

Patrick Marshall

EdD Submission

February 2012

Reflective Conversations with Headteachers: Exploring the Realities of Leadership in English Secondary Schools

Reflective Conversations with Headteachers: Exploring the Realities of Leadership in English Secondary Schools

Patrick Arthur Marshall

February 2012

Submitted to the University of Hertfordshire in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctorate in Education (EdD)

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervision team: Dr Susan Grey for her unsentimental belief in my ability to complete this research, for Dr Moira Calveley for her positive outlook and clarity and finally Dr Anne Punter for her unfailing support, optimism and determination to support me through this research.

I would also like to thank my colleague Headteachers, without whose generosity this research would not have been possible, as well as my work colleagues at school. I am grateful to the pioneers of cohort 1 of the EdD programme whose support has helped make sense of my research journey.

Finally I would like to thank my wife, family and friends for their patience and acceptance of my obsessive nature.

Abstract

The aim of this practitioner research is to explore and analyse how headteachers reflect on their own professional practice to help them sustain themselves and improve secondary schools. The research has two aspects: the first is an action participative enquiry between 2006 and 2009 into the realities of secondary headship; the second is an analysis of the significance of reflexivity in other headteachers and the participant headteacher researcher. Whilst there is a significant literature concerning school improvement and leadership there is very little of a longitudinal nature which examines the experience of secondary headteachers in depth. Therefore this research has significantly enhanced that body of knowledge. It is also appropriate in terms of professional practice as the government increasingly empowers headteachers to be free from the collaborative structures of Local Education Authorities.

This (almost) four year study of seven secondary school headteachers within the same metropolitan area takes the form of 25 extended conversations between practising headteachers who established strong "conversational partnerships" (Rubin and Rubin, 2005 p79) over the study. The analysis from the data identified how headteachers sustained good practice in their schools and how they formed co-coaching or mentoring relationships with one another over time. The research is characteristic of a social constructivist tradition. It generated rich, qualitative data gathered through the use of interviews, the participant researcher's field notes, Ofsted inspection reports and "naturally occurring" material.

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The research identified a range of themes in the area of school improvement common in the literature such as the importance of focusing on teaching and learning and appointing the 'right' staff. It also confirmed much of the existing research in the field of school leadership. It established that these headteachers readily engaged in reflexive practices which impacted positively in supporting the individual professionals and their schools.

The research also identified the existence of meta-reflection (Burge et al., 2000, Watson, 1998b) in an educational setting. A definition of meta-reflection would be a type of reflective practice used by of Headteachers in a professional 'power neutral' context. It is commonly found in the analysis of headteacher dialogues and requires the passage of time for Headteachers to reflect on these dialogues which allowed allow some headteachers to access a reflective state which supported their professional sustainability and improved their decision making. This ultimately had a positive impact on their schools.

The research found that all headteachers reflect on their professional practice at an operational level. It also found that they all were able to be reflexive almost to the degree of co-researching with the participant researcher headteacher. Finally a majority of the sample were also able to use meta-reflection to help then process decision making in their schools.

Existing models of leadership (Bush 2011), research analysis (Layder 1993) and reflexivity (Archer 2007) have been used and adapted to illuminate meta-reflection

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in the headteachers in the sample and to re-define “authentic” headship in this context.

This study is relevant not only to headteachers but also to policymakers and educationalists interested in how to improve schools over the long-term and sustain the workforce of headteachers in a manner which benefits all stakeholders.

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List of Abbreviations

The Office for Standards in Education	Ofsted
Department for Education	DfE
Department for Children Schools and Families	DCSF
Department for Education and Skills	DfES
Education Reform Act	ERA
Local Education Authority	LEA
National College for School Leadership	NCSL
Doctorate in Education	EdD
Master of Business Education	MBA
Her Majesty's Inspector(ate) for Schools	HMI
Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances	SfCC
Improving the Quality of Education for All	IQEA
Leadership Incentive Grant	LIG
Action Research	AR
Participative Action Research	PAR
Building Schools for the Future	BSF
Key Stage 3	KS3
General Certificate in Secondary Education	GCSE
Advanced Supplementary	AS

Chapter 1

The Reality of Being a Headteacher and Related Research Questions

1.1 Introduction

This dissertation is the result of a six year exploration into the realities of being a headteacher in a secondary school in England at the end of the first decade of the twenty first century. It draws upon the experience of headteachers using reflection to sustain themselves and their schools. Since the late 1980s secondary schools have become increasingly self-governing and therefore the leadership role of the headteachers within these self-managed entities has become increasingly politically accountable and socially important (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992).

