the headteacher in schools in the United Kingdom is, in many regards, similar to the role of Prime Ministers in the UK's executive branch of government. Like Prime Ministers, headteachers are nominally 'first among equals' in a team responsible for managing policies, resources and people within an organisation. The headteacher has to oversee their team's work in providing a high-quality education for students within a complex legal framework which, since the early 1990s, has been increasingly closely monitored by rigorous accountability mechanisms. Headteachers have also become increasingly expected to vocalise the mission of the school, articulate a vision for their community and cultivate shared values for people within their organisation. The headteacher is thus expected to take responsibility for the culture of their schools as well as accountability for the many measured outcomes of the organisation. When things go wrong, as they are wont to do in any complex institutional field, it is naturally assumed that the headteacher is the person to turn to in order to put things right or, if they can't, the person to blame for the failings.

It was because of these accountability and responsibility pressures in my role as headteacher that I began my programme of research on the Hertfordshire Business School's Doctorate of Management in October 2017. This has involved me writing autoethnographic narrative accounts of my experiences of breakdown in my work with others as the empirical material informing my inquiries. As I started my research, I was ambivalent and perhaps unconcerned about the accountability elements of my role as headteacher. The school carried an outstanding grading from the national inspection service and the various metrics of school performance were strong. I was committed to, and accepting of, the personal responsibility that came with my role and had not questioned this expectation of headteachers. At the time I was interested in exploring ideas from the complexity sciences, thinking of my work as a being organic and bottom-up (Arnstein, 1969) in contrast with other headteachers who seemed to me to be compliant with the accountability framework. I did, however, feel a sense of anxiety that something wasn't right in my practice with those closest to me on my team. I felt that they were resisting my attempts at organic approaches to leadership and I recognise now that I saw the doctorate as a way of persuading them with new knowledge to support my claims to stop disagreements between us.

The Project-Based, Portfolio Nature of this Thesis

This thesis, written in fulfilment of a professional doctoral programme, has been written in the 'real time' of my enactment of the role of headteacher over the past three years. During that time, I have written four projects that are presented here as a portfolio. Although rewritten numerous times at particular stages in my research until they were judged to be good enough by other researchers and my supervisors on my programme, my projects are presented in this thesis as they were completed. They have not been revised in light of further shifts in my thinking and my practice during later projects and, in this way, they better demonstrate that movement. It is only in the synopsis, which forms the final part of this thesis, that I have sought to capture the ways in which I think my practice and my thinking about my practice has changed. The synopsis also considers how this evolving understanding of school leadership might be generalisable for headteachers and other managers.

In the first of the four projects presented here I wrote about key moments from my childhood, the earlier parts of my career before I became a manager, and the experiences of management I had to the point where I joined the programme. I wrote this intellectual biography in order to consider the socially formed nature of my experiences that had brought me to that point in my career, to reflect more thoughtfully on those experiences and to think more reflexively about what those experiences continue to mean to me as a manager. This project interweaves these biographical episodes with exploration of ways of thinking that had influenced me at the time. These insights helped me make sense of the evolution of my thinking about my practice and to identify patterns of thought and behaviour whose importance I had not fully appreciated. I began engaging with literature that paid attention to the relational qualities of human behaviour and management to help me understand these patterns and to pay more attention to the intentions and emotions of others in my narratives.

The insights I gained in this first project helped me to formulate an initial research question for the thesis. Surprisingly, this was about the ethics of my practice in making judgments and the related, overwhelming sense of responsibility I was beginning to feel in my relationships with others on my team. This is a sign that there was already a shift in my thinking about my practice given how unconcerned I thought that I was about this aspect of my practice on joining the programme.

The second, third and fourth projects of this thesis are autoethnographic narrative accounts of situations that did not turn out as I had expected them to but which paradoxically reflected typical, and therefore to-be-expected, breakdowns in my work with others. Presented here as they were experienced, these narratives demonstrate the political struggle of my school leadership practice with others. The episodes shown here range from the seemingly unimportant to the apparently crucial. The theme cutting across all of these scenarios of typical school life for a leadership team is

the unceasingly conflictual nature of the collaborative sharing of responsibility and the difficulties this presents for headteachers and those working closely with them.

Project two includes a narrative episode where my decision to allow a colleague to change subject specialism had unexpected ramifications for others in my team that, with hindsight, were utterly predictable but which caused each of us significant moments of anxiety. Project three shows how I tried to respond to a troubling email from a member of my team by negotiating its contents with others on my team. By not responding to the email directly, and not enabling an open negotiation of its contents, I found myself managing a situation in which the author of the email felt unable to attend an important decision-making meeting. In the fourth and final project, the narrative and ensuing analysis explores how open discussions with my wider leadership team became fraught in the aftermath of a negative inspection judgment. The conflicting views between us appeared to replicate previously stuck patterns of hostility and culminated in a meeting in which I felt ganged up on by my own team and unable to give an account of my thinking and actions with them.

[The Ongoing Review of Literature Rather than a Literature Review](#)

I have mentioned how, in the first of my projects, the biographical episodes were interwoven with theoretical insights that I had drawn upon in the past and newer theoretical insights from authors taking a more paradoxical view of human relating. The second, third and fourth projects show how I have taken a similar approach throughout this thesis. Because the narratives I write about were not chosen at the start of my research the themes within them and the inquiry questions they evoked were emergent and unplanned. This has meant that I have, of necessity, taken a similarly abductive approach to reviewing literature, an approach that responds to the themes and inquiry questions. For this reason, there is no discrete literature review section to this thesis. As mentioned earlier, though, the predictably unpredictable nature of the narrative material means that I have also found myself engaging with theoretical insights that are not altogether surprising to me with hindsight.

An example of this is the way in which transformational school leadership literature theories that I have previously sought to implement as a headteacher make an appearance in all three of my projects about events in my work as a headteacher. In project two I drew upon the work of a former headteacher that had helped me make sense of leading a school with an ethic of care, prioritising the importance of staying strong for others (Buck, 2016). In the third project, I explored at greater depth the work of theorists advocating distributed leadership (Gronn, 2002; Harris, 2003, 2004) that has profoundly shaped much of my work as a senior leader since 2005. By the fourth project I was able to subject to more reflexive scrutiny my recent advocacy of relational trust theories (Bryk &

Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 1997, 2000, 2009, 2014). In doing so, I have brought the assumptions of these theoretical positions into far greater focus than I had done at the time I was using them. This unplanned review of professionally important literature has been disturbing for me, but it has also helped me be more reflexive about my practice. Finally, because of the emergent nature of the review of literature I had not considered the transformational paradigm within which these theoretical approaches sat. I have addressed this in the synopsis by discussing the history, appeal and impact of transformational discourses after the summary of my projects and before the articulation of my arguments.

My ongoing review of literature, as opposed to a literature review, has also enabled me to deepen my practice as a researcher of relational theories of human interdependence. In the methods section of my synopsis I have addressed the fact that my analysis of the insights of Elias and Arendt in earlier projects was a form of literary criticism, a cherry-picking of resonant quotes that seemed profound. I have contrasted this with my tendency in projects three and four to focus on depth of analysis of whole texts, which reflects the changes I have made in exploring professional literature discussed above. What I also notice in introducing this thesis is how I have increasingly managed to interweave insights from different authors during this ongoing review of literature. The arguments in my synopsis, for example, point to how the work of Elias (1978, 1994a) was helpful to me in recognising the inescapability of conflict within organisational life and I have linked this insight with the work of Mead on the functionalising of cult values (1923) and Arendt's notion of plurality (1958).

The evolving nature of the narratives themselves, and the inquiry questions they have stimulated, has also helped me to refine my ways of thinking about an ongoing review of literature in this thesis. An example of this is the realisation in later projects that I had come to idealise abstract facets of transformational literature within my practice shown in the narratives. This led me, in my final project, to inquire beyond the Deweyan concept of a democratic ideal (1927/2016) of plural action in the public realm and to consider, more fully, competing views of plurality within pragmatic philosophy. These insights helped shape the final argument of my thesis despite being one of the last pieces of theoretical material I came across, and this speaks to the importance of a literature review that has evolved as the research inquiry has evolved.

[The Importance of the Synopsis as a Provisional and Fallible Conclusion to the Thesis](#)

As I have explained earlier, the emergent nature of both my empirical material and my theoretical insights mean that the synopsis which concludes this thesis is important. It is in the synopsis that the reader will find a summary of the narratives that takes a further reflexive turn to demonstrate

the provisional nature of my findings at the time that they were written. Following this, I have included a section on the theoretical assumptions of transformational leadership whose significance only became apparent to me after the conclusion of my fourth and final project.

This interweaving of the emergent insights about the theoretical material and the emergent insights from my practice, which have formed and been formed by each other throughout my time on the DMan programme, enabled me to identify three arguments about the struggle for politics and plurality in school leadership practice. The first is that conflicting views of the good are an inescapable feature of plural organisational life precisely because it is plural people not singular individuals who inhabit the world (Arendt, 1958). Plural views of the good are to be expected and these can't be covered over by the illusions of harmony that transformational theories lead managers to expect. My second argument is that sharing responsibility in school leadership is not subject to the positional authority of the headteacher, as transformational approaches suggest, but is co-constructed relationally. My final argument is that negotiating as a community of inquiry (Peirce, 1955) can help managers functionalise cult values (Mead, 1923) and reduce anxiety that arises as a consequence of conditions of uncertainty. Working in communities of inquiry does not simplify complex organisational life, as transformational approaches suggest, but involves paying attention to the fragile, experimental and particular aspects of human relating. The ability to make promises and forgive are important for negotiating with others in a community of inquiry.

The fact that my synopsis reflects emergent insights from my research leads me to make modest epistemological claims (Aikin and Talisse, 2016) for a contribution to knowledge and practice. The strongest of these is the recognition that transformational leadership includes assumptions that are examples of magico-mythical thinking (Elias, 1956), but I recognise that these theories remain dominant in school leadership literature, policies and practices because they have an appeal for headteachers and other managers. This is a more nuanced position than many critical theorists of transformational leadership take. My second claim is that my arguments draw attention to the phenomenological actualisation of plurality through politics that authors such as Stivers (2009), Benhabib (1988) and Loidolt (2018) recognise but which has not been contextualised to school leadership previously. Finally, I suggest that these nuanced and phenomenologically-grounded claims in my research form an ethical way of thinking about practice for school leaders that does not rest on idealised views of the good.

In making claims about new phenomenological understandings of my practice, I have recognised, in my research, changes in my practice during the course of my studies. This thesis shows how I have come to pay much closer attention to the social and linguistic phenomena of daily experience

(Gadamer, 1960), the speech and actions between me and members of my team, rather than relying upon idealistic (perhaps ideological) readings of transformational leadership literature. My research demonstrates how I have expanded some horizons and questioned some prejudices (Dienstag, 2016) that had previously informed my approach to management. This represents what Loidolt (2018) calls a phenomenological ethics of plurality that is the actualisation of plurality: making sense of the experiences of others at the same time as making sense of my own experiences in the daily business of school leadership, dealing with actual events and actual people, not what I hope or want them to be.

The Methodology of my Research and the Ongoing Contribution to my Practice

In the synopsis I give a detailed explanation of my methods and methodology. Having outlined here the iterative writing process and the ongoing nature of reviewing literature, I want to complete this introduction by explaining how the relational nature of the research methodology behind this thesis has contributed to my practice. Practically, this involved me writing autoethnographic narratives about my experiences at work and sharing these, for iterative cycles of feedback and challenge, with a small group of other managers (my Learning Set). This small group has been nested within a larger cohort of researchers (the DMan Community) with whom I have practiced sharing my developing thoughts about my evolving practice in light of my Learning Set's comments. In this larger setting, I have also experimented with different ways of approaching social situations similar to those at work. In these ways, sharing my research and responding experimentally, working with other researchers as an academic community of inquiry (Peirce, 1955) on the DMan has enabled me to think more reflectively about the experience of others in the narratives I have written. As a result, I have been able to share my findings about our ways of working together with my colleagues, bringing them into the research process to help us make sense of experiences we have in common but experience differently. In this way, the DMan community has helped me with the difficult challenge of thinking more reflexively about my work at school, paying more attention to the patterned nature of my interactions with others and the possible explanations for those patterns.

Early in my research, I found myself struggling with competing views of the good in my team and on the programme. The social process of my method led fellow researchers to challenge me about my work in ways that mirrored challenges from my colleagues at school. These breakdowns in my research and practice left me feeling that something had to give. The turning point came with the difficult experiences I had of giving an account of my work at school and on the programme. At school it was a poor inspection whilst on the programme it was a difficult progression process. In

both cases, I appeared defensive about my practice. In thinking about these events reflexively, I was able to make sense of the patterned ways I respond defensively to plural views of the good, seeing them as a challenge but also as disharmony for which I feel responsible. Recognising my defensive response to conditions of uncertainty enabled me to address the theme of plurality, the anxieties it causes for me and others in my team and how transformational leadership theories had played a part in those struggles with plural views of the good.

In recognising as myths the transformational leadership ideals of enduring harmony, positional authority and complexity reduction, I find myself uncertain how to conceptualise my practice. There is also uncertainty in my work as re-inspection looms and my team continues to be agonistic and antagonistic with each other. Despite this, my inquiry has changed the way I think about my practice in ways that leave me less anxious about uncertainty as a headteacher. I feel responsible where my actions are not very thoughtful, but I do not absorb responsibility as I was accustomed to doing. This leaves me less defensive, better able to give an account of my actions and point out what others could do differently to be more thoughtful in their contributions to our interactions.

What I have come to appreciate more as I conclude my inquiries is that the work I have done on the DMan breaks down the traditional division between theory and practice. The patterns I have noted in my professional practice have been echoed in my academic studies and working in an academic community of inquiry has enabled me to recognise the importance of paying close attention to the dynamics my professional community of inquiry. I have also come to recognise that the ethics of inquiry into practice emerge from the thoughtfulness of our actions together, as researchers and practitioners, rather than from idealised notions of how we should act together.

[A Signpost: What to Expect from my Evolving Research](#)

As mentioned earlier, this thesis is presented as it was written over the four projects sandwiched between this introduction and the synopsis (p113). To aid the reader in making sense of my evolving research it may be helpful to signpost the key themes and concepts addressed in each project.

Project 1 (page 16) is a narrative autoethnographic account of my experiences prior to my time on the DMan programme. This project outlines insights about my understanding of responsibility, power and plurality at the time of the events narrated and at the time in which they were written.

In Project 2 (page 33), I make sense of a contemporary narrative about conflict at work in which I explore issues of responsibility, the ethics of decision-making, and the emotions and anxiety felt by myself and my colleagues as we negotiate our sense of responsibility in making decisions together.

Project 3 (page 59) continues my analysis of responsibility, locating the sharing of decision-making within the context of theories of distributed leadership. This project introduces the notion of action within a plurality as a way of making sense of conflicting, but interwoven, relationships at work.

In Project 4 (page 85), I write about relational trust and managerial control to make sense of a period of uncertainty for my team. This project explores the importance of attachment and democratic ideals for interdependent groups, and considers competing pragmatic theories about pluralism.

The Synopsis (page 112) brings together the insights from each of the projects but takes a further reflexive turn on how my practice and my thinking about my practice has evolved over the research. It is here that the reader will find a summary of my projects, a consideration of transformational leadership theories in the round and the arguments that I come to by the end of my research. The synopsis concludes with a discussion of my research methods and my claims for a contribution.

Project One

A Search for Belonging

I can locate the moment I became a man quite accurately. I had just turned eleven when my brother, Paul, was run over and killed by a man who didn't stop because he had been drink-driving. My conversion to manhood came at Paul's funeral when a distant male relative took me to one side and told me emphatically that "You're the man of the house now and you need to look after your mother and sister". These two men have had a huge impact on many aspects of my personal and professional ways of thinking ever since.

Paul's death came months before I made the transition from a small primary school to a much larger secondary school where an older brother was supposed to be waiting to look out for me. But, of course, he wasn't. During my first year at secondary school, I was too keen to prove that I could fit into Paul's shoes, tried too hard with teachers and was relentlessly bullied as a result. On one occasion all of the boys from my class were waiting for me on the way home and, whilst one of them held me down, the others took it in turn to kick me. Shortly after that event, for which none were punished, I was moved to another class and, whilst this new class became a haven for me, it felt as if it was me who had done something wrong and was being punished. The same boys sneered at me for another six years of my life and I still look back at my schooldays as a time of survival. It is odd that I have accidentally found my way back to education in my profession and have found in schools a deep joy I never experienced as a child and never expected when I first became a teacher.

The one bright spot of my school life, and the only male role model I remember with any great fondness, was Mr Podhajecki, an English teacher who, as well as teaching me English, taught me that there was a highly political animal inside me and that that was a good thing.

I'd been aware of politics since Margaret Thatcher was elected as Prime Minister. Growing up in the tribally left-wing North East of England where, it was said, a monkey wearing the red rosette of the Labour Party would get elected, this was not a good thing. Growing up there at a time that saw IRA hunger strikers dying for their cause, striking miners going a year without wages and the re-elections of the Thatcher government in 1983 and 1987, was also not a good thing. Growing up, there and then, in a single-parent family entirely dependent upon benefits, at a time when Thatcher's government was bringing New Right ideology (one that vilified single-parent families and those dependent upon benefits) into British politics was also not a good thing. I remember vividly Thatcher's era-defining interview, to 'Woman's Own' magazine in 1987. In saying, "We've been through a period where too many people have been given to understand that if they have a

problem, it's the government's job to cope with it... They're casting their problem on society. And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families" (Margaret Thatcher Foundation, 1987), she entirely negated my experience of the world.

Mr. Podhajecki, by contrast, taught my class about the very real ways society can cast its problems on individuals. The son of a Polish fighter-pilot who found refuge from Nazi occupation in England, he knew the impact of society upon individuals. He taught us about Derek Bentley and capital punishment, about the Birmingham Six and miscarriages of justice, about *Animal Farm* and the triumph of power over an egalitarian ideal.

The background of sociologist Norbert Elias, a German exile of Jewish descent who also found a home in England, bears comparison to Mr. Podhajecki, and explains similarities in their approaches. In 'The Society of Individuals' Elias writes that "society without individuals or the individual without society is an absurdity" (Elias, 1991, p75), and argues that the distinctions between these two concepts "depends to a large extent on...what people wish for and fear." (p85). At the time, influenced by a politically-active socialist uncle and a feeling of alienation amongst northerners towards the Conservative administration, I took Thatcher's words as representing fear of political opposition and the radical nature of disadvantaged communities. Now, although I still have visceral feelings of hatred towards Thatcher and her political ideology, I can at least see that it was not fear of society but a wish to improve the lives of individuals that motivated her.

Beyond the curriculum, Mr. Podhajecki encouraged me in my own political awakening by introducing me to left-wing texts. This wider reading and my studies under Mr. Podhajecki, coupled with my anti-Thatcher feeling, led to my political awakening into a naïve form of socialism. I became known as Red Kev to my peers, speaking at rallies in opposition to the Thatcher government's Poll Tax. Elias writes, "at earlier stages of development the we-identity often enough has precedence over the I-identity" (ibid, p156). Having lost part of my we-identity within a much-diminished family unit and having failed to establish a we-identity at school, the left-wing political community, with its shared ideology and rituals of protest, provided me with a sense of belonging I had lacked. This was cemented by the fact that we – and the me within that we – won the argument on Poll Tax and within a year Thatcher, the invincible Iron Lady of the ballot box, had resigned as Prime Minister.

[A Snowflake in Search of an Avalanche](#)

By my third year of university I was close to achieving a First Class until the day I handed in my first assignment to my Social History tutor. I was convinced this assignment was my best response yet but she gave it a low mark. I asked her to look at it again and the following week she handed it back

to me in front of the seminar group saying she saw no reason to adjust the marks. It was quite a comedown for the man who had brought down Margaret Thatcher! The ethnographer James C. Scott writes in his analysis of subaltern politics, 'Domination and the Arts of Resistance', that "under the appropriate conditions, the accumulation of petty acts can, rather like snowflakes on a steep mountainside, set off an avalanche" (Scott, 1990, p192). This had been the case in the demise of Thatcher and I decided to set off another avalanche, motivated by the injustice of how she had presented the work back to me in front of others. Scott writes that "one can experience an indignity at the hands of another despite the fact that no one else sees or hears about it. What is reasonably clear, however, is that any indignity is compounded greatly when it is inflicted in public." (ibid, p113).

I took the essay to a former tutor who said it was my best work and that I should put it in for a remark with the faculty. I did but a week later she returned it to me, again in front of the group, saying that she still saw no reason to adjust the marks. This public indignity upon public indignity led me to make an appointment with the course leader in order to hasten the avalanche but he insisted it was appropriate that the tutor should be the person to re-mark the work and that this was as far as I could take the matter. I learnt that political avalanches are rare events and are impossible to precipitate through the actions of a single snowflake.

Feedback from my learning set to this section of my narrative suggested a sense of aggression in the challenge my actions posed in this encounter. This is prescient as I did not include the fact that I led a walkout of students after the essay was returned for a second time. My response to a sense of unfairness called out in me some of the same feelings I had experienced at the response by those in authority to the death of my brother and in the bullying I had experienced. That the grade she had given marked the end of my hopes for a first-class degree, alongside my high-minded sense of right, led me to use strategies that would lead most people into defensive postures. This is typical even today of my response to perceived unfairness which is more constraining than it is enabling.

[A Sequence of Public Indignities](#)

I accidentally fell into teaching and halfway through my first year I nearly accidentally fell out of it. A 16-year-old girl told me she had been raped and I took her out in my car so she could confide in confidence. Soon afterwards an older male colleague, well-known as a gossip, found out about my mistake in speaking with the girl in my car and speculated that I had acted inappropriately with her. It was another example of 'public indignity' at the hands of a superior that was compounded when the school did not tackle this gossip leaving me feeling unsupported. I left under a dark cloud for

another job that fortunately came quickly. Initially, things at this school went well considering the bruising nature of my first year in teaching. Within two years though things changed dramatically as I struggled to manage student coursework. Complaints were made against me and I was summoned by the Headteacher who said he would be recommending my dismissal and advised me to leave without causing a fuss. Noting my distress, my union representative coaxed from me what had happened before saying, “Don’t worry, son. Leave this to me.” Almost immediately I was back in the Head’s office to receive an apology because of his failure to follow due process. I was not dismissed but, for the second time in my less than three-year-old career, I handed in my letter of resignation without having another position to go to.

By the end of the year things had improved and I was able to leave with some dignity but this manner of leaving mirrored that of how I departed my previous school. In both cases I should have stayed. In neither case was I blameless for the circumstances of my departures but, as a young teacher, I was victim of power relations, particularly those I had with older men and authority. This powerlessness meant that even the “open refusal to comply” was done by proxy by my union representative, another older male, not by me. I was not responsible for setting off an avalanche and didn’t even stay to give a leaving speech. As Scott notes “a public insult...is never fully laid to rest except by a public reply.” (ibid, p115). These two examples of workplace bullying call out feelings I experienced as a child and I look back at this as a time in which I did not fight for what I considered to be right: to not be gossiped about and to be given a fair hearing. These experiences have motivated my work in school leadership and my determination to ensure due process through effective, ethical HR practices. I now have a determination to treat with dignity those who find themselves on the wrong side of disciplinary or capability processes, seeing these processes as the means by which to rehabilitate, rather than punish, colleagues who are subject to them. This is the more positive and more enabling side to my strong sense of right and wrong.

[An Open Refusal to Comply](#)

It did not take long until I found myself in another power struggle though. It was 1998, a year into the New Labour government of Tony Blair whose manifesto commitment to education included much new money for schools but also a new robust language of “zero tolerance” (Labour Party Manifesto, 1997) that reflected more aggressive approaches to tackling underachievement. Enhanced scrutiny of performance measures meant I saw at close hand how a headteacher responded to external pressure and, in my black-and-white thinking at the time, it was not good.

When my Head of Department took a long-term leave of absence, the headteacher demanded detailed analyses of summer exam results and an improvement plan within a tight timescale. I ensured he had everything he wanted, upon receipt of which he asked me for more. I duly produced this too and it went on like this for months. In response I became a staff governor so I could challenge his decision-making publicly. During a staff meeting he was explaining two online tools for monitoring achievement data. The tools had the acronyms PANDA and PICS I which gave the meeting the flavour of a hybrid Chinese-Irish folktale, a point I jokingly made to those around me, eliciting laughter. He sent me out of the staff meeting.

A book written at the time, subtitled 'The Self-Inspecting School', asserts that "it is difficult to see how a system that allowed so much personal and professional autonomy could combat inertia, encourage improvements or provide any guarantee that teachers would have appropriately high expectations of their pupils" (Ferguson et al, 2000, p1). With hindsight, experience of headship and the constant pressures to perform that it brings, I understand why he acted as he did. Elias, in an essay called 'Changes in the We-I balance', explains how in dictatorial settings "state rules enfold the individual citizen so tightly" that "especially in public life external control heavily outweighs the self-control of the individual" (Elias, 1991, p181).

Soon after returning, my Head of Department announced that she was leaving. Her role passed to a long-time supporter of the Headteacher and I decided my time at the school was over. However, I was not going to go quietly this time and gave, in his presence, a withering leaving speech comparing his leadership of the school to that of an incompetent manager of a football team. This was revenge for my past two experiences in schools where I had been subject to 'public indignity' by previous headteachers. Finally, I was having my public reply. On finishing the speech, I looked around at my colleagues and realised they were not relishing the moment; there was no avalanche in response to this open refusal to comply. It was, I can see now, because I was leaving and they were staying. I was no longer part of the hidden transcript, no longer speaking for them. As Scott says, "sentiments that are idiosyncratic, unrepresentative, or have only weak resonance within the group are likely to be selected against or censored" (Scott, 1990, p119). I had had the last word, but not the last laugh.

[An Invisible Barrier](#)

My sixth year in teaching, at my fourth different school, began when I was beaten at interview by Jack, but took an alternative role. Almost immediately, he took compassionate leave to nurse his dying partner and, upon his return, I became Head of Department. The challenges of managing people surfaced rapidly. I had worked well with two members of the department but not with the

third, Katie. When Jack returned I found myself regularly in opposition to them. Things came to a head when she told me, tearfully, that I was “shit” at my job and was unsupportive. The next day, he told me much the same thing, saying that I ran “two different departments”.

I had revelled in challenging from below and now found myself having to respond to just such a challenge. I took advice from my line manager who advocated a strategy of studious neutrality. I distanced myself from the other members of the department whilst taking every opportunity to seek, and act upon, the views of Katie and Jack. Elias speaks about such strategies as being “the deflection of spontaneous tendencies away from direct discharge in action by the interposing of the stricter and more complex control functions of the individual himself” (Elias, 1991, p116). This leads to a situation in which “the individual is often overcome by the feeling of being cut off from all other people and the entire world by an invisible barrier” (ibid, p117). As a result of following this advice I alienated myself from those I had previously worked well with but established better relationships with the dissidents. In his leaving speech, years later, Jack said I was the best head of department for whom he had worked. Elias talks about how the we-less I has a “natural human need for an emotive affirmation of one’s own person by others” (ibid, p201) and I was proud of this comment, seeing it as marking my successful transition into leadership. I now see Jack’s praise represented a professional affirmation, not a personal one: recognising my role and not me.

This was my first experience of how contemporary management theory alienates leaders from followers. The expectation was that I could and should be studiously neutral in my dealings with others; that I should dilute companionship and dissent, rendering them indistinguishable. I lost good friends in the process. A decade later, I came upon an alternative interpretation through complexity theory that suggested that “novelty arises not from homogeneity and stability, but from the exploration of difference” (Mowles, 2011, p147). The author of these words, Chris Mowles, is the course leader for the doctoral programme on which I am now enrolled and he adds that “our values arise in intensely social situations where we are struggling to find a way of going on together. In the everyday our valuations will conflict with others’ and we will be forced to choose between one course of action and another, between different interpretations of the good” (ibid, p149). I understand better now the need to explore difference rather than trying to airbrush it out of existence.

[A Poacher Turned Gamekeeper?](#)

After five years as Head of Department I secured internal promotion to the Leadership Team as Assistant Headteacher. Working alongside a deputy headteacher our first project together was to

lead our school's response to a government-driven, national restructuring of leadership roles in schools utilising the Hay Group methodology. The Hay Group "works with leaders to transform strategy into reality" with a focus upon "organisational, people and cultural assets that underpin business performance" in order to "enable organisations to reduce costs and improve performance" (Hay Group, 2018). Ralph Stacey and Chris Mowles of the Hertfordshire Business School employ a complex responsive processes approach to management which would recognise the Hay Group as being one which exists in the dominant paradigm of neoliberal business schools in which "one of the most important leadership functions was thought to be formulating strategy of a transformatory kind and then inspiring others to implement it" (Stacey and Mowles, 2016, p13).

At the time, this mode of thinking was new in education and valued by government. Crucial to this approach was the deployment of managerial tools and techniques which I had never come across before. Even the language of leadership was different. Having established through consultation the 'enablers' and 'blockers' and aligned these with a 'SWOT analysis' of the school we had undertaken, we submitted different models for the future structure. My model was selected and, in preparing for the presentation to staff, I felt like a seasoned leader. I had no idea how far removed I had become from my former peers through the willing absorption of this new bureaucratic language and methodology of the Hay Group. Instead I assumed that my diligence in using such bureaucratic vocabulary and tools would render the aims and outcomes of the restructure as self-evident.

Staff however met the presentation with stony silence or polite resignation: another invisible barrier. I stayed back in order to engage with them further, during the course of which one of them said, "You're a poacher-turned-gamekeeper". At the time, and for years afterwards, I thought of this as being complimentary, assuming that I was still seen as part of the staff, as a poacher. Scott says, "for many peasants, activities such as poaching... are part of the hidden transcript" (Scott, 1990, p14) and I still believed that I was a peasant and a poacher. But Scott goes onto say, "subordinate groups do their own patrolling...singling out anyone who puts on airs, who denies his origins, ...who attempts to hobnob with the elites" (p130). I now fear that this cherished epithet was a joke at my expense, one that has got better for the fact that I have been telling it at my own expense for over a decade.

A Difficult 'Difficult Conversation'

During the 2000s, the New Labour government was becoming increasingly managerial and technocratic. Under the "Education Education Education" mantra, the Blair regime flooded schools with money which made a huge difference in the deprived schools in which I worked. Because

reforms were tied to funding, managerialism seemed a price worth paying. The government utilised a suite of policy reform known as the National Strategies accompanied by a National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) upon which I was enrolled when joining the leadership team. The NPQH was nominally a professional diploma but I now recognise it as a tool by which compliance with the National Strategies was to be assured, through which beliefs of non-leaders could be 'ironed out'.

A striking example of this came on my final assessment day when I was given the task of having a 'difficult conversation'. Difficult conversations were a recurring theme of the NPQH and remain so amongst school leadership training courses. The NPQH now brands these as 'fierce conversations', which is more fitting, as they focus on "the underperformance of a member of staff". In these conversations "ambiguity and delay compromises the high quality that is the entitlement of your clients, pupils or other stakeholders." There is a leader-centric recognition of emotional aspects of fierce conversations as "you are likely to feel quite strongly about the issue and your emotions will have been stirred. It is almost certain that what you are going to have to say will result in an emotional response from the receiver." (National College for School Leadership, 2018).

In the observed assessment task, the "problem colleague" was played by an actor in role as an Art teacher who had lost his fire, had suspicious absence patterns and was resistant to leadership policies. I had fifteen minutes to identify the issues and resolve them. I felt under pressure immediately and it quickly became apparent that I was not pushing the right buttons to allow the actor to move onto the next pre-planned scene in his role-play. At one point I perceived in the actor's eyes a sympathy for me when I seemed close to saying the right words, but I never did. I remember the goldfish bowl atmosphere and the sense that I was drowning. By the end I failed to even identify the issue let alone resolve it. I felt humiliated in spite of the fact that I knew it was a farcical simulacrum of a real-world context at which I was effective. At the time and to this day I view difficult conversations as being bi-directional (more likely to be about what leaders have done wrong) which need to be heard in meetings often lasting more than an hour. When I received the feedback from the assessment day, it was the only task I failed.

[An Idea Sufficient to Explain Everything](#)

This was typical of the managerialism our leadership team had embraced and I became increasingly the gamekeeper as the gap with staff grew wider. Oblivious, I experienced a heady sense of purpose as part of a mutually-supportive team charged with the responsibility of enacting change for a highly moral purpose. We were doing everything for the children, an appealing ideology for educators.

But ideologies are problematic when coupled with logic, as Hannah Arendt argues in her 1953 essay 'Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government'. As a Jewish-German Arendt saw first-hand the perils of ideology given free reign. Whilst it seems trite to bring comparison between totalitarianism and school leadership, her essay, written eight years after the fall of the Third Reich and in the same year as the death of Stalin, is generalizable when she writes that "ideologies always assume that one idea is sufficient to explain everything in the development from the premise, and that no experience can teach anything because everything is comprehended in this constant process of logical deduction" (Arendt, 1953, p317). In this leadership team I came to see prioritising the needs of students in ideological terms, the one idea sufficient to explain everything. The problem with this is that staff members were the mediating presences between the ideology and reality. Thus, when our policies were resisted by staff, it represented a perversion of the ideology and was therefore 'not about the kids'. It became easy for me to forget or ignore the existence of the hidden transcript of resistance, to codify it as amoral at best and immoral at worst.

One example of our leadership team's thinking illustrates this well. We had imposed a timetable change that had created split breaks where some classes would be in session whilst others were not. A significant unintended consequence soon emerged in that groups of students on breaks roamed the school disrupting lessons with acts of indiscipline that had staff clamouring for a solution from us. We chose not to police the affected areas ourselves, in keeping with our reification of efficiency. Instead we installed the Mosquito, "a device that emits a harmless but highly irritating sound audible only to those aged 13 to 25" (Moving Sound Technologies, 2018). The invisible barrier between the school community and the leadership team took on an ultrasonic form.

What we hadn't considered was that younger members of staff were affected by the noise and older colleagues were able to sense it to their discomfort. Their complaints were dismissed as being examples of an anti-achievement staff culture. Teaching in a room next to a Mosquito device, I can still remember the feeling of an almost-audible clicking in spite of our team's assertions to the contrary. Heaven knows what the children, for whose sake this policy was intended, felt about it. Arendt is correct when she writes that "the real content of the ideology...which originally had brought about the 'idea'...is devoured by the logic with which the idea is carried out" (Arendt, 1953, p319). The situation continued for months as we tweaked the devices' volume and frequency. The solution seemed always within grasp if only we could apply more logic. Arendt writes that "the tyranny of logicity begins with the mind's submission to logic as a never-ending process, on which man relies to engender his thoughts. By his submission, he surrenders his inner freedom" (ibid, p320).

I still feel a deep sense of shame that, in spite my discomfort, I surrendered my inner freedom in supporting the logicity with which we went about this business. What heartens me is that it was I who eventually broke the spell of logic when I questioned the brutality of the original decision to assault children with ultrasonic sound, unblocking the situation. The Mosquitos were unplugged and everyone got quietly back to the business of education. This dalliance with totalitarianism has remained with me since. A few years ago, I blogged about it because I am hugely concerned that, at a systemic level, we have adopted this ideology that it is “all about the kids” alongside a logicity that is leading, seemingly inexorably, to brutality and terror. For years now, and regularly with staff at my own school, I have given voice to the mantra that we (and I) need to “look after the staff so that the staff can look after the kids”, partly to ensure that I never have another Mosquito moment.

[A Challenge to the Public Transcript](#)

I was appointed as Deputy Headteacher of my current school in 2008. The school was preparing for significant growth and my experience of top-down innovation was highly regarded, with an expectation it would be applied in this new context. Canons struck me as a traditional workplace with strong staffroom identity, very low staff turnover and a disregard for the school reform agenda. There was no process for using pupil performance indicators at the school and, on the data task at interview, I had so impressed the Headteacher that she asked me to introduce a data-management system into the school. From mocking a former headteacher for talking about the PANDA and the PICS I was now in charge of their successors, RAISEonline and FFT, with this new staff. This didn't go down well. Within weeks staff called a 'Common Room Meeting', a well-established semi-formal gathering to complain about management. Members of the leadership team were not invited. Scott talks about 'unauthorised public gatherings' as being a challenge to the public transcript, writing an alternative into the official transcript; such meetings are “frowned upon” and “troubling” because they are “commonly seen as an implicit threat to domination” (Scott, 1990, p63).

Alongside another new deputy, I made a conscious choice to contravene the rules of the game and attended the meeting. The Common Room Meeting went against my principles of due process, the right to reply, a belief that the powerful should be open to critique and my faith in communitarian politics. In another piece of writing, 'On Violence', Hannah Arendt discusses the difference between a range of commonly-conflated terms such as power, force, violence and terror. She concludes that power is communitarian in nature writing that “power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together” (Arendt, 1970, p44). In my induction

to leadership I had taken wrong turns, but I see that period as a blip in an otherwise consistent way of thinking about leadership from the different perspectives of powerlessness and of powerfulness. Arendt argues that “a strong disinclination to obey is often accompanied by an equally strong disinclination to dominate and command” (ibid, p40), which captures this paradox well.

The meeting was awful. Colleague after colleague articulated what management were doing wrong and my work on data came in for sustained criticism. In an echo of the poacher-turned-gamekeeper discussion after the restructuring meeting, I received compliments for having come along and taken it but I could not help but feeling that I was an utter outsider at the school. Looking back on it now, I see it as an example of patterned behaviour that I feel the need to confront challenge head on, as the one doing the challenging or the one being challenged.

Since drafting this narrative, I showed my thoughts on the Common Room Meeting to the other deputy who attended. In discussing it with her I realise that I have developed a positive, idealised perspective on what happened and how it has impacted upon my way of thinking. She wrote to me that she has “never accepted the ethos as being valid” and still doesn’t have “respect for the old school community ways”. In contrast, my view of the meeting was that it was a turning point in my understanding of the school, in keeping with a complex responsive processes way of thinking.

Mowles writes that “being appreciative of other people’s points of view, of their valuations, is the best way of appreciating the full complexity of what one is dealing with” (Mowles, 2011, p161). Two years later the school had an unexpected Ofsted inspection and, whilst external data suggested a ‘good’ judgment, my work on internal data, in part, enabled us to achieve an ‘outstanding’ grade, the first in the school’s history. The achievement was highly valued by the vast majority of staff, students and families. My colleague at the Common Room Meeting would, I believe, ascribe this to how we changed the school. I am less certain, thinking that although change undoubtedly played a role, so too did continuity emerging, in part, from the events of that meeting and its aftermath.

[An Emergent Sense of the Organic](#)

Soon after a new assistant headteacher was appointed with whom I planned to develop a new approach to teaching and learning. Upon meeting she asked what our plans were and I responded that I had no plans, wanting our approach to be “organic”. I had no sense of what I meant by this, only as a reaction against the orthodoxy of command and control. I had realised that emphasis upon a data-driven approach to planning, de-problematization of difficult conversations, expectation of studious neutrality in relationships and top-down roll-out of government-written school policies did not square with my own beliefs in a communitarian approach to institutional change. I had come

across the work of Sherry Arnstein, an American community planning pioneer who worked as special assistant for the Department for Housing and Urban Development. A campaigner for civil rights, Arnstein is best known for her 'Ladder of Citizen Participation' (1969) which challenged my understanding about how citizen participation could be fostered by school leaders.

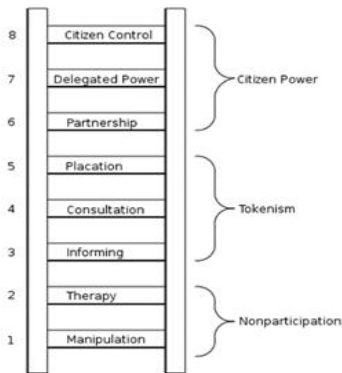


Figure 2. Eight rungs on the ladder of citizen participation

For example, Arnstein's conception of 'consultation', prized highly in the restructuring process at my previous school, included the belief that "when power-holders restrict the input of citizens' ideas solely to this level, participation remains just a window-dressing ritual... What citizens achieve in all this activity is that they have 'participated in participation'. Consequently, all that power-holders achieve is the evidence that they have gone through the required motions of involving "those people" (Arnstein, 1969, p219).

Contemporaneously to Arnstein, Hannah Arendt contended that "representative government itself is in crisis today, partly because it has lost, in the course of time, all institutions that permitted the citizens' actual participation" (Arendt, 1972, p89). That Arendt echoes Arnstein's language in an essay on civil disobedience resonates with my political beliefs and previous experiences as a non-powerholder in schools. Consequently, in conceptualising an approach to school leadership that was organic I sought to move towards the 'citizen power' rungs. At minimum I was seeking genuine 'partnership' with staff, characterised by Arnstein as being where "power is in fact redistributed through negotiation between citizens and powerholders" (Arnstein, 1969, p221). At best I hoped to reach the 'citizen control' rung, in which "participants or residents can govern a program or an institution, be in full charge of policy and managerial aspects, and be able to negotiate the conditions under which "outsiders" may change them" (p223). The concept of a ladder led us to conceptualise our organic approach as being 'bottom-up'.

I was also seeking a theoretical basis for my emergent understanding of the term 'organic' as applied to organisational life. I came across the work of chaos theorists and complexity scientists, gaining an understanding of chaos theory and Lorenz's strange attractors with their "sensitive dependence on initial conditions", which resonated with a developing realisation that obsession with consistency in schools does not beget consistency of outcomes. From there I encountered Prigogine's dissipative structures theory which reminded me of how government policy and school leaders' responses turn up the heat on staff, causing the system to flip from one strange attractor to another but not without unintended consequences. Finally, I came across complex adaptive systems theory and concepts that were analogous to my rudimentary understanding of 'organic': heterogeneity,

emergence, self-organising, far-from-equilibrium and, most powerfully, the concept of agency. Stacey and Mowles, in drawing upon complexity theory as an analogy for organisational life, write that “the global pattern cannot be changed by altering some global law or design, because there is none: a different pattern can only emerge across a whole population if the nature of local interactions changes” (Stacey and Mowles, 2016, p17). This comment goes some way to explain the organic nature of my thinking about the term ‘organic’; not only was there no “global law or design”, there wasn’t even a local one. This too is a familiar pattern in my professional life: the deliberate distancing of myself from received wisdom and the striving for something more authentic.