The accountability for headteachers was driven mainly by The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) which was created by the 1992 Education Act and was part of the desire to improve the quality of schooling by giving parents and parliament regular reports on the progress of schools in England and Wales (Matthews, 2004a). School improvement for the leaders of these self-managing schools became a central aspect of their leadership role. This reality has not just continued to be true up the present day, but becomes increasingly important as each subsequent government seeks to establish its identity in this important policy area.

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The Chief Inspector of Schools Sir Michael Wilshaw, appointed in October 2011, underlined this when he said:

"As Her Majesty's chief inspector, I will endeavour not only to provide a commentary on educational standards but also to challenge the service to provide consistently high-quality provision for young people and adults" (Mahadevan, 2011).

As Wilshaw makes clear, a major aspect of the reality of being a headteacher is the continual pressure to improve schools in line with national priorities (examination results or other standards). This study will show that headteachers also have personal priorities, such as the desire to create an inclusive educational experience for young people, or prepare the next generation for their part in English society in the early decades of the twenty first century.

School improvement is the process of change in the same way that leadership is about determining change (Cuban, 1988). Ideally this is change for the better but the understanding that schools cannot stand still is something that headteachers have no choice but to understand quickly. Nonetheless as Hopkins points out:

"...if change is a journey, then where does it lead? One of the problems that we associate with previous approaches to school improvement is that they have taken a short term view of change...in order to cope with change of this magnitude and complexity we need to adopt and nurture a long term perspective"(Hopkins, 2002 p98).

The desire to avoid this short term view and seek to find the long term perspective advocated by Hopkins was one of the underpinning principles of this dissertation.

For headteachers successfully to lead their schools this study suggests that they must grasp the social contexts within which they operate as individuals and

understand the importance of grasping the opportunities to engage in professional dialogues with other headteachers who are grappling with the same challenges.

Throughout this dissertation reference will be made to Layder's research map (Layder, 1993) which provides a helpful model because the levels of social organisation it describes align very well with the evolution from school improvement to the experience of headteachers that this study surveys. Layder(1993) identifies four levels of analysis moving inwards from the wider social and political context through the professional dialogues with others to the heart of the individual reflecting headteacher (Layder, 1993 p 71). Table 1 shows how this map applies to this research study.

Table 1 Layder's (1993) Research Map

Level	Area addressed in this dissertation	History
Context	Shifting government policy, inspection regimes and stakeholder accountability	
Setting	How schools are led and improved	
Situated activity	Professional conversations between headteachers	
Self	The reality of being a headteacher	

After Layder (1993 p72)

1.2 The Policy Context

In order to understand the role of headteachers today it is necessary to put this into a policy and political context. The impact of the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA)¹

¹ References to Education Acts in this dissertation refer to England and Wales only. Education in Scotland and Northern Ireland operate within a different legal framework.

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with its introduction of accountability for the National Curriculum, testing and school budgets established a "new order" (Ball, 2008) that made the role of headteachers even more complex than in previous decades. Gewirtz (2002) described the type of headteacher in post before ERA as being "welfarist" in that they were comfortable with notions like a public service ethos, socialisation within the welfare sector of education and an emphasis on collectivism (Gewirtz, 2002 p32). Headteachers after ERA are described by her as managerialists who are comfortable with targets and implementing objectives set by agencies like government who are external to the school:

"The new management discourse in education emphasises the instrumental purposes of schooling – raising standards and performance as measured by examination results, levels of attendance, and school leaver destination – and is frequently articulated within a lexicon of enterprise, excellence quality and effectiveness" (Gewirtz, 2002 p32).

An example of this was given by Hoyle and Wallace (2005) in reference to Ofsted's requirement for a school's vision aligning with a centralised view:

"any vision you like as long as it's central government's" (Hoyle and Wallace, 2005 p139).