With both citizen participation and complexity theory in mind I conceptualised a new role within school which we called Pedagogy Leaders. These colleagues would devise, based on their own expertise and interests, rather than those of the leadership team, a Canons’ Pedagogy, implement it through peer-led training and work with clusters of colleagues to broker expertise within the school. We appointed six grassroots colleagues as a Pedagogy Team, essentially a non-management leadership team. At our first meeting we set them a task while we observed their interactions, as in a goldfish bowl. They refused, sent us out of the room, ignored the task we had set them and came up with their own programme of activities. It seemed to me at the time to be a striking example of emergent behaviour and a much more impressive response to being given an inauthentic task than I had shown during my ‘difficult conversation’.

I can see now that Pedagogy Leaders was merely an approximation of an organic approach, reflecting my belief in communitarianism more than the complexity sciences. Arnstein’s ‘ladder’ and the fact that I implemented it from a position of seniority demonstrates it more as a reflection of systems thinking in which I believed that I could step outside of the system to control the behaviour of that system through the reification of citizen participation, and the subsequent conversion of that belief into a tool for school improvement. This idealisation of a communitarian approach mirrors the same ideological approach that lay behind the introduction of the Mosquito devices at my previous school; a single idea sufficient to explain everything and therefore an approach to which Arendt would have been opposed. I was projecting my own values onto the organisation and assuming that, because they were counter-cultural to the managerialist approach, they reflected a wider commitment to civil disobedience and citizen participation.

Since joining the DMan programme I have come across the work of Axel Honneth, a German neo-pragmatist philosopher whose work on recognition is rooted in inter-subjectivity. In ‘The Idea of Socialism’ Honneth explores weaknesses inherent in socialism that render it obsolescent in the post-industrial era. He reconceptualises socialism, writing that “the society of the future should no longer

be conceived of as an order steered centrally from below...but as an organic whole of independent and yet purposefully cooperating functions in which members act for each other in social freedom.” (Honneth, 2015, p93). The creation of a cadre of Pedagogy Leaders, and the ideology that underpinned it, was a clear case of my conceptualising “an order steered centrally from below” rather than an “organic whole”. It was an attempt to change the global law/design that Stacey and Mowles argue is impossible to do.

A Danger of Loneliness

When my Headteacher retired I applied for the role and suggested to the governors that I would be exploring the paradox of “change through continuity and continuity through change”, a manifesto that counters the dominant, disciplinarian ideology of school leadership that finds expression in the words of politicians, the press and many school leaders. I was successful and in less than six years had gone from wanting to leave the school to being its leader. In doing so I changed the school but the school changed me far more significantly. My core values, shaped in my early life, as a student and in the early part of my career, had remained similar. My approach as a leader had, however, fundamentally altered from being that of a technocrat at my previous school to welcoming complex and organic approaches at my current one. Mead writes that “a person is a personality because he belongs to a community, because he takes over the institutions of that community into his own conduct” (Mead, 2013, L2299). As I approach ten years at Canons, I feel that this has been the case for me, that I have gained a we-identity that I had lost at my previous school in becoming a Head of Department and then, to a greater extent, in becoming a member of a leadership team.

The biggest challenge in my three years of headship have been my relationship with the inner circle of my own leadership team: my deputies and business manager. Promoted from amongst them, I feel like a poacher-turned-gamekeeper again. It calls out the sense of loss and separation I felt after previous internal promotions. Each are brilliant but very different in outlook and approach, which is a strength in contrast to the leadership team of my previous school, but it makes mediating between them – and mediating myself as a member of that group – difficult. As Stacey and Mowles write, “interaction between members of an organisational population is characterised by political activity as people push for, or try to stop, particular activities which involve relationships of power” (Stacey and Mowles, 2016, p32). This has been exaggerated by my decision to give them teams of their own. The consequent jostling for resources, reputation and influence was a predictable outcome.

Some of my Team Leaders focus on seeking to control school outcomes through controlling the behaviour of people within the school, which brings to mind Hannah Arendt’s belief that “the

greater the bureaucratisation of public life, the greater will be the attraction of violence” (Arendt, 1970, p81). I, however, agree with Honneth when he writes about “the problem of how to reconcile the notion of an organic interaction between independent spheres of freedom with the notion of an active centre that can take over the necessary tasks of coordination and delineation” (Honneth, p94-5). As I see it, staff are the ‘independent spheres’ in this scenario with the leadership team as the ‘active centre’, but I suspect that for Team Leaders they are the ‘independent spheres’ with me as ‘active centre’. This explains their desire for me to bring in more control mechanisms to the school. As for myself, I am constantly struggling with a sense of separation from those who were my peers. Arendt writes of my situation that “solitary men have always been in danger of loneliness, when they can no longer find the redeeming grace of companionship to save them from duality and equivocality and doubt” (Arendt, 1953, p325). She links this to a preparation for ‘totalitarian domination’ and I see echoes of my situation in the 2000s when I became separated from my departmental team, from staff during the restructuring process and, with the Mosquito, from a sense of reality itself. “Self and world, capacity for thought and experience are lost at the same time” (ibid, p325) when loneliness takes hold. Having been there once in my career, it is a place to which I have no desire to return.

Conclusion – A Tale of Belonging, and not Belonging, to Two Tribes

As a child my ways of thinking were shaped by conflict. At a macroscopic level this was influenced by the political situation in the United Kingdom under Margaret Thatcher which, in turn, reflected the late Cold War posturing of the United States and Soviet Union. When I was twelve the musicians Frankie Goes to Hollywood reached number one with the song ‘Two Tribes’ and, at the same time, a year-long strike by miners in Britain saw open conflict between the strikers and the police that manifested itself in the ‘Battle of Orgreave’. At a microscopic level the same year was one of conflict between a group of bullies on one side and me on the other. The connecting point for my understanding of conflict was the lessons I learned in Mr. Podhajecki’s classroom and the literature and social issues I came across here. Thus, it is of little surprise that I made sense of conflict through socialist writing and political action. I chose one of the two tribes in order to achieve a sense of belonging that was otherwise not present in my life. I can see now that this identification with a tribe in conflict with others has played a significant role in my adult life, manifesting itself during my period of powerlessness in the form of rebellion and latterly as a powerholder in the form of resisting assimilation into the dominant ideologies of school leadership.

At university and in the early part of my career I became more aware of the sophisticated ways in which power manifests itself through forms of social control and bureaucratic processes. I came to recognise that open hostility and outright rebellion to such power figurations has limited success and that such an approach can make situations much worse for the powerless. Towards the end of this period I also learnt what Scott calls ‘the arts of resistance’ through ‘infrapolitics’ within the ‘hidden transcript’. I came to understand that authority can be resisted, but I still conceptualised power as an essentially negative force with one tribe in possession of it in service of their oppression of the other tribe. The influence this had upon my later career has been profound both ethically, in my determination to wield power gently, and intellectually, in my commitment to opening up opportunities for participation to the powerless. My reading, in preparation for and subsequent writing of this narrative, has highlighted something I have been sensing since becoming headteacher; power-holders are as trapped in these figurations as the nominally powerless. In coming to understand this better, my perceptions of those whom I have viewed as having delivered ‘public indignity’ to me have softened. Perhaps more reflexively, it has given me a clearer understanding of my own frustrations in my role at present.

My rapid rise through the ranks of leadership at one school during the 2000s, during which I went from being a second in department to a deputy headteacher, saw my induction into the dominant paradigm of educational leadership. From the moment I was advised to respond to conflict with subordinates through withdrawal and neutrality, I could see that the ‘two tribes’ philosophy was a part of the public transcript as much as it was part of the hidden transcript. I perceive now that I spent much of this time blinkered from how much I had changed, probably because it was led by a purportedly left-wing government and was backed by massive funding, but also because the sense of belonging that I had sought was provided by this language of leadership amongst leaders. Both of these things, belonging and socialism, were the hopes of my childhood and now appeared to be being fulfilled in these new roles. The two episodes from that era recounted in this narrative, the restructuring meeting and the Mosquito decision, illustrate how far I had been drawn into the solutions-focused web of technocracy and managerialism. They also show how far I had become removed from those without power to the extent that I could not, until writing this narrative, understand that “poacher turned gamekeeper” was not a compliment.

But I loved that school and only left it reluctantly, hating (for a short time) the school I moved to precisely because it had resisted such technocracy and managerialism. It took an “open refusal to comply”, as Scott has it, in this new setting for me to realise just how embedded into that dominant model of school leadership I had become at my previous school. I became aware of the split between my positional role in one tribe and my preferred belonging within the other. I had to find a

way to articulate how that divide could be bridged, or be forced to choose one tribe over the other. Without a language of management to articulate this, I was left to fall back on the catch-all term 'organic' and, appropriately enough, see where it led. Where it led in the first instance was to Arnstein's 'Ladder of Citizen Participation' and, from there, to Complexity Theory. From this came terms such as 'agency', 'disequilibrium' and an 'emergent' sense of organic that has come to mean something to me in both theory and practice. In enacting these concepts in the school domain, I have found a way to satisfy the tribal instincts of both sides of my experience. This is not to say that an organic approach is only enabling and never constraining. As I have articulated, in the later sections of this narrative, the sharing of power (or, more accurately, the formal recognition of the power that everyone holds) within the public transcript is not a tidy business, given that it leads inexorably to open conflict of ideas and ideals.

Project Two: The Man of the House: Responsibility and Emotion in School Leadership.

Introduction

During my first project I came to understand that there have been certain patterns recurring in my personal and professional lives that I am seeking to explore further in this project and future ones. These include a propensity to find myself at the centre of conflictual relationships; earlier in my career this was from a position of powerlessness but latterly from a more powerful position as headteacher of a school. Alongside this my narratives have indicated to me that I struggle with a sense of isolation from others and that I tend to seek belonging, most notably in an idealisation of a communitarian political tradition. Finally, I have shown that I have sought to distance myself from authoritarian tendencies in contemporary managerial discourse following a period in which I fully subscribed to this way of thinking, but that I have also over-subscribed to an idealisation of the concept of agency as the solution to all problems of managerial overreach. Covering over all of this, I can see that I tend to adopt very radical positions in the sense of easily identifying beliefs, practices and approaches as being either entirely good or entirely bad; in short, I often opt to simplify the complex in order to pass judgment upon it.

In this project I am seeking to explore further a number of these ways of thinking and patterned behaviours by writing about a decision I made in support of a colleague seeking a change of subject specialism that led to unexpected conflicts with members of my own team and, surprisingly, with the colleague who had sought and received my support. In the course of the events related in this narrative I will be considering how I understand responsibility; for decision-making, for outcomes of such decisions and for the emotions that emerge as a result. I have chosen this narrative as being representative of numerous situations within my professional life where I am called upon to be the lead decision-maker and responsibility-taker, the “man of the house” of my title (drawing from a reflection in my first project). This is a role I simultaneously enjoy and endure, and is one that I have become accustomed to, and competent in, playing. Consequently, others look to me to play it. My studies on the DMan programme have caused me to pay more attention to this way of working and so this project is an inquiry into why, how and to what effect I choose to adopt such a role.

Scene One – Mr. Ethics at Work

Karl sat down in his customary seat in my office, close to the door as if ready to escape at any moment. He adopted his familiar position, with elbows resting on the arms of the chair and his fingers interlaced in front of him almost as if in prayer. But on this occasion, he wasn't in trouble. In fact, the appointment was made at his request which rendered me curious what was on his mind.

Karl is probably the very definition of 'loose cannon': Like Forrest Gump's mother's box of chocolates, you never know what you are going to get. With the usual blend of certainty and uncertainty etched on his physiognomy, he began. "You know the Drama teacher vacancy you've just advertised? Well I was wondering if you would consider me for it."

A smile played on my lips as I breathed a sigh of relief. This was not what I had been expecting. My smile invited a reciprocal one from him. For a split second I allowed myself the rare luxury of being at ease. A split second later though the usual crowd of questions, problems and worries crowded in on me. Karl continued to smile but, as I gave myself a moment to make sense of what was going on in my head, he looked a little more puzzled. I could sense him shifting uncomfortably in his chair whilst simultaneously letting me know that a response was required: he has a discomfiting way of speaking volumes through his eyes alone. I am aware of the challenges my moments of reverie have upon my colleagues but I comfort myself that time for me to think is usually better for them than if I rush into decisions. We continued therefore to discomfort each other.

Metaphorically speaking, a wrestling match was taking place inside my head. In the red corner Mr. Strategy was angry and was pummelling away at me. Having had an horrendous year in terms of Computing teaching, finally resolved through a reworking of our curriculum, here was our only Computing teacher telling me he wanted to switch roles and leave us facing the same challenges in the year to come. Having done his worst, he tagged in Mr. Operational who pinioned me with a reminder of how hard it would be to find a new Computing teacher at incredibly short notice and what I would do if we had any external applicants for the Drama job we had literally just advertised.

And then, flying out from the blue corner, came the third wrestler, Mr. Ethics, who wiped the floor with the others and rescued me as he usually does. Of course, I was going to do whatever I could to support this colleague. The past year in Computing had been hideous for us all but this guy, the man at the chalk face, had lived and breathed that hideousness. As well as that he had bailed us out when he agreed to take on some Drama teaching the previous year. He was good at it too, and had fallen in love with the subject he had always wanted to teach. Ding, ding. The bout was over.

"Of course, Karl. I'll be happy to help you in any way I can."

“Really?!” He sounded nonplussed, as if this was the last thing he had been expecting. His face registered various waves of emotion, beginning with confusion, passing briefly by way of suspicion but coming to rest in one of the biggest smiles I had seen in my office. This time it was my turn to reflect back his good humour with a smile of my own.

The ethics of the decision resolved, we discussed the operational and strategic implications of the decision and agreed that he would help us find a replacement teacher of Computing, that he would interview for the role of Drama teacher against any other applicants and that, should he be successful, we would speak again about the Computing timetable with the caveat, for him, that he would be the one to decide whether to retain some teaching of that subject.

By the time the meeting concluded we had covered all bases. I had given myself a huge amount of work but this was offset by the familiar warm glow that I always get when someone leaves my office happy. As the door closed behind him, though, my thoughts turned to how I was going to break the news to the members of my leadership team who would have to accommodate my decision and turn my soft-heartedness into a reality that worked well for everyone.

Scene Two – Choosing Between People

A week later I was congratulating myself on a job well done and disaster averted. A Computing teacher from Greece, Nikos, was moving to England to join us. We had observed Karl teaching Drama and he had impressed Sara, his prospective Head of Department. Everyone seemed happy and I strode out of my office towards the canteen with a spring in my step. What could possibly go wrong, I thought as I smiled to greet Nicole and Claire, the two members of my team with line management responsibility for Drama and Computing.

“We need to talk!” Nicole began. Although she was smiling broadly, the words instantly took the edge off my sense of self-satisfaction. A glance at Claire’s less smiley demeanour didn’t help.

“I’m just heading to lunch. Can’t it wait?” I responded, more steel in my voice than I intended.

“No!” They responded in alarm-ringing unison as if having practised it. And then something strange happened. Or rather I think it happened. I can’t be sure whether they actually did take an arm each and guide me backwards towards my office as if I were a felon being apprehended. It may be that Nicole said, “We’re here to arrest you” and the memory is a fantasy. Or I may have reconstructed events to match the feeling I had of being a criminal being brought to book. The one thing that was certain was that my emotions had altered significantly within the space of a few seconds.

I unlocked the door and sat down. Claire sat next to me and Nicole sat opposite me. Both leant in. I felt cornered. I leaned back. Nicole invited Claire to begin.

“I’m worried about Nikos taking all of the Computing,” Claire said, of our new Greek colleague. “In the interview lesson he was great but I’ve chatted with the students since and they said that they were really struggling to understand his accent.”

This again!

“We dealt with this when we appointed him,” I responded and then gathered my breath. “He said that it was due to his nervousness and we’ve given him instructions to brush up on it before he comes to us and Sara has agreed that she can give him vocal coaching when he arrives and...”

As ever when I sense I am being challenged, I unwittingly used a defensive strategy of long sentences with multiple connectives, revisiting things that had been discussed and agreed. I could see Claire bristle. I could also hear the frustration in my voice, a frustration borne of the fact that not only had I had the same conversation with Claire but also with her line manager Lisa, who is one of my deputies. I got the feeling that this was an attack by Lisa via Claire for a rushed and wrong decision, one that put the welfare of colleagues above the organisational effectiveness of the school. Lisa is fearless on this latter point. This felt like a proxy battle.

Claire paused, as if gathering her arguments together in the face of my defensiveness.

“I know. I’m not arguing that we shouldn’t take Nikos on. I just think that we should speak with Karl about him taking on some of the Computing teaching. I think that we owe it to the students.”

This was reasonable. In fact, it was something I had agreed with Karl when we discussed his switch to Drama. I felt the tension ease from my shoulders and agreed with her, giving her permission to discuss this with Karl. I could go and get my lunch after all.

“But Nicole disagrees,” said Claire reciprocating the invitation Nicole had given her. The tension immediately ratcheted up again, largely because of the performative nature of this encounter. First the smiles, then the mock arrest and now the turn-taking appeal to my judgment: this was clearly something they had rehearsed and now they were playing the roles of prosecution and defence counsels. I was to be the judge.

“Okay. Let me have it,” I responded, turning to Nicole. My stomach rumbled its displeasure.

“Sara’s not happy with Karl taking any Computing. As Head of Department, she wants him to focus all his energies on Drama, especially as he is our only full-time teacher of the subject.”

Another proxy combatant had entered the fray. Once again, I spoke in a long sentence outlining how we had been through all this with Sara when she interviewed Karl, how she understood that the situation with Computing would have legacy implications for him, how he was educated to degree level in Drama and therefore wasn't going to need masses of support, and so on. Like Claire, Nicole waited for me to run out of breath before delivering an appeal to Mr. Ethics.

"It's not really fair to Karl to expect him to take responsibility for both Drama and Computing."

I thought. It was a convincing case. But so was Claire's to which I had already agreed. What would it look like if the judge who had already found in favour of one of the parties now found in favour of the other? What would they think of me? Their eyes were glued to me.

"Okay. I agree," I said, turning apologetically to Claire. "We have to believe in our capacity to support Nikos to communicate effectively. We have to. It's not fair to load this back onto Karl."

"But Karl wants to!" replied Claire, making a mockery of my switch of positions.

"What?" I said, feeling a surge of resentment towards them that this vital piece of information had not been shared sooner.

"But Kev," countered Nicole, "is it really fair on Sara, or Karl for that matter, even if he wants to?"

By this time the clock was showing nearly 1pm, leaving me only ten minutes for my lunch. I was hungry. I was annoyed with the fact that a positive situation had turned sour. I was humiliated by the vacillating nature of my capacity for judgment. And I was unimpressed at the theatrical, nakedly political, nature of the meeting.

"I'll tell you what. Why don't you two work it out and make the decision then." I motioned to leave.

Nicole instinctively met the challenge. "We can't. That's why we are here. Claire line manages Karl and I line manage Sara. We're both conflicted." I slumped back into my seat.

I responded in exasperation, "But you're also a Deputy Headteacher!" Then, indicating Claire, "And you're an Assistant Headteacher."

What I didn't say but thought and felt was that Nicole is a Deputy seeking Headship. These were precisely the kind of decisions that she would have to make in that role. Why couldn't she start now? What I also didn't say, but thought and felt, was that Claire is a future Deputy who must have her eyes on stepping into Nicole's role when she secures Headship. She'd only recently chastised me for not giving the assistant heads a bigger role in decision-making. Why couldn't she start now?

Instead of saying any of that I stood up and headed for the door muttering, “You’ve left me with no choice but to make the decision and so I will. Right now, I need to eat. I’ll let you know when I’ve decided.” Upon which point I turned and flounced out of my office, leaving them sitting there.

Almost immediately I realised that it was a stupid thing to do, one that could seriously harm my relationship with both of them. In four years of headship I’d never exited a meeting like that, but the urge to escape the oppressive sense of responsibility was too great. How was I to choose between Nicole and Claire, between Lisa and Sara, between Drama and Computing students, between Karl of the past and Karl of the future? My office was too crowded for me to think.

With some barely-digested food inside me, I did what I always do when seeking release from negative emotions and watched the students at play on our expansive, uncrowded fields. In doing so the emotions subsided enough for me to reflect upon my invitation for them to resolve the decision between them. Which was when it hit me; there was someone else at the centre of this conundrum. More to the point, he was someone to whom I had promised a discussion about what he wanted to do. I hurried off to find Karl, who concurred with Claire’s view that he wanted – really wanted – to teach some Computing as well as Drama.

Later I sought out Nicole in her office to give her the bad news and reassure her that I would fully support Sara as well. Then I apologised for my flounce. She looked perplexed.

“I thought you were just hungry. Don’t worry, it’s a good decision.”

From there, I went straight to Claire’s office, explained the same thing and again apologised for my flounce. Again, the perplexed look.

“I didn’t notice. Even if you did, it doesn’t matter. We needed to explain our views and you listened. We put you in a difficult position. It’s fine.”

On returning to my office I had a wry smile on my face, feeling a surge of love for my colleagues who could come and take me on in such a way and still have the good grace to be kind to me afterwards. Then I had a chuckle at the fact that I don’t even know how to flounce properly.

Scene Three – Twist in the Tale

Karl sat down in his customary seat in my office close to the door as if ready to escape at any moment. He adopted his familiar position too, with elbows resting on the arms of the chair and his fingers interlaced in front of him almost as in prayer. On this occasion he was in trouble. The meeting had been tense for both of us as we disagreed about the seriousness of the situation. There

had been a lot of clenching of jaws, passive-aggressive responses to each other, calming intakes of breath and, in the end, an agreement to disagree.

During all of this Karl made references to “another matter” he wanted to raise but stated that “now was not the right time”. Having concluded the matter at hand, I urged him to speak his mind in part out of bloody-mindedness that he had seemed to use this other matter as a weapon but partly because I could see that there was something troubling him about it.

When he started speaking, it became quite clear that the frustrations of the meeting were still with him. His tone began lightly enough but soon he was furrowing his brow and using words to describe his feelings about this as-yet-unnamed event such as “disappointed”, “disheartened”, “depressed”. I could feel my frustrations building too, my brow also furrowing as he rambled incoherently about how hard he had worked for the Computing students. I interjected to remind him that I knew exactly how hard he had worked and that perhaps he might want to get to the point of what was making him feel disappointed, disheartened and depressed. I spat the words back at him.

For the first time in that meeting, he looked me squarely in the eye. He was surprised that I had asked him the question and seemed fearful that he had gone too far, resembling a novice diver who had climbed to the highest platform, looked down, and realised that it was too high. Karl being Karl though, he decided to take the plunge and dive straight in.

“Your decision to let me become a Drama teacher is making me feel this way. When we met you just agreed to it straight away. It didn’t seem to bother you at all, like you didn’t care about the Computing students. That’s what’s making me feel disappointed, disheartened and depressed.” He spat the words right back at me.

Between watching these thought leap free of the diving platform and seeing them belly-flop into the water, I remember thinking to myself, “You are seriously not going to go there, Karl”. And then the emotions hit me as if the splash had created a tsunami inside me. I felt a truly surging wave of anger rise and crest within me and I knew before it happened that the swell of such emotions was going to break free of the dam of professional courtesy.

I offered him the briefest tsunami warning saying, “I can’t believe that you just said that.” Then I let go with a “How dare you!” My voice was louder and my words angrier than I have ever used with a colleague. So much so that, I later found out, my PA cleared her office and the surrounding vicinity.

I reminded him of our initial conversation on the matter, about his involvement in the recruitment of Nikos, and how I came to see him when I couldn’t come to an agreement with Nicole and Claire. I told him about myriad other conversations and challenges I had taken on and finished by rather

forcefully reminding him that, at every step along the way, it was his wellbeing that was at the centre of what had been done. It was a cathartic release of pent-up frustration and anger that emptied out of me and when the waters subsided, calmness quickly returned. I apologised to Karl.

To be fair to him, he weathered the tsunami incredibly well. He has an admirably stoic quality about him at times that stands in stark contrast to, at other times, his own release of surging emotion. Instead of responding to anything I had said directly he simply responded in his deadpan manner, “Well, then, I can see that you do care. I’m sorry if I doubted that.”

And that was that. We reverted to our usual modes of speaking, reassuring each other that we would find a way of ensuring success for the Computing students. We then stood up, shook hands, and he left. Once more I found myself smiling, even chuckling at what had just happened. It would appear that I do know how to flounce after all.

Reflections on the Narrative

What is most striking about this narrative is the challenges I have faced reflecting upon it, so much so that it is only with the fourth iteration that I have been able to do so. In fact, this is the second narrative that I have written. I was similarly unable to reflect on the previous narrative and wasn’t even able to write that narrative with any richness or thickness of description. In both cases it has been an anxiety about the ethics of writing about the situations that has blocked me from writing and reflecting upon them. Instead I have prioritised analytical and abstracted writing about the situations in which I keep seeking out an ideal for future situations of this kind. This is a way of thinking and behaving that has become patterned for me and is reflected in the narrative itself.

A Paradox of Thinking and Not Thinking

Attempting to decentre myself, the first thing that strikes me is how I have come to think that giving myself barely a moment to think about a complex situation is enough time for good judgment. It is equally striking that my colleagues have come to accept this, being complicit in allowing me do so. Paradoxically, what also emerges from the narrative is that in these very short periods of time I seem compelled to hold internally the conflicting goods that might inform decision-making. This is represented metaphorically by the wrestling match with which I wanted to convey a very real feeling of an internal battle that I have in such situations and to which I don’t want to make my colleagues victims.

This is leading me to wonder why I feel these twin compulsions, to decide quickly but decide well, and what the impact of such well-intentioned, but conflicting, compulsions is on both myself and

others within the school. I think that this is the result of adopting a very simplistic notion of ethics that essentially asks the question “what is the right thing to do?” This appears to be fine in one-on-one situations (scene 1), but becomes problematic for me and those around me when it runs into the reality of interdependent actions where there are many ‘right’ but conflicting things to do (scene 2). Most challenging for me, and the reason why I wrote this narrative, is that this simplistic notion of the ‘right’ often doesn’t work in reality for the individual with whom the decision was made when they come across other conflicting ‘right’ things to do in their own work (scene 3).

The Absorption of Responsibility

The second thing I notice from re-reading the narrative is the three-fold nature of how I choose to absorb responsibility for decision-making within the school; accepting responsibility for the decisions, the outcomes of the decision and the emotional responses to these outcomes.

I have come to see myself as the key decision-maker when decisions involving the wellbeing of colleagues are needed. This is not to say that I do so because of a lack of trust in others. Indeed, in the second scene I attempted to let others make such a decision although I can see now that this was largely because I felt that I had resolved the ethical dimensions in the initial interaction with Karl. Instead I can see that my absorption of responsibility for decisions about what is ‘right’ for humans is itself an attempt to protect other colleagues from the negative consequences of having to make those decisions themselves. In short, I have an ongoing tendency to overprotect others.

The narrative also portrays an absorption of responsibility for the outcomes of such decisions. It shows how I bounce between being elated and deflated like a tennis ball thwacked back and forth by feelings of positivity and negativity. This comes with powerful emotions for me and, as shown with Karl, for others. Paradoxically, I feel the need to cover over these emotions: my failed flounce and apologies to Nicole and Claire are examples of this and, although I let go of my anger with Karl, I felt compelled to ensure things were calmer by the end of the meeting. This is the third aspect of my absorption of responsibility; I tend to hold myself accountable not just for my own emotions but for those of everyone with whom I work.

This threefold absorption of responsibility is something that I have been aware of throughout my adult life. I have come to see it as a good thing for others, if not myself, which I rationalise as the job of being a leader, increasingly so since I have become a headteacher. What this narrative shows is that my acting as a sponge for responsibility is not an unequivocally good thing.

In writing that last sentence I notice a tendency again to hold myself accountable, so let me add that the narrative demonstrates how others play into that patterned behaviour. In decision-making,

others, particularly my senior leadership colleagues, accept the simplistic ethics that I espouse and rely on me to make decisions that they do not want to negotiate themselves. Nicole and Claire presented their cases in terms of what was the 'right' thing to do for the people they represented and left the decision to me. Letting me resolve disputes absolves them of blame, both intellectually and emotionally, and locates it with me. Perhaps more charitably it reflects their faith in my abilities as a decision-maker during their time working with me. It could be both.

An Emotional Tennis Ball?

The final reflection concerns the emotional impact of such experiences. I am aware of this in the daily interactions I have with others but what is most shocking to me, in seeing them in writing, is the emotional turbulence of my professional life as a headteacher. I have written above some of what this means to me in terms of responsibility but there is one other dimension of this emotionality to which I will draw attention.

Whilst not visible in the narrative itself, but strongly felt reading it, I carry huge anxiety about what people think about me at work. My experiences with 'bad' headteachers renders me panic-stricken with virtually every decision I make about people, and almost all decisions in schools are about people. I fear, more than I have ever acknowledged, being gossiped about as being like them and this links with my patterned behaviour described above. At every turn I sense the opportunity for reputational loss and exclusion, and an overwhelming urge to constantly prove myself as Mr. Ethics and be seen as such. The moment I feel this is not the case, when challenged by colleagues about a decision (scenes 2 and 3), I tend to self-justify at best and, at worst, to behave petulantly such as flouncing and shouting, which in turn leaves me wracked with guilt for being unethical.

But the metaphor of an emotional tennis ball is insufficient. It covers over my own agency and negates the emotional impact upon others. It is perhaps a way of thinking about emotions that comes from locating all responsibility for conjoint actions within myself. Our willingness to let me be accountable, and our emotions resulting from this, are very much co-constructed. In the remainder of this project I will seek to explore why this might be, drawing upon complex responsive processes of relating thinking and the managerial literature aimed at school leaders.

The Sociogenesis of Responsibility

My narrative demonstrates how overwhelmingly I absorb responsibility for our joint actions at work. In 'The Civilising Process' (1994a) the German émigré sociologist, Norbert Elias, sheds some light on this, drawing from historical texts on attitudes to manners to outline the civilising process of the title. He recounts the development of political life from medieval warlords via absolute monarchies to contemporary state formation, the latter of which is analogous to contemporary organisational life. He suggests that modern leadership resembles a stalemate of power and argues that when competing interests are of such equal strength, there is less threat to the central authority. This means that leaders within such a society/organisation are:

Always balanced on a tension between greater or lesser groups who keep each other in check as interdependent antagonists, as opponents and partners at once. (ibid, p320)

Elias illustrates this point with historical examples which demonstrate how centralisation of resources and force in these countries brought the need for centralised administrative bureaucracies and, subsequently, an increasing expectation of transparent rules and routines to ensure a degree of fairness. He explains that:

Once someone has attained a position in the central apparatus and held on to it for any time, it imposes its own regularities upon him. It distances him in varying degrees from all the other groups and classes of society, even the one which has brought him to power and from which he originates. (ibid, p320)

Elias is drawing attention here to historical processes of increasing constraints upon individuals, no matter how seemingly powerful, constraints that also enable as they allow a degree of stability and 'civilisation' unmatched in history. This comes at a price for the person with the most power.

What then does all this mean in the context of contemporary school leadership? What resonance does it have in discussing issues of responsibility for decision-making? Elias says that the function of the ruler/leader is "to superintend the cohesion and security of the whole", a task with which he is "confronted by daily experience" (ibid, p321). By this I take Elias not to mean 'whole' in any systemic sense but as a reference to the figuration into which the leader is acting, a figuration in which Elias suggests the leader's "power is anything but absolute". (ibid, p323)

Elias' notions of leadership resonate strongly with my experiences of headship as demonstrated in the narrative. The first scene shows the apparently unlimited nature of power of a headteacher. However, my description of the wrestling match involving strategic, operational and ethical concerns shows the multiplicity of demands that bound this autonomy. The second scene is a parable of Elias' "interdependent antagonists, as opponents and partners at once" with Nicole and Claire acting as

representatives of this. The third scene shows, through Karl's feeling of being unappreciated, how the central ruling figure becomes distanced and alienated from all others. This is also true of the scene involving Nicole and Claire.

Elias acknowledges that, in spite of these boundaries on the ruler, there is still significantly more leeway for this person than for all others within the organisation, but that this comes at a cost.

The relatively wide scope for decision left open in this way to the central ruler... comes about through his standing in the crossfire of social tensions, so being able to play on the variously directed interests and ambitions counterpoised in his domain. (ibid, p323)

For Elias this "relatively wide scope for decision" is both enabling in allowing the leader to play interests off against one another, such as the interests of Nicole in representing Drama and Claire in representing Computing, but it is simultaneously constraining in that it leads me to tensions with all three of them as a result of the execution of such decisions. I find both elements of this tension personally very challenging. Playing interests off against each other reminds me of the kinds of headteachers I despised as a younger teacher. Do I really want to be like them? On the other hand, being in tension with members of my team reminds me of the separation and isolation I felt during the early phase of my leadership career at my previous school. Do I really want to return there? The answer to both questions is a resounding "no" and I assumed that as a headteacher I could create a different pattern of interaction with those for whom I am most responsible, a pattern neither Machiavellian nor isolating. Elias' analysis of responsibility in 'The Civilising Process' indicates that this is an idealised notion of leadership.

Responsibility and Cult Values

Following this line of inquiry, that I seek to avoid what Elias suggests are the unavoidable constraints of leading and habitually reach for idealised notions of 'good', leads me to what George Herbert Mead identified as being 'cult values'. Mead, a leading philosopher in the pragmatic tradition, in his essay 'Scientific Method and the Moral Sciences', wrote that:

An institution should arise and be kept alive by its own function, but in so far as it does not function, the ideal of it can be kept alive only by some cult, whose aim is not the functioning of the institution, but the continued presence of the idea of it in the minds of those that cherish it. (Mead, 1923, p240)

The narrative in this project and the narratives from my first project draw attention to a constant pattern in my adult life in which I do clearly cherish such cultish notions of the good. Mead believes

such cult values are “the most precious part of our social heritage” (ibid, p243). Perhaps this explains why I have taken on the role of the senior responsibility holder within a school, one of the types of organisation named by Mead as being likely to have a strong sense of cult values. It also explains why others in the school are able to subscribe to appeals to such values to the extent that they defer final decision-making to me as leader of the cult.

Mead suggests that cult values ought not to be the final destination of those engaged in the praxis of organisational and societal life. He argues that we should “substitute functional values for cult values in formulating and undertaking to solve our social problems” (ibid, p246) through communicative interaction in the context of exercising practical judgment:

The task of intelligence is to use this growing consciousness of interdependence to formulate the problems of all, in terms of the problem of every one. In so far as this can be accomplished cult values will pass over into functional values. (ibid, p245)

Reflecting further upon the narrative, the three scenes can be seen as a movement in this direction. In the first scene the decision made to resolve Karl’s dilemma was made by me according to the cult value of an ethical workplace: I was dealing with a “problem of all”, by which I mean that I was acting in an ideological manner. By the second scene, with Nicole and Claire, we were making decisions “in terms of the problem of every one”, by which I mean that we were considering the problems of individuals as being unique to those individuals, not as ideological reference points.

In this inquiry the question then becomes why I found the situation so troubling. The narrative shows my willingness to play the role of Mr. Ethics and yet, at the same time, my anger at being coerced into functionalising those cult values. In this I notice my wanting to have my cake and eat it: frustration at their deference to my judgment and, at the same time, an inferred validation of the cult values to which I appealed. Perhaps what I was looking for was for them to make the ‘right’ decision collaboratively in line with my idealisation of the school’s cult values. Andy Buck, a former headteacher and leader of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), writes that:

For heads, having a team of staff who are committed to your shared goals and work effectively together to support one another in achieving them is at the heart of what makes a great school. In other words, this is all about getting a collective buy-in to what you want to achieve. (Buck, 2016, p15)

Buck is outlining a typical view of the headteacher’s role in terms of responsibility; articulating ‘shared goals’ and securing ‘buy-in’ to them so that they become automated within the organisation. This is an appealing vision of leadership, one into which I was trained on the National Professional Qualification for Headship, devised and administered by Buck’s former organisation. What Buck

suggests is that headteachers decide the cult values of the organisation and others must fall into line. By that standard my narrative represents a successful event and yet it doesn't feel like that. By contrast Mead talks about the use of practical judgment as the adventure of a "self-conscious society" that adjusts itself in the specific context of the "immediate problem" (Mead, 1923, p247). Such interdependent decision-making, the collaborative taking of responsibility for functionalising cult values, does not come without conflict. Doug Griffin, a founding member of the group within the Hertfordshire Business School that established the DMan programme, draws upon Mead's work in his exploration of ethics and leadership. He notes that:

Mead drew our attention to the everyday arena of conflict that we have the habit of ignoring or denying. In participating with each other, people functionalise the ideal in conflict and this is the ethical basis of leadership theory. (Griffin, 2002, p194)

Griffin locates responsibility firmly in the realm of purposeful organisational interaction as people move from an idealising of cult values to functionalising them. He cautions that such interactions mean that self-organisation is "incomplete" because all of the results of such interaction cannot be known (ibid, p189). He does not however let positional leaders 'off the hook' in negotiating conflict that emerges in their organisations. In this respect he is supported by his colleagues, Ralph Stacey and Chris Mowles, who remind us that "the leader is a participant" whose role is:

To encourage others towards taking responsibility, including identifying different conceptions of the good and alternative points of view in the group. He or she resists the inevitable idealisation of the leader and seeks to replace submission with cooperation and explorative conflict. (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, pp358-9)

Griffin, and Stacey and Mowles, draw attention to perhaps a more fruitful line of inquiry for me. Instead of being troubled that Nicole and Claire questioned my idealisation of ethics, 'bothering' me with operational/strategic matters, maybe it was their idealisation of me as the leader responsible for all key decisions that angered me. Or, more to the point, it was that together we have adopted that way of working. The feeling of failure that underpinned my choice of this narrative is related to Stacey and Mowles notion of the leader's role in helping others in "taking responsibility" in order to "replace submission with cooperation": they did not do the former and I did not do the latter.

Paradoxically, though, and reading the narrative from a perspective aligned with the dominant managerial discourses typified by Andy Buck, my colleagues were engaged in subversive activities or even outright rebellion. They did, as Stacey and Mowles suggest, identify "different conceptions of the good", challenging me in the process. Whilst unable to resolve their differences of opinion without recourse to my judgment, they did engage me in "explorative conflict". Indeed, this

narrative was written because such conflictual approaches to decision-making and responsibility-taking are typical of my experiences at school. This causes me anxiety partly because conflict is discomforting and partly because other school leaders, those influenced by the likes of Buck, do not appear to tolerate such conflicting approaches from their colleagues. What Griffin, Stacey and Mowles are suggesting is that such conflictual approaches are more likely to lead to a functionalising of the school's cult values, without guaranteeing whether this will be for good or for ill.

I have explored an Eliasian perspective on leadership, in which headteachers find themselves caught in a crossfire of social interactions, contrasting this with my idealisation of the possibility of a more harmonious way of working together. This led into a discussion of cult values and the identification of two opposing interpretations of why I might find organisational decision-making so troubling. Firstly, contrasting with dominant school leadership discourse, I am unable to align others with my own conception of the good. Alternatively, my colleagues and I have co-constructed a way of making decisions together that idealises me as the primary responsibility-bearer in spite of our valuing explorative conflict; we haven't gone far enough in functionalising the school's cult values.

Relational Responsibility

Having considered my own responsibility, and that of others in the narrative, I want to consider the way in which responsibility for the events of my narrative may also include those offstage others who weren't directly involved in the decision-making processes.

'Relational Responsibility' (1999) by Sheila McNamee and Kenneth Gergen takes a social constructionist approach to issues of responsibility and decision-making within organisational life. Drawing from a range of disciplines, they explore concepts of 'internal others', 'conjoint relations', 'relations among groups' and 'systemic process' as being helpful in explaining how conflict arises. In common with pragmatic theorists, they believe that conflicts are, by necessity, social. A difference is that they largely perceive such conflict negatively as is demonstrated by their assertion that:

The conflict, the anguish, the retribution, and so on are being played out by fractional impulses acquired from others and because, in Walt Whitman's terms, "we contain multitudes", we are invited to expand the retinue of guests at the table of responsibility.

(McNamee & Gergen, 1999, p13)

McNamee and Gergen pay significant attention to offstage others. They explain how "interlocutors are (or have been) enmeshed" in wider relationships that play out during conflict (ibid, p14). Such wider relationships may include those within the organisation itself, personal relationships outside

of the organisation, historical voices from childhood or early professional life and wider approving or disapproving societal voices.

It is clear that I define my headship in opposition to previous headteachers for whom I have worked. I have come to perceive the ideal of being good against my experiences of having bad done to me. I can see in my treatment of Karl a deliberate inversion of the way in which I was treated by a headteacher who tried to force me out of the school. This recourse to considering myself in opposition to past headteachers is enabling for me in that it ensures I look after my colleagues, but also constrains because the slightest suggestion that I am like these former heads causes anxiety. I am also aware that a 'what wouldn't THEY do' approach is as constraining for colleagues as it is enabling, and I draw attention to this in the final line of the first scene in which I anticipate a negative response from my team for allowing Karl to change subjects. It is also particularly visible in Karl's feelings as he articulated them to me in the final scene of the narrative. Trying to do the right thing, to be Mr. Ethics, is clearly not always the right thing to try to do.

So, the tremendous feelings of responsibility I have are a product of a desire to be the headteacher that I needed early in my career. They are also bound up with the guilt I still feel about my treatment of colleagues in the school where I rose through the ranks of leadership, particularly the two colleagues who felt alienated from my leadership of my department. The guilt is also about those who suffered from decisions I was part of as a leadership team, notably the imposition of the Mosquito devices. There are so many at my "table of responsibility" that it might even mean that responsibility isn't just relational, but relative? Ian Burkitt, writing in response to McNamee and Gergen's proposals, says:

Relations and joint activities are multiauthored and multivoiced..., responsibility is always shared so that a single individual is never entirely to blame for a situation or event. (ibid, p72)

McNamee & Gergen go further:

There is no means of extricating a particulate action from the whole of what there is; any action is both a manifestation of and a constituent part of the array. There is, then, no fixed and identifiable locus of origin for what is the case. (ibid, p18)

This is a radical proposition, giving the impression that responsibility is so "multiauthored" as to be, by extension, authorless. This doesn't hold for one of the responding authors, John Lannaman, who contends that "once agency is dismissed, accountability disappears as well" (ibid, p86).

I have some sympathy with Lannaman. As well as colleagues from my past, I draw attention in my narrative to the offstage others, including Lisa and Sara, whose presence I felt at the meeting with Nicole and Claire. I can also see that each player within the drama had their own histories: in Karl's gestures and responses I recognise that he has had complex relationships with authority figures in the past which may have explained his decisions in our interactions. However, it is difficult to accept that there is "no fixed and identifiable locus" of responsibility for decisions. Lannaman believes that McNamee and Gergen's radically relational responsibility goes too far and argues instead for a better balance between the 'I' and the 'we' of social interaction that is in keeping with a paradoxical way of thinking. He says that:

Novelty and change are produced through joint actions with other social 'I's' whose practices contribute to, but do not determine, the unintended consequences of interaction. Thus, relational change is the consequence of interaction between social agents, not abstract relationships. (ibid, p87)

Although I concur with Lannaman, it is another offstage other who has shaped significantly my own thinking about responsibility. That offstage other is the relative who told me, aged eleven, that I was the "man of the house" in the aftermath of the death of my brother. Metaphorically, he invited me to sit at the head of the "table of responsibility". It is a place I have occupied ever since. Becoming headteacher is an extension of a role I have played and been allowed to play since childhood. As my narrative demonstrates, I paradoxically enjoy and endure this role which causes me to feel both success and failure at the same time. Given my past, strong emotions are always at play within this.

Playing the role of "man of the house" as a headteacher is as enabling and constraining for my colleagues as it is for me. On the one hand they are able to confront me, to shape decision-making and to challenge me. Sometimes, as with Karl, they do so very directly. The co-construction of an ultimately-responsible father figure in organisational life, though, runs the risk of being too protective, paternal, even patriarchal. This latter point is perhaps suggested by the fact that two women in my senior leadership team felt the need to refer a final decision on the matter at hand to me, a thought that sits uncomfortably.

My tendency to absorb responsibility sits in stark contrast to what McNamee and Gergen call the "systemic soup" (ibid, p17) of organisational life which is, as Lannaman concludes, too relativist. His recognition of the paradox of shaping and being shaped by social interaction, and the accountability we have to one another in such a process, reflects the view of Ralph Stacey in his book *Complexity and Group Processes*. Stacey writes that:

Communicative cooperation arises in the process of people holding each other accountable for their actions in some way. (Stacey, 2003, p122)

Both Lannaman and Stacey draw attention to Griffin's concept, drawn from Mead, of the 'living present' in which both leadership and ethics emerge, in which responsibility is both individual and social and under constant construction and reconstruction. McNamee and Gergen's idea of 'relational responsibility' is theoretically helpful for a leader with a tendency to locate responsibility internally. Followed to a logical conclusion, though, it drowns all notions of individual responsibility in their "systemic soup" of non-responsibility. In reality, as demonstrated in the strength of emotions felt by the protagonists within my narrative, responsibility is not merely relational, existing in the spaces between people (and therefore nowhere), but is instead felt by each individual as a result of the contested nature of communicative cooperation.

Emotions, Power and Isolation

Throughout my narrative what is striking is the prevalence of emotions, in particular my feelings of being isolated and lonely as a result of my being in a position of power. In the first scene I write about a feeling of relief rapidly followed by an onset of worries with regard to a decision I had to make and about my perception of waves of emotion running through the physiognomy of Karl. In the second scene powerful emotions caused me to storm out of a meeting. At the same time my masking of these emotions rendered them invisible to others. In contrast, the third scene describes a conversation of highly emotional gestures, mutually reinforcing, in which little was masked.

Norbert Elias writes about 'The Society of Individuals' in which he draws attention to how the social processes of emotion formation have come to be routinely located within individuals. He says we are more isolated than ever before, seeing this atomisation as part of a macroscopic tendency in modern bureaucratic societies, one that is simultaneously enabling and constraining:

The high level of individualisation... of loneliness characteristic of this kind of society, which may even be needed for the maintenance of these societies, frequently does not harmonise very well with the complex and, to the individual, unfathomable network of dependence in which he is enclosed. (Elias, 1991, p149)

Hannah Arendt, another German exile from Hitler's regime, echoes Elias in reflecting on the rise of bureaucracy through modernity, and points to challenges that face positional leaders:

The role of the beginner and leader, who was a *primus inter pares*, changed into that of a ruler; the original interdependence of action...split into two altogether different functions:

the function of giving commands, which became the prerogative of the ruler, and the function of executing them, which became the duty of his subjects. (Arendt, 1958, p189)

This resonates strongly with the issues raised in my narrative and my reflections upon it. I have drawn attention to the fact that I have a tendency, with only a moment's thought, to make decisions of significant importance and leave others to execute the commands I give. The result, as shown in the second and third scenes, is that I become detached from others, something which Arendt sees as following from the splitting of action. She distinguishes between solitude (being together with one's self), loneliness (being alone), and isolation, arguing that:

Whoever, for whatever reasons, isolates himself and does not partake in such being together, forfeits power and becomes impotent, no matter how great his strength and how valid his reasons. (p201)

I find myself reflecting uncomfortably on the idea that, in taking up headship, I have moved from seeing myself as being a first among equals to being perceived as a ruler. My narrative points to my "function of giving commands" in asking Nicole and Claire to oblige me in changing Karl's subject, giving them the "function of executing" those commands. The following two scenes in the narrative describe the isolating effects of such a split, as Arendt has it, and the strong emotions generated by such isolation. In the second scene I demonstrate how I covered over these emotions and isolated myself even further. Perhaps this reflects the dominant managerial paradigm, which suggests that emotions are something that the leader has to control. Andy Buck is illustrative here. In 'Leadership Matters', he argues that:

Emotional responses are natural and not a sign of vulnerability. If you can identify these and know what kinds of situation trigger stress or emotional responses in you, then you have a better chance of remaining in control of a situation... It also allows you to be more objective. (Buck, 2016, p37)

This way of thinking, that emotions are not a sign of vulnerability, does not resonate with my experience of emotions in this narrative or other interactions within my school. Buck obviously perceives vulnerability to be anathema to effective leadership. What follows is even more striking; that identification of emotions is possible, that it enhances control of situations and that such actions can enable greater objectivity. This suggests an idealised version of the leader who can isolate emotions within himself, something that I was trying to do (and simultaneously trying not to do) in flouncing out of my meeting with Nicole and Claire. He continues:

In order to stay strong for your team, you have to stay strong yourself, which means managing your emotions. (ibid, p40)

This idea of submerging emotions in order to “stay strong” for my team resonates more with me. It taps into an idea of the selfless leader putting others’ interests before self, making me wonder how much I have absorbed of the dominant managerial paradigm in spite of my resistance to many of the solutions it purports to offer school leaders. For example, when Buck goes on to talk about the importance of school leaders giving “reassurance”, “being optimistic” and making others “feel secure” (ibid, p42), he speaks to the greater ethics to which I and many others, not least of all within my team, tend to subscribe. He also speaks to my “man of the house” persona.

But Buck’s strategy for staying strong validates Arendt’s point about leaders who isolate themselves (in this case through only showing strength, control and optimism) being at risk of forfeiting power:

A powerful strategy can be to reflect on a situation by imagining yourself stepping outside your body and viewing the situation objectively. What will you tell yourself to do? (ibid, p37)

I recognise this in my actions during scene two when, rather than staying with the challenges of engaging Nicole and Claire in further discussion, I took myself to an isolated situation on the school field. I removed myself from what Arendt calls the “overcrowded cave of human affairs” and quite literally located myself under the “sky of ideas” (Arendt, 1958, p226) with a strong notion of the good but alone and isolated.

Such isolation can lead to leadership practices that are emblematic of tyranny or, worse in Arendt’s estimation, totalitarianism. Elias recognises precisely such emotions when he writes that:

The need to stand alone goes hand in hand with the need to belong. The feeling of participating, being involved, is frequently mingled with one of being uninvolved, detached – ‘what is all that to do with me?’ (Elias, 1991, p149)

Elias identifies a defining paradox, for me, of headship, that of being both detached and involved. In doing so he contrasts starkly the pure detachment of Buck’s strategy of stepping outside one’s body in order to become more objective. For Buck, being involved in our experiences threatens us with subjectivity and threatens others with a lack of reassurance in their leader. In such ways of thinking, to which I am prone, the paradox of detached involvement remains unexplored.

Elias sheds light on my experience when he identifies the tendency to think “what is all that to do with me?” Although I instigated the decision to allow Karl to change roles within the school, I chose to detach myself from the implications of the decision and attempted to compel Nicole and Claire to take responsibility for resolving the conflict that resulted. What had that to do with me? Similarly, when Karl spoke of being disappointed, disheartened and depressed by the initial decision, I

responded as though uninvolved in his heightened emotions. What had that to do with me? In resisting involvement my actions were authoritarian, perhaps totalitarian. This is the consequence of Buck's strategy of "what will you tell yourself to do?" in order to govern one's emotions. Borne out of undoubtedly good intentions for others, it negates both self and others along the way and builds all human interaction on the foundational goods of greater ethics. In this way ideals become ideologies. If I demand objectivity of myself I must impose it upon others.

Both Elias and Arendt present isolation as emerging from a focus on the individuality of embodied emotional experience rather than the plurality of such experience. This is entirely typical of organisational life. Russ Vince and Yiannis Gabriel of the University of Bath write about 'Organisations, Learning and Emotion' and suggest that emotions are "interwoven with politics and power in organisations" (Vince & Gabriel in Easterby-Smith & Lyles (Eds), 2011, p6).

It therefore seems logical to locate "politics and power" of organisational life in the persona of the leader. Indeed, that is exactly what I have done in talking about what the conflicts in scenes two and three of my narrative had (or had not) to do with me. But Vince and Gabriel look instead at the social processes of emotion within organisations in which power and politics are shared experiences, which mean that leaders are "also a product of the fantasies of followers" (ibid, p10).

Thus, Nicole and Claire's actions demonstrate a fantasy of my leadership. They themselves had a "what is all that to do with me" moment in openly refusing my request that they resolve the matter between themselves, perhaps in order to go on better with those they line manage. Similarly, Karl's fantasies, in which he elected to ignore his instigation of and participation in my decision to allow him to change roles, was saying "what is all that to do with me" with regard to his own consternation and anxiety. Vince and Gabriel explain this phenomenon:

A team produces the behaviour of the leader, as well as the leadership decisions and choices that are voiced, through their conscious and unconscious actions and inactions. (ibid, p10)

This argument suggests that the feelings of isolation and detachment, felt bodily by me in interaction with these colleagues, were actually co-created in part because of their need to isolate and detach themselves from the anxiety-inducing decision-making. But why were they doing so and what purpose did it serve for our organisational life together? Vince and Gabriel offer a potential explanation in talking about the importance of an 'ethic of care' within organisational life (ibid, p11), which appears to be a step forward from Buck's strategies for managing and controlling emotions outlined earlier. Rather than promising an escape from subjectivity they suggest that:

An ethic of care offers a partial containment of anxieties unleashed by both the learning process and organisational politics. It allows for mistakes to be recognised and corrected, it

supports experimentation and responsible improvisation, and it promotes respect for human fallibility and insecurity. (ibid, p11)

Looking at the entirety of the narrative this can certainly be seen to be the case. Together, my colleagues and I collaborated in helping Karl change roles (supports experimentation), recruit and timetable a new colleague (responsible improvisation), and then renegotiate the terms of the changes to meet the needs of the greatest number (mistakes recognised and corrected). Although emotions reached high levels within these interactions, relationships remained friendly and were never seriously under threat (promotes respect for human fallibility and insecurity).

There is however a fundamental problem with Vince and Gabriel's 'ethic of care'. It is, in spite of their assertions to the contrary, "a universal warm blanket" (ibid, p12). It is an idealisation of the same cult values that underpin the Mr. Ethics of my narrative. It suggests an ethical imperative and is built upon the same foundational good that informs Buck's writing. The difference is that Vince and Gabriel only offer a "partial containment of anxieties" rather than the "reassurance" though emotional control that Buck promises. As my narrative clearly demonstrates, my belief in an 'ethic of care' is much stronger than my ability to control my emotions, and yet anxieties remain.

Emotions and Anxiety

In this inquiry I have noted that constraints resulting from the mutual dependencies of school life distance leaders from followers. I recognise that this has become an embedded way of working in my own professional life, as colleagues with competing ideas of the good seek resolution of these ideas in action. This causes anxiety for all. I have also identified how strong appeals to cult values, such as ethical treatment of colleagues, are functionalised in the arena of explorative conflict. This too causes anxiety for all. I have drawn attention to my own conflict with dominant expectations of 'outstanding' headteachers and my own bitter experiences of bad headteachers and how this causes me act in opposition to these norms. This causes huge anxiety for me but also isolates me further from others, adding to their anxieties too. Finally, my inquiry has led me to consider how power dynamics within organisations are often built upon the expectation that emotions are something that leaders should cover over and control, or at least mitigate under the umbrella of an ethic of care. Anxiety-reduction is seen as an end, but such approaches create anxiety about anxiety.

In 'The Civilising Process' Elias argues that anxiety is unavoidable in a highly differentiated society with long chains of interdependence. Drawing parallels with medieval society, in which human affects and drives were less constrained, he argues that in the contemporary world:

The battlefield is, in a sense, moved within... The drives, the passionate affects, that can no longer directly manifest themselves in the relationships *between* people, often struggle no less violently *within* the individual against this supervising part of themselves. (Elias, 1994, p375)

He draws attention to the social constraints people in such societies exert upon one another and says that this becomes habituated within the individual as a “psychological counterpart” to such social constraints (ibid, p442). What Elias is suggesting is that the anxieties at play within my narrative were largely inescapable. My anxieties of being a good headteacher, not letting down others as I had been let down in the past, were played out in discussions about the decisions I took. Nicole and Claire’s refusal to decide between alternatives reflects their anxieties about letting down those they line manage. Karl’s obvious delight at being allowed to change subjects was not sufficient to cover over his own anxieties about letting down students who had previously been under his care. That these anxieties were intertwined with one another amplified these tensions.

Andy Buck doesn’t mention anxiety but in a section of his book entitled ‘Turning negativity into positivity’ he proffers a solution for the anxieties of leadership:

In the moments of highest pressure and negative criticism you have two choices: you can either let the criticism build into a negative spiral, or you can see and use it as an opportunity to respond positively and build support. (Buck, 2016, p41)

It is notable here that he sees anxiety as being largely about criticism and as an externally generated phenomenon. In my reflections on the narrative I noted that I feel deeply anxious about being criticised for the decisions I make, the outcomes of these decisions and the emotions that emerge as a result. What I realise in thinking about the externality of Buck’s understanding of criticism is that my feelings of being criticised were internally role-played responses to perceived gestures of criticism, not criticism itself. Nicole and Claire were not criticising me. Even Karl’s comments were about his feelings with an aside about the speed of my decision-making. His response, that he could see that I did care, revealed his comments to be more of an enquiry than a critique. It is typical of my management practice that I perceive more criticism than I actually receive. This makes Buck’s utilitarian solutions, to transform criticism into support, of no use.

Drawing from Elias’ process sociology as well as pragmatist philosophy and Group Analysis, Ralph Stacey articulates a reason why a social self, an individual within an organisation, might feel anxiety.

For a being for whom the social is essential to life itself, the deepest existential anxiety must be aroused by any threat of separation or exclusion since it means the potential loss or fragmentation of identity, even death. (Stacey, 2003, p130)

Looking again at my narrative I can see how Karl leaving his department would evoke “existential anxiety” and how Nicole, Claire and I would be equally anxious, as is often the case for senior leaders, at being separated or excluded from the staff body generally and our line management relations specifically. Drawing from the narratives recounted in my first project, Stacey’s reference to death is striking, perhaps as a reflection of my own experience of the death of my brother. He says that our:

Fragile sense of self stems from the fragility and insecurity of attachment and often reflects early attachment and separation difficulties. Anxiety generated by endlessly waiting and preparing to be abandoned and rejected, reflecting past experience, is replaced with panic, anger, rivalry and fear of closeness. (ibid, p133)

I recounted in my first project how, immediately after the death of my brother, I was cajoled into becoming “the man of the house” and, given the nature of family life afterwards, this happened. My work anxieties are part of a wider anxiety I have of being abandoned and separated from others, of being unloved, leading to an incredibly strong sense of responsibility for those around me to whom I am attached, whom I love. This has become more apparent to me during this inquiry. It came up initially in thinking about how I absorb responsibility for making decisions about the wellbeing of others – Karl, Nicole, Claire, and the multitude of offstage others – and how this is manifested in anxiety when conflict about such decisions comes into play. It showed itself again when writing about the possibly patrician and patriarchal aspects of my taking on such responsibility. Through this inquiry there is a recurring theme of isolation, of not belonging, and how this feeds my own sense of “fragility and insecurity”.

I have become aware that such anxieties are not entirely of my making. They shape the experience of others in my school and are in turn shaped by them. Nicole and Claire may well have had their own anxieties amplified by my absorption of responsibility and by the way in which I exercise judgment, but the narrative demonstrates how they too play into the “man of the house” myth, what Stacey and Mowles call the “idealisation of the leader”. Karl’s criticism of the thoughtlessness of my decision-making may well have reflected anxieties caused by my eagerness to make decisions for the greater good without giving full attention to the smaller goods of his lived experience, but he too was playing into the “man of the house” myth by seeking me out to make such a decision whilst being unprepared for the consequences of that decision on his own sense of anxiety.

There is some solace for me in the view of Elias, who points to the enabling elements of tension and conflict which are usually seen as constraining in management discourses.

Only with the tensions and conflicts between people can those within people become milder and less damaging to their chance of enjoyment. (Elias, 1994, p446)

I say only 'some solace' because this inquiry has left me with more questions than answers. At times it feels that there are no solutions and no sense of resolution: anxieties remain. What I have learnt in the course of these reflections is that habitual reference to myself as being Mr. Ethics, by which I mean that I put the care of colleagues ahead of all other considerations, does not leave myself or others the time and space to sit with such anxieties. Such an approach may, to contrast Elias' comment above, very well be counterproductive, leaving us all with less mild and more damaging tensions and conflicts within. As I move to the next project I am keen to think more about how my sense of responsibility for everything and everyone manifests itself in my professional life and to consider how I might approach such situations differently in order to feel/become less isolated.

Conclusions

In this project I have presented a narrative that reflects situations I regularly face in my daily life as a headteacher: being called upon to make a decision of significance for others, being held to account for that decision, and dealing with the emotional repercussions that such decision-making can have. Having explored numerous possible themes emerging for me from this narrative, I have come to realise that the two themes with most resonance for me are those of responsibility and emotions.

During the course of taking the experiences recounted in this narrative seriously, I have come to recognise that responsibility for decision-making, for the outcomes of such decisions and for the emotions felt as the result of these outcomes is something that I overwhelmingly absorb. I use the word overwhelmingly because it overwhelms my capacity for thoughtfulness and judgment as well as my emotional wellbeing. It also overwhelms the responsibility of others with whom I work, simultaneously enabling them to leave difficult decision-making to me and constraining them from being able to make potentially advantageous decisions without recourse to me. Like mine, their emotional wellbeing is demonstrably at stake. In absorbing responsibility in this way, I have been subscribing to dominant discourses in educational leadership which seek to reduce decision-making to a problem of securing 'buy-in' to the leader's overall responsibility.

I have considered the social constructionist perspective of 'relational responsibility', noting that it leads to the idea of nobody being responsible for anything. This doesn't resonate with my experiences in the highly accountable world of school leadership. Instead I have come to better understand Elias' assertion that the nature of a civilised society is one in which the constraints upon leaders distances them from others in part because it involves playing off "variously directed

interests". Although I initially found this Machiavellian-sounding notion troubling, what Elias is actually suggesting is that responsibility is thoroughly social in nature. Drawing from Mead's notion of functionalising cult values leads Griffin to suggest that the workplace is an "everyday arena of conflict" for all involved. This idea has led me to better understand that, in organisational life, we are left with negotiation of the constraints and conflicts that are part and parcel of the taking of responsibility for meeting the needs of others and ourselves.

In terms of emotions, paying close attention to this narrative, I have come to better understand the role that my status as headteacher plays for me. In line with typical school leadership literature, I have unquestioningly accepted the notion that it is my job to "stay strong" for others. It is an appealing myth, particularly for one who has habitually accepted that it is his role to be the "man of the house". This way of thinking does not fully resonate with me, though, because I don't accept the premise of such literature that I can control negative emotions arising from detachment by further detaching myself to achieve objectivity. Thus, I find myself left with a desire to be seen as staying strong alongside an awareness of my own emotional frailty, perhaps the worst of both worlds.

I have explored the idea that an "ethic of care" is a potential solution for mediating anxiety but this offers little difference to my characteristic way of thinking about school leadership in that it steers me in the direction of greater ethics. To continue thinking in such ways will only serve to maintain, for me and for those with whom I work, a heightened sense of anxiety when competing goods, each of which is consistent with such greater ethics, come into conflict. Instead I have come to recognise Elias' argument that modern society has the characteristic of making individuals feel that they are "standing in isolation", separated from the networks into which we are bound. A final conclusion emerging for me in this project is that I have to accept, as Stacey argues, that "existential anxiety", mine and others, is unavoidable but can reduce the damage done by the internalisation of individual anxiety.

Further Inquiry

In project three, acting upon the final sentence of my conclusion, I wish to stay with the theme of anxiety because this inquiry has led me to see an ongoing patterning of anxiousness in my interactions with others. Specifically, I am keen to think more about the need for belonging with its historical antecedents that I identify in the final part of this inquiry as being significant in my leadership practice, causing me to have heightened emotional responses that manifest themselves both affectively and cognitively in my work.

Project Three: An Analysis of how an Idealisation of Harmony in Distributed Leadership Approaches is Insufficient to Explain how Power Relations and Political Action Engender Conflict in Sharing Responsibility for School Leadership.

Introduction

In the previous project of this thesis I struggled to recount and reflect upon a narrative of my experiences at work. During the course of this struggle I noticed two things that are important. The first of these is that the narratives I write relate to strong feelings of having disappointed others in some way and of having failed to live up to their expectations. This is because I have understood workplace ethics in terms of doing the 'right' thing for people, of exercising a duty of care, which leads me to absorb responsibility, not only for actions, but for the outcomes of these actions and the emotions generated. I thus feel deep anxiety in my interactions with colleagues which gives me a strong sense of isolation from them. In turn, this sense of isolation causes me further anxiety.

The second thing that I have noticed through both projects one and two is that these concerns are manifested in my reflections upon the narratives. I have found it difficult to take a 'detour via detachment' (Elias, 1956, p229), by which I mean that I have tended to think in abstract ways about my experiences, idealising theoretical insights as the 'right' way of doing things and contrasting this with my 'wrong' ways of leading and managing. It has been difficult for me to detach myself from this way of monopolising responsibility and see that such patterns are co-created. My willingness to play the "man of the house", of which I had only been subconsciously aware, is supported by the colleagues with whom I work and by those writing about headship, such as Andy Buck (2016), who suggest that staying strong in difficult times for the benefit of others is a core responsibility for headteachers.

In this project I will be seeking to pay more attention to the co-created patterns of how we act together. Focusing on the interactions between myself and the four members of my inner circle of Team Leaders, about whom I have previously avoided writing, I will explore an example of a breakdown in those interactions. Although specific, this breakdown was typical of how we have struggled to go on together for the past five years. In drawing attention to my experience of the events recounted, I will be exploring how the themes that emerge may be important for others in my narrative. I hope to understand how my patterned ways of thinking as a headteacher have an influence on the more social patterns of behaviour that emerge between us as a senior leadership team.

Context for the Narrative

Nicole, Colin, Lisa and Faith are the senior members of my leadership team who are also known as Team Leaders. We have worked together for a decade and I was promoted from amongst them to the headship of our school. The three women are deputy headteachers whereas Colin, our business manager, is from the support staff. Nicole and Colin have a close working relationship, having initially been members of the same sub-team within my leadership team. Colin took on his own team two years later but their work regularly coincides, reflecting their functions associated with the more 'business' side of the school. This parallels the closeness between Faith and Lisa whose work is associated with the more 'education' side of the school. In truth, and for me who oversees the 'education business' that is the school, their work is reciprocally vital. The narrative is set against the backdrop of Nicole's immanent departure to lead another school and this is relevant to the heightened tensions described. Tensions, however, existed before Nicole's promotion. These conflicts, between people articulating competing values of how the school should be managed, have caused me considerable difficulty for my five years of headship.

Narrative: The Elephants in the Room

Within days of Nicole securing headship at another school, Colin sent me his thoughts, via email as usual. As ever he was quick off the mark and highly strategic with wide-ranging ideas focused on the future of the school in the context of the national policy agenda. His main proposal, to be expected, was that we shouldn't appoint anyone else given the size of the team and the pressures on the budget: he would be willing to take on more. I knew that this, and other proposals in his email, would be contentious with the other members of my Team Leader group. He also proposed a possible new role for a colleague on the leadership team and I noted this proposal echoed an email I had received from this person days earlier. I rolled my eyes, sent a holding email saying I'd get back to him after the weekend, and blew out my cheeks in a mixture of irritation, exasperation and something else that I couldn't quite put my finger on; foreboding perhaps.

I could sense how badly these proposals would play with Faith and Lisa. The most likely internal candidate for the role would be Claire, an Assistant Headteacher whom Lisa line manages and who Faith gets on well with. She is well-positioned for the step up and Colin's proposals would mean that she wouldn't have the opportunity. If I accepted his recommendations I would lose Claire to another school soon. As someone whose work I hold in high regard, this filled me trepidation.

Neither Lisa nor Faith have a warm working relationship with Colin in the way that Nicole has. At times in our meetings each has been affected by his blunt stance on matters. Tears have been shed

and voices raised. He in turn is clearly annoyed by their strategies for bringing ideas to the table, often seeming to have worked them out together beforehand. I regularly find myself discussing these matters with them individually, mediating their actions and attempting to negotiate their standing in each other's eyes. But this hasn't worked. Just weeks before Lisa told me that, when I explained Colin's actions, I appeared to be defending him. This shocked me and left me wondering what more I could do to restore harmony to our meetings.

That weekend, the weekend I was going to be putting together my response to Colin's email, something happened in my role as the trustee of a charity and the email went unanswered. Christmas came and went and the issue with the charity rumbled on, absorbing much of my spare time and energy. Still the email remained unanswered and became an elephant in the room whenever we met. Neither of us mentioned it and life went on. In a sense I was aided by the fact that Nicole had not handed in her resignation and so I couldn't, I told myself, act upon his recommendations anyway. Not very strategic of me.

Then, all of a sudden, the issue came to the fore as the other matters were resolved and Nicole's resignation letter came in. Still I did not answer the email. This was my decision I told myself. I knew Colin's thoughts, recollecting his assertion that he didn't send emails expecting an answer. Now it was time to plan and to discuss with the others, to lay the groundwork ahead of a discussion between us all. I could address some of his ideas whilst putting off the more provocative ones.

Firstly, I had a difficult conversation with Faith in which I told her my plans to take responsibility for student behaviour from her as part of the leadership team reshaping. I practised the conversation with Lisa to see whether she agreed with the idea, but also aware that Lisa would be likely to 'prep' Faith for the actual difficult conversation, making it less difficult. Lisa agreed it made sense and she thought Faith would be okay with it. Then I told Faith. She seemed to take it in her stride, saying "Of course, Kev, me being me, it is my nature to be worried that this could imply a lack of confidence in me". I waited for the tears to come. None came. A slightly disturbing period of silence followed in which I felt the familiar pressure to reassure her that my decision was not motivated by a lack of belief. I sensed that I was becoming angry with her for projecting her worries about status back on to me and, at the same time, guilty that there might be some truth in those worries.

As usual I filled the space as reassuringly as I could. "I want you to focus on inclusion. That's where your talent is and your views are closer to mine than anyone else." This was emotional blackmail, but she had started it and it was no less true for that. The hug she gave me as the meeting ended seemed to indicate relief as much as agreement. Perhaps she had expected worse or perhaps Lisa had given her the heads up.

More preparatory conversations took place, first with Nicole and then with Kay as someone else who would be affected by the decisions. All seemed well. I was on a roll, happy that my plans were falling in to place and that I was addressing many of the issues Colin had raised in his email.

The culmination of these moves was a presentation to the wider team on my thoughts about the future of the leadership team. In concluding I unveiled proposals for changes in line with the conversations I had had. I glanced nervously at Colin to see his response. Ever inscrutable, I had to wait until the very end of the discussion to have it confirmed that he agreed with the plans. As the meeting adjourned, my thoughts turned to the upcoming Team Leaders' meeting where we would thrash out the details of the recruitment process for Nicole's replacement. I felt confident all would be well.

In preparation for the meeting I sent out the reworked job description to Lisa, Faith and Colin the evening before including a change in title, from Deputy Headteacher to Vice Principal so that it would be inclusive of those, like Colin, from the support staff. This was something I anticipated would go down badly with Lisa and Faith who have previously opposed my attempts to open up leadership roles to those who are sometimes called "non-teachers". To Colin I included an apology for having ignored the now six-week old email.

Five minutes later I received an email from him in which he said that he wasn't "wanting to be overly dramatic" and that he didn't mean "any criticism" but that he was aware there had been ongoing discussions about this of which he hadn't been a part. He asserted that he had "more to lose" than anyone else and was minded not to attend the meeting. Albeit civilly worded, this was a dramatic intervention for someone normally circumspect in his emails, particularly about his feelings. It felt like a punch in the stomach and, at the same time, that somehow I must have done the same to him.

I needed to set the record straight and began composing a tortuously long response. It took me an hour to write, explaining the reasoning behind my proposals, the limited discussions with others, the reasons for not speaking with him sooner and my hopes for the meeting. By the time I finished iterating and reiterating my ideas, I felt I had found the words to reassure him, finishing with "fondest thoughts", a phrase out of keeping with our relationship. I could not have meant it more, but as I hit 'send', I realised that there would be no reply until the morning. I had spent so long on it that it had gone past his early bedtime.

As ever with Colin – early to bed and early to rise – I woke up to his response. It was warm, generous and thoughtful but concluded by telling me he did not feel he could attend the Team

Leaders' meeting in spite of my reassurances. Not attending a meeting where any decision would be made, let alone a series of crucial decisions, was unlike Colin.

Lisa and Faith looked at me quizzically when they noticed Colin's seat was unoccupied. I told them he would not be coming and why but glossed over the fact he was wary that they had already been party to decisions. Instead I told them that he was unhappy with me for the way I had gone about the process. As I responded to Lisa's incredulous "But why?" with more glossing, I couldn't help but feel that I was missing an opportunity to bring into the light the elephants in the room. We rarely have a discussion without one of us causing distress to others. We have become reliant on conducting discussion through bilateral, not multilateral, discussions. Such interactions have created an opacity of decision-making that make the meetings even more likely to cause distress. I glossed over those facts, taking the blame instead for failing to keep Colin properly informed. They let me do so. We had decisions to make and only a short time in which to make them. It didn't occur to me that we should wait until Colin was ready to participate to get the process going.

As the meeting ended I realised how smoothly it had gone, how productive it had been and how amiable it had felt. We had decided to replace Nicole, change the role to Vice Principal, change our own titles to be consistent with the new role, refocus the new team on 'Values and Professionalism', and advertise the role internally after the impending break. We hadn't argued once, even about the more contentious issues. Why weren't all of our meetings, with all of us present, like this?

The next day I went to see Colin in his office which is actually the storage room of the library. Entering it, I felt the familiar guilt that he had ended up here in a round of office moves I had organised in which Faith had taken his well-appointed office at the front of the school. At the same time, I remembered that he could have ended up somewhere better than this dark corner of the school but chose to come here in an act that seemed simultaneously self-harming and provocative.

I hadn't continued the email conversation after he had told me he wouldn't be at the meeting. Nor had I gone to see him before the meeting itself, partly because I felt that if he wasn't going to attend he would send his thoughts, but also because I felt that in not attending he forfeited the right to contribute. This sounds punitive, which it was, but they are sentiments with which he would agree, making his absence from the meeting even more concerning.

He looked tired, more tired than usual and I wondered, before pushing it from my thoughts as nonsensical, whether he had been crying. He told me he was not able to respond to events but would when he had gathered his thoughts. It was extremely awkward, moments of silence followed points where we talked at the same time. This is usual and we have come to be at ease with

uneasiness. I can't imagine myself in an embrace with him: writing "fondest thoughts" to him was already pushing it. He didn't ask about the meeting or the outcomes, and I didn't offer to tell him.

We talked about the role of Vice Principal, which was the one change I expected him to support but which he had disagreed with in his email. I asked him why. He began with his usual challenge about whether I wanted him to work fewer hours than he currently does. I countered, pointing out that he already fails to take most of his annual leave. "There must be something else," I pushed. He paused, mouth half open as if he was about to say something important. I resisted the opportunity to intervene and we held the silence for an inordinate amount of time. His eyes implored me to say something and not make him speak next. Still, I held firm and then it came. He told me how, in his previous school, the Principal had appointed him to the post of Vice Principal but, when a new boss came in, they hated the idea of a "non-teacher" in such a role and had forced him out.

Suddenly his decision not to attend the meeting made sense. He wasn't monopolising grief about the fact that Nicole was leaving. Nor was he rejecting the decision I had made to replace Nicole rather than absorb her responsibilities within the work of others. For the first time in a decade he was letting me in on something powerful for him, the kind of experience he normally determinedly separates from work. I wasn't sure how to respond and he quickly moved the conversation on. The moment was gone. I knew better to push him any further when he had already gone so far.

Moments later I bid a stilted adieu to him, one of those looking-down-at-your-feet moments when nobody quite knows what to say or how to say it. I also couldn't help feeling pity for the poor soul who chose to become a member of this so-called 'inner circle' when Nicole finally left.

[Reflections on the Narrative](#)

The narrative, focusing upon the work of my immediate team within the school, suggests that conflict is a regular feature of our work together, impacting profoundly upon our practices. This contrasts with the concept of a harmonious culture of school leadership prevalent in the dominant discourses of leadership by writers such as Day et al (1999), Yamamoto et al (2014), Gill and Arnold (2015), Steward (2014), Myatt (2016) and Raynor (2004). Earlier projects show that I have not experienced harmony in school leadership with the exception of one period of middle and early senior leadership which left me feeling ashamed about what harmony led to. In spite of this, I have come to idealise harmonious working, leading me to experience non-harmonious working with my Team Leaders as negative conflict which needs to be smoothed over. For this reason, one animating

question emerging from me is to better understand why sharing responsibility manifests itself as disagreement within our group.

The narrative demonstrates how such disagreement and conflict impacts upon how we work together. I have drawn attention to how bilateral dialogue has replaced multilateral conversation between us. These shadow conversations lead to significant anxiety for our group. Such conversations are typical in organisational life, but appear to have become a dominant way of working for us, partly because they replace disharmonious going on together and partly because they serve each of us well at times. The question is what is the cost of this bilateralism? I am interested in how far these conversations have come to revolve around me, with each of us playing into the idea of my being the 'man of the house'. The second theme for my inquiry will therefore be about why my team leaders avoid engaging with our differences at meetings in favour of shadow conversations and what the impact of this might be for us.

Sharing Responsibility by Distributing Leadership

In my first project I concluded that the view of responsibility I have held for most of my professional life, caring for others by doing the 'right' thing, was problematic and constraining others in exercising their responsibilities. The same theme recurred in my second project in which I recognised that responsibility is not individual or social, but is both at the same time. Negotiating competing values and ideas of the good necessarily involves conflict with others who are also responsible. Although I have experienced a significant movement in my thinking, the narrative in this project demonstrates that I still struggle with the implications of sharing responsibility with others in spite of these insights. For this reason, gaining a greater understanding of how my team acts when sharing responsibility remains an animating question for me in researching my management practice.

Distributed Leadership in Theory

In project one I outlined how I came to reject many 'typical' school leadership techniques and tools as a result of being ashamed at how they were exercised during my first years on a leadership team. I explained at length how I had come to value agentic approaches in leading groups of people that I had come to see as a form of 'bottom-up' leadership. I outlined how I created a cadre of 'Pedagogy Leaders' from outside the leadership team and supported them in developing the school's policies and practices with regard to teaching and learning. In doing so I formed a sub-team of the school leadership team, one that included people from middle leadership positions and those with no formal responsibilities.

Such was the success of this, and so rewarding was it for me, that when I became headteacher I used this sub-team structure as a blueprint for the work of the leadership team. Instead of having the leadership team function as a committee for making all decisions about the management of the school, which is the usual practice in schools, I created my Team Leader group and asked them to work with others in the organisation who would not normally have the opportunity to influence whole-school policies and practices directly. As well as working with other members of the leadership team, they were to involve middle leaders and, particularly, grassroots leaders (those seconded into leadership responsibilities) so that many more voices might be heard in the decision-making processes of running the school. In establishing this structure I was drawing upon research literature on 'distributed leadership'.

Distributed Leadership became influential in school leadership in the early part of this century. The distributed leadership approach was a reaction against what had come to be seen as 'heroic' forms of leadership by school headteachers whose individual traits and decision-making skills had been seen as necessary in driving school improvement. Instead advocates for more distributed forms of leadership stressed the importance of headteachers involving others, particularly those not in hierarchical leadership positions, to help build greater capacity for change within their schools. Not only would headteachers be able to improve outcomes for students, they would also develop better leadership skills across their staff and, with this, greater commitment to their schools by those who might one day become positional leaders within the school hierarchy. Having read much of this literature and put it into practice with my team of Pedagogy Leaders, the challenge emerging from this narrative is why sharing responsibility through distributed leadership is now so fraught with difficulty that we struggle to find a way to come together and discuss, let alone agree, ways forward with each other in running the school.

One of the academics who developed the concept of distributed leadership is Peter Gronn, an Emeritus Professor of Education at Cambridge University. Gronn (2002) was disturbed by what he perceived to be an increasing dominance in mainstream literature about stand-alone and heroic forms of school leadership as well as an emerging anti-leadership bias in critical management literature. He argued instead for a more social form of authority within schools, arguing that school leadership has become significantly more complex in recent decades. This complexity is reflected in my school since it became an academy in 2011, a status which gives the headteacher legal responsibility for the site, buildings, finance and human resources, as well as for the education of children. These are areas of my overall responsibility for which I am particularly dependent on Colin as the school's Business Manager. Such new responsibilities, argues Gronn, mean that there is more

need for headteachers to differentiate and integrate a range of competing managerial workstreams.

This has led to:

Emerging new forms of role interdependence and coordination which have resulted in distributed patterns of leadership. (Gronn, 2002, p428)

Instead of solo leadership, Gronn believes that school settings are the source of what he terms “numerical action” in which some, many, or all of the school staff (ibid, p429) are engaged in leadership practices. Alongside this, schools are arenas in which “concertive action” between leaders makes distributed leadership more than the sum of its parts. For Gronn, distributed leadership can take the form of spontaneous collaboration between actors within schools which can, in turn, lead to intuitive working relations, but it is most effective when it is embedded within what he terms “institutionalised arrangements” (ibid). Such institutionalised arrangements can be designed and implemented by those in formal leadership roles, which reflects the way in which I came to create the Team Leader grouping and the teams they lead.

Gronn refers to interactions within distributed leadership as representing “conjoint agency”.

Conjoint agency means that agents synchronise their actions by having regard to their own plans, those of their peers, and their sense of unit membership. (ibid, p431)

Although he is positive about the power of such synchronicity to help form synergies within schools, Gronn recognises distributed leadership as potentially problematic for school leaders because of its cross-hierarchical nature in which role boundaries are blurred or expanded. This is particularly so for headteachers who have a contractual authority that means their relationships with others are “disjoint, rather than conjoint” (ibid). At the same time headteachers rely upon subordinates to facilitate institutionalised arrangements for distributing leadership. Distributed leadership is also laced with tension where authority is segmented, as is the case with the Team Leaders who hold responsibility for different key elements of the school. Such organisational arrangements can leave “multiple agents, pursuing different objectives in fluid relationships” (ibid, p441). Gronn argues that this can lead to disputes about jurisdictional authority and the pursuit of alliances by agents.

It is these last two points that most resonate with my reflections on the narrative. I recognise the disjointed nature of the Team Leader grouping as we enact a distributed approach to leadership. Faith’s interaction with me about her change in role is one example. Although we had discussed the matter on a number of occasions, it was clear that she did not want to lose responsibility for student behaviour. It was a decision I felt that I had to make because student behaviour appeared to be worsening and staff at the school were increasingly unhappy with the lack of effectiveness of the

systems we were using to help them manage it. The timing of the arrangement alongside recruitment of a team member was opportune for me. For Faith, the same timing meant she was effectively being replaced by someone yet to be appointed, which may have been more anxiety-inducing for her. My discomfort during this interaction perhaps reflects a feeling that in making and enforcing a decision with which I knew she was unhappy, from a hierarchically superior position, I was behaving in a way that was antithetical to my interpretation of Gronn's synergistic notion of distributed leadership, something I had come to see as implying equal authority.