The current study is set within this policy context. It demonstrates that the leadership of the participatory headteachers showed clearly that for them leadership was about how they could find strategies to remain "focused on classroom learning" (Bush, 2008 p285) in their schools. For all of these headteachers (none of whom reached leadership position pre ERA) managerialism was a context to which they were adjusting in order to meet their professional and personal aims as leaders. All of these headteachers acknowledged the pressures of external control and

accountability, but all had found ways to keep the education of young people as the focus of their day to day reality.

1.3 This is Personal

This dissertation is, and always has been, as much a personal journey of discovery as it was an attempt to explain the relationship between headteachers and school improvement. I have been a secondary headteacher since January 2002 and live the reality of leading a school in the contexts of the shifting political expectations and the constant accountability to my school community.

I have been a researcher for almost seven years and have found that the academic perspective this has given me has provided a great deal of practical support over this period. I hope therefore the reader will forgive my shift into the first person at certain points in this dissertation. This is done to exemplify the importance of research into the practice of being a headteacher from the perspective of a participant headteacher and to demonstrate the significance of this research.

Burgess et al suggest that:

“Research is an engaging and all-consuming activity”(Burgess et al., 2006 p8)

I would go further and say that research can easily become an obsession. I say this because since 2005, this has been my experience when combining my research with my professional practice. It has been said by some of my work colleagues, and my

wife who has known me for over 30 years, that I am prone to obsessions, so it is not surprising that such a fixated approach to what I am doing informs both my practice as an educator (especially in my role as a headteacher) and as a researcher (specifically undertaking an EdD programme).

1.3.1 Why a practice based doctorate?

By researching my own practice I have been able to improve my practice by reflecting on what I did through the lens of an educational researcher. I had been promoted to my first headship in January 2002 and therefore had acquired the early years of experience in this role before embarking on my doctorate. My school in 2002 had been bottom of the school league tables in the town for several years and there was local 'talk' of closure. An Ofsted inspection² was imminent and the school I had inherited was half full (it had a capacity for 1000³ students and had just over 590 on roll at the time). The Local Education Authority (LEA) was acutely interested in the situation and the Director of the newly formed Children Schools and Families for Houseman⁴ had spent two days interviewing for this headship. After my appointment he wrote me a letter which explicitly indicated the very high expectations he had of me. As a headteacher I was accountable to act quickly and decisively to improve the standards and reputation of the school for the students, teachers and parents. This is the reality of all new headteachers taking up their first

² "The inspection system was created by the Education Reform Act 1992 and subsequently the 1998 Act which changed the post war education system from paternalistic Local Education Authorities into one with 'policies involving marketisation' – open enrolment, per capita funding and devolution of resource management to schools – with centralisation - a National Curriculum associated with testing and monitoring regimes and a strong system of school inspection" (Strain and Simkins 2008 p155)

³ An approximately average sized comprehensive school in England and Wales (Ofsted 2008)

⁴ Houseman is a pseudonym for the large shire county and LEA where this research was undertaken.

posts (Boerema, 2011) but I could not have known at this point, as I do now, that the deeper challenge was to understand how headteachers used reflection to support their practice.

I also realised that I would need to develop as a professional and a person in order to do this. During interviews for headships I had been asked how I knew I would be able to do all the things I was confidently telling appointing panels I would do with their schools. The very simple answer to this is that I did not know I could do it and the truth is no one does, until they actually sit in the metaphorical chair and find out whether they can or cannot lead a secondary school. This awareness of one's limitations and understanding of "self" is another reality of headship (Branson, 2007a).

These two 'realities' were clearly interlinked and I had an instinct that academic study could at least be part of the solution. My MBA final dissertation looked at the impact of how a new headteacher's vision had changed my previous school where I was a deputy headteacher. The completion of my master's dissertation taught me how to use the research process as a way of reflecting on my practice as a school leader, specifically the question of a new headteacher's vision. This was a classic insider researcher position (Hellawell, 2006) which allowed me to influence the development of that school.