The narrative also shows examples of the potentially problematic pursuit of alliances that fragmented my team. I refer to how I used one of these, between Lisa and Faith, to my advantage but the relationship between Colin and Kay is more problematic for me as he, in his original email, pushed an agenda that she had already elaborated with me. This could explain why I was unwilling to respond directly to his email. This would appear to contradict Gronn's notions of synchronicity and synergy being symptomatic of distributed leadership, although it is also notable that events since the narrative have seen Nicole's successor, Claire, form a strong working relationship with Colin who was initially making the argument not to appoint her.

One of Gronn's key assumptions is that a designed form of distributed leadership can be knowingly constructed as 'institutionalised arrangements' by headteachers in order to create synergies. Gronn takes a systems approach to leadership where headteachers can step outside of the context in which they work to create a functioning system from complex interdependencies through structural alignment. As shown by my shadow conversations about replacing Nicole, I found myself unable to step outside of ongoing relationships with the Team Leaders and their competing versions of what we should do next. For their part, these shadow conversations demonstrate the political nature of school leadership in that each of them proposed ways forward that would further their agendas or help strengthen their allegiances.

The struggles I had in negotiating these competing interests led me to forgo the obvious approaches I could have taken, such as sitting down with my Team Leaders to thrash out collective agreement on the matters in hand. Instead I took an approach, through shadow conversations, involving a lot of work and a large degree of subterfuge. This is perhaps a reflection of how far I have absorbed the assumptions of distributed leadership that it was my responsibility to design the institutionalised arrangements which somehow would make everyone happy and more effective in their roles. Had I not involved them in bilateral discussions, I might have brought the 'distributed' nature of my work into question. Had I met with them all in a multilateral discussion, and failed to help us find a way forward together, it might have brought the 'leadership' nature of my work into question.

This is perhaps the key insight I have gained into Gronn's assumptions about distributed leadership. In asserting the designability of distributed leadership practices, Gronn falls back on the insufficient heroic leadership models that he was countering in the first place. Whilst a headteacher who takes a distributive approach may be less inspirational or dictatorial, and more collaboratively-minded, than those taking a heroic approach to leadership, for Gronn there remains the belief that they will be transformational in designing their schools.

The phrase 'distributed leadership' has a contradictory, rather than paradoxical, quality to it that leaves headteachers who are attempting to use Gronn's theoretical insights with the burden of being in charge and yet not in charge, rather than being both at the same time. The narrative reflects the challenges this poses for headteachers, who are expected to be the distributive designer but not the heroic leader, and the impact upon others in the school who are left uncertain about what is distributed, and therefore negotiable, and what is not. Little wonder that my team could not find a way forward together when faced with an issue of profound importance and disagreement.

Distributed Leadership in Practice

Gronn recognised that, rather than being a fully realised theory of leadership, his contribution proposed a new unit of analysis for studying research into leadership. However, his ideas were rapidly taken up by academics and by the British government during the 2000s. When I began my work as Assistant Headteacher in 2005 it had become so dominant amongst theories of educational leadership that it became a core strand of the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) that I started the following year. At that time, I researched the theory for a project I was undertaking to build student leadership opportunities at my school. The most prominent academic I came across whose work shaped my understanding of distributed leadership, was Alma Harris, a Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy.

In 2003 Harris wrote an article on distributed leadership with the subtitle "heresy, fantasy or possibility?" She concludes that distributed leadership is a possibility and links it to complexity theory stressing, like Gronn, its emergent and interdependent nature. She argues that:

Leadership can therefore only be understood in relation to shared or invented meanings within an organisation [which] represent the prevailing values, norms, philosophy, rules and climate of the organisation, in other words its culture. (Harris, 2003, p314)

Building upon Gronn's work, she argues for the wide sharing of leadership responsibilities as being both empowering and democratic in nature, in contrast to command and control models of

leadership, because power is relinquished by school leaders. Given my socialist roots and disrespect for authority described in project one, this form of leadership approach resonated strongly with me, appearing to represent a shift from the controlling tools and techniques that had shamed me during early senior leadership. Harris' claim that distribution is not delegation seemed to offer me something for which I was looking.

In another article Harris gives examples, drawn from empirical studies, of the theory of distributed leadership in practice. Again, she stresses the importance of school culture to the project:

Distributed leadership...means multiple sources of guidance and direction, following the contours of expertise in an organisation, made coherent through a common culture. (Harris, 2004, p14)

Harris claims that distributed leadership in the case study schools had led to improved student outcomes and enhanced teacher self-efficacy and morale. Whilst claiming that distributed leadership generates collective agency, Harris recognises the urgent need for support from those in positional authority. She stresses the vital role of transformational headteachers who lead "the cognitive and the affective lives of the school" (ibid, p16). Squaring these claims with her earlier argument for relinquishing authority, Harris writes that these headteachers were:

Demonstrating distributed leadership but paradoxically in a 'top-down' way. (ibid, p19)

Harris goes on to describe this top-down approach to distributed leadership in ways that point to it being more of a contradiction than a paradox. Like Gronn, Harris acknowledges that headteachers must contend with significant barriers to implementing distributed leadership. The empowerment of those without positional responsibility can generate anxiety and a feeling of vulnerability for those who occupy such positions. This may explain the concerns of both Colin and Faith about the promotion of someone new to our team. For Colin this manifested itself in his radical solution of not appointing someone, with him taking on the resulting workload. For Faith it may explain her reluctance to let go of one of her key areas of responsibility to the new member of our team. There are also challenges for those taking on distributed leadership who may face hostility, insecurity and estrangement from others. Events following those in the narrative reflected this with the new postholder, Claire, having to negotiate such feelings of hostility and estrangement from both those in our team and others within the school. The solution to such problems, for Harris, lies in the development of "strong interpersonal skills" by advocates of distributed leadership, and a "school culture" that supports the resultant organisational changes.

I concluded the previous section on Gronn's work by drawing attention to the problem of who distributes leadership when the headteacher is required not to be heroic as a leader. The insights of Harris similarly draw attention to the challenges I have faced within the Team Leader grouping. She argues that the 'paradox' inherent in a headteacher-led distributive approach is resolved through interpersonal skills and a strong school culture. This is problematic as it means that the theory of distributed leadership, which has the intention of rejecting an individualistic form of leadership, falls back on precisely such a way of thinking. It is also problematic because, in my lived experience of headship, falling back on individualistic approaches has not helped. Although I am seen as possessing effective interpersonal skills and a commitment to the culture of an ethic of care within the school, the narrative shows how others within my team continue to come into conflict with each other. The anxieties about the lack of agreement within the team are further located with me, representing a personal failure in harmonising these relationships and in leading the culture of the school. The fact that Colin felt unable to attend the meeting thus felt to me, at the time, as being a strategic failure to implement distributed leadership effectively, and as being a personal failure to recognise his contribution to our collective work in leading the school.

I can recognise however that Colin perhaps felt the same way about his inability to communicate his views within a supposedly distributed leadership paradigm. The fact that he emailed me directly his perspective on how to replace Nicole, rather than the team as a whole, suggests that he did not feel the democratic empowerment about which Harris writes. My attempts to negotiate his views with others, using my interpersonal skills in shadow conversations, excluded him and heightened his anxieties. This may have been compounded by my emphasising a culture of distribution of which he did not feel a part, exacerbating his feelings of isolation and unimportance to the discussion. My application of Harris' top-down solutions to the challenges of distributed leadership may have unintentionally worsened anxiety within the team and led Colin to conclude that there was no point attending the meeting.

Harris' work on distributed leadership is premised upon the creation, existence and maintenance of a school culture although she pays little attention to identifying how this is achieved or what she understands culture to be. What is clear from her analysis is that the headteacher is ultimately responsible for the distribution of leadership, sometimes through permitting ad hoc groups to continue their work but largely through actively developing of a distributed leadership 'culture'. This renders her argument circular and, like Gronn's, curiously reliant upon the authority of the headteacher to create a system that is not reliant on the authority of the headteacher. Neither author discusses at length the issue of power within a distributed leadership approach led by the person with positional authority in the school, although both admit that it has relevance. In the next

section, therefore, I will turn to an author whose critique of distributed leadership is rooted in the issues of power and control that Harris and Gronn suggest can be widely shared.

Distributed Leadership and Power

Jacky Lumby, an Emeritus Professor of Education, is an academic whose interests in diversity, equity and power have led her to very different insights about distributed leadership. She recognises that it has become the dominant theory for school leaders and those writing about school leadership, but believes it creates a “mirage” of an “apolitical workplace” whilst maintaining the status quo of power relations within schools (Lumby, 2013, p582). She asserts that distributed leadership is a rebranding of the traditional work of headteachers who have always developed leadership skills in colleagues and asked them to take on responsibility. She sees this rebranding as an attempt to make leadership seem more inclusive but calls it “inclusivity lite” (ibid, p589) because it does not alleviate traditional power relations within schools. In fact, it does much to obscure such relations.

In its avoidance of issues of power, distributed leadership is a profoundly political phenomenon, replete with uses and abuses of power. (ibid, p592)

In a more recent article Lumby argues against distributed leadership as a panacea in educational leadership theory, recognising it instead as representing an anti-bureaucratic tendency by contemporary educational theorists. She believes it seeks to replace notions of obedience and conformity, which are seen as typical of bureaucracy, with concepts such as empowerment and autonomy. This is not a tenable argument for Lumby who argues that school staff are neither entirely autonomous nor entirely obedient:

Consensus is a fine thing, but even a cursory knowledge about staff meetings and corridor conversations brings an understanding that empowerment and autonomy cannot be assumed to lead to agreed action. (Lumby, 2017, p9)

She asserts that whilst bureaucracy is not perfect, it offers “sophisticated balances, checks and protections” (ibid, p14) for a reasonably ethical use of power. Distributed leadership as a managerial practice does not allow space for such resistance. Its lack of a clear definition is one reason for this as is the fact that power is glossed over by opaque terms such as ‘democratic’ and ‘emergent’. But it is with regard to the “persistence of hierarchy” (ibid, p10) by those in formal roles that distributed leadership is most dishonest and most threatening for Lumby. She argues that distributed leadership exponents portray it as a “zero-sum game” (ibid, p12) in which positional leaders give away power so others might have it. Drawing from the qualitative evidence supporting distributed

leadership, however, she finds numerous examples which are indicative of school leaders augmenting their power by empowering others whilst retaining control through their authority role. In advocating and enacting such an approach, theorists and practitioners of distributed leadership make a claim to symmetrical power that “appears wilfully disingenuous” (ibid, p13).

Lumby’s critical insights into distributed leadership allow me to think differently about events recounted in my narrative. Instead of seeing the conflict between the Team Leader grouping as reflecting vulnerability, I can see that they are perhaps more a reflection of the frustration, on all our parts, caused by the rebranding of standard managerial practices as being distributed leadership. In choosing a pathway between the competing versions of how to recruit Nicole’s replacement, I was exercising the authority vested in me by my positional role within the school hierarchy. By conceptualising our collective approach to leadership as being distributed, however, I was inviting the others to take a position that they felt had more weight than perhaps it did. This may be particularly true of Colin who saw his well-intended proposals ignored for many weeks and then, after secretive negotiations of which he was aware but not involved, completely rejected.

Similarly, my frustrations with them, and my decision to negotiate with them separately, may have been symptomatic of my resistance to terms such as obedience and conformity that Lumby says are anathema to the grammar of distributed leadership. My speaking to Lisa before meeting with Faith can be seen to be, more consciously than unconsciously, a method for ensuring Faith’s obedience and compliance when we met. Indeed, the whole range of shadow conversations which I held in the lead up to the decision-making meeting were designed to ensure that there would be as little conflict as possible at the meeting, and this perhaps served my interests better than it did those of my Team Leaders. Whilst I had to sacrifice some aspects of my own wishes in doing so, it also meant I was able to achieve most of what I wanted.

A key assumption underpinning Lumby’s critique of distributed leadership is that she clearly sees power as a thing which leaders possess. Although she criticises advocates of distributed leadership for seeing power as a zero-sum game in which it can be given away, she herself argues that distributed leadership is a means by which the powerful can consolidate their authority within schools. In doing so, she suggests that the trump cards are held by those in positional authority. My narrative would seem to suggest that something more complex is going on between me and my Team Leader group with power being neither given away by me, as I may previously have claimed, but also not being augmented by me through the interactions I have recounted.

Lumby’s recognition of the uncritical adoption of distributed leadership in schools suggests why I have found the events recounted in the narrative problematic. She argues that a paradigm shift in

the attitudes of those who believe in the concept is needed because it is hard for them to “shake off the emotional hold of the concept” (ibid, p15). Through distributed leadership I found a conceptual underpinning to my work as a school leader that appeared successful at a time when I was working with others much lower in the school hierarchy. This belief system survived a period when I was ashamed of my work as a senior leader, whereas other approaches were jettisoned. This is because it more comfortably reflected ways of thinking I had held for many years. With the Team Leaders I have increasingly questioned my work alongside others, their motives, and the relationships between us without challenging the beliefs underpinning my approach with them.

Having held such beliefs for well over a decade, I have come to understand through this inquiry the problematic nature of distributed leadership. I am not alone in this. Gronn, writing well over a decade after his initial advocacy of distributed leadership, argues that he has “become a sceptic” (Gronn, 2016, p168). In particular, he recognises that advocating a pluralist approach to school leadership that is dependent upon the positional leader of the school was “the attempted reconciliation of two irreconcilables” (ibid, p169). Instead he now proposes a more nuanced recognition of leadership as complex, something both individual and collective, arguing that distributed leadership simply replaces the word ‘leader’ with ‘leaders’ without qualitatively exploring what that difference might mean.

Thus far my inquiry has helped me to understand that sharing responsibility does not necessarily lead to harmonious working even, or perhaps especially, when it is done under the banner of distributed leadership. Taking a distributed leadership approach can lead to confusion about who of the many leaders possesses authority, potentially engendering conflict beyond that which would be expected from a less distributed view of authority. At other times a distributed leadership approach requires the headteacher to step in and exert authority in ways that are contradictory to the stated aims of the theory. This may aggravate feelings of disharmony for all those involved in sharing the responsibility of leading schools. In the remainder of this project I will seek to explore what a more paradoxical understanding of school leadership means in relation to the narrative.

[Acting Together in Sharing Responsibility](#)

Earlier projects demonstrated the challenges I find seeing responsibility as being both individual and social at the same time. Much of this rests, I realised in project two, on an idealistic view I have held of responsibility as caring for others. The narrative in this project outlines how I have held an equally idealised view of responsibility being enacted through the agency of others. In this inquiry I have come to better understand how my adoption of distributed leadership reflects this idealisation

of “conjoint agency”. My analysis reveals that this may have had an impact on the nature of Team Leaders’ interactions with each other, but also demonstrates that our interactions can be seen as typical of normal bureaucratic practice. The idea that a distributed leadership approach was behind what was going for us is a “mirage”, covering over power relationships within our Team Leader group. I want now to better understand the dynamics we are caught up in together by resorting to bilateral conversations rather than multilateral dialogue.

Acting Together as a Double-Bind

Both Gronn and Harris articulate the belief that distributed leadership is an emergent phenomenon that reflects the increasing levels of interdependence in contemporary school life, and yet both authors struggle to explain conflict within a distributed leadership paradigm. Ultimately both end up falling back on the individualism of heroic headteachers that they begin by rejecting, suggesting that distributed leadership theory is paradoxically dependent upon the traits and skills, particularly the interpersonal skills, of those in positional leadership. Lumby counters by arguing that distributed leadership is an anti-bureaucratic tendency that leaves no space for resistance and the checks and balances to power that are inherent in bureaucratic structures.

In *Reflections on a Life*, Norbert Elias articulates a view of human interdependence that is more in keeping with Lumby’s beliefs in checks and balances than the claims of distributed leadership.

Groups capable of governing, have manoeuvred themselves into a double-bind figuration. For fear of being overwhelmed by the other side, each of these groups tries to overwhelm the other, or at least to become stronger than it, and thus to attain a position of hegemony. Each finds itself in a dilemma which dictates its moves. (Elias, 1994, p148)

In talking about a double-bind, Elias is referring to the ways in which individuals within groups, and groups within groups, are both acting and reacting at the same time to the actions and reactions of others, making their interactions together neither entirely predictable nor entirely unpredictable. Social relations are being constantly, unendingly negotiated and renegotiated, which threatens the status of individuals, or groups, and their relations with others. The notion of a double-bind evokes the knottiness of the problem of shared responsibility such as the examples recounted in my narrative, knots that could not be disentangled by my acting alone or in bilateral conversations with individual Team Leaders. Elias employs similar imagery in talking about interdependence as being web-like (Elias in van Krieken, 1998, p57), in which the balance of power is pulled in all directions with unpredictable effects elsewhere in the figuration.

Elias' belief in these fluctuations in power relationships came from his work on *The Court Society* and *The Civilising Process*. They stem from historical analysis of medieval courtly manners and their evolution during the period of state formation. He pays attention to positional authority within figurations but warns against the assumption that such positional authority ensures a greater degree of control. On the one hand, the medieval ruler had nobles dependent on him who could be replaced easily from a "reserve army" of others (van Krieken, 1998, p91). On the other hand, the same ruler is required to minutely supervise the kingdom which is always at risk as a result of changes in the balance of tensions (Elias, 2000, p341). The multiplicity of shadow conversations that I have described, which are not untypical of my work at school, can be seen as examples of such minute supervision. My intention in having such conversations, I have come to realise, is both to prevent dispute breaking out into the open and to ensure that my authority is not completely overwhelmed by others.

Elias claims that the civilising process has meant that conflict between people has been internalised within people acting together as part of figurations, including those in contemporary bureaucracies. He recognises this as a historical process by which individuals have come to regulate their conduct in an increasingly stable manner to the point where such conduct becomes a "self-compulsion that he or she cannot resist even if he or she constantly wishes to" (ibid, p367). Interdependence between individuals within figurations enables the self-constraint shown by each person acting with hindsight and foresight about the nature of their interactions (ibid, p374). At the same time the action of individuals is constrained by the regulation of emotional responses. This can produce "atrophy" in the performance of social functions (ibid, p375), such as my inability to respond to Colin's email and his inability to attend the meeting. This is a far cry from the 'strong interpersonal skills' that Harris claims are needed to ensure the success of distributed leadership.

Elias suggests that the doubly-bound nature of our social interactions in groups provokes anxiety for managers who seek escape from incessant conflicts, idealising organisations as places where peaceful cooperation can be achieved without the problems caused by others determined to wreck such harmony. He argues that one approach managers take in seeking peace and harmony is to reduce power differentials between themselves and others, and between others, in their organisations. Gronn's claims for synergistic 'conjoint agency' and Harris belief in the 'collective agency' engendered by a distributed leadership approach reflect this idealisation of harmony through greater equality. Elias, however, concludes that reducing power differentials has the opposite effect, increasing the "intensity of tensions and the frequency of open conflicts" (Elias, van Krieken & Dunning, 1997, p359).

Elias' insights help me understand the way in which my narrative describes tensions within the Team Leader group as we exercise shared responsibility. In contrast to Lumby's 'zero-sum game' view, a 'balance of tensions' approach explains how Lisa, Faith and Colin each played a significant role in events. Colin's refusal to attend the meeting, therefore, was not simply a defensive response to my having side-lined him in negotiations. It was also an offensive act. By not attending he preserved his integrity as a powerful person within the organisation and challenged the legitimacy of the discussions that had taken place and any decisions taken at the meeting. At the same time Colin sought my thoughts about his ideas of the good in his initial email, and Faith was able to openly question my belief in her competence. This suggests that my colleagues value my insights as well as being capable of offering their own, seeking to influence and be influenced by me. The fact that we have become increasingly dependent on doing so privately, in shadow conversations, rather than publicly within team meetings does not mean that we are not doubly-bound to one another. Instead, it points to a difficulty we have come to experience and share in how we manage the tensions and conflict that such plural action necessarily involves.

The Public Realm

The work of Harris, in contrast to Elias, covers over the tensions and conflicts between leaders. She claims that distributed leadership is instead democratic and empowering and I have explained how this has been important for me as a headteacher because it reflects my patterned political ways of thinking. She also argues that distributed leadership improves staff efficacy and morale, an assertion made based on the results of attitudinal surveys, which was also important to me given my idealisation of an ethic of care in my work as headteacher. My narrative, however, reflects a situation in which shared responsibility was negotiated through bilateral discussions which lacked the open conflict, but also the transparency, of our collective discussions. What emerges from these interactions is shown to be neither empowering of others nor good for the morale of any of us involved. Although our intentions were to find a good solution to a problematic situation, by acting in the shadows, we were unable to openly negotiate with one another our differing ideas of the good. This is a far cry from the democratic ideal espoused by Harris.

In *The Human Condition* Hannah Arendt, who was acutely concerned with the importance of political action, draws a distinction between the private and public realms based on her analysis of ancient Athenian society. For her the private realm is a place of singularity where one voice controls the interactions of others in the same way as the private citizen in Athens controlled his family and slaves within the private sphere of his home. This strongly reminds me of the heroic headship

approaches that Harris and Gronn sought to challenge but which, as I have argued earlier, they fall back upon in stressing the necessity for a strong school leader to ensure the distribution of leadership. Lumby calls this 'inclusivity lite', an argument supported by the events in my narrative in which none of my Team Leaders were able to openly negotiate their ideas with one another. By bringing them into one-to-one shadow conversations with me, I was engaging in private rather than public negotiations and leaving no space for the resistance that Lumby argues is vital for effective and equitable bureaucratic processes. It is also notable that they too opted not to press me to hold a more open and inclusive form of discussion and decision-making about the issues they raised and clearly felt strongly about.

Arendt's model of the public realm is drawn from her understanding of the Athenian polis, in which common sense and objectivity are achieved through purposeful, sometimes painful, collective negotiation of competing goods. It is political in nature and intent, and it is achieved through collaborative action in plural groups. This was of vital importance to Arendt who had witnessed first-hand the profound impact of the loss of a public space for political action in Nazi Germany. The result of this loss of public space, occupied by plural actors, led to totalitarianism with its consequent effects of loss of power, citizenship and lives for those deemed unworthy by the regime. Thus, the concept of plurality as a bulwark against totalitarianism informs Arendt's understanding of the public realm of political action. Like Elias she sees plurality as both social and individual at the same time:

In man, otherness, which he shares with everything that is, and distinctness, which he shares with everything alive, becomes uniqueness, and human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings. (Arendt, 1958, p176)

This belief stands in stark contrast to the work of Harris, who repeatedly falls back on the need to establish a 'school culture' to support distributed leadership, one led by the headteacher who, for her, is the leader of the 'cognitive and affective lives' of the school. Otherness, distinctness and uniqueness are seen as less important than distributed leadership's 'mirage' of an apolitical workplace, as Lumby terms it. This perhaps goes some way in explaining why my interactions with my colleagues saw us unable to explore our differences and plural perspectives on the issues which we faced and chose to interact in private settings. In many regards it was as if we were seeking to pay homage to a school culture of harmonious and apolitical working rather than to explore those differences and plural perspectives.

Arendt also shares with Elias the belief that action within pluralities is political and therefore generates the unexpected (ibid, p178) because individuals cannot act with full knowledge of what their intentions will lead to or what their effects will be. This is because speech, which Arendt saw

as essential to the human condition of action, “fall[s] into an already existing web” and starts a new process in which “action almost never achieves its purpose” (ibid, p184). Such action in the public realm produces new stories unrelated to the intentions of the speaker. This, for Arendt, is the price of plurality and it is one worth paying. My narrative reveals how each of us attempted to control the decision-making process through bilateral discussions, perhaps assuming that to do so privately might be more likely to bring our intentions to fruition where multilateral discussion would not. This could explain why Colin chose to email his ideas personally to me, why I sought to persuade Lisa about my decision to change Faith’s role before speaking to Faith herself, and why Faith tried to change my decision by referring to my putative lack of belief in her. We left ourselves closed to the ‘new stories’ of which Arendt writes, each attempting to assert our own notions of the good.

I have suggested earlier that engaging in bilateral conversations, instead of negotiating these challenges together, might be problematic for us as we share responsibility together. The insights I have gained from Arendt provide some support for this but also challenge how I have come to think about these conversations. She argues that action “can never be reliably confined to two partners” (ibid, p190), by which I had assumed she meant that one-to-one discussions were not representative of the public realm of political action. I have come to see that Arendt’s perspective does not dismiss bilateral discussions as examples of purposive political action into the plurality. In Arendt’s quote about action not being reliably confined to two partners, the emphasis ought to be on the word ‘reliably’. On the one hand, this lack of reliability may suggest that partners in bilateral discussions ought not to consider such agreements as reliable: they can be later altered through interaction with others. On the other hand, bilateral agreements may become less reliable for school leaders over time: they may cease to be effective through repeated use. My narrative demonstrates that there is some merit in both of these interpretations.

The shadow conversations recounted in my narrative can be seen as political action rather than as symptomatic of a total breakdown of communication between us. Whilst Lumby argues that distributed leadership leaves no space for resistance or the application of checks and balances within an organisation, my narrative points to a number of ways in which my colleagues resisted each other and me through these one-to-one conversations. In many respects, such interactions can be seen to have been successful as we came to the necessary decisions in order to organise the appointment of a colleague. Later events also demonstrated the way in which we found a way forward together.

Two weeks later, Lisa, Faith and Colin sat together with me as we argued about whether to appoint Claire to Nicole’s position. Although he had requested not to be involved, I told Colin that I wanted and needed his input to such an important decision and he agreed to do so. The argument was

heated and we divided along the usual lines. In the end though we all agreed the appointment. Since then, Colin has established a productive rapport with Claire reminiscent of his working relationship with Nicole. These outcomes, achieved initially through shadow conversations, show that political action in the public realm can be conducted through bilateral discussion without causing lasting harm to others. In the end the decisions made bilaterally required us to work together multilaterally. The collective discussion during the appointment of Nicole's replacement was in part a product of my reflections and reflexive inquiry into the shadow conversations. Without this it is possible that my preferred way of trying to reduce conflict might have led me to complete the recruitment process without Colin.

Acting Together in the Public Realm

Margaret Canovan, Arendt's biographer, suggests that the political thinker's views are similar to those of Elias in that Arendt saw political action as a balance of tensions in which individuals within groups are paradoxically both frustrated and enabled by the very plurality of their work together.

For this reason:

Action, to Arendt, is therefore not simply a blessing but a problem and an agenda. (Canovan, 1992, p276-7)

In previous projects I showed how I have routinely personalised this sense of political action as my blessing and my problem, not ours. This reflects the way in which I have internalised responsibility for the interactions in school and within my team, particularly those interactions which involve conflict. This has been influenced by my adherence to the principles of distributed leadership which Harris argues is made successful by the interpersonal skills of the headteacher and his or her creation of a strong 'school culture'. It is not a big leap to consider that the reverse is true and that a failure of distributed leadership represents a failure of the interpersonal skills and culture-creation of such a headteacher. I have therefore often wondered what I could have done differently to avoid conflict between us. I have considered less what others could have done, and paid little to no attention to the idea that such tensions might simply be an inevitable part of organisational life. This is perhaps symptomatic of the impact of leadership theories that focus on the transformational qualities of the leader or the transcendental qualities of a harmonious culture that a leader is expected to create. This is perhaps what Lumby means when she talks of the emotional hold distributed leadership has on school leaders.

Arendt argues against the idea of an authority that transcends the power of the plurality acting together in the public realm because it prevents us paying close attention to “the elementary problems of human living together” (Arendt, 1977, p141). Like Elias, she does not see power as something possessed by individuals but as something that can only emerge between people acting together in the political realm. For Arendt, privatised power threatens to undermine the public realm by leaving political communities impotent. This is true even when it is done benevolently as caring responsibility for others. Although the bilateral conversations shown in my narrative can be seen as being examples of political power, there is the possibility that the overuse of such shadow conversations might pose an existential threat for us. We would do well to heed Arendt’s insight that “power cannot be stored up and kept in reserve for emergencies” (Arendt, 1958, p200) because, as a group of school leaders, we have pressing matters to confront together that require us to work together in order to look after the interests of those for whom we are jointly responsible.

Arendt argues that it is in the interplay of differing political viewpoints within the public realm of action that power is generated because opposing perspectives can function as checks and balances on each other (ibid, p201). This echoes exactly the words of Jacky Lumby in arguing against distributed leadership which she says is ‘disingenuous’ in claiming democratic empowerment whilst serving to augment the power of positional leaders. Arendt would only go so far with Lumby on this given her belief in power as only being achievable through plural action. Power for Arendt cannot be augmented by leaders but can only be lost where plural action is squeezed out of the public domain. Although the shadow conversations we engaged in acted as checks and balances by proxy, they removed the authors of competing viewpoints from the conversations and disagreements about their proposals. Each of us sought to avoid the tensions we feel when acting together in the public realm of our Team Leader meetings. But such tensions are less problematic than they may seem. A much greater threat to the power of our Team Leader group would be either a failure to communicate with each other at all or to communicate in ways that prioritised harmony and complete agreement. Instead, as Canovan points out, Arendt believed:

Unanimity is neither probable nor desirable... In so far as unanimity does occur, it seemed to her a danger signal, a sign that people had ceased to think. (Canovan, 1992, p227)

At the time of writing this project, Arendt’s insights about the potentially beneficial aspects of a lack of unanimity gave me hope. I took them to mean that conflict in the Team Leader group, conducted through bilateral conversation, could be seen as indicative of our willingness to challenge and be challenged by each other, preserving our ability to think. Since that time, with the benefit of

reflection and reflexive thinking about the cost of such negotiations in the shadows, things have changed significantly.

At a meeting of the Team Leaders, I shared the insights emerging from this project and we discussed the personal costs of the approach we had been taking. Colin was missing, this time for professional reasons. Knowing I would share his thoughts in his absence, he had outlined to me his view that the group had outlasted its usefulness and ought to be ended. Taking this as our starting point, Lisa shared how the shadow conversations had left her feeling isolated from others and exhausted in the process. Faith concurred. Claire's insights were the most telling. She articulated the personal cost of being within the wider leadership team but outside the Team Leader grouping, describing how useless it had made her feel, how problematic she had found the opacity of what was Team Leader business and what was not, and how these feelings had left her feeling that she needed to leave the school because of how unhappy they made her. I outlined my concerns; that an attempt to create a perfect version of distributed leadership had paradoxically led to a situation in which I became more, not less, crucial to every decision made. Citing a colleague who had suggested I was likely to have a heart attack if I continued working this way, I outlined my preference to find a healthier way of agreeing to disagree.

We decided Colin was right and disbanded the Team Leader group. Since then, all decisions about the leadership of the school have been taken by the leadership team as a whole. Peculiarly this involves a greater distribution of leadership activity than was ever the case when we were prioritising a Distributed Leadership approach. With thirteen members of the wider team, this is not always easy and is rarely unanimous. There are still divisions and, no doubt, shadow conversations continue to proliferate. Ultimately, though, more voices contribute to debates which may be more indicative of political action conducted in the public realm.

Conclusions

In this project I sought to understand why sharing responsibility manifests itself as disagreement within the Team Leader grouping. This led me to consider the impact of taking a 'distributed leadership' approach in the formation of the group. I considered the way in which supporters of distributed leadership seek to resolve the paradox of a headteacher-led approach to shared responsibility. On the one hand, they recognise that anxieties are inherent in a distributed approach to leadership, particularly in terms of conflicts over jurisdictional authority and a tendency to build alliances by those with shared responsibility for school leadership. On the other hand, they stress the benefits of a distributed approach in achieving high levels of synergy between those same school

leaders. Responsibility for resolving this paradox is located with headteachers who can design and implement a distributed leadership architecture by appealing to a supportive school culture, using interpersonal skills and being transformational in their appeals to others.

My analysis suggests that distributed leadership is idealistic. It appeals to anti-bureaucratic instincts and a resistance to conceptualising authority as demanding obedience or conformity, even though these are natural facets of organisational life without which schools would cease to function. The distributed leadership paradigm is built upon the irreconcilable notion that power is best shared by headteachers willing to relinquish their authority. In reality, the belief in distributed leadership can result in conflictual working relationships in which nobody is quite certain about who carries authority for making decisions. This is potentially exacerbated when the positional leader makes decisions that others would expect to be distributed in line with the philosophy they are espousing. For these reasons, educational theorists such as Lumby and one of distributed leadership's earliest proponents, Gronn, have sought to dissociate themselves from distributed leadership. As the narrative shows, their criticisms have not yet impacted upon school leadership practice.

This project also sought to understand why those in the Team Leader group avoid engaging with our differences at meetings, preferring instead to take part in shadow conversations. The insights from Elias led me to understand that, in spite of the challenges of working together with conflicting ideas of the good, we remain dependent on each other for leading the school. This is what he refers to as the double-bind in which we are enmeshed. But the 'civilised' nature of our work means that we regulate our conduct with each other by exercising self-restraint. When we cannot communicate effectively together, we seek to do so privately with others with whom we have more in common. This leads to more bilateral ways of working, which both enables and constrains our individual work and our collective exercise of shared responsibility. We have struggled to communicate these issues with each other through multilateral dialogue, and struggled also to find a better way of going on together.

Whilst advocates for distributed leadership such as Harris argue that it is empowering, democratic and morale-boosting, the narrative in this project suggests otherwise. With this in mind, I turned to the work of Arendt and considered her distinction between private and public realms. I considered how the shadow conversations amongst my Team Leaders might reflect a privatisation of our work in order to avoid the painful, collective negotiation of competing goods that Arendt suggests is more totemic of the public sphere. Upon reflection, I concluded that bilateral negotiations are political in nature and involved the resistance of my colleagues, to me and each other, in order to provide the checks and balances typical of the public arena. Shadow conversations, like multilateral discussions,

can be both frustrating and enabling, but the assumptions underpinning distributed leadership theories seek to cover over emergent conflicts as signalling a failure of school culture. Lumby, criticising distributed leadership, suggests that such conflicts allow positional leaders to augment their power over others. For Arendt, though, there is no authority that transcends the power of the plurality acting together. Appealing to a culture of distributed leadership, or to my own authority as headteacher through bilateral meetings, has not negated the power of the Team Leader grouping, but I conclude that school leaders who fail to meet each other at all, or who prioritise harmonious agreement in meetings, may threaten such collective political power in the public realm.

As explained in this project, there are changes taking place in how my team works together as a result of this inquiry. The Team Leader group has disbanded and we have brought the shadow conversations into the political light and heat of discussion within the public realm of our wider leadership team. It is too early to conclude how this will change our ways of working together given Arendt's assertion that all action as a plurality generates unintended consequences. One thing is particularly notable about the Team Leader decision to disband itself. Having shared with each other the personal and professional impact of how we were working together, all of us agreed that we needed to find a better way of sharing responsibility for leading the school.

Project Four: Understanding Plural and Competing Views of Good Enough ‘Trust’ and ‘Control’ in the Context of a School Leadership Team in Conditions of Uncertainty.

Introduction

In project three of this thesis I explored how I had conceptualised the sharing of responsibility with others by adhering to the theory of distributed leadership. Although a distributed approach to school leadership suggests that harmony is possible, it creates two irreconcilable problems that, if anything, make conflict more likely: it seems to empower multiple leaders, each of whom have differing notions of the good, and reinforces the positional superiority of the headteacher as the ultimate arbiter of these conflicting notions of the good.

Paying specific attention to a tendency within my team to communicate via bilateral discussions, rather than multilaterally in meetings, I recognised that school leadership is a form of political action taking place in the public realm. Although my Team Leader group sought to avoid conflict by holding shadow conversations, this is still plural action in which conflict cannot be avoided. Where such shadow conversations are problematic is in how they exclude others on my wider leadership team from taking part in collective responsibility for decision-making.

In light of the insights I gained in project three, our team has chosen to abandon the smaller Team Leader grouping and chosen instead to conduct all discussions within the wider leadership team of thirteen people. In this project I will be exploring the challenges of working as a larger group. The narrative used as my empirical material begins with the down-grading of the school by the UK’s school inspectorate, Ofsted, and goes on to show how the impact of this negative judgment plays out within the public realm of my wider leadership team.

Scene 1: The Inspection

It was high noon when ‘the call’ came. My ashen-faced personal assistant, Jackie, knocked and entered without awaiting a response.

“You’re going to want to take this call.”

Nothing else was said. We knew what was about to happen. I stood up and walked to my desk in a funereal manner. Jackie transferred the call. Time stood still. I wondered how I would be able to speak given my dry mouth and constricted throat. Shakily, I picked up the handset. Introducing myself, I knew my voice lacked the expected confidence.

The voice at the other end – calm, honeyed and courteous – belonged to David. He explained that he was ringing on behalf of Her Majesty’s Inspectorate, Ofsted, and that the school was going to be inspected over the following two days. I felt unprepared, a feeling made worse when David asked me to send over our school SEF. I told him we didn’t have one, at which point his silky voice faltered. This did not compute. “You don’t have one?” he echoed, sounding both shocked and ominous.

The SEF, or Self-Evaluation Form, was a statutory requirement for schools between 2005 and 2012, by which school leaders had to judge their schools against the inspection framework. It became non-statutory and schools are no longer required to provide one. I had decided to do without a SEF, seeing it as a pointless document at best and, at worst, a way of seeking to control others and enforce their submission. David’s incredulity made me realise how vulnerable we were without one. Anxieties about having not listened to others on my team who had argued for a SEF were forming a giant ball in my chest as David ended the call. This had not been the start we had needed.

Two days later I sat alongside Lisa to hear the judgment of the inspection team. The morning after the call, five inspectors arrived to test their data-driven hypotheses about the school by observing lessons, scrutinising documents, interrogating senior and middle leaders, and interviewing students. The process completed, the inspection team were now gathered around a table with Lisa and I sat outside their circle as the team came to their final judgments. We were permitted to listen and comment, ensuring the process was seen as being ‘done with’ not ‘done to’ the school, but after discussing each key area for judgment they would have the final word.

I felt like a well-wrung dishcloth by this time. Having begun the process on the back foot, things had gone from bad to worse. Each member of the inspection team was as incredulous as David when they discovered we did not have a SEF, asking us “but how do you know?” each time we met to discuss our work. We presented them with reams of evidence of how we thought we knew. Paper mountains formed in my office as colleagues came armed with documents to convince the inspectors that, even without a SEF, we knew our school.

Perhaps we had done enough to be judged as good. Lisa sat poised with her pen and paper to take notes. I sat equally poised, leaning into the team’s discussion, as closely as I dared, to listen and respond in a final attempt to convince the team. Their first judgment about the quality of teaching would be vital. I intervened to fight our cause, but my challenges were dismissed and the decision came. As David uttered the words “requires improvement”, I slumped back in my chair. Ofsted had spoken. We had not been good enough.

Scene 2: The School Improvement Plan

Three months later, months that had been defined by shock, denial, anger (at ourselves, each other, the inspection team, the school accountability system) and a tentative acceptance of our position, the leadership team met to discuss the draft School Improvement Plan (SIP). In the immediate aftermath of the inspection outcome, I had written an action plan to help us respond to the short-term areas for improvement. One result of this was that the leadership team had been expanded to accommodate two middle leaders, that the inspection report said should be involved to function more 'strategically', and two new Assistant Principals appointed to improve teaching and learning, another key recommendation. We had also agreed that the teams within the leadership team would end. From now on we would discuss everything together to see our individual work in a team context. The SIP, a medium-term plan for the coming school year which had been discussed at many of our meetings since the inspection, linked the action plan to the school's longer-term vision statement. It had been a painstaking effort to bring it together in a way that, I hoped, captured the conflicting views expressed in those meetings.

I had sent the leadership team the draft SIP without a lengthy explanation of the reasoning behind it, aware that I have stifled discussion in the past by doing so. I devoted the two-hour meeting to discussing the SIP, giving time for others to have their say. For my part, I went into the meeting determined to listen, partly to avoid coming across as defensive should there be criticism, but also because I had already had a huge say in the document in drafting it.

It began well. Broadly speaking everyone agreed with the thrust of the document. Then Lisa, in her to-the-point, blunt northern accent, noted there was no part of the plan about creating a SEF. I bristled with irritation that she couldn't see that self-evaluation, if not a SEF specifically, was clearly woven throughout the whole document. I felt like I had compromised a huge amount in putting this document together and left plenty of space for a SEF to emerge, but was determined that school improvement ought not to be reduced to the creation of one. For the moment, though, I said nothing. In recent meetings keeping my counsel had had a seemingly positive effect on giving others the space to contribute and I wondered who else might take up the challenge of responding.

It was Kay, an Assistant Principal, who took up the challenge. Quietly spoken, her words carefully chosen, she voiced the points I was holding back from saying. She stressed the importance of professional learning and line management, arguing against a top-down approach to monitoring the school. This was much to my relief as, otherwise, I would have intervened to make similar points. Although soft-spoken, I could sense her frustration that many in our team have not used the

professional development processes she had created, which they had supported. I agreed with her that meaningful self-evaluation is rooted in such processes but again held my tongue.

At this point, one of the new team members, Kirsten, spoke fervently in support of more monitoring of staff. She spoke, as animated as a preacher, about the need to put children first. Her contribution culminated in a rhetorical question asking why our teachers were afraid of us entering their classrooms. Many school leaders talk this way, emphasising the importance of children over the adults in the organisation. I felt she was wrong about people not wanting the leadership team in their classrooms and put this down to the fact that she was new. She didn't know the school, I thought, forgetting that I had appointed her to bring this different way of thinking to our team. I continued to say nothing, which was becoming increasingly difficult but was, I felt, helping meaningful discussion and disagreement.