This doctoral research aims to explore how headteachers fulfil their professional roles. It is also concerned with how developing the research skills of critical reading

and analysis could support a practice role. Further, this study attempts to show how the development of my critical thinking and professional reflection has been enhanced by the academic rigour of doctoral study.

1.4. Becoming A Reflexive Headteacher

In this dissertation an underlying theme is the exploration of the relationship between my practice as a headteacher and my practice as a doctoral researcher.

The tensions created by the dual role are similar to those found by Arber (2006) who uses reflexivity to help her gain perspective on her research:

“For practitioners... the credibility of one’s research is dependent upon a degree of reflexivity about one’s theoretical and methodological assumptions, and how these are experienced in field experiences (Arber, 2006 p156).

The working definition in this dissertation is that reflexivity is the understanding of one’s position as a researcher within the process of research. This study attempts to capture the process of reflection as headteachers reflect. Therefore my own reflective and reflexive practices are a central part of the analysis.

In order to draw on personal reflexivity I will sometimes quote my own earlier work to show the development of the process of reflection and show how this has impacted on my professional practice. In order to make this clear to the reader I will box these references. There will be occasions when, due to the reflective nature of this dissertation, there will be boxes within boxes when I quote a reflection of a previous reflection. This is an attempt to capture the complexity of reflection in a

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textual manner and is more easily understood by the image of reflections reflecting back into reflections of themselves.

In 2001, therefore, before the thought of doctoral work I was able to self-reflect on vision at 'masters' level'. This was expressed in the following way:

"Schools can operate without a strong vision. This is because the majority of teachers in their own classrooms concentrate on creating personal learning environments which might fulfil an overarching vision of delivering a curriculum but may not add to the specific headteacher's vision. Add to this the National Curriculum and the policing of classroom practice by Ofsted and we have an operational model of teaching and learning. Effective middle management and good monitoring can improve this, of course. Indeed Ofsted reports on many "successful" schools that have key heads of department who are excellent managers, getting excellent results from their teams without a clear strategic vision from the headteacher and the senior team. The model offered by Senge (1990 pp219-220) looks at the way a vision becomes shared and this kind of response would be described as grudging compliance, non-compliance or apathy...In this model the vision never actually affects any other part of the school. The school will operate without vision because it will self-correct up to a point. A professional orchestra can play familiar pieces of music without a conductor because they know what to do. The real problem comes when either the repertoire or key members of the orchestra change or the "knowledge of what to do" is affected by an external pressure. Similarly headteachers can cope on different pages of the score if the players are good at their jobs but run the risk that the music will become discordant and out of time; ending in an ugly mess of competent individuals each hearing their own tune and all blaming everyone else for the chaos."

(MBA thesis Marshall, 2001 p2)

Upon reflection the researcher 'me' noticed the assertions and intemperate use of verbs like "policing" used by the practitioner 'me' engaged in the reality of being a headteacher. By contrast an extract from my later reflective journal (kept as a direct consequence of being a doctoral student see appendix 6) showed a different aspect of the reflective process:

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"It does seem less than efficient to have the return of Ofsted just a year since our last section 5⁵ but it will improve the lesson planning in the last few weeks and remind us all of our accountabilities (Reflective Journal November 2009).

It seemed, therefore, that the process of becoming a researcher and the reflexive study of being a headteacher had changed the manner in which I reflected.

It is relevant to examine my motives for deciding to choose to study at doctoral level as they affect my relationship to my own research (Söderqvist, 1991). Whilst doctorates in an academic field may enhance one's career prospects, (Denholm and Evans, 2006) this is less relevant in secondary education as doctorates are rare and practice-based ones are even rarer.⁶ The "standards agenda" at Masham School⁷ and the high levels of external scrutiny were a constant reality. Although it could be argued that doctoral study could have a part to play and might be considered as a form of external validation for external agencies like Ofsted the truth was that there were stronger personal reasons for undertaking a doctorate which aligned with the point in my career when I was headteacher of a potentially failing school. How I could make and sustain improvement in a school like mine had become a critical factor in my personal and professional life.