Kay's response sounded as if spoken through clenched teeth. Her frustration was tangible. I felt a sense of affinity that her work of years had passed over the heads of others. She challenged the team about how poorly we had used existing processes of validating the work of those for whom we had responsibility. I noted that her arguments left others in the team looking sheepish, embarrassed perhaps that she was right. I was eager to validate her diagnosis of the key reason for our failure in the inspection process, but was aware that in doing so I would be having the final word. Despite my lack of contribution, or perhaps because of it, the meeting had felt like a successful exploration of differing views of the good. There had been conflict and no shortage of emotions, but people had made their points well. I concluded the debate saying that I had enough to make amendments to the SIP that I hoped would capture the many viewpoints expressed. I experienced in that moment the usual frustrating feeling of having cut people off without bringing them to agreement and of having the burden of making sense of their competing viewpoints. I had a lot of work to do.

Scene 3: The Coup

A few weeks later, with the SIP agreed, our work as a leadership team appeared to be going well as we pursued, individually and collectively, the actions outlined in the plan. We were near the end of our weekly meeting and discussions had gone well, business-like and friendly. The penultimate item was from Colin, our Business Manager, and was a speculative proposal to consider hosting a local charity, with whom we had a strong partnership, on our site. He had been reluctant to share it because it was intended for governors rather than the leadership team, but I had persuaded him to do so. In order to soothe Colin's concerns, I spoke ahead of the discussion to explain that this was a

paper for the governors and that it was coming to the leadership team as a courtesy. Nothing provocative in that, I had thought, putting Colin's concerns down to over-cautiousness on his part.

Immediately Lisa asked why we were considering housing the charity when we had such dire need of space for our own students. Her bullish manner took me aback as she has always supported our work with the charity. Colin explained the reasons, stating that this proposal did not mean we could not invest in other buildings for our students. I felt relief that he was on form as Lisa came back again and again, terrier-like in her questioning. If I had spoken it would have been defensive. I was wary, though, of Colin being blamed for this paper when the decision to share it had been mine.

At this point, Kirsten joined the discussion to ask what the direct benefits to student outcomes would be, a question I was anticipating. I explained how we would never know the 'direct' impact because of the confidentiality of the charity's work with our families, but that it might mean the difference between a family being evicted or not, a child having breakfast or not. For good measure, and to illustrate my moral purpose, I mentioned my own precarious childhood. I was aware that I might be closing down criticism in making this point, but was also appealing to others from similar backgrounds who had supported our work with the charity.

Noting that the fifteen minutes we had scheduled for the item had long since expired, I tried to bring the discussion to a close by reminding colleagues that this was a paper for governors. By now, unlike at the start of the meeting, I was aware that I was closing down criticism. Lisa re-entered the fray with an open challenge, asking why it wasn't a paper for the leadership team when it clearly affected the school. She stared and waited for a response. I felt bemused, temporarily incapable of speech. Lisa knew that the leadership team are there to assist in the running of the school but that matters involving site and finances were matters for governors. I explained this to the team.

"Well," she pushed again, "that's a different way of working than we are used to."

The challenge hung in the air. I wanted to say something about how our previous ways of working had seen us fail our inspection. I held on to the anger, but felt it blocking any meaningful response. Instead, weakly, I said I was sorry that she felt that way. I wasn't sorry though. I felt betrayed.

"So, are you going to tell governors how the leadership team feel about it?"

I swung my head to the left, scarcely able to believe what I was hearing. It was Martyn, someone who had barely contributed to recent meetings, openly challenging my authority. For some reason, I sensed a threat that he would be checking this with governors. Again, the feeling of betrayal locked down meaningful responses and so, again, I weakly said this was a paper for the governing body, not the leadership team, before adding more provocatively that their views were not relevant.

Everyone went silent. It was clear that enough had been said. It was time to move on.

“You haven’t given him a straight answer,” said Kirsten. My head now swung to the right.

“Pardon?” I said, scarcely able to believe what I had heard from someone whom I had just appointed. It was the starkest and most direct challenge of the lot. She repeated it.

As I tried to answer, competing thoughts and feelings overwhelmed me. This felt like a coup. One challenger in front, one to my left, one to my right, and nobody in support. Silently, I considered alternatives. I could storm out. I could ask them to leave. I could cry. And then it came to me.

“I’m noticing,” I began, “that I have started to feel somewhat upset and cross. I’m noticing that I’m feeling like I am being attacked, which may not be your intention, but my feelings are affecting my ability to respond to these inquiries in a coherent way.”

I paused to see whether anyone wanted to interrupt. Nobody did. It was their turn to look stunned.

“With that in mind, I think it’s probably for the best if we leave this agenda item for tonight.”

In short order, we moved onto the final item of the agenda which, somehow, we managed to discuss and agree on. Then I left immediately and, without looking back, shut myself in my dark office before re-emerging, ten minutes later, for a meeting with the governing body.

Later that week, I added the same item onto our next agenda, informing my colleagues that I would try to give a better account of myself when we met and inviting them to do the same.

Reflections on the Narrative

The narrative reflects the toughest period of my professional life. The inspection process was a disaster from start to finish and I felt incredibly guilty and ashamed about the judgment for many reasons. The way I had led the school for five years appeared to have been wrong. I was not adequately prepared for something that a basic risk assessment would conclude would be a likely and challenging event. I had not ensured that relationships between people or the education provided for students was good enough. I had been defensive with the lead inspector, reflecting the defensiveness of interactions with my team when they wanted us to pursue a different course to the one now deemed not to be good enough.

In the aftermath there emerged a brief period of harmony within my team. We knew we had to be better and believed we would be able to act on the weaknesses outlined by the inspection report to rise phoenix-like from the ashes. But it didn’t last. Scenes two and three show how I tried to cope

with new conflicts emerging in my expanded team, by being silent in order to enable others to work through their difference and by paying attention to my emergent thoughts and feelings and speaking about these with my team. The narratives show how I continue to struggle to make sense of conflicting ideas of the good with others on my team. A difference that has emerged since the inspection is that I do so with less confidence in my ability as a headteacher and their ability to function as a team to lead the school effectively. There are times when I think that I don't even know what good enough school leadership is. This concerns me as people look to me to help bring our work together as we rebuild and improve.

One aspect of the inspection report that shames me is a sentence that explains how I am "highly valued, respected and supported by staff". This is true, reflecting the emphasis I have placed upon trusting others to do their work with minimal control mechanisms in place to monitor performance. It reflects a deliberate attempt by me to make the school a great place to work but it clearly wasn't good enough to ensure that we maintained the standards expected of us. The inspection outcome appears to have threatened this approach by making us mistrustful of ourselves, each other and each other's work. It is this feeling of mistrust in one another as members of a leadership team that I sense when re-reading my narratives. Perhaps this is not a bad thing in itself, but I continue to feel an antipathy towards control measures that is not shared by others on my team. Knowing we will not be able to find lasting harmony in a public realm of our leadership team, my animating question is how we make better sense of the seemingly contradictory ideals of trust and control as we go about making changes that will have a positive and lasting impact on the school.

Relational Trust – Bryk & Schneider

In project three I outlined how I drew heavily on theories of 'Distributed Leadership' prior to becoming a headteacher in order to shape how my leadership team would be organised. After taking on the role, my focus turned to another strand of transformational school leadership literature which emphasises the importance of trust in ensuring school improvement. The seminal text which kick-started this strand of thinking was 'Trust in Schools' by Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider. Their work on urban education and human development for the University of Chicago led them to conduct a mixed-methods, longitudinal research project involving educators at twelve schools in the city. Drawing from interviews, observations, achievement data and surveys conducted between 1991 and 1997, they concluded that 'relational trust' is "a core resource for school improvement" (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Bryk & Schneider distinguish 'relational trust' from 'organic trust' and 'contractual trust'. Organic trust involves unquestioning belief in others and is appropriate for "total institutions" (ibid, p17) such as families and religious groups. However, the "shared values" (ibid) that underpin schools require more rationalisation. Headteachers cannot invoke parental or religious authority but must explain their reasoning in decision-making to secure acceptance. Contractual trust goes too far the other way, leading to "a much more constrained relation" (ibid) between people in schools which are too complex to enable school leaders to expect or enforce specific outcomes and procedures.

Bryk and Schneider see relational trust as a "grounded theory of social trust" (ibid, p12) which mediates between elements of contractual and organic trust found in schools. Relational trust has four properties that set it apart from the contractual and organic forms of trust: respect, competence, personal regard for others and integrity. When these properties of relational trust are demonstrated, they enable relationships between different "role sets" (ibid, p20) such as principal/staff, staff/staff, staff/students and school/families to achieve synchrony.

Schools work well as organisations when this synchrony is achieved within all the major role sets that comprise a school community. In many schools, however, the behaviours of 'others' do not conform to expectations. (ibid, p21)

Relational trust works at three levels in order to achieve this synchrony. It is intrapersonal, helping people to discern the intentions of others. It is interpersonal, helping define role relations. It is organisational, enabling effective decision-making and providing moral authority to ensure people "go the extra mile" (ibid, p22) in pursuing innovation. Disagreements are more easily resolved and social control exercised so that colleagues voluntarily work longer hours, risk failure and accept conflict in pursuit of the "primary principles of the institution" (ibid, p25) and the "best interests of children" (ibid, p34).

Bryk and Schneider present empirical evidence which correlate the findings of surveys into trust in schools with the performance of students in standardised tests, and also with surveys of institutional properties such as 'orientation to innovation' and 'academic press'. They use case studies to exemplify schools in which relational trust is high and outcomes good, and others where relational trust is low and outcomes poor. The role of the headteacher in securing and maintaining relational trust within their schools is key to Bryk and Schneider's statistical findings and observational data. Headteachers do this by having inclusive processes for decision-making, articulating a "compelling vision" (ibid, p29), setting norms and showing "regard for others on a daily basis" (ibid, p129).

Considering events in my narrative in light of Bryk and Schneider's research, it is possible to see the correlation between the low levels of relational trust exemplified in my leadership team's meetings with our school's underperformance on inspection. It can be argued that our interactions show a lack of mutual respect or consideration, as exemplified by the conflict between Kay and Lisa or by my negative responses to Lisa, Martyn and Kirsten. Given the headteacher's role in establishing relational trust in their schools, my response to being challenged by my leadership team colleagues in what I have termed 'the coup' may not demonstrate regard for others. My resistance to the creation of a SEF, even after the inspection, also points to questions about my competence and that of my team as they were unable to persuade me to do so.

There is another way of thinking about this. Bryk and Schneider go on to argue that the creation of relational trust sometimes requires headteachers to "jump start change" through their positional authority (ibid, p137).

Principals may be called on to demonstrate trust in colleagues who may not fully reciprocate, at least initially. But they must also be prepared to use coercive power to reform a dysfunctional school community around professional norms. (ibid, p138)

Considering again the events in my narrative in light of Bryk and Schneider's insights, my rejection of Lisa's views on the SEF, in favour of Kay's assertions about failures to utilise professional learning and line management norms, reflects appropriate use of my role authority. Similarly, shutting down debate with Lisa, Martyn and Kirsten about the charity represents an example of coercive resistance to their beliefs regarding the influence of the leadership team qua the governing body.

These reflections, that Bryk and Schneider's research can be interpreted to both criticise and support my actions with my leadership team, reveal contradictions within the assumptions underpinning relational trust theory. The first is a methodological assumption that a concept as complex as trust, with multiple and equally complex facets such as respect, can be reliably measured, neatly packaged and implemented by school leaders. The second is an assumption that synchrony is desirable and achievable. A third set of assumptions is that the headteacher is able to stand outside relationships in order to define dysfunctionality, establish a compelling vision and, if needed, use coercion in achieving the utopian ideal of a high-functioning, harmonious school.

The implications for my practice, having idealised relational trust, is that expectations of synchrony in enacting a headteacher's compelling vision can render those with differing notions of how to achieve this vision unable to communicate effectively in making sense of their differences. Conflict, as a daily reality of school leadership, is avoided in Bryk and Schneider's account in preference to

adherence to the headteacher's authority. School leaders faced with this dilemma are forced to navigate change by appealing to the positional authority of the heroic headteacher. If the actions they manage to take together in spite of all this are found wanting, then either the headteacher is to blame for failing to be heroic enough or other school leaders are to blame for failing to reward the trust placed in them. Whichever interpretation is chosen, it corrodes trust when it is most needed.

Multi-faceted Trust

Bryk and Schneider's findings have informed subsequent research on trust by other American educational academics, notably Megan Tschannen-Moran who identified five facets of trust in a definition accepted by most of the research into trust in schools since.

Trust is defined as the willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the other party is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent. (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015, p257)

The reasons given for a multi-faceted definition of trust are that schools are complex organisations (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1997) which are highly accountable (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015), requiring the significant sharing of responsibility (Wahlstrom & Seashore Louis, 2008) that is not easy to standardise (Forsyth et al, 2011) and which traditional measurement tools are unable to capture (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). These researchers writing about trust follow the lead of Bryk and Schneider in using factor analysis to provide quantitative data about the perceptions of school leaders, staff and students with regard to trust within schools.

Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (1997) explicitly link their research on multi-faceted trust to the transformational leadership paradigm, asserting that trusting approaches reflect anti-bureaucratic sentiment. Bureaucracy, they claim, thwarts productivity and prevents school staff from "going beyond explicit requirements of the job" (ibid, p584). Tschannen-Moran places the enacting of multi-faceted trust in contrast to a "machine bureaucracy" approach which she sees as being coercive and not suitable for environments where rapid change requires swift action (Tschannen-Moran, 2009, p219). Instead schools should de-emphasise bureaucratic controls so that they can more swiftly deal with lack of professionalism (ibid, p242) in ways that are non-coercive. Forsyth et al (2011) agree that an anti-bureaucratic and anti-hierarchical approach is necessary for schools:

Bureaucratic and other formal controls can constrain the ability of organisations and those who work in them to respond to constant change and diversity of conditions. (ibid, p112)

The authors writing about multi-faceted trust in school leadership do not believe in a notion that anything goes in how schools operate. Tschannen-Moran (2009) argues that schools must be planned as “professional bureaucracies” in which the detrimental outcomes of a machine bureaucracy are avoided whilst the “greater deliberative practices” of professional organisations are enjoyed (ibid, p219). This is done through establishing appropriate norms, “creating bonds of trust to inspire higher effort” (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2014, p68) and providing a compelling vision. For Forsyth et al (2011) formal control is still necessary but most school leadership should be done through informal controls and collective trust to allow shared goals, values and norms to emerge. When the right balance between formal control, informal control and collective trust is reached;

Teachers will cooperate, acting predictably, yet flexibly, in consonance with the commonly shaped and embraced goals of the school. (ibid, p118)

This claim leaves me with troubling insights from the events recounted in my narrative, given our team’s failure to acquire a good judgment on inspection. This implication is that we were not acting in consonance with the goals of the school to provide a good education for children. I suggest that the lack of a SEF, which I have habitually seen as a negative control measure, may have contributed to the inspection outcome. Some of my leadership team colleagues would agree, but the first meeting shows how this is contested. Kay’s arguments point instead to our failure to use informal controls effectively. This points to a failure in collective trust by our leadership team: we had not implemented the informal control measures through our line management of middle leaders across the school even though we had collectively agreed to do so.

For theorists of multi-faceted trust, the headteacher is counterintuitively vital to collective trust emerging because of their personal skills of emotional intelligence, empathy and conflict resolution (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2014, p85). For Forsyth et al (2011) the principal’s role is “undeniably critical” especially when facing challenges.

Schools and principals under stress may often resort to formal control and close supervision rather than trust building. (ibid, p156)

In these situations, nurturing a culture of optimism is key, achieved through “constant reflection, vigilance, and effort” (ibid, p116) because headteachers should be “the best of organisational citizens” (ibid, p169). But as well as personal attributes, the literature on multi-faceted trust is replete with imagery suggesting that headteachers must transcend their intersubjective relations with others in their school. One set of images suggests that headteachers need to be prophets, inspiring others through their vision (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2014, p68) and mission (ibid, p71)

to help their schools fulfil their “higher purposes” (Forsyth et al, 2011, p159). A second set of images present the headteacher as a farmer whose role is the “cultivation” (Tschannen-Moran, 2009, p241) and “harvesting” (Forsyth et al, 2011, p159) of organisational trust. Headteachers are responsible for “harnessing” (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2014, p71) organisational capacity so that trust is “shepherded” (Forsyth et al, 2011, p168) into daily institutional life.

If the failure of our school’s inspection comes down to the lack of a SEF (formal control), ineffective use of professional review processes (informal control) and the leadership team’s relationships with each other in overseeing this (collective trust), an emphasis on the headteacher becomes troubling. It locates responsibility for institutional failure individually. As with distributed leadership, this emphasis on the critical role of the headteacher leaves others absent from collective responsibility for negative outcomes. It also leaves them absent from solutions about taking good enough next steps, which for these theorists rely instead on the headteacher providing a new, better vision to cultivate trust. This is not how I experienced the meetings described in my narratives. Instead they represent attempts to identify how we each contributed towards the failures noted by the inspection and how we can find a way forward together.

There are a number of assumptions underpinning the literature on multifaceted trust and many reflect those within Bryk and Schneider’s relational trust theory: trust can be reliably measured and implemented; synchrony can be achieved between people working towards complex goals; the headteacher stands apart from others in the pursuit of this. The imagery of the headteacher as messiah or farmer represents a further assumption, that establishing trust is a linear process that begins with a seed which unfolds teleologically given the right conditions, or a vision of the future achievable through instrumental steps on a somehow-preordained pathway.

The implications for practice of this linear way of thinking are reflected by events in my narrative. The creation of a SEF, or better professional review practices, are expected to lead us inexorably to a more advantageous position by the next inspection, like seeds to be planted and nurtured. Alternatively, we must subscribe to the vision that it’s all about the students and let that guide our actions in the unwavering faith that it will result in a better outcome on judgment day. However, none of these things were missing in our work together. Self-evaluation mechanisms, if not a SEF, were used. Professional learning was identified as a strength during the inspection. Outcomes for students have always been our focus. Underpinning these informal control mechanisms, I have prioritised a culture of trust. As events in the narrative show, these causes have not had the desired effects on our team’s work together. An instrumental and linear approach has not worked.

Trust as a Reduction of Complexity – Luhmann

In contrast to the linear and headteacher-dependent theories of trust, the German philosopher of social science, Niklas Luhmann, offers a radically different understanding of the nature of trust in organisations. Like Bryk and Schneider and Tschannen-Moran, Luhmann sees trust as being an essential part of highly complex social systems in which the:

Superabundance of realities and possibilities...make it virtually impossible for stable expectations to emerge. (Luhmann, 2017, p6)

Unlike the writers I have analysed thus far, Luhmann sees a paradoxical relationship between trust and complexity. Whilst trust within relationships helps reduce complexity by giving individuals confidence in their expectations of others, it also engenders conditions in which increased complexity can emerge because trusting relationships enable new possibilities for action that is uncertain. The principal reason for this difference to the work of relational trust theorists is that they take an essentially linear approach to trust, while Luhmann takes a nonlinear approach in which trust has a “problematic relationship with time” (ibid, p12). He explains this paradoxical idea of time as an interrelationship between perceived change (‘events’) and duration (‘constancies’). Events can be seen as being independent of the past, present or future. Constancies are seen a “continuously actual present” (ibid, p13). In the narrative the inspection has the character of an event whereas the interactions with my leadership team in meetings are indicative of constancy. However, the distinction is not clear cut for Luhmann, as:

The basis of all trust is the present as an enduring continuum of changing events, as the totality of constancies where events can occur. (ibid, p15)

The event-like nature of the inspection has come to inform my team’s present understanding of our predicament about how to retain the constants of our ways of interacting and leading. At the same time the events happening in our present ways of leading and interacting reflect some agreement with the judgments made in the inspection about our ongoing practice. Thus, the inspection marked both a schism and a continuity in our work together as do the meetings described in the narrative. Kay’s work on professional review was trusted and so was not challenged. In light of the inspection outcome, however, it has been revealed that it was misunderstood by others who now mistrust it as the solution to our current predicament as a school. What was trusted then is not trusted now and therefore should not have been trusted at the time it was trusted by them.

Where this paradoxical understanding of time relates to trust for Luhmann, is in how trust anticipates the future. The complexity of the future requires people to trust one another enough in

moving into that future in a way that reduces uncertainty. Trust enables people to consider 'future presents' through planning, but this increases uncertainty as plans involve potentially hazardous 'events' that break from existing ways of working. To reduce the complexity of this schism, people are compelled to anchor these 'future presents' by referring them back to the present as 'present futures', lending them the air of constancies. Thus, Lisa continues to argue for a SEF whilst I continue to argue against it, Kay continues to argue for better use of professional review processes, and Kirsten continues to argue for a focus on children. Whilst we may not trust each other's recipe for future success, we trust the familiarity of each other's views and this underpins our relationships with each other.

Luhmann recognises that such familiarity is dependent on personal trust but asserts that this is not sufficient and must give way to 'system trust', in which trust is not defined emotionally but in terms of performance. System trust, Luhmann contends, is necessary because it can more easily absorb the risks inherent in organisations, offering indifference through the use of indices of performance:

Because reality is too complex for actual control, trust is kept under control with the aid of the implications provided by symbols. This is supported by a crudely simplified framework of indices as a form of feedback loop carrying messages about whether or not the continuance of trust is justified. (ibid, p32).

The narrative shows how system trust is negotiated in our interactions as a leadership team. The SEF is an index of trust that is a substitution for actual, but too-complex, control through personal relationships in line management. Such indices of performance are "a manufactured illusion" that:

Provides a durable basis for the continuation of contacts so long as everyone observes the rules of the game and works together, in trust, to maintain the performance. (ibid, p74)

But what if everyone does not observe the 'rules of the game' of trust as suggested by my narrative? Luhmann sees distrust as a functional equivalent for, not an opposite to, trust. Distrust reduces complexity in situations where one cannot trust: it results from "unquestioning familiarity" or where there has been a "reversal of trust" (ibid, p81) and leads to situations which are emotionally tense and others are enemies to be fought. The events in 'The Coup' scene reflects this othering of my colleagues as enemies. Their positions to the left, right and in front of me strongly evoked Tennyson's 'Charge of the Light Brigade', a heroically futile account of warfare. The encounter, in the aftermath of the inspection, is evocative of a reversal of trust attributable to the possibility that our team had previously become a forum for unquestioning familiarity.

Luhmann's work on trust concludes in a way that contrasts sharply with the instrumentalism of theories of relational, multifaceted trust discussed earlier in this project, asserting that:

Trust is not a means that can be chosen for particular ends, much less an ends/means structure capable of being optimised. (ibid, p97)

He also argues that an "ethics of principles" cannot reliably inform a "theory of action" in a complex social world (ibid, p96). This contrasts with how I have come to base much of my leadership approach on theories that see ethical idealisations (of care, distributed leadership and relational trust) as potentially transformative to my practice of school leadership.

Taking a different approach to instrumental and ethical insights, Luhmann asserts the autopoietic nature of social systems, suggesting they can be self-reproducing and self-maintaining given the right circumstances. Although he begins his work on trust emphasising the paradoxical nature of complex social systems, he concludes in ways that contradict the relational aspect of his insights and people disappear entirely. He suggests that systems should be created which coordinate trust and distrust "independently of personal motivation" drawing upon "impersonal" motives for action which then "depersonalises" the mechanisms by which trust/control is achieved (ibid, p102). This systemic coordination of trust and control will lead to the situation in which:

The person who distrusts no longer does so by going back to personal modes of reduction, such as personal animosity...but does so on the basis of the system, which has already programmed in advance the mode of behaviour for cases of disappointment. (ibid, p102)

These conclusions suggest the same ends/means thinking against which Luhmann argues in the same chapter of his work. It not only sees organisations as systems, but suggests that people are systems too, equally capable of being controlled given the right inputs. Illusions of control and indices of trust can lead to a form of synchrony similar to that proposed by advocates of relational trust. The difference is that even the headteacher disappears from the equation, equally controlled by a self-regulating system that eventually has no need of human inputs. The implication for this in my practice is an essentially depoliticised public realm in which none of us are called upon to think through the consequences of our actions together. It is best reflected in the meeting where I chose not to speak, assuming that the systemic nature of the meeting and 'manufactured illusion' of the improvement plan would be sufficient to allow conflict between my colleagues to resolve itself. It didn't. Nor did my silence, a disappearance from the public realm, reduce my anxieties about the situation and, judging from their reactions, it did not do so for members of my team either.

Summary of the Argument So Far

In this inquiry I have explored literature on trust and identified how control is seen as integral to this. Whilst the school-based theories by Bryk and Schneider, Tschannen-Moran and others focus on relational and multi-faceted trust, all concede that the headteacher must retain the ability to control others who do not synchronise with the ethos of trust. Even in high-trust conditions these authors routinely stress the importance of the role of headteacher. Taking a radically different view of trust, Luhmann concludes that it is system trust through a framework of indices that depersonalises the mechanisms by which trust is achieved.

Considering the insights provided by these authors in relation to my narratives, I find that the inevitable plurality of organisational life is somehow rendered absent. If trust can be achieved through my control as headteacher, or by our collective acceptance of control mechanisms, why is it that we continue to find ourselves in familiar patterns of disagreement with each other? Despite the negative inspection outcome, and the consequent need to make organisational changes ahead of a future inspection, why do we cling on to seemingly discredited ways of relating to each other?

Attachment and the Politics of Uncertainty - Marris

Peter Marris, an academic whose work spans urban planning, political theory, psychology and sociology, offers some insights about trust in his 1996 work 'The Politics of Uncertainty'. He takes as his starting point the experiences of childhood attachment that each individual has, and the meanings which we have each made of those experiences.

We create ourselves out of a thread of memory and souvenirs, devoting much thought and attention to keeping the record straight. (Marris, 1996, p22)

Our behaviours in adult life are regulated by meanings arising from experiences of attachment which we then project onto social causes and ideals. We then strive to manipulate the meanings of others, trying to make them understand what we understand. Marris contends that in doing so we may choose to enter into 'holy war' in which we destroy incompatible meanings, 'litigation' in which we seek to win a case, and 'persuasion' in which we try to convince others. For Marris, of these three forms of manipulation, only persuasion has "respect for the experience and understanding of others" (ibid, p24). This latter form of engagement is, however, difficult because:

Even when we are all fighting for the same cause, what that means to each of us is still fundamentally unique. (ibid, p38)

As a result, we can find ourselves engaging in patterns of behaviour that are “not rewarded or rewarding” (ibid, p41). The coercive assertion of authority, as advocated by Bryk and Schneider, can contribute to such patterns of behaviour, as indeed can the emphasis on shared values because:

Common languages always distort and inhibit what we can express, organising the world less sensitively to our particular attachments. Any attempt to escape this dilemma by radically simplifying meaning only intensifies the tensions between irreducibly distinct kinds of understanding, making them harder to articulate. (ibid, p61)

The way forward, Marris contends, is through negotiating understandings. It is thus not sufficient for me as headteacher to promote trust in our work together through ‘litigation’, by producing evidence to support my claims. In doing so I am drawing on meanings derived from my attachment relationships, and such an approach may have little resonance for attachment experiences of others. Even our shared experience of our work with the charity becomes fraught with tension and ends up being fought as a ‘holy war’. The end of that meeting shows my inability to articulate a persuasive case for the charity. The exclusion of others’ views, by my stressing that the item was for governors to decide, may have left them similarly unable to articulate a persuasive argument on the matter.

Marris explains how reciprocal planning for the future is a way of negotiating uncertainty more co-operatively, mirroring the insights of Luhmann who sees such plans as necessarily manufactured illusions. In spite of our experience of planning being often “disillusioning”, Marris suggests that plans “restore a sense control” (ibid, p100). Plans are reaffirming, reassuring, suggestive of harmony and make collaboration seem more predictable. This reduces uncertainty “but people still have to be convinced that they can trust others.” (ibid, p105)

This last point is where Marris departs from Luhmann, who asserts that system trust is generated through depersonalised mechanisms of control. Marris instead concludes that whilst plans can aid collaboration, they can lead to penalties for those who “trust the untrustworthy” (ibid, p109) and advantages for those who wish to act uncooperatively, particularly at times when organisations are facing uncertainty. They can generate pervasive feelings of insecurity and the withdrawal of individuals into “smaller, more homogeneous communities of interest” that can in turn lead to blame, exclusion and suppression (ibid, p113). These insights function as an explanation for how my leadership team has divided over the execution of previously-agreed plans, and also as a warning against our assuming that post-inspection plans will ensure future collaboration and improved trust or control. The narratives demonstrate the potential for further division into smaller, homogeneous groups working in opposition to each other to emerge in spite of, or even because of, such plans.

Marris returns to the importance of attachment relationships arguing that:

To defend a politics of reciprocity against everything that pulls towards exploitation and disengagement, we have to rediscover the common ground of our moral intuitions. (ibid)

He believes that moral uncertainty in the workplace is a particularly stressful form of uncertainty. Although morality is a universal experience, it is seen as relativistic and therefore underprivileged as something we talk about in the public sphere. At the same time morality for the individual manifests itself in the form of ideals that are liberating and protective for us and which therefore make us vulnerable to others in the interdependence of organisational life.

The ideal then protects and encourages us, like a super-parent, making us feel worthy of love; and in so far as we embody it in our own lives, we also become part of a nurturing and protective force which extends beyond our own lives. (ibid, p119)

The vulnerability of individuals engaging with debate and disagreement about their moralities and ideals is problematic at times of uncertainty. It renders individuals preoccupied with the approval of others; an anxiety to conform that undermines the self-confidence and self-trust of individuals necessary for establishing trusting relationships with others (ibid, p124).

It is notable that at the meeting referred to as 'the coup', much of the debate involved potentially fruitful areas for discussion of competing moralities. Lisa wanted to talk about how we deploy resources for maximum effectiveness for our students. Martyn wanted to talk about the relationship between school leadership and governance. Kirsten wanted to talk about how we respond to challenges in our meetings. For my part, although I initially paid attention to my defensiveness in response to colleagues' challenges, I can now see that I drew attention to the morality of their ganging up on me, something that may often remain unspoken by those in positional authority who are assumed to be able to 'take it' because of their role.

Marris asserts that there is no escape from the need to find moral coherence in our relationships with others or from the need to gain a moral understanding of those relationships as a whole.

Strategies of reciprocal collaboration against uncertainty depend on trust, and trust implies a shared morality. (ibid, p125)

The insights of Marris challenge many of the assumptions underpinning the work of Bryk and Schneider and Tschannen-Moran. Trust and control cannot be exhorted or coerced into being by a transcendental headteacher. On the other hand, whilst control mechanisms such as the SEF can help organisational life, Marris' insights are distinctly anti-autopoietic: systemic illusions of control

still leave the issue of trusting relationships crucial, in contrast to Luhmann's belief that system trust in such mechanisms render it unnecessary. Marris, however, leaves the reader with little more than an assertion of the need to negotiate moralities. He stresses the need to find 'moral coherence' and 'moral understanding' for collaborative trusting relationships within a 'moral community' but goes no further. In considering how such pluralism may be manifested in order to explore moralities, I wish to turn to the pragmatic philosophical tradition.

The Public and its Problems – Dewey

In the third project of this thesis, I drew attention to the distinction between the private and the public in the work of Hannah Arendt. In his 1927 work, 'The Public and its Problems', pragmatic philosopher John Dewey identifies that the public emerges from the "factual consequences" for others arising from groups politically adjudicating between competing notions of the good in their concrete, rather than abstract, form (Dewey, 1927/2016, p52). Whilst recognising, like Marris, the importance of human habits and attachment to causes aligned with our thinking:

We must in any case start from acts which are performed, not from hypothetical causes for those acts, and consider their consequences. (ibid, p66)

Action taken in public through conjoint activity can generate shared interests (ibid, p77), can inform measures for the amelioration of these shared interests (ibid, p84), and can have a profound impact on the "dispositions in emotion, desire, planning and valuing" of singular persons subject to these shared interests (ibid, p111). In contrast to authors discussed earlier, I recognise that Dewey's insights are neither instrumentalist or autopoietic. Inquiry must focus, he argues, on observable consequences not an "absolutistic attitude" that favours political, social and intellectual unity via abstractions. Such unity of thought serves, in public discourse and action, to generate heat and no light (ibid, p144) on the one hand, and regimentation and mediocrity on the other (ibid, p148).

Ideals and standards formed without regard to the means by which they are to be achieved and incarnated in flesh are bound to be thin and wavering. (ibid, p169)

Throughout this thesis I have shown how, under my leadership, our team have subscribed to such ideals and standards. In project two this was an 'ethic of care'. In project three it was 'distributed leadership'. In this project it is 'relational trust'. Running through each of these projects is the common theme of how little these ideals actually hold us together as a team because they are ideals which we cannot incarnate. Given the precarious situation in which we find ourselves, and the more public nature of our discussions at the newly-reconfigured SLT meetings, it is unsurprising that they

generate significant heat for us. In particular, my decision to remain silent in the second scene, and my silencing of others in the third scene, point to difficulties I/we have felt since the inspection process. The failure to achieve a good enough judgment seems like a failure of my/our ideals. How can we trust those ideals again? Silence appears to offer a way out, but it isn't.

Concerning himself particularly with the failure of democratic politics, Dewey observes the limitations of "doctrinal formulations" which may suit a specific local need in a pragmatic way but which, when applied more extensively as final truths, are pragmatically insufficient (ibid, p173). He does, though, still hope for the emergence of a 'great community' achieved through the democratic ideal in a generic and social sense.

It is an ideal in the only intelligible sense of an ideal: namely, the tendency and movement of some thing which exists carried to its final limit, viewed as completed, perfected...

Democracy in this sense is not a fact and never will be. (ibid, p175)

Perhaps, then, there is value in the concept of trust and in the facets of trust outlined by Tschannen-Moran. The ideals of benevolence, openness, honesty, reliability and competence are not at odds with the Deweyan ideal of democracy. The examples of silencing shown in the narratives, however, belie the idea that these facets of trust routinely inform our community of inquiry. He argues that:

To learn to be human is to develop through the give-and-take of communication an effective sense of being an individually distinctive member of a community; one who understands and appreciates its beliefs, desires and methods, and who contributes to a further conversion of organic powers into human resources and values. (ibid, p180)

At the time of writing my narratives, I considered the silencing almost entirely from my perspective, negating the experience of others. Instead, thinking more reflexively, I have come to understand that Kirsten's decision to challenge me about closing down Martyn's inquiry represents a powerful example of the benevolence and honesty seen as facets of trust. Martyn's challenge, to represent the leadership team's views to governors, reflects facets of openness and competence as elements of trusting relationships. Both were willing to be vulnerable which is a key component of trust for Tschannen-Moran. By these examples the ideal of trust, if considered in a Deweyan sense, is not as problematic as my inquiries have suggested and, re-focussing on my experience of the meetings, my colleagues' challenges represent less of a failure than I had previously thought.

But silence in conjoint action can only be considered a limited success. My colleague's challenges deserved better responses, and post-hoc rationalisations such as these are, for Dewey, a covering-up of fear of the experimental method (ibid, p192).

Those who have ability to manipulate social relations for their own advantage have to be reckoned with. They have an uncanny instinct for detecting whatever intellectual tendencies even threaten to encroach upon their control. (ibid)

Dewey calls this desire to control “a social pathology” (ibid, p193) and suggests that it can take multiple forms, such as optimism and idealisation. Such pathological forms of control serve to repress thought in pervasive ways. They are the attempt to control opinions, by which Dewey means judgments of future actions, and are the antithesis of the “continuous inquiry” (ibid, p199) which is necessary for the endurance of judgments in the public realm.

Relating this back to the work of Marris, I can see how such a pathology exhibited by me as leader of this team is related to the attachment relationships recounted in my first project. Dewey asserts that groups and individuals within groups may be opposed to one another, a fact with which I have consistently struggled especially since becoming headteacher. Ideals of care, distributed leadership and trust represent alternatives to continuous inquiry, whilst the optimism of my rationalisation of the narrative’s events may replace exploration of the consequences of our team’s conjoint action.

Dewey argues that “the genuine problem is that of adjusting groups and individuals to see one another” (ibid, p211) but my preference, imposed on and adopted by my team, has been to focus on the general rather than the particular in our interactions. When the particular intercedes, we find ourselves unable to deal with it: the absolute confounds the experimental. Trust and control are at the heart of our discussions, but the narratives show how we try to explain these abstract notions with further abstractions (it’s all about the students, it’s all about professional learning). If we cannot make sense of the plurality of our views on these matters through talking about them in our team meetings, then we have no hope of making sense of them for others in the school.

Dewey concludes that:

The essential need...is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion, and persuasion. That is *the* problem of the public. (ibid, p225)

The ability to develop close attachments, engage in vibrant discussion, and pay heed to evidence when making judgments are the guarantees of genuine give-and-take in the experimental method. Anything else is, for Dewey, soliloquy which is typical of the private, not public, sphere (ibid, p233).

My intention was to conclude with Dewey. The democratic ideal, one that is not totalising and is therefore a pragmatic conception of the ideal, fits the inquiry neatly and provides a neat conclusion. Paying heed to my tendency to look for idealisations of plural action, it is a perhaps dangerous for me and my team to conclude in this way, given that this is the final project of my thesis. Instead, I

want to conclude by considering those who have challenged, from within pragmatic philosophy, Dewey's ideal of democratic pluralism as essential to a community of inquiry.

The Competing Pluralisms of Pragmatic Thought

In 'The Public and its Problems' Dewey does not define pluralism. He implies rather than articulates its meaning. Richard Bernstein, taking a Deweyan approach, addresses this lacuna in 'Pluralism and Pragmatism':

In moral, political and social life, pluralism means that we must always respect and do justice to differences and seek to understand what presents itself as the other and alien without violently imposing our own blind prejudices and ideologies. (Bernstein, 1987, p521)

The currents that run against such a view are centrifugal, forcing us apart, and centripetal, forcing us together. The consequences of this are, on the one hand, an atomistic experience of public life or, on the other, an equally damaging "false totality" (ibid). The centrifugal tendency, in particular, presents the danger of what Bernstein calls "degenerate pluralism" (ibid), something capable of blocking communication within a community of inquiry. For Bernstein, there is no permanent solution to this "wild pluralism" (ibid, p522) of multiple and incommensurable views of the good. This negatively framed description of pluralism accords with experiences recounted in my narratives; the repressed differences in which we each find causes by which we can fight what Marris called a 'holy war', or legal cases by which we can engage in reciprocal 'litigation'.

Bernstein identified more negatively-defined pluralisms in a subsequent essay, 'Pluralism and the Healing of Wounds', in which he identifies key features of the "pragmatic ethos" (Bernstein, 1989, p10). These include anti-foundationalism (there is no firm ground upon which to take a lasting position), fallibilism (we are never certain of our position), the social character of the self (our position is always in relation to the positions of others) and radical contingency (our position is constantly under threat from unpredictable experiences). Bernstein concludes that plurality pervades each of these themes but identifies multiple forms of pluralism which are contrary to the pragmatic ethos. 'Fragmentary pluralism' is synonymous with the 'wild' version. 'Flabby pluralism' is superficial and reflects the school-based literature on trust that aims for agreeable, unspecific notions of the good. 'Polemical pluralism' is used as an ideological weapon and might be identified with my satisfaction in watching others argue with one another whilst I remained silent. 'Defensive pluralism' is tokenistic, with groups paying lip-service to their differences but seeing nothing to be learnt from one another. This last negative version of pluralism is shown in the narratives by how

Kay's work had been agreed by the team without being fully understood. Defensive pluralism is then perhaps an effective description of how we have worked together in the past, a pluralism that has been disturbed by the inspection judgment and our more open encounters as an enlarged team.

Bernstein argues that there is a form of pluralism that "represents what is best in our pragmatic tradition" and labels it "engaged fallibilistic pluralism" (ibid, p15). Bernstein stresses its temporariness and fragility, subject to unexpected contingencies and riddled with conflict and disagreement, and therefore its consonance with the pragmatic ethos. Engaged fallibilistic pluralism requires an experimental, dialogic approach that is profoundly Deweyan:

Conflict is just as important in dialogical encounters, because understanding does not entail agreement. On the contrary, it is the way to clarify our disagreements. (ibid, p17)

Thus, for Bernstein, the democratic ideal of Dewey is instructive for pragmatic pluralism. Colin Koopman, an academic with interests in political theory and ethics, is more critical of Dewey's democratic ideal in the face of what he terms "unruly pluralism" (Koopman, 2016, p28):

Deweyan democracy's retrieval of idealism seems to underestimate the extent to which conflict is irremediably entrenched in non-ideal publics. (ibid, p30)

The only solution to such unruly pluralism is found in the procedural norms of "inclusive tolerance" rather than the Deweyan "synthesising ideal" (ibid, p31). This perspective, Koopman claims, better recognises the ugly nature of persistent pluralism, keeping incommensurable perspectives in motion with each other, rather than aiming at the synthesis of pluralistic conflict.

Cheryl Misak, a philosopher who acknowledges a Peircean commitment to truth in her work, offers the idea of "deep pluralism". For her, Dewey omits "something essential to pragmatism" (Misak, 2005, p129) in adopting a pluralist stance in which there is no truth.

Let me put it bluntly. We do learn, we do improve our beliefs, we do take disagreement to matter. All of this makes sense only on the assumption that there is something to get right – that there is a truth of the matter. (ibid, p131)

Whilst Koopman and Misak both disagree fundamentally with the democratic ideal that underpins Dewey's work, they do so with completely different assumptions which have radically different implications for practice even though they both adhere to the components of Bernstein's pragmatic ethos. Practising their insights would mean my team engaging one another with greater openness to the social processes of debate, holding our fallibilism close to the surface with an awareness of the potential for radical contingency to upend our plans for improving the school. However, whilst

Koopman's thesis renders agreement unnecessary, Misak's thesis regards disagreement as a failure to locate truth or a sign that there is no truth to be found. Either way, both writers suggest that the ideal of continuous inquiry in Dewey's work is not sufficient in and of itself: to what end is the inquiry directed if not to the end of achieving a democratic community of inquirers?