⁵ A new system of school inspection was introduced in September 2005 as laid out in Section 5 of the Education Act 2005 OFSTED 2005b. Framework for the Inspection of Schools in England from September 2005. London: TSO. "The main elements of the system are more frequent inspections with shorter notice, smaller inspection teams, new and greater emphasis on the school's own self-evaluation evidence, a common framework for inspection across all phases of education and shorter, sharper reports, with clear recommendations for improvement."MCRONE, T., RUDD, P., BLENKINSOP, S. & WADE, P. 2006. The Impact of Section 5 Inspections: maintained Schools in England. Slough: NFER.

⁶ Out of the 76 headteachers in Houseman LEA 3 headteachers have doctorates, 1 in his own practice.

⁷ Masham School is a pseudonym for the school where I am headteacher.

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Another motivating factor, and one specific to choosing an EdD rather than a PhD, was the need to be with others; the feelings of isolation and loneliness for those new to headship are common experiences (Thornton, 2002). There was also a research itch I had to scratch (Maynard, 1986 p364). There were questions about the ways schools operated and how headteachers were perceived, that needed to be fully examined and looked at from the perspective of an insider. I was also aware of how potentially exciting the interface between practice and academic study could be. Finally the prospect of making an original contribution to both one's professional practice setting and scholarly thought was very attractive:

"during the research training process [doctoral students] are in a unique 'window of opportunity' ...where they are able to use their newly acquired research skills as leverage to expand their professional and academic network"(Denholm and Evans, 2006 p263).

My research itch (Zemliansky and Bishop, 2004) therefore, was based around my new role and my new status and how I could sustain improvement in my school at a systemic level. I expressed this idea in a short paper following on from the first two weekend sessions on the EdD programme:

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"Over the last twenty years the area of school improvement has developed into an industry. The entire Ofsted edifice, entire sections of the DfES and countless school improvement initiatives bear witness to this view. The question is 'has all this effort improved our schools?' and if, after twenty years and millions of pounds of investment it has not 'why?'

Like many phrases in the world of educational reform the complexity of what school improvement really is, belies its common sense definition. There can surely be no-one who would not believe it is right to improve schools and thereby improve the learning and life chances of the people that use them. And yet within that last sentence I have assumed a range of 'accepted truths'; for example what do we mean by 'school?' How do we define learning, what is the connection between learning and life chance (and indeed both in relation to school) and finally exactly who are these people and what do we mean by 'use?'

The view we take changes what we see. There can be no neutral or true view of how we look at these areas unless we drill down to the philosophy which underpins our assumptions of how the world works.

Whilst we must guard against reducing all things down to philosophical first principles and thus grind to a complete halt it is important to acknowledge the philosophical frameworks that do underpin many models of school improvement operating in the educational establishment.

Hopkins (Hopkins, 2001) suggests that we have reached the stage of authentic or real school improvement and he defines this as those activities which have a systemic and long lasting effect on schools.

The theoretical framework for this view comes from the work done by Jurgen Habermas (Habermas, 1984 [1981]). Other researchers have distilled Habermas' post Marxist philosophy into a useful framework expressed by three levels, each leading up to the basis for 'authentic' action (Aoki, 1979). Close examinations of these perspectives highlight some reasons why the school improvement industry has not yet improved every school in the country and shows why the idea of authenticity may be useful to us."

The Problems with School Improvement (Marshall, 2005)

1.5 Talking with Headteachers

Another personal reality which helped me during the early stages of headship (Earley and Weindling, 2007) was the importance of talking to other headteachers.

These conversations ranged from casual chats to dialogues that lasted hours and explored issues relating to schools and headteachers in the conversations. I

remember being struck at how generous other headteachers were in giving so freely of their time and wisdom. The practice of being part of these 'head to head' conversations became an unwritten rule - that if another headteacher needs to speak to you as a headteacher you will respond as a matter of professional courtesy. This became a key feature of the eventual design of the research. I also realised how much dialogic learning resonated with me on a personal level - a realisation discovered by other researchers also:

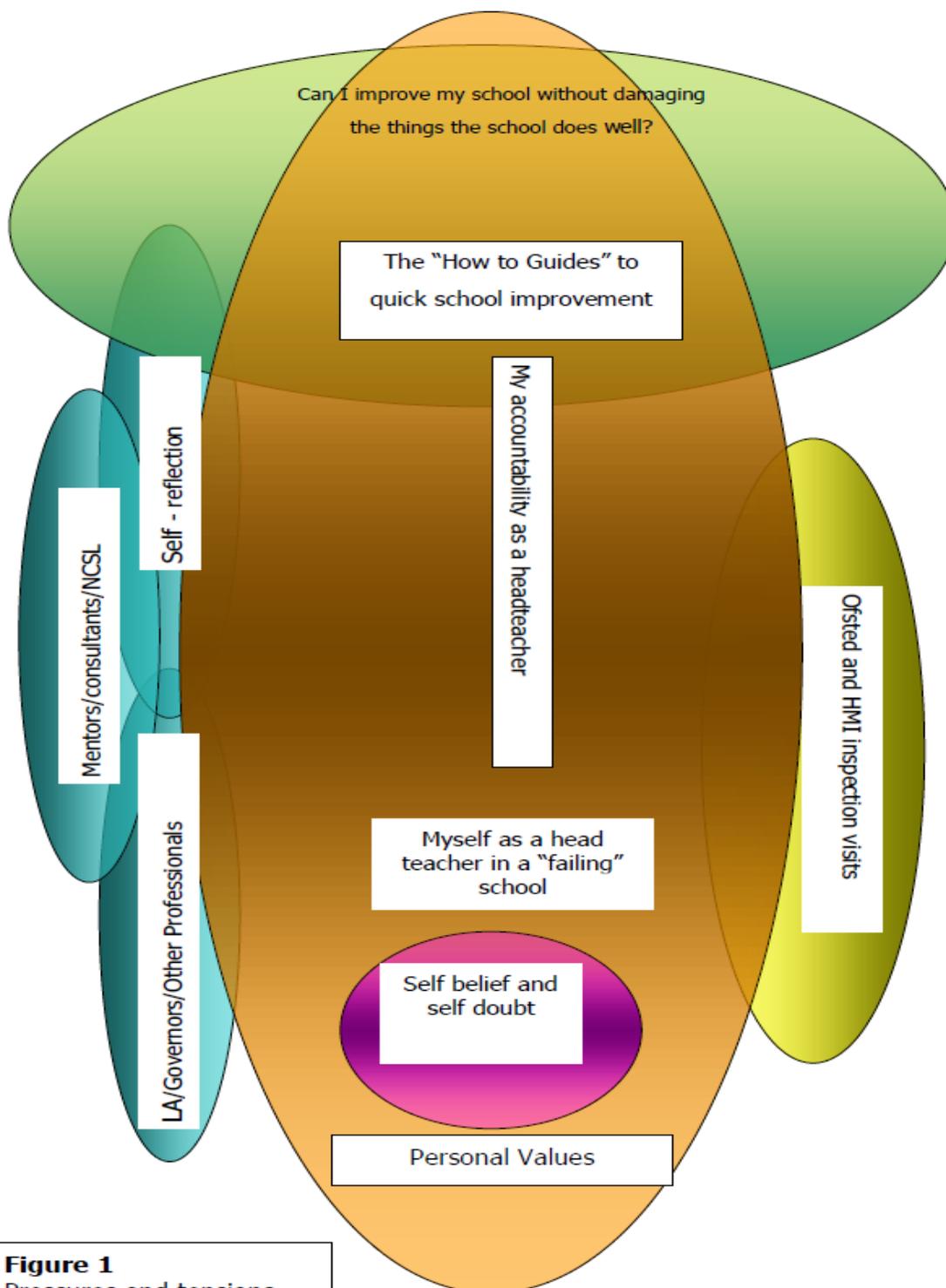
"Dialogue may not be the only way to access one's understanding but it is one of the most worthy educative engagements." (Angelides et al., 2004 p474).