Robert Talisse and Scott Aikin come to a radically different conclusion about pluralism in 'Why Pragmatists Cannot be Pluralists' (2005). They recognise three types of pluralism; shallow, deep and *modus vivendi* pluralism. Shallow pluralism echoes Koopman in arguing for "the norm and procedure of tolerating difference" (Talisse & Aikin, 2005a, p103). Deep pluralism echoes Misak's position, and is agonistic as "conflicts among goods are arational and consequently often violent" (ibid). *Modus vivendi* pluralism echoes Dewey and aims "to shape the political and intellectual terrain so that individuals and groups can coexist" (ibid). None of these pluralisms, according to the authors, are authentically pragmatic positions. Deep pluralism is anti-fallibilistic and means each viewpoint is static.

Just as the parties in a conflict cannot enter into corrective dialogue with each other, *they cannot even do so with themselves.* (ibid, p109)

Modus vivendi pluralism is pragmatically ineffective. It leads to compromises that mask continuing disagreements which are at risk of imminent collapse into the agonism of deeply pluralistic views. Shallow pluralism is consistent with pragmatism but, Talisse and Aikin believe, is not actually a form of pluralism because of the ease with which commensurability is achieved and beliefs abandoned.

Talisse and Aikin's conclusions reflect my team's inability to bridge the gap between our plural beliefs. The dedication to inclusivity, tolerance, openness, experimentation and anti-dogmatism of the pragmatic ethos are not reflected in the narratives about our work together. Talisse and Aikin's 2005 insights suggest that our team is pluralist but not pragmatic. By 2016, though, the same authors came to a different conclusion in 'Pragmatism and Pluralism Revisited', that pragmatism was consistent with 'modest epistemological pluralism', which:

Holds that our moral knowledge is incomplete, and for all we know it could be complete with further inquiry. (Aikin & Talisse, 2016, p22)

The key qualities of this form of pluralism are "epistemic humility" and "earnestness", which is the "desire to believe the truth and follow the best reasons" (ibid, p23) through tolerance, diversity and dialogue. In this sense, it has strong echoes of Dewey's democratic ideal and Bernstein's 'engaged fallibilistic pluralism'. Aikin and Talisse recognise that some conflicts resist commensurability and

therefore a rational resolution. This can lead to “tragic conflicts” in which committing wrongs is inevitable and judging between wrongs is impossible (ibid, p24). As a result:

Modest epistemological pluralism seems a positive inducement towards... moral gentleness, generosity, consideration and forgiveness in the face of the moral struggles of others. (ibid)

In contrast to Talisse and Aikins earlier findings, I see some consonance here with the conjoint action undertaken by our leadership team. The contributions of Lisa and Kay in the second narrative, whilst conflictual, demonstrate their earnestness in striving to find a way forward with each other. The third narrative shows the humility of Martyn and Kirsten in seeking the best reasons from me for the decision I had made to close down conversations about the charity. My decision to revisit the discussion, acknowledging my failure to engage in the initial debate, is indicative of moral gentleness and a seeking of forgiveness. These discussions, and many others we have, feel morally tragic. They show how we strive for balance between trusting and controlling one another as we share plural responsibility in leading a school that carries the burden of having been judged as not good enough. We are not sure that the good enough we are collectively striving for can be realised and recognise, in our striving, that we do not have enough knowledge to deem ourselves good enough yet. In spite of appearances, there does seem to be some pragmatism in our engaged but fallibilistic pluralism.

Conclusions

I began this inquiry, in light of my narrative about ongoing conflict within my leadership team, with an animating question about how we make better sense of the seemingly contradictory ideals of trust and control as we go about making changes that will have a positive and lasting impact on the school. In doing so I was recognising, from earlier projects, that we will not be able to find lasting harmony in the public realm. I came to this question through sensing strong currents of distrust in my team, contrasting with the perhaps misplaced trust we had in ourselves, each other and our work together previously. This reflects new ways of relating to each other in a larger team after a failed inspection. When we most need to trust one another, we seem to have lost the ability to do so and seem focused on enacting what I have typically seen as restrictive, punitive control measures.

I focused on school-based literature on trust which argues that the establishment of ‘relational trust’ helps school leaders achieve a synchrony that enables success. Trust is led by headteachers with a compelling vision who set norms that others follow. Where vision and norms fall short, the use of coercive power by headteachers is a remedy. I concluded that this literature is problematic in its attempts to measure and correlate abstract concepts to suggest causation. School-based literature on trust is highly instrumental, suggesting that headteachers can stand outside of their interactions

with others to control events. The focus on the headteacher and reliance on force explain why relationships within our team, and our work together, have not been good enough. Abstract concepts, on which relational trust theories rely, fail to offer a way forward that is different from the past.

I turned next to Luhmann's work on trust. He argues that increased trust enables greater complexity which increases insecurity, requiring more trust. The process is non-linear, with a relationship between the past, present and future seen paradoxically as 'events' and 'constancies'. Personal trust is important, but future planning through the use of symbolic tools of manufactured illusion enables system trust to emerge, and this allows control to be programmed into organisational life. Luhmann's work has some explanatory force about uncertainty in my team's work and relationships. However, he falls back on autopoiesis, arguing that systems can be depersonalised and become self-regulating. Luhmann's depersonalised nature of trust and control does not present any obvious insights for how to respond to the highly embodied nature of our uncertainty with each other.

Seeing that neither instrumental nor autopoietic approaches made full sense in the context of my narratives, I turned to more relational explanations of how trust and control appear in the work of teams with plural views of the good. The work of Marris stresses the important role of attachment as individuals generate meanings in their interactions and link these to comforting ideals. We seek to manipulate the meanings of others in ways that can be destructive or persuasive. Through reciprocal planning we can gain an illusory but helpful sense of control, but this does not supplant our need to trust in others. This trust can only be achieved when we recognise the importance of our own and others' attachment relationships and create a moral community. I concluded that Marris' work was helpful in thinking about the anxieties of our team in more generous terms. However, his assertion of the need to form a moral community lacked any procedural insights about how such a moral community might operate.

I turned next to the work of Dewey. His insights start from the position that the consequences of conjoint action define the 'public'. These consequences generate shared interests, are observable and cannot be conceived of as ideals or doctrinal formulations. He offers a democratic ideal as key to the development of political communities of inquiry, but stresses that this must be founded on experimental methods such as methodical inquiry through debate, discussion and persuasion. Such communities can be manipulated by those seeking control and, from Dewey's insights, I concluded that the dogmatic pursuit of ideals is a theme running through my work. Whilst helpful for insights about my team's work together, I felt that a pragmatic critique of Dewey's work might offer some moderating perspectives to help me avoid perceiving and adopting Dewey's insights uncritically.

I considered alternative views of pluralism held by a number of pragmatic philosophers. These writers demonstrated scepticism about 'wild', 'unruly', 'flabby' and 'polemic' forms of pluralism that are not in keeping with the pragmatic ethos. Bernstein suggests that 'engaged fallibilistic pluralism' is an exception. Koopman and Misak offer pragmatic pluralisms that are markedly different from Dewey by being, respectively, less idealistic and more committed to pursuing truth. Talisse and Aikin, having concluded that pluralism and pragmatism were antithetical, changed their minds and offered a 'modest epistemological pluralism' that they now believe is consistent with pragmatism.

Together, these insights have led me to reconsider my thinking about how my team works together and relate to one another in doing so. Having been naively optimistic about trust and critical of control in our work together, my views were upended by the inspection judgment and have been further challenged by our new ways of working together. The first half of this project led me to conclude that a blindly positive view of trust and blindly negative view of control was problematic not just because it is blind. I have come to recognise how our team have come to see both trust and control in instrumental and autopoietic terms, and as being essentially self-regulating.

The work of Marris, Dewey and the pragmatic philosophers led me to understand further that whilst the ideal of trust is problematic, it does not mean that the facets of trust defined by Tschannen-Moran are themselves problematic: benevolence, openness, honesty, reliability and competence are important aspects of human relating. However, the fact that they are conceptualised as being instrumental to organisational success renders them as problematic as the instruments of control I have typically seen as restrictive or coercive. By the same logic, I have come to see that tools and techniques of control, such as the SEF that we have now agreed to implement, are not inherently restrictive or coercive. It is, instead, the failure to think about, to discuss, to disagree about how we go about trusting and controlling the work of others – both of which are necessary to the functioning of the school as we try to be better – that are important. It is how we relate to one another, how we trust and mistrust each other because of our plural beliefs, that may help us generate more positive concrete consequences in the public realm of our leadership team for the public realm of our school.

Synopsis: The Struggle for Plurality and Politics in School Leadership Practice: Exploring the Importance of Thoughtful Action in Conditions of Uncertainty.

Introduction to the Synopsis

As mentioned in the introduction, the projects that make up this thesis have been written over the course of my three years on the DMan programme and over three years of my professional life.

They are presented here as they were completed at the time, showing the real-time movement in my thinking and practice. I have not tidied them up but have used them as further material to reflect on and to help me make a final reflexive turn in this synopsis. I will begin by summarising each of the projects, drawing out the key themes and insights that I have taken from each of them whilst also reflecting further upon them and the implications for my practice. From this, I will identify recurring and patterned themes from my practice and draw upon the academic and professional literature I have researched to present the arguments of my thesis.

In order to demonstrate the social nature of my research – the plurality of thinking and acting together of my title – I will include in this synopsis an explanation of the methods informing my research and the ways in which this methodology has shaped my understanding of the empirical material presented in my narratives and my ongoing practice. I conclude by articulating the generalisability of my research and staking my claim for a contribution to knowledge and practice.

Summary of Project One

The first project of my thesis involved writing about events in my life that have shaped the way in which I have come to understand my professional practice with others, becoming more reflective and reflexive about these events. This was not an easy process as such memories had become personally precious touchstones: they had become fixed in my memory, enabled me to feel a sense of identity in the world and to act accordingly. Subjecting these memories to critical scrutiny significantly disrupted the enabling aspects of these stories, drawing attention to the way in which such stories were also constraining. We are often the heroes of our own stories and to consider more carefully others within them means to pay attention to less heroic qualities in what we have been doing. In such disruption a sense of the self as villainous, with attendant feelings of guilt and shame, can arise. Taking a final reflexive turn in this synopsis has enabled me to recognise that I and my colleagues down the years are neither heroes nor villains, but ordinary human beings.

Responsibility: Care and Anger

One thing I noticed in revisiting this project is the way in which anger and blame ripple through the narratives about my childhood and working life in ways not apparent to me at the time of writing. The first page of my first project identifies many objects of my anger and, upon re-reading, left me ashamed. The project finishes with a section entitled “a danger of loneliness”, without recognising that these patterned angry ways of thinking about others might have played a part in my feelings of isolation. Even as I pay attention to the constraining nature of this anger, I am drawn to the enabling features of such anger arising from the lifelong sense of responsibility I have felt in looking after others. This is reflected in the first paragraph of my project, which recounts how I was instructed, aged eleven, to be responsible for my family following the death of my brother. This event perhaps best illustrates my choice of profession as a teacher, my desire to become a headteacher, and the ways in which I have executed those roles through a strong sense of care and looking after others.

What I have come to see more clearly through this research is that caring is a relational process: others have invited me to continue playing my preferred care-taking role. At other times, though, people in my narratives have challenged my taking up of that role, including the former headteachers who found it to be insubordinate and threatening. This project touches upon how members of my leadership team have struggled with our tendency to allow me to take on responsibility as a personal crusade, something that comes to the fore in later projects.

Fellow researchers have repeatedly asked me to consider the paradoxical, relational quality of the caring/angry interactions with others featured in my narratives during the programme. I have come to recognise the unavoidability of conflicting views within organisational life where plural ideas of the good are negotiated. This has changed my practice as a manager, helping me better understand what is going on when me and my colleagues disagree. I have also become less angry about people discussed in this first project, seeing less to blame and more to understand about their actions. An example of this is the headteacher about whom I gave an eviscerating leaving speech. During my research, I have come to recognise first-hand the risks under which headteachers work and the anxieties he must have felt as one of the first generation of school leaders to feel this burden.

Power: Right and Wrong

A second disruptive feature I notice in re-reading this project is my patterned binary way of thinking about right and wrong arising from thwarted care-taking and responsibility-holding. One example of this is the ongoing battle I had with the headteacher I have just mentioned who ‘wrongly’ followed government guidance in taking a data-driven approach to school leadership. Such feelings of

rightness and wrongness have been baked in to my ways of viewing the world since childhood through my political beliefs and actions. This perhaps explains my current role as a headteacher trying to do things in the 'right' way.

Many of my observations in this project are about power. Drawing from Arendt (1970), I note my lack of power as a young teacher and my intent to 'wield power gently' as a headteacher, in contrast to the headteacher who failed to address gossip about me in my first school and the headteacher who failed to follow HR processes with me in my second school. In later projects I have developed a less naïve understanding of power as an object that can be used in a right or wrong way. I now see power relationally, emerging between people engaged in political action rather than something to be wielded, gently or otherwise. I have also recognised, with Elias (1978), that my position as headteacher gives me a privileged voice in my interactions with others, resulting from an imbalanced power ratio between myself and my colleagues. I recognise that what I meant in the wielding of gentle power was a commitment to reducing power differentials in working with others.

This insight led to a key reflexive turn I took as I recognised that a conscious attempt on my part to impose democratic forms of leadership is paradoxically an individualistic approach to communal values. This approach reflects a systems-thinking paradigm where leaders can stand outside of relationships to control others' behaviour (Stacey & Mowles, 2016). This systemic discourse suggests that managers can become leaders of others as a result of their ability to rise above, and so control, the system to ensure that it adapts by exercising their positional authority. In the project, this is shown in how I attempted to introduce a 'bottom-up' approach in the work of my leadership teams, but then found myself frustrated and confused by the belief that others in my team used this autonomy to be more 'top-down' in their approaches with others. This led me, in later projects, to pay closer attention to transformational leadership literature with similar assumptions: that shared values can generate harmony and simplify the complexity of plural working relationships.

Plurality: Visibility and Invisibility

A third pattern I notice in re-considering my first project is how other people and their concerns disappear as a result of thinking about them as friends who are right or enemies who are wrong. I wrote at length about a university tutor who I claim ruined my chance of a first-class degree but refer only fleetingly to the fact that I led a walk-out from her class. I only included this in response to the challenges of my learning set about the aggression in my actions and do not try to make sense of what might have been going on for her in this interaction.

Another reason I think I make people's concerns disappear in my narratives for project one is in my attempt to be studiously neutral in resolving conflict. As a new department head, I took the advice a trusted line manager to be neutral about all parties' interests as a way of taking care of people in my team who were upset at our team's dynamics. I point out the limitations of studious neutrality in this project, writing about a time when the leadership team I joined at the same school was unconcerned about the emotions felt by colleagues about our use of Mosquito ultrasonic devices to control student behaviour. We failed to recognise the violence done by the logic with which we were carrying out our plans, losing sight of the means of student achievement in our idealisation of it as an end goal. Although studious neutrality can be problematic, I now recognise its value too. My departmental colleagues mentioned above were happier because I took this approach. It was a form of responsibility-taking that required me to move beyond notions of right and wrong by noticing the concerns of individuals: seeing their equality and their uniqueness (Arendt, 1958). Arendt's ideas about the equality and uniqueness of individuals are more suggestive of impartiality than neutrality, involving recognition of plural views rather than covering them over. I have come to understand that impartiality is necessary in preserving a public space for political action, whereas neutrality carries the danger of neutralising dissensus by rendering competing views of the good less visible.

At the end of the project I refer to the members of my leadership team who feature in later projects. Foreshadowing project four, I contrast my efforts to trust colleagues in school with my team's desire to control them. Placing my team firmly on the bad/wrong side of the dichotomy for their wish to control, I suggested their actions were motivated by violence. I do not give them a voice or a good enough account of their concerns. They disappear and, unsurprisingly, I note a sense of separation from them. I had focused on my experiences and emotions in this project, and I lost sight of them.

Another way of considering this empirical material is that I have become adept as a manager at being studiously neutral, but not dispassionate, with those whose work I manage. In seeing myself as the primary locus of responsibility, and in seeing political power as something to be wielded gently, I have sought to cover over conflict in our work with each other. My colleagues' own sense of responsibility for doing things in a right way, influenced by my patterned ways of acting with them, the societal value placed on such approaches and their own biographies, has perhaps rendered us all keen to be studiously neutral with one another. We negate the different ways in which these concepts of responsibility and rightness are perceived and enacted by others in our team. I have come to recognise that, in covering over conflicting plural views, our team cover over the other as a person too, hiding them from our sight.

Summary of Project Two

Drawing on the themes of responsibility and ethics emerging from project one, for the second project I wrote about a situation at work in which I was called on to exercise judgment between competing notions of the good in a way that caused anxiety. I also considered more fully the third theme arising from the first project of keeping others in view. My work in completing this project was therefore unsettling and represented an important shift in my thinking that would, in later projects, help me become less introspective and more dispassionate about myself in my practice.

The Narrative in Context: The Man of the House

The project two narrative details problems emerging from a colleague seeking to change subject, a request to which I swiftly agreed. The decision led to disputes between middle leaders that were brought to me for resolution by senior leaders as line managers of the subjects. The narrative shows how headteachers carry responsibility for the well-being of colleagues. Reflecting on this now, I can see how the turbulent emotions in the narrative are typical for managers responsible for personnel matters. Not only do HR issues evoke empathy, they also provoke feelings of shame when managers perceive they have not carried out their role well, and feelings of defensiveness when managers consider themselves blameless. I recognise why other colleagues felt they should refer the matter to me, their concern about the decision, and their mixed emotions about negotiations shown in the narrative: the plurality of perspectives explains the relational patterns shown. As the terminus of all line management relations in school, a headteacher judges between competing goods. Reflecting on my anger with others for holding me to account, I note how headteachers must take responsibility for their decisions, but that other senior leaders are bound by obligations to represent those they manage. This creates unease for all, which is shown in breaches of courtesy we cover over to avoid significant harm being done to our relationships. This is important given that headteachers and other school leaders need to find a way of going on together despite challenging one another daily.

Given the title of this narrative, 'The Man of the House', it is not difficult to see how my history plays a part in the emergence of my patterned behaviours. I began project one by outlining how I have been expected, and have expected myself, to look after others since childhood. My first forays into the political world were posited on the notion that society can be unfair and that the remedy to this is for social organisations to avoid wrongdoing and actively do good. Finally, my experience of perceived public indignity (Scott, 1990), at the hands of headteachers through my early career, sharpened that instinct to take care of those with seemingly less power. My experience of seeking

headship was to improve the lives of both adults and children, and to do so better than I had personally known in my life or in my work. In my experience, these motivations are not untypical of headteachers.

The Febrile Equilibrium of Balancing Tensions in Functionalising Cult Values

The narrative shows my tendency to make decisions quickly according to a predetermined personal view of ethics. It also shows how others let me do so without us fully considering the consequences. When challenged by others seeking to resolve the tensions caused by such decision-making, I become angry with them. In my reflections, I considered at length my emotions but did not fully consider the emotions of others involved in the interaction. This introspective preoccupation was reflected in my approach to the work of Elias (1994). Whilst seeing the resonance of his views about the stalemate of power relations, the febrile equilibrium of finely balanced tensions that are typical of figurations, I paid more attention to what Elias had to say about the ruler in this situation. Although I began to consider the problems of an idealised notion of caring leadership, I initially came to similar conclusions to those of project one, a desire to avoid being like headteachers who adopted uncaring technocratic approaches.

I drew on Mead's work on cult values (1923) to better consider the nature of idealistic approaches to leadership. Mead recognised that cult values are part of our social heritage, ideas that underpin communities. For schools, cult values might include a commitment to personal development, the belief that all can achieve or, in the case of this narrative, a belief in an ethic of care. Mead's work, however, challenges the belief that idealised cult values can guide social interaction without the involvement of those engaged in that interaction. Cult values are negotiated through the give-and-take of discussion about, and enactment of, their idealisations with regard to the specific, concrete circumstances in a process Mead calls functionalising. This helped me to come to the first profound insight that challenged my patterned ways of thinking: others in my leadership team were thinking more concretely about colleagues within the school and the effects on them than I was with my abstract, generalised and ideological thinking. From this reading of Mead, I now recognise their attempts to engage me in focused consideration of the details of what caring for others means in practice, the functionalising of an idealised cult value of an ethic of care for others. At the time, I took it as a criticism of my decision-making.

Involvement or Detachment: Transformational Leadership and Relational Responsibility

Contrasting Mead's advocacy of communicative interaction in exercising practical judgment with transformational leadership literature that emphasises the importance of shared goals (Buck, 2017), I started becoming critical towards transformational approaches to school leadership. Originally coined by sociologist James Downton in 1973, transformational leadership was developed further by historian James MacGregor Burns (1978) based on his studies of presidential leadership in America. MacGregor's view of transformational leadership was one that was anti-bureaucratic, a contrast to transactional leadership approaches, and less reliant on the morals of the individual leader than charismatic approaches. Instead, transformational leadership involves leaders fostering better-than-expected organisational performance through "collective commitment to a higher moral cause" (Diaz-Saenz in Bryman et al, 2011, p299). Taken up by the Labour government whose influence on education I describe in project one, transformational leadership was defined as a commitment to "higher standards and increased efficiency" (Bates, 2012, p94) as cult values. This realisation that, as headteacher, I was using moral causes to promote the government's standards agenda became clearer in later projects but, at this stage in my research, I realised that subscribing to idealised cult values, such as an ethic of care, was constraining for all of us. Being seen to be acting against idealised values, labelling ourselves or others as uncaring, provides some explanation of our emotional turbulence in the everyday conflict inherent in functionalising values (Griffin, 2002).

The literature on transformational leadership in schools reifies an emphasis on shared values that is centripetal, forcing people together. To counter this, I considered the social constructionist notion of 'relational responsibility' (McNamee & Gergen, 1999). In relation to the events of the narrative, I explored the view of McNamee and Gergen that the multiple disagreements with members of my team might be seen as an example of responsibility so diffuse that no individual person might be responsible for what happened. Whilst recognising the influence of wider relationships on our interactions in the narrative, I concluded that McNamee and Gergen's views are relativistic and potentially allow for accountability to become abstract. The social constructionist approach splits accountability from our actions, allowing responsibility to disappear rather than emerge between us. The narrative material in project two suggests that this form of pluralism is centrifugal, leaving us unable to negotiate accountability for our actions together. Previously, I viewed accountability as something imposed upon school staff by the government. This view also splits the notion of school accountability from that of responsibility for others, which I have located in my role as headteacher protecting others from accountability mechanisms. This separation denies the conflict inherent in plural political action and leaves the responsibility of others seemingly absent in our work together. It also leaves me lost and isolated in the introspection of an ethic of care, invisible to them.

Involvement and Detachment: Anxieties about Isolation and Belonging

In this project I struggled to recognise my isolation from others, seeing instead a sense of belonging to something bigger through a set of values, which others were invited to idealise with me. Elias (1991) recognises this centrifugal current in human relations as being atomising, generating a loneliness that may be important for social relationships, keeping us aware of the harms we may potentially be doing to others, but which also leaves us with feelings of detachment. Arendt (1958) sees benefit in solitude, in which one is together with oneself through thinking, but cautions against detachment that becomes loneliness or isolation from the world. In the narrative I refer to finding solace in intensely personal reflection on our school field before making an individual decision. I have since come to understand solitude more reflexively, as a space to think by myself in a way that keeps colleagues and their interests present, even though I may seem withdrawn. It helps me to make better sense of my anger and frustration in our interactions by paying attention to their competing views of the good that I struggle to make sense of at the time of those interactions.

By the end of my second project, I came to pay more attention to feelings of anxiety about events in my narrative. I felt this resonated with the insight by Elias that the civilising process (1994) involves the habituated internalisation of conflict *within people* that historically took place *between people*. This led me to consider more thoughtfully the anxieties of others and, reflecting my feelings about this back onto myself, I noted that I perceive more criticism than I receive. At the end of my analysis, I was struck by Stacey's (2003) view that personally-felt fragility of the self reflects insecure attachment relationships in the present that are informed by past anxieties about attachment. In this project I did not explore the link between my biographical attachment anxieties, outlined in project one, and my emotions about conflicting ideas of the good as a headteacher. Instead I concluded that a sense of personal responsibility in my role overwhelms my thoughtfulness and suggested that my next project would stay with the issues of **my** heightened emotions and **my** need for belonging. What strikes me now, looking back, is how, in common with the first project, other people and plural views were in the background of my thinking about these issues.

Summary of Project Three

In light of the introspective nature of earlier projects, I began thinking more relationally about my team's patterned behaviour to consider how my research themes are important for others too. The narrative showed how one of my Team Leader group refused to attend a meeting because of the anxieties he felt after I seemed to ignore an email from him about recruiting someone to the team.

In trying to negotiate his controversial ideas with others, rather than including him in discussions to explain and defend those ideas, I gave the appearance that I was not paying sufficient attention to his view of the good. At that meeting, the rest of our team made the decision without him being present, something that caused us to feel anxiety too. The insights from this project were profound, as together we discussed the usefulness of the Team Leader group before deciding to dismantle it to more fully engage with the wider leadership team.

The Narrative in Context: Elephants in the Room

The focus of this narrative was the relationship between those I directly manage, my Team Leader group of three Deputy Headteachers and the Business Manager, Colin. Although my analysis draws attention to the personalities involved, the context is generalisable. In 2011 our school became an academy funded directly by government. With this came accountability for the school as a business beyond educational provision, hence the central role for a Business Manager within my team. At the same time, the UK government prioritised tougher accountability for educational outcomes. Colin's influence reflects my dependence upon his business expertise, contrasting sharply with my lesser reliance on other Team Leaders whose roles I know well. This dependence seems to others like I prefer his insights. This explains why others may feel the need to negotiate together before team meetings and why I undertake the labour-intensive work of multiple bilateral conversations to help us negotiate meanings rather than fall into patterned divisions. As a Business Manager, Colin's view of the strategic management of schools is fundamentally different to the rest of us, making him appear an outsider (Elias & Scotson, 1994) figure amongst other school leaders with teaching backgrounds.

Evoking my patterned role as 'man of the house', Colin's outsider status leads me to try and look after him which amplifies divisions. In the narrative, this is shown when I try to negotiate an idea on his behalf, and by the frustration of one of my deputies with my attempts to explain his reasoning. I have already explained how being studiously neutral has caused me to feel anxiety about separation from others through my career. It is likely that headteachers always risk isolation because they take a position that privileges one competing idea of the good at times and unable to take a position at others, leaving none of their team feeling fully recognised. In my narrative, the bilateral meetings I describe did both these things at the same time. My deciding with Faith and Lisa to replace Claire, I seemed to be privileging their positions against Colin's views of the good whilst, to them, I had appeared as not willing to take a position about his absence from a crucial meeting.

Distributed Leadership as a Contradiction not a Paradox

In trying to understand the conflicts within my team better, I found that the ways in which I analysed these experiences began to change significantly as a result of the increased rigour of my academic work. Rather than cherry-picking resonant quotes by authors, I noticed that I had begun to engage with whole texts to come to a more critical view. In this project, I explored Distributed Leadership as a theory which has significantly shaped my practice. The work of Gronn (2002) was the theoretical basis for distributed school leadership practice. Gronn draws on complexity sciences to emphasise the emergent nature of distributed leadership, suggesting that this can lead to synchronised plans and actions. In light of my narrative material, this is a problematic view of complexity science which stresses how novelty emerges from difference rather than alignment (Stacey & Mowles, 2016). The assumptions of systems theory dominate Gronn's work. He stresses the headteacher's importance in institutionalising distributed leadership to create synergies. In light of the anxieties evident for my colleagues in this narrative (the annoyance of Lisa about my defence of Colin, the upset of Faith who felt that I didn't value her work, and the isolation of Colin who sensed that his views had gone unheard), I conclude that the emphasis of transformational leadership theories on the importance of the headteacher leaves partners in action uncertain about what is distributed and what is not.

The work of Harris (2003, 2004) rests largely upon the importance of shared meanings forming the culture of schools. Although she asserts that school culture in a distributed leadership paradigm must be democratic and empowering, it is curiously dependent on the headteacher. For Harris, distributed leadership is paradoxical but I conclude that it is contradictory rather than paradoxical: the distribution of leadership rests on the headteacher, keeping in place individualistic assumptions about leadership. Unhelpfully, the contradiction is left to the headteacher to resolve, perhaps explaining my tendency to absorb responsibility. In common with other transformational leadership literature cited in my thesis, the resolution of conflict is achieved through the personal attributes of headteachers and their ability to align others to a shared vision or culture. In critiquing this, my narrative shows how I have become adept at negotiating with others on a personal level without being able to guarantee alignment of competing views of the good, even regarding a matter as important to us all as recruitment to our group.

Having revisited the work of authors whose taken-for-granted view of distributed leadership had influenced my practice, I decided to turn to an author critical of the paradigm. Lumby's critical perspective (2013, 2017) sees distributed leadership as sacrificing the safeguards of bureaucratic governance. Under the guise of distribution, hierarchical leaders use the diffusion of responsibility, away from other managers and towards less positionally-influential others, in order to dilute challenge to their views of the good. This did not resonate with my experience regarding the

negotiations with each of my team. I concluded at the time that Lumby's objective, rather than relational, view of power did not help me understand my experiences within this narrative. I now find myself rethinking this, noting that I achieved all of my goals in the negotiations shown in this narrative, where others did not. Distributed leadership practised as bilateral conversations rather than multilateral discussion, as in this narrative, tends to disaggregate negotiations between us, leaving others in my team feeling unable to challenge my idealised views as a headteacher, the person with the greatest power chance.

Bilateral Conversations and Political Action in the Public Realm

The plurality of ideas of the good is where the heat of my inquiries throughout my thesis has been. That plural views have manifested themselves in conflicts within my team has been the cause of the feelings of isolation in my role, but not the source. I now recognise that the source of my feelings of isolation has been my struggle to reconcile competing views of the good and avoid conflict. In the narrative for project three, this is shown in how I envisioned conflict from an email suggestion from Colin and, feeling unable to prevent it, chose to privatise negotiations to work them out peacefully. The narrative includes blame of others and shame in myself as conflict unfolded despite my efforts. I located the reasons for these patterned feelings of blame and shame in the bilateral conversations with others in my team: using these to steer the conversation between us all had backfired when Colin, whom I was trying to protect, chose not to attend the decision-making meeting.

In making sense of this, I returned to the insights of Elias (1956, 1987, 1994, 2000) about figurations being a fluctuating equilibrium of finely-balanced tensions, paying more attention to the fluctuating experience of others whilst being less defensive of my own concerns about balance in our work. In writing about the self-regulation of conduct resulting from the internalisation of conflict, I was able to reflect more meaningfully on the parallels between my inaction in responding to Colin's email and his inaction through absenting himself from the meeting. In revisiting, less introspectively, Elias' comments on how managers attempt but fail to reduce anxiety by reducing power differentials between themselves and others (Elias, van Krieken & Dunning, 1997), I drew attention to the limitations of distributed leadership theory that leaders can generate harmony through promoting collective agency (Gronn, 2002). My narratives show how this can lead to colleagues negotiating positions before meetings or absenting themselves from meetings where they see the potential of having their preferences negated by a collective view of the good.

I returned to the insights of Arendt (1958, 1977, 2006) in understanding the bilateral conversations recounted in my narrative. Drawing on her distinction between private and public realms, I reverted

to my tendency to see things as right or wrong. Initially, I equated bilateral conversations with the private realm, and therefore wrong, and multilateral conversations with the public realm, and therefore right. Paying more attention to Arendt's belief that pluralities generate the unexpected because they produce new stories that cannot be controlled by anyone (1958), I challenged this simplistic interpretation of bilateral conversations, recognising them as purposeful political action. I focused on Arendt's belief that the public realm is the source of action for political purposes (ibid). Whilst bilateral conversation with others in my team is a form of political action in the public realm, multilateral conversation with a range of conflicting views is a more reliable form of political action and a preferable setting for the public realm. In a multilateral plurality of conflicting ideas of the good, we are more likely to become more nuanced rather than idealising cult values, like distributed leadership, where others disappear as unique humans capable of starting something new through their actions.

Summary of Project Four

Having recognised in my research the need for a relational understanding of the work I did with my team, my fourth project shows how my team responded to uncertainty following a poor inspection judgment. The narrative shows how we struggle to agree with each other, including a meeting in which I felt ganged up on, to which I responded defensively. Buffeted by emotions, I was unable to explain myself but was able to revisit the discussion with them later. This narrative reflects a changed way of working in which we have become better able to challenge one another, and my analysis of this reflects a significant shift in my understanding of the importance of plural views of the good.

The Narrative in Context: Not Good Enough

The fourth project begins with our inspection by the Office for Standards for Education (Ofsted). Ofsted is a disciplinary force in England, routinely changing its inspection processes to wrongfoot school leaders who are adept at playing the inspection game. The risk of not second-guessing Ofsted is represented by our decision not to have a Self-Evaluation Form (SEF), a supposedly non-statutory document without which the inspection team felt unable to judge the school 'good' or better. The questions posed by inspectors seeking quantitative evidence of leadership impact on standards has left us seeking measures that will better satisfy what Ofsted will expect when they revisit the school.

The disagreements recounted in the narrative show how we came to question our ethos of trust and our control of school processes. What was striking for me was noticing how my guilt at the outcome and defensiveness about valued aspects of my work was mirrored by others. When we needed to be open to critique, we found ourselves hardening positions with others. Even the impetus of new team members is problematic, bringing a wider plurality of views and reducing the opportunity for people to contribute fully. It brings a different challenge to our interactions as newcomers seek to make sense of their roles and invite us to reflect on choices we have previously made.

In project one I wrestled with the discomfort of realising that a colleague's comment that I was a poacher turned gamekeeper was not a compliment. Having spent my early career fighting against the school standards agenda, and the middle part of my career with shame at my eager acceptance of managerialism, I had thought I had found a better way with a bottom-up approach to leadership (Arnstein, 1969) that seemed to work for people as well as standards. The events in this narrative appear to suggest that there is a fundamental double-bind (Elias, 1994) in school leadership. Playing the managerial game differently to others, by not having a SEF for example, involves loss of the game whilst playing the game according to the rules, by having a SEF for example, involves loss of the self for headteachers and school leaders. We find ourselves disappearing in importance not only because of the expectations of seemingly impersonal accountability mechanisms, but also by the accepted forms of responding to those expectations. What is the point of school leaders if they appear to have no control over the 'why' or the 'how' of school leadership practice?

Multifaceted Relational Trust and Linearity

The narratives in this project reflect my concerns that our team appear to lack trust in each other and in me as headteacher. The inspection outcome has brought this into focus, but it is apparent in earlier projects. I therefore examined issues regarding trust and control I had previously viewed as being, respectively, good and bad approaches to school leadership. Having explored idealisations of care and distributed leadership in previous projects, I chose to revisit my understanding of relational trust. I began by exploring theoretical work I have drawn on as headteacher by Bryk and Schneider (2002), and Tschannen-Moran (1997, 2000, 2009, 2014), who suggest a multifaceted relational view of trust that reflects the complexity of school life. Their work draws on correlations between facets of trust and school outcomes measured by metrics of attitude and student achievement. For a new headteacher this approach was incredibly persuasive, promising improvements in performative and ethical dimensions of school life. In completing this project, I came to see how advocates of school-

based trust literature place unwarranted emphasis on the ability to measure trust, the likelihood of synchrony between school leaders, and the positional authority of headteachers.

These insights did not match the experiences of my narrative, which described a lack of synchrony about effective measures of trust and challenge of my authority. Relational trust theorists repeat insights I had disputed in earlier projects, relying on headteacher agency to generate harmony. In view of my narrative, the literature on school-based trust is problematic. It presents an idealised reality of headship that does not resonate with my experiences of being a headteacher who has advocated for, and believed in, such idealised views. For example, the literature on relational trust takes a linear approach to organisational change, using metaphors with a religious or pastoral quality (Forsyth et al, 2011. Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2014) in which the headteacher's vision, or the seeds of trust they plant, will inspire others or grow naturally. This ran counter to our inspection report, which noted high levels of trust despite a poor judgment, and the ensuing arguments of our leadership team. Conflicting visions and rival seeds in the flower-bed are invisible to transformational leadership literature. Our experience shows that simply asserting the value of trust in improving outcomes denies alternative interpretations of what trusting means as a relational process, with the unintended consequence of stifling dissent.

Planning for Trust: A Case of Autopoiesis or Attachment?

The work of Luhmann (2017) provided me with a more relational, less linear understanding of trust, and a more nuanced view of control and distrust as interwoven with ideas about trust. Luhmann's insights helped explain how times when we appear to trust one another allow us to see what he calls 'future presents', notions of the uncertain future which are risky and contingent on what we agree upon now as we move forward towards our next inspection. At the same time, disagreement and distrust amongst us, understandably prevalent in this narrative, enable us to rethink what we are doing together and draw up plans and performance indicators that we can enact to bring greater control to our relationships with each other. These plans or indices demonstrate 'present futures' that help build system trust to supersede personal trust. This indicates Luhmann's interest in developing a theory of organisational change that operates independently of human individuality. In the narrative, systemic trust takes the form of a self-evaluation form (or SEF) that potentially offers my team a pathway between advocacy for more monitoring or more professional learning. We can trust that both can coexist, rather than fighting for one or other as the only way forward.

System trust indices allow us to notice and recognise competing views, but Luhmann asserts that system trust can become autopoietic, self-maintaining and depersonalised: an index such as a SEF

replaces the need for our team to negotiate plural views of the good. Drawn from the biological insights of Maturana, Varela and Uribe (1981), autopoiesis applied to human interaction claims that living systems have boundaries in which unity and homeostasis can be maintained by the absorption of perturbations that only come from within the boundaries of the system (Varela, 1981). A belief in autopoiesis informs the assumptions underpinning the English inspection system: the inspection report is an index of performance from which improvement of the bounded school system follows. I recognise how my uncritical advocacy of relational trust also appealed to autopoiesis: if my team, as a bounded system, learned how to trust then we would work better together, enabling greater trust that in turn would enable us to work even better still. What these conclusions fail to recognise is the inherently unbounded nature of human interaction. Luhmann's insights enabled me to see conflict with my team less personally, but his conclusions suggest an essentially depersonalised public realm, which is no public realm at all. While the inspection process trusts schools to improve, my narratives show this is achieved with hard-fought interpersonal political action.

Having rejected the autopoietic nature of both Luhmann and relational trust theories as too abstract and too detached from the experiences of headship shown in my narratives, I wanted to turn to theories that recognised the attachments involved in negotiating plural views of the good with which I had struggled in previous projects. Marris (1996) pays attention to the interdependence of people working together, focusing on how the experience of childhood attachment shapes adult attitudes about social causes. The narrative shows how members of my team care deeply enough about their contribution to our work together to argue passionately for continuity, even as we recognised collectively the need to change our practice. When attachments are negotiated, the differences that emerge between people are to be expected and Marris suggests that these are best negotiated through persuasion. This involves respect for others' views by staying in conversation to try and understand their understanding of the world. It is reflected in my narrative by the way in which, having not understood why members of my team were unhappy, I promised to return to the topic later to try and to give them a better account.

Like Luhmann, Marris sees plans as helping control co-operating but conflictual views, but views the negotiation of trust as personal, not systemic. This is especially true in uncertainty when blame and exclusion cause feelings of insecurity and when ideals can function as a 'super-parent' to separate us from others. It is striking that I have idealised so many super-parental ideals and have invited the 'man of the house' idealisation of my leadership. Although benevolent and enabling at times, my thesis shows how the headteacher-as-parent ideal can be unbenevolent and constraining for my colleagues and myself, infantilising others in my team and leaving me with a sense of responsibility which is overwhelming. A 'man of the house' leader is unhelpful in constructing what Marris calls a

shared morality, a commitment to negotiating persuasively with others, which is essential for the trusting relationships needed when working together in times of uncertainty.

The Pluralism of Pluralisms: Deep, Shallow and Modus Vivendi

Marris stresses the need for coherence and understanding in moral matters but does not identify how this might be manifested in the plurality of the public sphere. I turned to the work of Dewey (1927/2016), who defines 'the public' as conjoint activity between people negotiating competing notions of the good that have factual, concrete consequences for others. A focus on general ideals is problematic for public discourse because it loses sight of the particular ways in which the ideal manifests itself in our practice. Our work as a school leadership team responding to a negative inspection is an example of the public, but idealising trust as an abstract, generalised concept rather than something emerging between people is problematic for the political functioning of that public.

Dewey warns against how those with a greater power ratio can manipulate others, using ideals to control or repress thoughts and opinions of others often through seemingly benevolent dispositions. Writing at a time when advocacy of technocratic governance threatened democratic ideals, Dewey asserts that idealised forms of 'the public' could mean that the plurality of views necessary for the public realm are silenced or disappear. This explains the importance of my team's willingness to stay in debate with each other, even when this can seem conflictual and disharmonious. In doing so we exemplify the Deweyan democratic ideal of a community of inquiry which involves paying attention to attachments, engaging in discussion and using inquiry to make judgments about the particular.

Recognising that I have been uncritical as a manager about appealing ideals with a communitarian flavour, I chose not to conclude with Dewey's democratic ideal of plurality. Instead, I explored other pragmatic views of pluralism, discovering a rich seam of analytical thinking by pragmatists suggesting a plurality of competing notions of plurality. Aikin and Talisse (2005, 2016) synthesise by recognising three forms of pluralism. 'Shallow pluralism' is tolerant of, but disengaged with, competing views. 'Deep pluralism' is agonistic and sometimes violent in the quest for truth. 'Modus vivendi pluralism' seeks a processual character for negotiating differences, and I equated this last version of pluralism with Dewey's notion of the 'democratic ideal'. I have since come to believe that a pluralism of pluralisms has a relational quality that better explains the narratives in my thesis and what they say about the work of my team. Sometimes we care deeply enough about our ideas of the good to fight hard and persuade others to think as we do. Sometimes the differences between us are shallow enough for us to accept other ideas of the good. And sometimes, most often, we find a good enough way to negotiate and functionalise competing ideas of the good that are neither very deep

nor shallow but have enough resonance to keep us in conversation as a way of managing together. In doing so, we know that we have had our say, been visible to others in the political process of inquiry and are therefore partly responsible for what ensues, be it good enough or not.

Critical Evaluation of my Research

Throughout my projects, I have become increasingly interested in theories of leadership considered part of the transformational leadership paradigm. This has only become apparent to me towards the end of my research and so the next section of my synopsis contextualises the arguments I will go on to make later. I will show how school transformation has become the dominant discourse in educational theory, considering the appeal of these approaches and the implications they have for the practice of headteachers and school leaders. In reconsidering the value of transformational leadership theories for understanding my practice, I have taken a critically reflexive approach in my research, identifying assumptions within transformational approaches that lack explanatory power for my experience of school leadership. In making sense of this, I characterise the contradictions inherent in transformational school leadership literature as examples of magico-mythical thinking (Elias, 1956). I conclude this section by identifying three particular examples of magico-mythical thinking within the transformational approaches I have previously found important in thinking about my practice: the myths of enduring harmony, positional authority and complexity reduction.

Transformation in Schools as the Dominant Discourse for School Leadership

I have taken an abductive approach to my inquiry (Mowles, 2017b), allowing narrative episodes to suggest questions about my practice with others which have led me to consider old theoretical ideas informing my work to construct novel insights. In taking this abductive approach, I have also come to reconsider existing ways of thinking about my practice drawn from theoretical material I have engaged with in the past. This has included my enactment of the insights of researchers who have promoted theories of distributed leadership (Gronn, 2002. Harris, 2003, 2004) and relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002. Tschannen-Moran, 1997, 2000, 2009, 2014) as potential solutions to the messy complexity of educational settings. Both of these theoretical constructs are examples of the transformational school leadership literature.

Transformational approaches have become the dominant discourse in educational theory in the past thirty years, a period of time that notably coincides with the high-accountability era in the UK's

education system and the entirety of my career in teaching. My first middle leader role was in 2000 and my first senior leader role in 2005, and so it is unsurprising that these theories have been consequential for my practice as a headteacher. Since the turn of the century, the assumptions underpinning transformational school leadership have been routinely promoted by school leadership training programmes of the kind that I took as I progressed into senior leadership roles. The latest incarnation of the National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) for school leaders includes references to facets of relational trust for middle leaders in the NPQML and the importance of distributed forms of leadership for senior leaders in the NPQSL (Department for Education, 2019). Future 'Executive Leaders' of multiple schools taking the NPQEL are required to learn how to "motivate and unite a wide range of people across organisations around visionary or challenging goals" (ibid, unpagged), mirroring transformational leadership's pseudo-religious imagery which I have discussed in this thesis. How is it that transformational approaches have come to dominate the landscape of educational theory, policy and practice?

Transformational Leadership: From Political to Organisational to Educational Theory

Transforming leadership, the forerunner of transformational approaches, was given theoretical form by historian and political theorist Burns. Drawing inspiration from global politics and histories of renowned leaders, Burns "salvages" aspects of charismatic and ideological leadership as strands of transforming leadership (Burns, 1978, p251). In contrast to transactional leadership, which involves a "muddling through" by leaders faced with a pluralist "plethora of values" (ibid, p409), transforming leaders show mastery, using conflict to align their political environment to intentionally effect ethically good change. Leaders, acting on their values, transform systems and elevate followers through planned action. Transforming leaders see political change as starting anew through "heightened motivations, purpose, and missionary spirit" (ibid, p437). The positional authority of the leader is paramount in developing hierarchies, centralising communication and maintaining discipline to exploit the energies of followers. The transforming leader's higher morality keeps ethical goals of change in view, promoting unity and congruence of purpose and motivation with followers so that "social and political collectivity" (ibid, p452) follows.

The application of Burn's ideas to organisational politics was made by Bass and Avolio. Bass seeks to soften the possible anti-democratic facets of Burns' transforming theory (Bass, 2005, p5). Leaders serving self-interests are "pseudo-transformational, or inauthentic transformational leaders" (ibid, p13). Authentic transformational leaders treat followers as ends, not the means to other ends, using their charisma positively in ways that stimulate, engage and inspire followers to "extraordinary

outcomes” (ibid, p3). Together with Avolio, Bass brought notions of culture-building and shared vision into transformational approaches. Leaders can change their organisation’s culture by understanding it and realigning it through “a new vision and a revision of its shared assumptions, values, and norms” (Bass & Avolio, 1993, p112). Transformational leaders influence, motivate and show consideration in their work, are personally responsible for followers and believe everyone to be trustworthy and capable of growing into transformational leaders themselves. Although “there is generally a sense of purpose and a feeling of family” (ibid, p116), transformational leaders are wary of conservative attitudes, beliefs and rituals that hamper change efforts in their organisations.

Hallinger and Leithwood apply transformational leadership to schools. Like Burns and Bass, these authors contrast transformational ideals with transactional approaches in the form ‘instructional leadership’. Instructional approaches are rejected by Hallinger (1992) as “inherently managerial” (p38) and not valid for schools responsible for “the *initiation* of change, not just the *implementation* of changes” (ibid, p40). Leithwood identifies differences between traditionally autonomous school cultures and an emerging student-centred school culture. A transformed school system requires transformational leaders “to take schools into the 21st century” (Leithwood, 1992, p8). Leithwood reflects the leader-centric view of Burns and Bass, but softens it as transformational school leaders “reduce differences in the status of organisational members” (ibid, p9). This marks the emergence of distributed leadership (Gronn, 2002. Harris, 2003 & 2004), a strand of transformational theory discussed in this thesis. Hallinger stresses the problem-solving and capacity-building responsibilities of transformational headteachers, but insists that collaboration is key in achieving this. It is not the headteacher’s personal vision that determines school policy but the goals of “those who interact on a daily basis with students” (Hallinger, 1992, p41). This belief forms a link to relational trust theories (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2009) discussed in this thesis. Educational theorists take a more nuanced view of the headteacher’s role in transformational leadership than earlier theorists, but the headteacher as leader of leaders (ibid) still retains a positional authority to share power, create “high levels of commitment” and “foster norms and beliefs” (Leithwood, 1990, p10).

A final turn taken in transformational leadership literature, as it became the dominant discourse in educational theory and practice, saw it taken up by politicians to inform education policies. Crucial to this was the work of Barber (1995 & 1997), who links transformational approaches to the system leadership discourse in advocating a ‘reconstructing’ of the teaching profession (Barber, 1995) and ‘reengineering’ of school leadership (Barber, 1997). A supporter of the New Labour policies enacted from 1997 to 2010, Barber’s work echoes the elevating, ethical dimensions of Burns and the culture change views in the work of Bass. Barber stresses the need for a “quantum leap in standards”

(Barber, 1995, p77) achieved through a “crusade” for radical change (ibid, p78). Seeking “political, economic and social transformation” (Barber, 1997, p196) requires a crusading, missionary government willing to strengthen accountability mechanisms and the collective endeavour of school leaders and teachers (ibid, p188-189). Collaboration for transformation is hard and conflictual, demanding “the creation of a new climate which assumes a shared sense of ambition” (ibid, p196) in pursuit of higher standards to build “competitiveness and social wellbeing” (ibid, p199).

The Appeal of Transformational Leadership Theories for an Aspiring Headteacher

The theories of transformational school leadership literature discussed above have helped to define my identity as a school leader and a headteacher. Returning to look again at the assumptions that have shaped my professional practice, and critique them, has led me to question a good deal of what I have been doing in ways that have been professionally challenging. I hope in this section to give a good enough account of their appeal to me at the time even though, through my inquiry, I now consider them to be fairly shallow explanations of the complex nature of organisational life.

Transformational school leadership theories seek to transform the moral values of others based on the moral values of the leader to effect ‘real change’. My first experiences of school leadership coincided with the election of a Labour government that promised real change. As a supporter of this government, their support for transformational leadership, backed with huge expenditure on education to promote social justice, gave these theories a sense of legitimacy for me. I was also attracted by the ethical intent of these theories, with leaders elevating others through consideration and family feeling. This contrasted with former headteachers who had embarked on programmes of change in ways that I found divisive and threatening, not inspiring of others. My inquiries into my practice as a headteacher show, however, that my positional authority can also be experienced negatively by others, however ethical my intentions. This has caused me to question appeals to harmony, and the positional moral authority of the headteacher, in transformational approaches.

Transformational approaches were also appealing for me as a new, young manager who stood on the cusp of the 21st century. Each of the theorists discussed above persuade readers by contrasting the new with the old, to the detriment of the latter. Seeing leadership as a form of starting anew is appealing, and with transformational theories came new resources and new training opportunities, particularly in leadership theory. Contrasting conservatism and change, or implementation and initiation, is a persuasive device in transformational theories of leadership. Seeing transformation against ‘muddling through’ appeals to the agency of the individual headteacher. My empirical material suggests, however, that the complex process of negotiating competing views of the good

with others cannot easily be simplified without rendering those ideas of the good, and the people who hold them, less visible. This has caused me to question appeals to positional authority and to complexity reduction in transformational theories of school leadership.

Transformational theories also appeal to managers by promising a perceived community of practice, with a vocabulary that evokes school leadership as a communal experience. According to these theories, assured leaders elicit unity, congruence, culture-building and shared vision to democratise schools as more community-centred. These ideas suggest belonging for leaders, using the jargon of leadership to connote that sense of belonging. Even if ideals are not realised, transformational leaders transform the way leaders speak about their practice. This emphasis upon a community of shared values contrasts with the daily experience of school leadership shown in my narratives, in which we always appear to be arguing for different ways to achieve the same ends. As a result, I have come to question the ways transformational theories appeal to headteachers and other school leaders about the possibility of enduring harmony and reduced complexity in their practice.

The Contradictions of Transformative School Leadership Literature

In my thesis, therefore, I have repeatedly noticed a striking contradiction between the experiences I have had as a headteacher and the transformational leadership theories to which I have subscribed. My team's experiences, exemplified by the narratives, are full of examples of disagreement, conflict, negative emotions, attacks, revenge and self-censorship of these affects through suppressed speech and action. By contrast, transformational school leadership suggests that headteachers can create a world of collective buy-in (Buck, 2017), synchrony (Gronn, 2002), common culture (Harris, 2004), shared values (Bryk & Schneider, 2002) and greater deliberation (Tschannen-Moran, 2009).

The seemingly negative experience of daily life as a headteacher described in my projects can have only two explanations for theorists of transformational school leadership. Either the team is dysfunctional and must be coerced into appropriate behaviours by the headteacher, or the headteacher is incompetent and should be replaced. The headteacher as "best of organisational citizens" is located at the centre of the explanation (Forsyth et al, 2011, p169). Others disappear unless they are doing as they are told or as they are willed. Little wonder, as a subscriber to transformational leadership, that these narratives convey so much anxiety for me and my team.

Others, like Lumby (2013, 2019), have been critical of transformational approaches, arguing that they potentially remove the checks and balances of bureaucratic governance structures. Drawing from Arendt, the UK-based theorist of educational leadership, Helen Gunter, recognises the banality of distributed leadership which is "seductive and exciting" but thoughtless (Gunter, 2014, p90),

focused on the “imagined heroic single leaders” of schools (ibid, p94). Both Lumby and Gunter see the irony of a supposedly democratic ideal of distributed leadership that enhances the power of positional leaders. I share their concerns about the potentially totalising nature of transformational approaches reliant on the headteacher, unquestioned ideas of the good dominated by the authority of the positional leader, but it was to more relational theories of organisational life that I turned to explore the contradiction between transformational leadership literature and my lived experience.

Magico-Mythical Thinking

I will make the bridge between my project summaries, this necessary discussion of transformational leadership theories and my arguments with the idea of ‘magico-mythical thinking’ (Elias, 1956). Elias argues that we think about our participation in figurations as being both involved and detached. Involved thinking is typical of the pre-scientific age, when causal explanations of events were not known. It was expressed in the form of magico-mythical thinking, where metaphysical or transcendental ideas provided explanations for events: God’s anger as an explanation for plagues, harvest failures or untimely deaths are examples. Following Elias, Stacey argues that this mode of magico-mythical thinking – “the creation of a mystery to solve a mystery” (Stacey, 2007, p297) – is reflected in contemporary leadership literature. Mowles argues that this leads to leadership texts in which “insubstantial nonsense is presented as though it were common sense” (Mowles, 2011, p110; Spicer, 2018). From my research, I argue that transformational school leadership literature relies on three myths that create mysteries to solve mysteries by presenting nonsense as common sense: the myths of enduring harmony, complexity reduction and positional authority.

The Enduring Harmony Myth

The first of these myths is the ‘enduring harmony myth’, in which fleeting moments of concord for school managers are posed as potentially permanent organisational features by transformational literature. Having followed their theories diligently as headteacher, why had I not seen promised harmonious outcomes? Advocates of distributed leadership say that it creates synergy, democracy and empowerment. Synchrony and inclusivity follow when schools implement effective relational trust. Although conflict is recognised by these authors, particularly jurisdictional arguments for distributed leadership and untrustworthy behaviour of others for school-based trust, their theories promise effective conflict avoidance and disagreement resolution.

The Complexity Reduction Myth

A second feature of these texts is the 'complexity reduction myth'. Transformational authors claim that distributed leadership and relational trust are vital in highly complex schools that are shaped by the expectations of equally complex national systems and societies. Their methodologies involve the measurement of abstract concepts such as culture, climate and morale (distributed leadership) and respect, competence and integrity (relational trust). Aggregated data is correlated with student outcomes to quantify impact and is presented as causative to suggest that distributed leadership and relational trust lead to improved school outcomes. As with harmony, this idea of complexity as something that can be measured, packaged and implemented does not resonate with my experiences in the narratives.

The Positional Authority Myth

Another assumption made by transformational leadership literature about schools is the 'positional authority myth'. Transformational leadership literature seeks to empower others and democratise schools but is dependent on the headteacher to jump-start change, develop a common culture and resolve conflict through social control or coercion. Headteachers possess interpersonal skills such as emotional intelligence, empathy and optimism alongside constant effort, vigilance and reflection in order to achieve high levels of care, distribution or trust. Transformational literature claims this top-down leadership of bottom-up change is paradoxical. My narratives show that it is contradictory. The headteacher is expected to manage the contradiction of being in charge and not in charge, as well as the anxiety and uncertainty for others about what is distributed and what is not.

The Enduring Appeal of Transformational School Leadership Myths

A minority of educational academics are critical of transformational leadership theories and agree on its neoliberal nature. Transformational approaches function as 'corporate technology' (Gunter, 2018) to narrow the freedom of school leaders (Niesche & Thomson in Waite & Bogotch, 2017) and cause extensive damage to teachers and students (Hughes et al, 2019). Others suggest that unbenign visioning (Gunter & McGinity, 2014) and the primacy of the individual are ethically problematic (Pendola, 2019), and that transformational leadership is a wilful elite discourse (Veck & Jessop, 2016) that requires the thoughtless following of orders from those with control of power structures (Gunter, 2015) at a local, national and global level.

My research shows that distributed leadership theories advocate exploitation of 'leaders' beyond those remunerated for hierarchical leadership positions. Relational trust theories unquestioningly

promote voluntary labour and staff resilience in coping with rapid and constant change, as though change is a good in itself. In this way, both forms of transformational leadership featured in this thesis uncritically accept the erosion of bureaucratic safeguards in pursuit of student outcomes.

Why are transformational leadership myths so appealing? Recent research on transformational school leadership is largely uncritical with one review concluding that it is “the leadership style most researchers feel is appropriate for today’s schools” (Anderson, 2017, p1). Reflecting the myths outlined above, researchers across the world promote the centrality of the headteacher (Moolenaar & Slegers, 2015) in generating staff self-efficacy (Damanik & Aldridge, 2017), ‘psychological empowerment’ (Sagnak et al, 2015) and work motivation (Andriani et al, 2018. Kouni et al, 2018). Research on transformational leadership reports a positive impact on teacher performance (Aunga & Masare, 2017) and ‘team learning’ (Bouwman et al, 2017) contributing to reduced staff turnover (Sun & Wang, 2016). Where evidence suggests that it has had little impact on achievement (Allen et al, 2015; Dutta & Sahney, 2016. Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016), researchers suggest the need to address shortcomings in transformational school leadership rather than abandon it (Berkovich, 2016) because of its positive ethical and moral impacts on schooling (Cherkowski et al, 2015).

Transformational approaches seem here to stay, suggesting its myths resonate with the interests of headteachers and school leaders. Who doesn’t value harmony, simplicity and benignly-exercised authority in leading a school to improved staff efficacy and student achievement? The longevity and dominance of transformational leadership suggest that it reflects the cult values of educational leadership. What these approaches do not offer for managers is a nuanced understanding of how those cult values are functionalised in the phenomenological arena of school leadership practice.

Arguments

Introduction to my Arguments

It is only in concluding my research that I can identify as myths the assumptions of transformational school leadership literature about ideas of enduring harmony, positional authority and complexity reduction. This is in part a result of the lack of explanatory power the myths have for events in my narratives and my experience of school leadership, but is also as a result of my deep engagement with other literature that takes a relational view of human action.

In the following pages I will argue that the myth of enduring harmony is unwarranted because plural views of the good are inescapable within organisational life. I argue against the positional authority myth, suggesting that responsibility for our actions together is a shared endeavour that is continually co-constructed in relation with others. Finally, I argue that the complexity reduction myth is flawed, and that negotiation with others as a community of inquiry can help us functionalise cult values in order to reduce the anxiety of uncertainty.

Argument 1: Plural views of the good are an inescapable feature of organisational life which cannot be covered over by illusions of harmony.

The Presence of Conflict in my Empirical Material

Throughout my thesis, conflict is a dominant motif. My first project demonstrates how I had come to 'other' others with whom I have had conflictual relationships, to negate their perspectives and render them invisible. Whilst this othering continues in the narratives written during my research, these conflictual relationships sit more uneasily with me than through my career as, in this thesis, I have attempted to give a better account of others and be more critical of my own ways of thinking and acting. Conflicts remain, however, and continue to trouble me as a manager. In the narratives there are fleeting moments of harmony, but more prevalent are negative feelings of anger and irritation which lead to punitive actions including a flounce, defensiveness, self-justification and the side-lining of partners in disagreement. This is also true for others who use emotional blackmail, absent themselves from discussions, and gang up on others in meetings.

What is going on here? Are violent emotions and hurtful actions symptomatic of a dysfunctional relationship between leaders in my team, or typical of the political give-and-take of organisational life? The fleetingness of the moments of harmony, and their importance to us, perhaps give a clue as to what is happening, as does the fact that these moments involve a sense of dread anticipation

of the next conflict. The feelings of shame and the inability to communicate how each of us feel suggest that the patterns within my team are generalisable features of organisational life.

Conflict as an Inescapable Feature of Organisational Life

A recurring feature for many of the theorists whose work I have drawn upon in this thesis is the insight that we do not exist in isolation. I refer to Mead's belief that there would be no individual sense of mind and self without other selves (Mead, 1934, 1958). I also draw upon Arendt's dictum that plurality is an essential feature of the human condition simply because it is men in the plural and not man in the singular who inhabit the world (Arendt, 1958). Like Mead and Arendt, Elias (1991) recognises that we are born into already existing social processes and are utterly dependent upon others to survive in the world and gain a sense of our self in it. Setting one above the other, as Thatcher seemed, to my teenage self, to be doing in claiming that there was no such thing as society (1987), is 'absurd' to Elias and this single resonant comment invited me in to consider more fully his work.

Elias writes about social groups as being double-bind figurations (1994) in which interdependent antagonists are mutually tied to each other as a result of their varying power chances and their manoeuvres within the group to influence the thoughts and actions of others. In my narratives, the double-bind of our work is experienced by my team as conflict. The intense emotions created and reflected by this incessantly fluctuating balance of tensions (2000) within our group isn't adequately explained by transformational leadership theories. In early projects I paid attention to Elias' insights about the nominal rulers in these figurations. His claim that rulers restrain spontaneous tendencies in ways that create invisible barriers (1991) between themselves and others echoed the introspective approach I took in understanding my responses to conflict. Paying attention to Elias' work in a less centred way, I recognised how all partners in interaction are affected by fluctuations of power chances. We are all dependent on each other, whether we like it or not. This helped me better understand why two members of my team demanded I resolve a conflict between them that was not profound. This re-thinking of my experience encouraged me to write more openly, in later projects, about the most troubling conflicts within my team that I had struggled to write previously.

In taking a self-centred view of the writings of Elias, I was reflecting how far I had absorbed some of the myths of transformational leadership literature: it was my responsibility to build harmony and avoid or resolve conflicts by distributing more power to others and showing more trust in them.

Elias, however, recognises that in a balance of tensions marked by constant struggles to overwhelm or be overwhelmed by others, there is a tendency for all to idealise peace and harmony (1994). In

the anxiety to avoid conflict, leaders who strive to reduce tensions by reducing power differentials between themselves and others in the figuration may serve to increase both the intensity and frequency of conflicts, making distributed leadership potentially counterproductive.

Elias explores how socially-formed, and socially-forming, interdependent figurations generate psychologically-formed, and psychologically-forming, constraints on behaviour. In contemporary societies, the tension and conflict playing out between people has also been internalised by people (ibid). By emphasising abstract notions intended to lessen external disagreements and conflict (an ethic of care, distributed leadership or relational trust), leaders are likely instead to increase tensions and conflicts within people. These abstractions take us away from the specific words and actions of individuals, leaving us wondering whether we are actually cared for, entrusted or trusted. This is perhaps most strikingly demonstrated by my colleague's refusal to attend a meeting. By contrast, the cathartic and satisfying release of the one open conflict in my narratives, gives credibility to Elias' insight that conflict between people can paradoxically lessen tension or conflict within them.

Plural Views of the Good as an Inescapable Feature of Organisational Life

In challenging the notion of a myth of enduring harmony prevalent in theories of transformational school leadership literature, I am aware of the potential of moving from an idealistic view of the political arena of school leadership to an antagonistic, perhaps cynical perspective. The work of Arendt (1958) argues for recognition of the agonistic nature of political endeavour with others, one that is rooted in her notion that plurality is a fundamental aspect of the human condition.

Placing this insight in context, I note in this thesis how Arendt (1951) saw such plurality as a bulwark against the totalitarianism that had shaped her personal and professional life as a German-Jewish political thinker. Plurality helps us challenge the single ideas present in political life that claim to be sufficient to explain everything (Arendt, 1953), and to disrupt the logicity that squeezes out thoughtful consideration of alternative ideas and constricts the space for collaboration. Action in concert with others is our primary method for establishing a common sense (Arendt, 1981) of the world we inhabit so we can better care for that world and become visible to each other in our individuality. Common sense for Arendt (2005) is a sixth sense that emerges between people as a multi-perspectival understanding of the phenomena about which they are collectively engaged through speech and action. It does not refer to a fixed point of agreement but is constantly in flux through agonistic consideration and reconsideration of the things we perceive to be common to us.

Arendt's insights relate closely to Mead's notion of the functionalisation of cult values, as opposed to their idealisation (1923). The latter can be achieved by the individual, but the former must be

worked on within a plurality. This idea of common sense as a plural negotiation of cult values to functionalise them stands in contrast to the individualised nature of transformational leadership literature which depends on harmonious ideals around which plural views of the good coalesce. Alignment and compliance are the likely states of transformational 'harmony'. Cooperation and conflict functioning together uncomfortably are, however, the likely states of the enactment of common sense-making within a plurality of competing views of the good.

Throughout this thesis, I have been drawn to the inescapability of conflict in the organisational life of the school I lead through the narratives about our work together. Through my research I have come to recognise that an idealistic notion of conflict-free harmony is neither possible nor desirable and that conflict is not an antagonistic expression of dysfunctionality in my team. Instead we are struggling for a good enough harmony to take the next steps together as a leadership team. The conflict that we engage in along the way is an entirely normal consequence of plurality that is covered over by transformational literature which reifies the centrality of the role of headteacher in managing and resolving conflict. It is this 'positional authority myth', one that has profoundly shaped my understanding of responsibility, that I will address in the second argument of my thesis.

Argument 2: Responsibility for action within organisational life is co-constructed relationally.

Responsibility in Transformational Theories: Individualised Natality as Positional Authority

Throughout my thesis, I have engaged with literature that has challenged the ways in which I had come to accept the assumption within transformational leadership literature that responsibility for the politics of an organisation lies with the most senior postholder. Transformational leadership suggests that those with positional authority are responsible for the organisation's shared values (Harris, 2004). I have recognised how idealised cult values exist only through being functionalised in everyday communicative interaction in which people consider concrete phenomena, not abstract ideals (Mead, 1923). Values cannot be known in advance but emerge from interaction (Griffin, 2002): although they are held by individuals (and have a hold on individuals) they are revealed in the social process of functionalising idealised cult values. By contrast, transformational theories suggest that shared values have a teleological nature (Forsyth et al, 2011. Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2014) and that headteachers exercise responsibility through planting the seeds or inspiring the vision. Transformational approaches also suggest that the positional authority of headteacher means that they are responsible for other people in schools, with whom they have disjoint relations (Gronn,

2002). This myth resonates with managers who find themselves in the crossfire of tensions (Elias, 1994), seeing their roles as being responsible for navigating others' interests to prevent dispute.

The disillusionment in my narratives show what happens when headteachers 'responsible' for enacting transformational approaches are unable to guarantee the promised outcomes. Through these projects I show how headteachers taking responsibility for their school's values and for others in the organisation is difficult, demanding and, ultimately, self-defeating. The assumption that responsibility relies on the positional authority of the headteacher impacts collective responsibility. By sharing responsibility, but recognising that this does not mean an equal sharing of responsibility at all times, my team has increasingly stayed involved with each other at times of uncertainty. In later narratives we revisit disagreements together to more thoughtfully consider the consequences of our actions. At the same time, I notice how I have come to think in structural terms, seeing that changing groupings can facilitate shared responsibility. This shows that there remains a lingering appeal to the 'positional responsibility myth', a sense of my being the designer of institutional processes in my practice as headteacher, although I recognise at the same time that this was a decision we took together. This has led me to consider how individuals remain accountable for the thoughtfulness or otherwise of their actions within a plurality, even though they cannot and should not consider themselves responsible for the actions or values of the plurality.

Responsibility for the self *with* others does not equate to positional authority *over* others. In Arendtian terms, the emphasis upon the headteacher's positional authority to distribute leadership or to engender relational trust is a recognition of the natality of headteachers; their capacity to act into the public realm in a way that is different or new. They can also act into the public realm in a way that allows for novelty to emerge as a consequence of the social process of encountering difference, and can participate in conversation in ways that help create and sustain a public space long enough to enable the engagement of a plurality of perspectives. Transformational leadership literature, however, tends to negate the natality of others working with headteachers in the public realm of school leadership. The emphasis the myth of positional authority places on compliance in service of enduring harmony can cause headteachers to lose sight of others in social processes. No single person can be fully responsible for the public realm because actions are unpredictable and irreversible, generating novelty as much as they generate predictability (Arendt, 1958).

Responsibility as a Politically-Engaged Plurality that is Neither Relativist and Autopoietic
Recognising that the natality of political action can be significantly influenced by the headteacher does not subsume the natality of political action by others. As a consequence of my research, my

practice during the period of my research has significantly shifted. My narratives show how I have come to engage more with competing ideas within my team, although this has not been altogether unproblematic. The individual notion of responsibility, evident in my first project as I became the 'man of the house', led me to realise, in the second project, how this assumed authority can cause adept colleagues to rely on me to decide between them. In project three I showed how taking responsibility for bilateral discussions to negotiate between team members left one unwilling to attend a key meeting. The fourth project concludes the thesis by showing a more multilateral approach to our shared responsibility at a time of uncertainty for our leadership team, but shows how we also struggle to stay in conversation together, to hear or agree with others, whilst doing so.

In critiquing the myth of the positional authority of the headteacher in transformational school leadership, I have explored some relationally-oriented theorists whose conclusions I have disputed as not reflecting my experiences as a school leader. I critiqued the relativist idea that it is impossible to extricate individual responsibility in organisational life (McNamee & Gergen, 1999), but was persuaded by the counter-argument that the 'I' and the 'we' of responsible interaction are inevitably intertwined (Lannaman in McNamee & Gergen, 1999). Removing individual agency risks losing sight of individual accountability in organisational life. Relativism also covers over the paradoxical nature of responsibility that forms and is formed intersubjectively with others (Griffin, 2002). I have also critiqued the idea that organisational life can become autopoietic in human relationships, so that personal trust is superseded by system trust (Luhmann, 2017). I recognise that autopoietic assumptions underpin the myths of transformational leadership when they suggest that synchrony can be achieved (Bryk & Schneider, 2002) by institutionalised arrangements that render the actions of others predictable (Forsyth et al, 2011).

The myth of positional authority can mask the leader's ideals as being either a private property or a systemic property, negating the responsibility of others for their actions and inviting them to idealise the headteacher as leader. In thinking through the Arendtian concept of plurality as an essential aspect of the human condition, I have come to recognise that plurality is not sufficient by itself for engaged school leadership if the privately-held values of the headteacher are imposed upon others. Doing so simply allows others to withdraw into a relativistic stepping-back from their individual responsibility for their actions with others or to give undue weight to the capacity of impersonal and systemic tools to autopoietically shape human action and interaction. Instead, as plural views of the good are inescapable, there is no escape from uncertainty because others' views about social phenomena are profoundly shaped by their personal attachments (Marris, 1996). Managers can participate in the relational exercise of responsibility by encouraging others to take responsibility and resisting the idealisation by others of themselves as leader (Stacey & Mowles, 2016).

Responsibility as Political Narrativity and Enlarged Thought in the Public Realm of Action
As I struggled to come to a more relational understanding of responsibility, Arendt's distinction between the private realm and the public realm (1958) proved helpful. The private realm is subject to the authority and control of a dominant individual while the public realm is a space of appearance for unique beings to engage in purposeful, sometimes painful, negotiation of competing goods. In my thesis, I have wrestled with the distinction between public and private for my practice, coming to recognise that the public realm of school leadership is not simply defined by the structure or space in which public action takes place. The importance I placed on the movement from unilateral to bilateral to multilateral discussions with others in my narratives shows an initial misunderstanding of Arendt's phenomenological view of plurality as something that is actualised through political action in a public space of appearances (Loidolt, 2018).

This is not to say that individual responsibility disappears altogether in pluralities, as relativist and autopoietic approaches assume. In the public realm, power emerges between people acting in concert (Arendt, 2005) not through the positional authority of one person within the group but through plural ideas of the good. These differing views operate as checks and balances on each other to generate a relational form of power without forfeiting individual agency and responsibility. Benhabib reinterprets Arendt's concept of political action in the public realm as narrativity, by which she means the "immersion of action in a web of interpretations" and human relationships (Benhabib, 1988, p32). Narrativity, as the interweaving of natality and plurality, involves judgment about our duties, our actions in fulfilling those duties and our values as revealed through our actions. It can only be achieved with others and towards others, through action and dialogue, by which we gain an understanding of the moral relevance of what we are doing together.

The unanimity promised by transformational leadership literature's emphasis on shared values is not possible in the public realm. It is a sign that people have ceased to think and are thus not engaged in political action. The moral and ethical dimensions of our work together emerge from and constitute our work together. Appeals to positional authority individualises natality and disengages plurality and can, deliberately or accidentally, remove the rights to opinion and action that are vital for the public realm. And where the rights to opinion and action are removed, the responsibility for those opinions and actions are also sacrificed. The individual capacity to think, act and take responsibility for our actions, is crucial to understanding plurality and the public realm. Without individual responsibility for thinking and acting as part of a plurality, without the agonism of negotiating competing notions of the good, plurality fails to achieve its purpose and the public ceases to exist. This leaves a vacuum into which totalising ideals of the good and banally evil practices can emerge (Arendt, 1963). The alternative, messy as it is, is a political ethic of a narratively maintained public

realm in which the public space, community, power and participation (Benhabib, 1988) are continually co-constructed by relationally-involved individuals who are responsible to one another. This is particularly important in conditions of uncertainty, where breakdowns in practice function as impulses that are likely to require school leaders to reconsider their habits (Dewey, 1922) and to re-narrate, perhaps tentatively at first, their accounts of their work together.

Narrativity as an Ethical Form of School Leadership

The intertwining of the natality and plurality of individual and collective school leaders, forming the narrativity of collaborative school leadership, represents an alternative ethical paradigm to that proposed by the myth of positional authority within transformational literature. It is a form of 'emergent ethics' (Griffin, 2002) that is processual rather than ideological, rooted in the ongoing functionalisation of cult values (Mead, 1923) rather than their individual idealisation. This is a far cry from the appeal to a Mr. Ethics of my second project because of the individualistic and idealistic notion of that idea. Although 'competing notions of the good' (Stacey & Mowles, 2016) may itself be seen as an idealised cult value, this thesis points to the importance of keeping an evolving notion of 'the good' in motion through the negotiation of 'competing' ideals of what that means, rather than an over-arching ideal that is static.

The paradox of school leadership is that the idealisation of cult values is in necessary tension with their functionalisation: the 'is' and the 'ought to be' (Dewey, 1922), or the means and the end, are necessarily interwoven for each school leader (indeed, each member of the school community). This is because, as Mead observes, cult values are precious for our social heritage (Mead, 1923), in schools as much as anywhere else. Arendt (2005) points to the same thing in noting that 'common sense' is an ideal that is dependent upon the competing individual senses of the plurality of unique being, but one that is also continually in motion because of the unpredictability and irreversibility of human action mentioned above. Dewey (1927/2016) holds the same view of a democratic ideal that is constantly kept in motion through an experimental method, rather than a definition of democracy. This movement of ideals happens, for Griffin (2002) and Stacey (2003) in the 'living present' where the ideals are functionalised in local interaction. The 'living present' has a paradoxical potential for continuity and change at the same time as idealised cult values are functionalised with others.

For all of these thinkers, 'the good', by which we might mean the ethics of what we are doing together, is not a fixed concept. The good of our collective ethical intent, in the context of the specific phenomena of leading a school, adapts because of how our individually 'competing' notions of such ethical intent might change through the ethical actuality of our acting together when we

disagree. Acting in this way does not generate enduring harmony, nor does it rely upon positional authority. In the final part of my argument in this thesis, I will show that the emergent ethics of a narratively-maintained approach to the phenomena of school leadership is also not something that can serve to reduce the complexity of organisational life with other school leaders.

Argument 3: Negotiating with others as a community of inquiry can help managers functionalise cult values and reduce the anxiety of uncertainty.

The Problems of a Transformational Approach to Maintaining the Public Realm

I have argued that conflict is an inescapable feature of organisational life that is potentially covered over by transformational leadership literature, and that responsibility for actions within organisational life is co-constructed relationally. My thesis has challenged the myths of transformational leadership literature that enduring harmony is possible in organisations and that leaders can step away from their involvement in the organisation to exercise authority. Although Arendt's work has been influential in my thinking about my practice as a manager, my thesis notes in her work a lack of prescription or description of what a public realm of political action might look like beyond the Athenian model that informs her analysis. Her reader is hopeful but not optimistic about the chances of participating in a genuinely public and political community. It is with the hope of addressing this lacuna, paying attention to the phenomena of school leadership, that I turn to pragmatist views of plurality and the public to address the final myth of transformational school leadership literature, that headteachers can reduce the complexity of organisational life.

This myth informs the method of transformational leadership research which metricises complex social phenomena, but it is the underpinning assumptions that are problematic for headteachers adhering to these approaches. In seeking to reduce the complexity of organisational phenomena, transformational approaches reify the general and encourage managers to adopt idealised cult values. This can cause managers to lose sight of particular problems and individuals with which they are working. My narratives show how people and their problems become less visible in the pursuit of ideals of care, distributed leadership and trust. Despite this, I conclude that my narratives offer hope because the particular keeps reasserting itself in our interactions with each other: the complex refuses reduction.

Relational theories informed by pragmatic philosophy helped me understand the importance of this for my practice. Mead argues that functionalising cult values requires the exercise of practical judgment in communicative interactions, requiring intelligence and a reflexive approach that adjusts

to the specific problem (Mead, 1923). Stacey and Mowles suggest that managers should focus on local interactions, not global patterns which they cannot change (Stacey & Mowles, 2016), because appreciating others' views is the best way of appreciating complexity (Mowles, 2011). Marris (1996) emphasises respect for the experiences and attachments of others as a way of negotiating within a moral community when conflicting views of the good are in flux. By contrast, transformational leadership theories start with idealised ends in view and see people as the means to those ends.

Dewey and the Problems of the Public

In 'The Public and its Problems' (1927/2016), Dewey concludes that *the* problem of the public is to improve debate, discussion and persuasion. He identifies four ways in which such improvement might be enacted: developing close attachments, staying engaged in discussion, heeding evidence in making judgments, and employing an experimental method to social problems. Having understood that conflict is inescapable in organisational life and that responsibility is a relational process rather than an individual gift or curse, these suggestions by Dewey made me re-evaluate conclusions I had drawn from my empirical material. I came to appreciate the strength of attachments in our team, the vibrancy of our discussions, how new information helps us develop our thinking, and how adept we are at experimenting together. This called into question the antagonistic ways in which I had experienced these events, unable to see the strengths and advantages of our ways of working together. How is it possible for managers to lose sight of the good things about their interactions with others? Is the most profound downside of transformational leadership theories that they promote myths that can never be achieved and disenchant managers in their work with others?

Dewey argues that ideals conceptualised as ends without close reference to their means are 'thin and wavering' (ibid). The ethic of care discussed in my second project, for example, left each of us involved embroiled in disputes with each other that were profoundly anxiety-inducing. Abstractions and absolutes are not unifying but instead they generate the heat of conflict without the light of knowledge. It is through the give-and-take of discussion with others that we develop a sense of our distinctiveness as well as a sense of community, able to engage in continuous inquiry together because we can adjust to see one another. It is in the particular and experimental experiences of entrusting and trusting, not the general and absolute ideals of distributed leadership and relational trust, that we are able to recognise the aspects of human relating that we are claiming to value. This is a functionalising "democratic form of being together" (Loidolt, 2018, p55) rather than an idealising view of a democratic organisation which underpins, for example, the distributed leadership theories.

Peirce's community of inquiry (1955) is an example of how a democratic ideal of plurality (Dewey, 1927/2016) might be enacted. Dewey describes such an ideal as something that exists which might

be viewed as completed even as it is being socially constructed. In doing so, he is mirroring the insights of Elias who points to the human paradox of forming and being formed through individual interaction within social groupings. Griffin (2002) points to the way in which ethics emerge from figurational interweaving of the individual and the social. Attempting to reduce the complexity of such interwoven forms of human relating through the imposition of ethical norms is likely to be impossible and permits groups to avoid negotiating ethical meaning together through action.

For Dewey, communities of inquiry also reflect the paradoxical nature of the democratic ideal by keeping the ideal in mind when dealing with concrete instances of the ideal in motion, without idealising it as an abstract end-goal to be attained whatever the cost. This means that communities of inquiry consider 'what ought to be' and 'what is' at the same time, and this is one of the key ways in which we can maintain the public realm of a community of inquiry capable of functionalising cult values. The myth of complexity reduction within transformational leadership theories loses sight of people by covering over the 'what is' of human interaction in favour of the 'what ought to be'.

Bernstein (1987) argues that the pragmatic ethos requires an 'engaged fallibilistic pluralism' in which engagement with others generates outcomes that are temporary, fragile, conflictual and contingent. Lasting agreement is not necessary for Bernstein as disagreements are clarified through experiment and dialogue that respects difference so that there is enough agreement for us to go on together in our next steps. For Talisse and Aikin (2016) a pragmatic pluralism is uncertain and involves conflict between competing ideas of the good that can be incommensurable. Wrongdoing is inevitable and so the human qualities needed to maintain interaction include humility, earnestness, moral gentleness, consideration and forgiveness. These versions of pluralism accord with my conclusions that conflict is inescapable and responsibility relational in organisations. As demonstrated by my narratives, agreements between us are frequently fragile and temporary and our work is utterly contingent in an educational landscape fraught with uncertainty for managers. Complexity reduction in these conditions is a mirage, and a not particularly helpful one at that.

[Making Promises and Forgiving \(and Trusting\) in a Community of Inquiry](#)

Having suggested a lacuna in the work of Arendt about what a public realm might look like, I have gone some way with pragmatic philosophy in filling this hole. Conceptualising the public realm as a community of inquiry suggests how such a community might be negotiated in organisational life. Critiquing transformational approaches that are sustained by myths of enduring harmony, complexity reduction and positional authority, I will argue that there are three facets of a community of inquiry opposed to these myths. In formulating my conclusions in opposition to the

dominant leadership discourse in education, I hope to illustrate for headteachers and other managers ways of working with others that recognise the inescapability of conflict and relational nature of responsibility in organisations.

My thesis does not, however, propose a mechanistic, technocratic approach that can be neatly implemented in organisational life. Having concluded that plurality is contingent upon human relating, what are the alternatives to individualised approaches and their centrifugal tendency to split apart responsibility from others or a centripetal focus on shared values that removes individual responsibility altogether? In considering this, I want to return to Arendt's insight (1958) that it is only in the humanity of human plurality that responsibility for the love and care for the world can be enacted, not systems, ideals or institutions. Plurality and political action in the public realm are thus riddled with the uncertainty that has been a key theme in my empirical material. This uncertainty is a result of the irreversibility and unpredictability of our actions together which, for Arendt, requires the ability of making promises and forgiving. Not only are the entirely human actions of promising and forgiving necessary, they are also more reliable responses to the plurality of views of the good than the illusion of certainty offered by transformational leadership theories.

Loidolt (2018) argues that acts of promising and forgiving, and trusting, form a phenomenological ethics of plurality. The narrative interweaving of the whos of individual members and the we of the plurality, imposes ethical demands (ibid, p233), as I have outlined in the previous section. Although the complexity of plural action is irreducible, our responsibility to others means that promises we make to pluralities are more reliable than those we make to ourselves and forgiveness we receive in pluralities more meaningful than self-forgiveness. Loidolt sees Arendt's ethical principle as:

Endorsing everything that fosters plurality while rejecting that which flattens plurality and morally condemning that which destroys plurality. (ibid, p252)

My conclusions are a strong critique rather than a rejection and condemnation of transformational literature. The myths of transformational approaches can mask conflict in organisational life and prioritise individualised rather than relational explanations of responsibility. My narratives show, however, that even where myths are taken up in school leadership practice, they do not have the power to destroy plurality or even to flatten it for any length of time. This does not mean that this thesis represents an endorsement of transformational school leadership, as my narrative material has also shown that the myths of these theories do not serve to foster plurality in school leadership.

In avoiding outright rejection or outright endorsement of transformational approaches, I want to offer a reconstructive conclusion that recognises that these theories are likely to remain prevalent in

education. It is also likely that the myths of transformational literature will continue to appeal to school leaders as recognisable and resonant, but idealised, cult values. My concluding points suggest potential ways in which professional communities of inquiry might help school leaders and other managers to create conditions in which those values might be functionalised in practice.

In critiquing the harmony myth, a community of inquiry can help managers reduce the anxiety of uncertainty by recognising that the community, its interactions and its outcomes are temporary, fragile and conflictual whilst still achieving things together. Negotiating in a community of inquiry is an iterative process in which people can begin anew with each other necessitating the ability to forgive ourselves and one another.

In critiquing the complexity myth, a community of inquiry can help managers functionalise cult values by keeping concrete and particular means in view, resisting abstract and general ends to recognise that ideals are forming and being formed. Negotiating in a community of inquiry involves adjusting to the specific issue under consideration necessitating the ability to make promises and keep them.

In critiquing the positional authority myth, a community of inquiry can help managers maintain the public realm by respecting and appreciating the views and attachments of others whilst engaging in persuasion and experimentation with them. Negotiating in a community of inquiry is a relational process which necessitates trusting one another to keep promises and grant forgiveness.

Research Methods on the DMan Programme

The research methods I have employed in writing this thesis have been shaped by my participation in an academic community of inquiry composed of managers who seek to understand their work in organisations as complex responsive processes of relating. This perspective, developed by members of the Hertfordshire Business School, draws on insights gained from process sociology, pragmatic philosophy, group analysis and the complexity sciences (Stacey et al, 2000, Stacey & Mowles, 2016) and is located in the critical tradition of management theory (Mowles, 2017b). I will draw attention to the research methods that inform this thesis and examine underpinning methodological approaches that inform my particular inquiry, enabling a more reflexive understanding of my work as a headteacher.

The DMan as a Community of Inquiry: Community Meetings

Although the most visible aspect of my research appears individualised and centred, taking the form of reflective and reflexive narratives about my practice, I want to draw attention to the less visible social processes that underpin my research. The DMan is a community of inquiry, supported by six members of faculty, of around twenty managers, from a range of professional settings around the world, working together to better understand their practice. It is a slow-open group, meaning that the community is always evolving as new researchers join and experienced researchers leave the programme. The community meets four times a year at four-day residential in which we practise the methodological approach of 'taking experience seriously' (a concept I will come back to). As well as participating in traditional academic seminars, researchers also take part in Community Meetings and Learning Set Meetings.

Community Meetings take place three times per residential and are median experiential groups in the Group Analysis tradition established by Foulkes (Foulkes, 1975). Each meeting begins at the same time each morning of the residential, when the group falls silent, and concludes ninety minutes later regardless of how involved discussions might be at the time. As meetings without planned agendas, these encounters can seem like blank canvases on which anything affecting the community might be drawn. However, the imagery of a blank canvas is insufficient because the community is a rich web of relations, and each community member is embedded in further rich webs of relations. My progress over thirty-six Community Meetings illustrates their importance to my research.

In early Community Meetings, I found myself enacting the same patterned behaviours in relation to male role authority figures described in my first project. Feelings of anger at unfair treatment of others caused me to openly challenge the most senior members of faculty, comparing their actions to punishment beatings. Nuanced issues of human relating were simplified to right and wrong as they had been in my biographical encounters with authority. Reflecting on this in my writing, I considered the experimental possibilities within the Community Meeting structure for how I might pay better attention to my relations with others. I began simply by observing those receiving comments rather than those speaking, noticing how few people watch the listener in meetings even though we usually look at the person to whom we are speaking. It was a small insight, but I realised that I was trying to make more sense of the emotions of others, seeing them better and this insight plays out in the central argument of my thesis about responsibility being relational.

Around the mid-point of my research, I gained confidence in my experiments into Community Meetings and began speaking out the feelings of anxiety I had covered over in my practice at work. Gradually I began challenging others in the group in quite provocative ways that felt risky, doing so specifically with those with whom I had the strongest attachment relationships. This is reflected in my argument that conflict is an inescapable but covered over facet of organisational life.

As an experienced researcher, my experiments in this forum became subtler. In one meeting, following a realisation about my defensiveness in meetings and its effect on others, an opportunity emerged in a Community Meeting to pay attention to the experience of being talked about and misrecognised by others without defending myself. I stress 'emerged' because my experimentation has not been planned in advance given the unpredictability of action into this public space. The insights from this particular encounter, and my reflections on the Community Meetings generally, partly informs the third argument of my thesis of the importance of a community of inquiry.

The DMan as a Community of Inquiry: The Learning Set

My ability to experiment in Community Meetings was only possible because of my ability to discuss my findings with a smaller group of colleagues known as the Learning Set (Mowles, 2017a). Typically including three or four researchers and a supervisor, these groups meet regularly each residential weekend and virtually between residential. They function to collectively supervise the inquiries of the individual researcher, giving regular feedback on work and being the first point of generalisability. Learning Sets also ground individual researchers in a more closely relational web than the larger community can sustain. This is enabling as colleagues become intimately involved in the researcher's work and their relationships with others in their practice. The closeness of Learning Sets is also constraining, and my experience of these meetings is characterised by emotional intensity with regular episodes of anxiety, crisis and breakdown. This seems critical of the method, but it is from these moments of disruption that the strongest insights of my research have emerged. I see how the dynamics of the Learning Set mirror the dynamics of my Team Leader group at work, meaning that transference from one setting to the other was taking place. Moments of breakdown with the Learning Set often occurred at the end of residential as I contemplated my return to conflictual relationships at work.

Another reason for anxiety in my experience of the Learning Set is related to the closeness of the group to my empirical material. This has enabled them to identify unhelpful patterns in my relationships with people at work and accounts I give of others in my writing. The idealisation of harmony and suppression of conflict was noticed by members of my set, as was the way in which

responsibility-taking might be overwhelming for those with whom I work. These challenges have become pivotal for my research, helping me gain the reflexivity needed to change patterned ways of thinking about my practice. Without the Learning Set I would not have been able to write my thesis and would not have been able to become more thoughtful about my practice as a headteacher.

The Self in the Social: Writing Projects About Workplace Breakdowns

Having explained the relational nature of research methods on the DMan programme, I want to describe the more individual, but still social, process of writing that contributes to this research. My thesis comprises four projects that include narrative accounts of disruptive events in my practice, reflections to identify themes and animating questions, and theoretical material to make sense of those animating questions and the disruptive events in the narratives. Writing about temporary breakdowns in which my expectations are thwarted has helped me move from “absorbed coping” (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011, p344) about my practice to “involved thematic deliberation” (Dreyfus, 1995, p72-3) about it. This deliberation has been with colleagues in my learning set and wider DMan community, but also with my colleagues at work. Each of these projects was iteratively developed, drawing on feedback and insights from other members of the Learning Set, with approximately four iterations per project to reach the DMan standard of ‘good enough’ (Mowles, 2017b).

Perhaps the most challenging research part of the DMan for me has been the choice and drafting of narratives as my empirical material. This became apparent in project two when I worried about the ethical implications of writing about two close colleagues whose conflict I felt unable to resolve. I can recognise now that, as well as finding narrative-writing “ethically fraught” about my relations with others, it also reflected a sense of my own vulnerability in this research process (Lapadet, 2017, p589). I found myself able to give a thick enough description (Geertz, 1973) of the encounter whilst also struggling with introspection about the events. I abandoned the narrative material after two iterations, replacing it with a thematically similar, but less intense, situation at work. I made a similar decision, for very different reasons, to abandon the narrative used in the first two iterations of my third project because it was too detached. My supervisor expressed confidence in my ability, as a researcher, to deal effectively with narratives that were more involved and anxiety-inducing. This was supported by the insights drawn from my experimental approach to the Community Meetings, which enabled me to talk openly with colleagues at work about the conflict between us. As we continued to interact in our ongoing professional relationships, these conversations helped me as a researcher to protect others, maintain relationships and avoid the self-stigmatisation (Lapadat, 2017) that I had struggled with earlier in my inquiry.

With hindsight, I recognise that changing narratives allowed me to keep thinking about my practice rather than get stuck. The abandoned narratives are present in my arguments about how conflicts are covered over by transformative approaches which emphasise an individual view of responsibility, and the importance of negotiating competing goods as a community of inquiry. As well as helping my cognitive understanding about the themes these incomplete narratives were pointing to, the process of writing (and not being able to write) about others demonstrated the experiential importance of contingency and “ongoing negotiation” with others (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p510) which underpins the logic of my arguments. My experience of the emergent nature of narrative writing, and the relational nature of both the research methods and empirical material, helped significantly in shaping both my research and my practice. More than this, the evaluative nature of narratives as more than stories helped to break down the dualistic way of thinking about my research and practice, recognising them as two aspects of the same process (Mowles, 2017b).

My practice has been patterned by idealisations, drawn from transformational leadership literature, that suggest the possibility of enduring harmony in organisational life and depict headteachers as the locus of responsibility. At work, I have typically withdrawn into personal contemplation of my responsibility for conflict or over-explained and become defensive with others. The same pattern has been noted in my writing by researchers in my Learning Set: first iterations of projects have often been overly introspective and second iterations have often been overly analytical. The profound struggle I have had in giving a good enough, reflexive account of my practice is not untypical of autoethnography in which.

The researcher’s self is the ethical axis where reflexive ethical deliberations must take place.
(Lapadat, 2017, p592)

This self-reflexivity of surfacing, and questioning, taken-for-granted assumptions about my values (Hibbert et al, 2019) has also been accompanied by a more critical reflexivity (ibid) that recognises the importance of rational, as well as relational, consideration of my practice (Burkitt, 2012). To explain this further, I will say more about the way in which my research reviews literature about themes emerging from my narrative material.

The Paradoxical Absence and Presence of a Literature Review

Unlike many academic communities of inquiry, the DMan programme does not prescribe the use of a systematic literature review for researchers. Reflecting theoretical roots in pragmatic philosophy, process sociology, group analysis and the complexity sciences, research on the DMan is an abductive and emergent process that encourages reflexivity from participant-researchers (Mowles, 2017b).

In terms of abduction, the breakdowns we research are predictably unpredictable (Stacey, 2003 & 2005) in the sense that they are particular events which could not have been predicted at the start of my research, but which are not altogether inexplicable and which have generated patterned responses from myself and others. So, one key event in my narratives is the departure of a key colleague, whilst another is a school inspection. Both are to-be-expected events in school life but ones whose particular qualities caused the feelings of breakdown discussed above. The abductive process involves a movement “from the particular to the general, rather than the other way around” (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p511), and one of the ways in which my research demonstrates this is in its use of theoretical insights that help explain my experiences of management.

Breakdowns in my narratives are opportunities for theoretical problematisation which grounds practice within existing frameworks but which, at the same time, provides ‘mysteries’ that challenge existing theories (Alvesson & Karreman, 2011). The metaphor of ‘mystery’, for Alvesson and Karreman, relates to theory development about interesting social problems which have the potential for novel insights emerging from unexpected experiences that overturns previous knowledge in some way. The metaphoric idea of investigating mysteries through inquiry can thus discipline the researchers subjective understanding of those experiences. My abductive inquiry into mysteries at work, as shown in my narratives, has enabled me to achieve a degree of ‘critical reflexivity’ to accompany the ‘self-reflexivity’ described above (Hibbert et al, 2019), particularly in terms of the theories of transformational school leadership literature.

This last point perhaps best explains the emergent properties of the DMan research process, in which novel insights about established (sometimes patterned) ways of thinking are called into question. Having located myself in traditions of thought related to systemic and transformational leadership theories, by the third project I had come to realise that I was becoming more critically aware of the assumptions of the transformational paradigm. In particular, I have systematically reconsidered academic insights by Harris (2003, 2004) and Tschannen-Moran (2009), two writers who have significantly influenced my practice as a headteacher. This led me into more intensive engagement with those theories (Stacey & Mowles, 2016) that has culminated in my research being able to identify, critique and counter the myths within this approach to school leadership. This emergent interest in, and ability to interrogate and resist, a dominant theoretical stance (Lapadat, 2017) means that my arguments are “justifiable in terms of a wider tradition of thought” (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p511). At the same time, the emergent insights for my practice has enabled me to discipline my subjectivity by rethinking my preferred positions (Alvesson & Karreman, 2011) about

transformational school leadership literature and its implications for practice. In this way the critical reflexivity paradoxically arises from, but also feeds back into, my self-reflexivity as a headteacher.

I have not only seen a self-reflexive and critically-reflexive shift in my thinking as a practitioner but as a researcher too. When my second supervisor compared my writing to literary criticism, I realised the cherry-picked way I engaged with theory in early projects. This is perhaps typical for managers who become used to thinking about organisational dynamics in terms of second order abstractions through models and metrics of social processes by which “people disappear from view” (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p439). In taking this feedback seriously, I gave a more rounded analysis of full texts and developed a deeper form of inquiry that is better able to question assumptions and implications for my practice. As well as enabling me to recognise the limitations in transformational leadership literature that had been hiding in plain sight, it had a positive impact on my narrative writing in which I could better ‘see’ and recognise others in the first order abstractions of my narratives. Again, critical reflexivity allowed me to bend back my insights self-reflexively in my practice.

A final element of critical reflexivity, achieved through prioritising the emergence of a literature review responding abductively to the breakdowns in my narratives, was in the way in which I have increasingly placed importance on a variety of perspectives (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011). As a participant on the DMan, I have immersed myself in the insights of authors who take a relational view of human interactions. My research draws heavily on Dewey (1927/2016) and Mead (1923, 1925, 1934) from the pragmatic tradition and Elias (1956, 1978, 1991, 1994a, 1994b) from the process sociological tradition, as authors whose work underpins the view of the DMan community of inquiry that organisational life involves complex responsive processes of relating.

Researchers are encouraged to draw from a wide range of other theorists, whose views of the relational nature of organisations may be subtly or strikingly different to those central to the DMan programme. Examples of subtly different literature informing my thesis include Arendt (1951, 1953, 1958, 1963, 1970, 1981, 2003, 2005) and Marris (1996), and examples of more strikingly different perspectives I have drawn on include Luhmann (2017) and McNamee & Gergen (1999). Although some of these theorists, notably Dewey and Arendt, have been used by previous researchers in educational fields, very few academics have addressed their insights in the realm of educational leadership. This thesis does so and marks a contribution to knowledge that could not have been predicted at the outset of my research. The emergent and processual nature of my literature review thus reflects the privileging of deepening understanding in making counter-cultural arguments on the DMan programme (Mowles, 2017b), as well as the importance of narratives being a “basis for making an argument” (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p510).

Taking Experience Seriously – Narrative Autoethnography and Intersubjective Reflexivity
Researchers on the DMan commit to taking experience seriously (Mowles, 2017b, Stacey & Mowles, 2016). The immediate, concrete and practical features of daily life in organisations inform the choice of empirical and theoretical material relevant to their work. This involves writing autoethnographic narratives, taking the experience of the self in relation to others as a starting point. Researchers on the DMan pay attention to the speech, actions and emotions of themselves and their colleagues in moments characteristic of breakdowns (Alvesson & Karreman, 2007). These breakdowns involve breaches (Bruner, 1991), moments of uncertainty (Brinkmann, 2014) and disruption to managers' expected ways of working with others (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011). Typically, for me, these involve situations where confusing emotions including anger, shame, guilt and blame have been unleashed, often at unexpected moments where little seemed at risk in my interactions with others.

Writing about these moments in narratives necessarily involves recognising the entangled emotions of organisational life that are unavoidable and which reflect the self in the social context (Hibbert et al, 2019). Autoethnographic narratives are first order abstractions of real life that call the attention of researchers to disorder, deviance and conflict where they may be more used to thinking about their practice through second order abstractions that suggest harmony, design and control (Stacey & Mowles, 2016). Immersion is prioritised over abstraction, at least initially in the narrativising process, and drama and plot become important so that participants can engage in “complex responsive reflection on ordinary lived experience” (ibid, p509).

Given the prominence of Arendtian insights for my thesis, it is notable that two prominent students of her work, Benhabib and Kristeva, pay attention to the importance of narrativity in Arendt's understanding of politics and plurality. Benhabib (1988) suggests that narratives tell the story of the initiation of action, its unfolding and its immersion into the web of others' narratives. They generate greater perspectival understanding, what Arendt conceives of as 'enlarged thought', helping the self to both be individuated and to “think from the standpoint of everyone else” (ibid, p47) at the same time. Kristeva also recognises the paradox of narrativity for individual and social understanding:

Narrative is the most immediately shared action and, in that sense, the most initially political action. Finally, and because of narrative, the 'initial' itself is dismantled, and dispersed into 'strangeness' within the infinity of narrations. (Kristeva, 2001, p27)

In this way, autoethnographic narratives used to inform inquiries into action are an example of natality and can stimulate further action as they interweave with the narratives of others, creating new and unexpected stories. Narratives thus capture the “specifically human” nature of life itself

(ibid, p8), rather than the second order abstractions about leadership work, such as plans or models, that managers are used to working with in thinking about and making sense of their practice.

Although autoethnography is “a method rooted in ethical intent” (Lapadat, 2017, p589) because of its social nature and the obligations it places on researchers (ibid, p593), one criticism of the method is that it can lend itself to introspective research with little opportunity of generalisability to a wider audience. The DMan is, however, a “simultaneously individual and social process” of research (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p510) in which the researcher is required to give a good enough account of others in their narratives to those in their learning set. This requires of the researcher that they write narratives that others find plausible and convincing (ibid) meaning that the method on the programme is a form of collaborative autoethnography (Lapadat, 2017. Chang et al, 2013), even though it is an individual researcher identified with the thesis produced. Taking the experience of fellow researchers, as well as my colleagues at work, seriously involves taking multiple perspectives into account in ways that make my research methodologically more rigorous (Lapadat, 2017). Learning set colleagues can be supportive but also require my commitment to honesty because they have the “courage to question interpretations” I have come to about my practice (ibid, p600).

For these reasons my narratives pay attention to the paradoxical quality of involved detachment (Elias, 1987), rather than attempt to resolve that paradox with involved introspection on the one hand or analytical detachment on the other. Fellow researchers have provoked me to reconsider the patterns of gestures and responses (Mead, 1934) recounted in my narratives to provide more reflexive explanations of my own choices in these interactions and more thoughtful evaluations of the actions of others. Having identified the thought styles (Fleck, 1979) that contribute to my patterned ways of interacting with others in project one, fellow researchers recognise how these patterns continue to influence my thinking enabling them to challenge the subjectivity of narrative episodes. Because my learning set colleagues have come from other backgrounds, their sense of resonance with my work enable me to make claims of broadly relevant contributions to theory and generalisability because of my continued contact with them (Alvesson & Karreman, 2011). These processes of inquiry within the DMan community challenge the negative view of subjectivity, recognising that all experience is subjective because we are all engaged in the intersubjective relations. Engaging in intersubjectively reflexive methods of research therefore closes the gap between theory and practice.

The social nature of my research is more than just submission of work and reception of feedback. My research sits in the hermeneutic tradition of Gadamer (1960), a contemporary of Arendt’s in inter-war Germany. Gadamer’s belief that understanding is an essentially social and linguistic

phenomenon, based on agreement happening between people through language, stands against the dominant 'scientific' methods (Gadamer in Dienstag, 2016) that underpin the complexity-reducing tendencies of transformational leadership literature. Instead, my methods reflect a belief that human experience is always interpretive and that the task of research is to let whatever truths there are in my narratives appear (ibid) in the social process of my research with others. Gadamer's insights point to the 'horizons' of individual's understanding of the world they experience through the prejudices of the assumptions and conceptions of the world they hold. Paradoxically, these prejudices evoke our ability to refine our prejudices. As Dienstag has it:

Our horizon is always limited, but capable of being expanded by an encounter with experience that causes us to question some prejudice. (Dienstag, 2016)

The self-reflexivity and critical reflexivity provoked by my research as part of the DMan community, described above, helps not only in my interpretation of others in my narratives but also in the process of reinterpreting my own prejudices shown in the narratives. Recognising that a detour via detachment can help us make more sense about our involvement in our interdependencies with others (Elias, 1956), autoethnographic narratives experienced collaboratively with other researchers helps in taking the attitude of the other and the generalised other (Mead, 1934) into the iterative process of adjusting, in writing and in practice, to take shared experience more seriously. Understanding arises in the social process of exploring the things in common with other researchers, a political process that Arendt (2005) contends leads to an enlarged mentality.

I have described above how, for me, this has involved experimental work in Community Meetings alongside more agonistic thinking about my practice in Learning Set meetings. In my thesis, this reflexive turn has unexpectedly led me to review transformational leadership literature that once provided me with a sense of identity as a headteacher in ways that became unsettling for me during the research. The changes to my practice with colleagues at school were therefore unsettling for us all because they were counterintuitive to what we have come to expect of me as a headteacher. As colleagues at work have adjusted to changes in my practice, reflexive insights from my research have also changed their ways of working. This reflects how we are caught up in a web of relations, but has also come from the conversations we have had about my research into our practice together.

Claims for Generalisability from my Research

Informed by pragmatism, the generalisability claims for my insights are modestly epistemological (Aikin & Talisse, 2016). They come from the process of social inquiry as a community of researchers, and the effect of this on my development as a headteacher making sense of plural views of the good

in the context of transformational school leadership practice. The insights generated by my research have simply enabled me to change my own practice by staying in conversation with my colleagues in order to better work with them. Despite this, I have been struck by how other researchers from vastly different backgrounds have felt resonance with my research. Towards the end of my inquiries, I summarised my arguments with the wider DMan community. What was clear from their response was that assumptions underpinning transformative school leadership literature were similar to the literature informing practice in other domains. They recognised myths that place undue value on organisational harmony, the emphasis on responsibility being located in those with positional authority, and claims that complexity can be measured and tamed by metrics and plans.

In this sense, the concept of resonance within the DMan programme, which is the paradox of an individual researcher's experiences provoking "some general aspect of human relating" in others, is important (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p511). In subjecting my work to the scrutiny of others through dozens of iterations of my projects, I have invited them to make sense (or not), be interested by (or not) and be persuaded by (or not) the aspects of my experience with others at work that seem to make sense to me, be interesting to me and be persuasive to me. In doing so, my research on the programme has mirrored the negotiations and politics of everyday life that I have also experienced as I consider that research in my ongoing practice with my colleagues at work. In doing so, my work on the programme does not split apart the Aristotelian distinctions between different types of knowledge (episteme, techne, phronesis, metis and theoria) or lay generalisable claims in any one of these areas. Instead, my claims for generalisability have emerged from the resonance provoked by my autoethnographic narratives through "deep involvement and participation in what is going on, rather than disengagement and detachment" with others (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p513).

Ethics

Although the focus of narrative inquiry is autoethnography, the study of the self through writing, the insights of Elias, Mead, Stacey, Mowles and Arendt point to the plurality of the social self. It is impossible to write about one's interaction as part of the plurality without taking a position about the actions and intentions of others. This makes the ethics of my research incredibly important and, as I began the programme, the potential ethical problems of writing about my colleagues troubled me. I struggled to write about two colleagues in conflict, reflecting my patterned reliance on notions of right and wrong through my life and career. I judged that the ethical assurances I had given about anonymising my narratives would not protect these colleagues from harm. In hindsight, I can see how I was continuing to struggle with the fact that I was unable to manage this conflict in line with

the transformational leadership approaches I had followed. Not writing about them seemed to be the ethical thing to do but I now see how failing to engage with disagreement as a way of caring for others, protecting them from conflict, is not ethically clear-cut.

This was a profound insight about how I viewed ethics at work in subscribing to idealised views of the good based on Kantian moral imperatives to do no harm: the Mr. Ethics of my second project. As my research developed, I wrote about more profound disagreements within my team, finding myself directly confronting the ethical dilemmas covered over by abstract notions of right and wrong. Subsequently, I discussed my research with my colleagues at work, gaining a better understanding of what was going on for them in our interactions. This has been problematic at times, but recognising with them that I did not carry sole responsibility for navigating the ethics of our interactions enabled me to recognise that responsibility for actions in organisational life is a continually co-constructed relational process. Arguments earlier in this thesis reflect the importance of the processual nature of ethical action as being crucial to seeing leadership in social, rather than individual, terms. Instead of seeing ethics as somehow separate or more important than my work with others, I now recognise how the important cult value of ethical intent (or, the good) in our work together is our work together. It is a functionalising means as well as an idealised end, and is more fully considered as we negotiate the competing ethics of the actions we take together.

I continued to fully consider the ethics of my practice with others, not only in my writing about them but in my experimental approach to Community Meeting as I practised challenging others in ways that I was unable to do at work. This enabled me to come to the concluding arguments in my work outlining how a community of inquiry can keep means, as well as ends, in view and respect other views of the good whilst engaging in persuasion and experimentation. Linking these to Arendt's emphasis on promising and forgiving demonstrates a recognition of the emergence of ethics in practice (Griffin, 2002), rather than the idealisation of the good. Researchers on the DMan are routinely interested in the ethics of research. Our research method, subjecting our writing about our practice to scrutiny eight times a year, invites others to stand up for colleagues about whom we write critically rather than reflexively. Participating in the DMan involves taking their experiences, as well as our own, seriously and that is as good a starting point for ethical behaviour as any.

Contribution to Knowledge and Practice

This thesis makes important general contributions for researchers and practitioners of educational leadership. In contrasting the dominant, systemic view of transformational school leadership with an alternative, relational approach to practice, this thesis takes seriously the experiences and

phenomena with which school leaders and other managers will be familiar but which often escapes leadership texts. By focusing on the processes, not just the outcomes, of school leadership practice, this thesis deals with issues of conflict and responsibility, and the emotions they generate for managers, with important implications for personal and organisational development within schools and perhaps more widely. For example, the recognition that conflict forms an essential part in the checks and balances of leadership practices suggests how we might rethink the negatively-framed approach to dissensus in organisational life and, at the same time, strengthen governance structures that might be ill-served by the appeals to harmony common in managerial literature.

This thesis contains particularly important general insights for researcher-practitioners. Because the projects here are presented as they were written, it exemplifies the intellectual progression of a current researcher-practitioner over time that is rare in academic literature. The description of a movement in my research practice from cherry-picking ideas to close reading and nuanced critique of the kinds of literature prevalent for school leaders is also important. The mythologically-informed nonsense presented as common sense (Mowles, 2011) in transformational literature thrives because of its uncritical reception as much as it does because of the fact that it is dominant in school leadership training. This thesis demonstrates to researcher-practitioners their importance in making better sense of this literature, as well as their experiences and the experience of others. The following pages outline four specific claims for contributions arising from my own sense-making.

A Critique of Myths in Transformational School Leadership Literature

My first claim for a specific contribution to knowledge is that I have identified three examples of magico-mythical thinking that cut across different theoretical strands of transformational school leadership literature on care, distributed leadership and relational trust. I outline how the myths of enduring harmony, positional authority and complexity reduction are problematic for school leaders. Other critical theorists identify similar problems with transformational leadership literature but do so in ways that see some headteachers as ruthless parvenus who welcome such neoliberal doctrine (Hughes, Courtney & Gunter, 2019). My thesis counters the view that “headteachers are immunised from thinking politically” (Courtney & Gunter, 2015, p412) because values do not matter to them (Courtney & Gunter, 2018). The nuance of my arguments recognises that there can be no standing outside of neoliberalism as a dominating pattern in education for headteachers, but that this does not mean that headteachers remove the possibility to start something new and make themselves superfluous in taking up transformational leadership theories and their myths (Gunter, 2015).

My research, written from the experiential habitus of being a headteacher, presents a more nuanced understanding of the ideals that explain the attractiveness of these myths to headteachers and other school leaders. I have synthesised the insights of Elias, Mead, Dewey and Arendt to provide a relational explanation for why the myths of enduring harmony, positional authority and complexity reduction are insufficient but enduring in schools. My thesis thus proposes a potentially more helpful critique of transformational leadership theory, as enacted by headteachers in schools, than is present in the extant literature on the subject.

[A Phenomenological Understanding of School Leadership Practice](#)

My thesis contributes to knowledge by taking an intra-organisational, phenomenological approach in understanding the consequences for practitioners of transformational leadership myths. Self-doubt and shame for leaders caught up in idealising these myths when the expectations they produce are not realised are shown through the narrative episodes that form my empirical material. In making sense of these emotions I have drawn on the writings of Arendt, whose work remains influential (Bernstein, 2018) but controversial (Canovan, 1992; Young-Bruehl, 1982).

My findings echo phenomenological conclusions drawn by Arendtian scholars critical of transformational approaches in espousing a democratic, dialogic view of school leadership (Rogers, 2013a. Gunter, 2018). My thesis recognises that plurality is endlessly demanding (Gunter, 2018), producing tension (Courtney & Gunter, 2015) and a feeling of “performative isolation” (Hughes et al, 2019) as school leaders feel forced to labour to meet the demands of school accountability or craft visions that cover over human interaction (Gunter, 2018 & 2015). My concluding arguments about the phenomenological importance of a community of inquiry points to the intersubjectively maintained processes of cooperating (Stivers, 2009) and judging with others so that “we are able to think from the perspective of others” (Benhabib, 1988, p43). This thesis links Arendt’s notion of the public realm with the Deweyan concept of the democratic ideal to argue that the phenomenology of plurality involves striving for ideals that keeps means and ends in view.

[An Ethical View of School Leadership through Thoughtful Action](#)

By taking a more nuanced view of the myths of transformational literature and a phenomenological understanding of school leadership practice in the context of these myths, my thesis contributes to knowledge in concluding that thoughtful action within a plurality provides an ethical practice of school leadership for headteachers. My projects show a political ethics of plurality in which those in my team remain visible as the common world is fostered, practised and defended as a “democratic form of being together” (Loidolt, 2018, p155). This is vital for democratic institutions such as

schools, and my arguments prioritise such democratic forms of being together rather than idealised notions of the school as a democracy that have shaped my practice in the past.

In considering leadership practice with the help of Arendtian insights, this thesis counters the argument that her view of politics is aesthetic, indifferent (Wolin, 1983) and lacking in justice (Pitkin, 1981). Instead, I argue that a democratic ideal occurs through action with others which produces limited promises (Kristeva, 2001) based on the particularity of particular situations (Bernstein, 2018). In doing so I have linked Arendt's public sphere, via Dewey's democratic ideal, to Bernstein's notion of engaged fallibilistic pluralism (1987) in which competing views of the good are neither too deep to prevent agreement nor too shallow to prevent agreement mattering. Simply put, this thesis argues for the modest claims of thoughtful political action (Steinberger, 1990) in school leadership.

My arguments form an ethical view of school leadership, recognising that in public spaces individual 'whos' and the collective 'we' impose mutual ethical demands (Loidolt, 2018). This is not a harmonic space. Positional authority is not sovereign. The public space is a complex, turbulent, fragile balance of tensions which evokes the desire to tame it through myths such as those of transformational leadership literature. My research concludes by stressing how ethics are intrinsic to a community of inquiry. Our action together is unpredictable and irreversible, requiring us to make promises and forgive others as we practice what it means to care, to entrust and to trust one another.

But this thesis does not propose subsuming the individual 'who', within the 'we' suggested by linguistic terms such as 'our', 'team' or 'staff'. Although my arguments for thoughtful action in a community of inquiry stress the 'inclusivity' of a more relational form of school leadership than proposed by transformational approaches, they hold on to the irrevocable tensions between the individuals within figurations. It is in holding onto the paradox of the social individual (Stacey, 2003) that we can make sense of the centripetal and centrifugal tendencies of human interaction that appear to pull us apart or push us together in ways that may be unhelpful. In making sense of these forces, individually and collaboratively, we may generate novelty in finding a better way forward.

[A Less Mythological Practice for School Leadership](#)

My thesis represents a contribution to practice by recognising how headteachers can become caught up in discourses that pay little attention to the phenomenological experience of leading a school but also by identifying ways in which managers can begin anew, reconstructing with others the capacity to act in concert by promising and forgiving. The myths of transformational leadership theories speak to the values of school leaders. Caring, entrusting and trusting are important in counteracting the risks from neoliberal education policy, but unthinking acceptance of idealised values may cover

over plural views of the good and unwittingly reinforce this agenda. Neoliberal education policy is constraining, not least in its conflation of accountability and responsibility as schools are expected to achieve the political capital of a good student results and good inspection outcomes. This thesis recognises that plural political action in a community of inquiry enables us to exercise responsibility, think whilst acting together and give a better account of ourselves to others in uncertain times.

As a result of these insights, my own practice has changed considerably during the course of my research. I find myself more academically critical of leadership theories that rest on assumptions of enduring harmony, positional authority and complexity reduction, paying more attention to the relational nature of my team's work together. In doing so, I have found myself less emotionally critical of the ways in which we interact, better able to forgive others and myself for actions which provoke disagreements and anger. I have become better at making promises, and trying to keep them whilst, at the same time, recognising how contingent and fallible such promises can be.

I want to conclude my contribution to practice with a short narrative. At the end of my research, our school went into lockdown as a result of the spread of coronavirus pandemic. For six months, my leadership team did not see each other in person. In such striking conditions of uncertainty, our ability to act thoughtfully with each other was tested. It became possible for me as headteacher to act unilaterally according to my idealised views of the good, rather than engage politically with plural views within my team. But we didn't. Instead, we committed ourselves to weekly virtual meetings and established a new way of reporting our work, inviting and responding to critique from others. By the time we came together again, we found that the community of staff, students and families for whom our work together is vital, had coped with the experience of lockdown well and expressed appreciation our team's ability to act thoughtfully and offer some degree of certainty in dark times.

This is not a happy ending. Now that we are back together, the anxieties we provoke and evoke in each other remain, not least of all the anxieties we feel in paying more attention to the plural views of the good that exist amongst us. On return from lockdown, I found myself involved in a difficult negotiation between Faith and Colin about the distribution of government laptops to disadvantaged students. We had enough devices for only a fraction of our disadvantaged children and neither of them could agree with how to choose which student to give them to, or how to monitor the impact of the devices. Under pressure to account for the distribution of these devices, I met with Faith who wanted me to decide between the competing views of the good in the matter. I refused to do so, reminding her of her responsibility, to me and others, for finding a way forward. But I did offer to meet with her and Colin to thrash it out together. We agreed that I would set this meeting up but, within half an hour of our meeting, I received a message from Faith saying that she and Colin had

caught up and come up with a way forward. This way of resolving seemingly intractable conflict between us is becoming more common as we are gradually finding it easier to talk about anxieties in considering plural views of the good, and find ways to negotiate them with each other.

A Future Contribution to Theory and Practice?

Prior to conducting this research, I contributed greatly to the professional community of educational inquiry in the UK and more widely through Twitter, blogging and grassroots conferences. I recognise now how the echo chamber nature of these interactions had allowed me to become less nuanced in my practice as a headteacher and my thinking as a researcher. Following the completion of my thesis, I will seek publication of my findings in academic journals devoted to educational research such as 'Educational Management and Administration', 'Journal of Educational Administration' and 'Journal of School Leadership'. I will also consider developing my insights into the works of Dewey and Arendt in the context of contemporary school leadership practice in book form with domain-specific publishers such as John Catt Educational.

Having already experimented in developing small-scale group analysis programmes for school leaders with Hertfordshire Business School, it is my intention to further develop my insights into the phenomenological nature of school leadership practice by developing my knowledge of, and skills in, group analysis. This will enable me to work in a consultancy role with practitioners, particularly other headteachers, in making better sense of their work with others, perhaps in partnership with the charity Education Support. Having completed my research, I also hope to resume tweeting, blogging and conferencing again but to challenge myself to continue to be more nuanced in thinking about my practice with others.

Epilogue: Diving for Pearls and Keeping Company with Others

In her short story 'The Diver', Karen Blixen (known as Isak Dinesen) tells of a student of theology who is preoccupied with the idea of human flight as a means by which people might touch the feet of angels and "learn to understand the pattern of the universe" (Dinesen, 1958/2013, p5). The people of his town become alarmed by the young man's ambitions and contrive to thwart his plans. Finding his wings destroyed, the student disappears from human society and becomes a pearl diver, communing with a fish who describes to him the perils of the human condition:

How will real security be obtained by a creature ever anxious about the direction in which he moves, and attaching vital importance to his rising or falling? How can equilibrium be obtained by a creature which refuses to give up the idea of hope and risk? (ibid, p20)

For fish “hope is left out” because they “run no risks” where man is “unbalanced by incessant wanderings between past and future” (ibid). The story provided a title for a collection of essays by Arendt (1977) and her conceptual understanding of a historiographic approach being akin to diving for pearls. Dinesen was one of only two women recognised by Arendt as a person for dark times.

The story parallels my experience of school leadership as I have come to understand it in writing this thesis. Through my narratives I can recognise the excitement of the young man striving to comprehend the ‘patterns of the universe’ through transformational school leadership literature, to feel his anger at the perceived thwarting of his ambition by others, and his sense of disillusionment at the failure of his plans. Where does this leave me, and other managers similarly disenchanted with the failed promises of the myths of transformational approaches? Do we abandon hope and see if we can “float better without it” (ibid)? Do we avoid risk and the “inexplicable passionate deliberation” (ibid) that goes with it? My thesis concludes that this cannot be the case, but that managers must continue to wrestle with both hope and risk ‘between past and future’.

With that said, there is a place for detachment through diving for pearls by more reflexive inquiry into the phenomenological everyday interactions of our work together with others. But, unlike fish, we must always come back to the shores of involvement. These insights remind me of a song that held importance to me as a young man in search of a pattern to the universe and my place within it. The resonance of ‘Ordinary Angel’ by Hue and Cry continued with me into adulthood, so much so that my blogsite was named after a line in the song, whose chorus includes the following lines:

I am an ordinary angel winning tiny victories, and though ordinary angels fly wings weigh heavily. I try to be a daily genius; there’s no idea beyond my reach. With all the angels and the geniuses, my company I’m gonna keep. (Kane & Kane, 1988)

In conceptualising the work of my leadership team as a professional community of inquiry, I have come to better recognise that others can be ordinary angels and daily geniuses too, recognising that my position as headteacher may give me some authority over them, but that this authority is far from being total. The conflict between Faith and Colin about distributing the laptops exemplifies this well. In many respects, it echoed all three of the contemporary narratives in this thesis in terms of the anxiety each of us involved in the exchange felt at the time. I didn’t, however, accept the role of judge in the situation. Nor did I try and resolve disagreement through bilateral discussions. And I

didn't try to stay silent in the hope that a solution would emerge. Equally importantly, Faith and Colin kept their disagreements and conflicts in motion, eventually finding a mutually-acceptable and, in truth, pretty good way forward without me but knowing I was there for them if they needed me.

Recognising that our work together as a community of inquiry is necessarily fraught, I have come to better recognise that such tiny victories can be good enough, rejecting the notion that we will find enduring harmony in our work. Understanding that our complex interactions in managing our complex school are irreducible, I recognise the heavy weight of our work as a community of inquiry. We cannot hope to escape our hopes nor risk a being together without risks and so, in continued dark times of uncertainty for school leaders and other managers, we must do our best at keeping each other company.

Acknowledgements and Dedications

When a complete agreement could not otherwise be reached, a general massacre of all who have not thought in a certain way has proved a very effective means of settling opinion.

C. S Peirce (1958): 'The Fixation of Belief'

There is indeed only one principle which announces, with the same uncompromising clarity as the principle that 'you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs', the diametrically opposite maxim for political action... 'L'affaire d'un seul est l'affaire de tous'.

H. Arendt (c.1950): 'The Eggs Speak Up'

I want to begin by acknowledging my colleagues at work, the unwitting but informed additional subjects of my autoethnographic narratives. Although they have been anonymised in publishing this thesis, and so cannot really be mentioned here, I feel that they have been de-anonymised in the production of it. They consistently refuse to think in the certain ways that I sometimes advocate, but no massacres have ensued and we continue to strive to find ways to work with each other. I am lucky to work with them. No eggs have been broken in the production of this research. The one exception I will make about naming colleagues is to thank my PA, Jackie, who has only a walk-on part in one of my narratives. In my daily experience of headship, though, she plays a much bigger role and has provided many of my happiest, most enjoyable moments in managing a school.

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