Such educative engagements were particularly helpful during the period of the most intensive scrutiny by Ofsted between 2003 and 2005. Experienced headteachers who had successfully navigated their schools out of categories⁸ would go out of their way to invite me to visit their schools, or drop in for a cup tea. These conversations had no other agenda except to reassure and allow me to talk through actions taken, or actions planned. There was never any judgement (this was supplied by the Local Education Authority and Ofsted on a termly basis) there was just the sharing of their professional reality through story and anecdote. I became aware of the importance of headteacher to headteacher dialogues in supporting the professional practice of being a headteacher. The model (figure 1) shows the point in time in 2005 when the various tensions between my professional practice and developing research

⁸ If in the judgement of the Ofsted inspection team a school was failing to provide an adequate standard of education it was judged to fall into the category of 'special measures'. If the inspectors feared there was a danger that a school may become inadequate without intervention, the category 'serious weakness' or 'notice to improve' could be applied OFSTED 2005b. Framework for the Inspection of Schools in England from September 2005. London: TSO.

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interest was captured i.e. my reflexive understanding of myself as both a headteacher and a researcher.



All these different pressures were interwoven into my doctoral study.

1.6. The Interface between Improving a School and Surviving as a Headteacher

Masham School's Improvement experiences over the last twenty years present an interesting way of looking at both the context of a specific school and the historical context of school improvement in general. Hopkins's (2001) analysis usefully described the prevalent view of the late 1980s which he characterised as the "school development" phase. This was essentially a school-based evaluation process with little external scrutiny.

This certainly described Masham School in the early 1990s. The school had been underperforming for many years since the departure of a "hero head" (Fincham, 2010) in 1988. This coincided (as is often the case) with a sudden change of key staff, falling pupil rolls in the town and the rise in the reputations of two neighbouring schools. This resulted in a calamitous decline in Masham's popularity and general performance. By 1993 the number on roll had fallen from 956 to 395. Less than 30 families expressed any preference for Masham as the school for their children (and only seventeen picked the school as their first choice). The school's budget was in crisis and the headteacher was removed.

A new head was appointed and the LEA became much more closely involved. This could be equated with what Hopkins (2001) describes as the fourth phase of school

improvement ("systemic reform," p37) which includes this element of external scrutiny. This scrutiny was initially provided by the LEA but Ofsted and Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools (HMI) also became involved from the 1990s onward as part of the norms set up following ERA:

"The Act transferred the conduct of most inspections to independent teams co-ordinated by a new non-ministerial department of state (Ofsted)...all schools received regular inspections of considerable length and intensity and the results were published."(Whitty, 2008 p170).

Under this new headteacher the school improved⁹. There were two Ofsted inspections (both LEA led as was often the case in the early days of the post ERA education world) one in 1993 and one on 1998. Both showed the Masham School's position to be satisfactory but insecure with good leadership and management. During this period the school became effectively an early "Fresh Start"¹⁰ School and would be ripe to become an Academy¹¹ in the current climate. The school was re-branded and in 1995 changed its name to Masham from the original one which referred to its local community.

The roll by 2002 had risen to 590 the budget was under control and the local reputation had recovered somewhat; 131 parents expressed a preference for their children to attend Masham School, 78 making this school the first choice for their children. Standards of examination performance were still low. Children who

⁹ The definition of "improved" I am using is from what Ofsted described in their strategic plan: "Inspection contributes much – and we intend that it should contribute more – to what education providers themselves do to improve quality and choice as well as raise standards" OFSTED 2004. Strategic Plan 2005 to 2008. *In*: OFSTED (ed.). TSO..

¹⁰ Fresh Start schools gave LEAs to opportunity to rename and re-launch schools they deemed to be failing.

¹¹ The Academy Schools programme allowed schools to be taken out of LEA control and be run by private companies or trusts.

achieved any 5 A*-C grades at GCSE¹² reached 20.5% in 2002 and the local authority put the school in its 'causing concern' category. The LEA also played a significant role in Masham School's improvement journey. This is part of the territory covered by research looking at an LEA's role in school improvement (Ainscow and Howes, 2001a). The relationship between the school and the LEA was falling somewhere between Hopkins' "combined centralisation and decentralisation" strategies (Hopkins, 2001 p37):

"Certainly the LEA emphasised the idea of school led improvement and we noted that [School Improvement Officers] SIOs were often conscious of the danger of creating dependent relationships. Nevertheless, many of the senior staff within the LEA, particularly Headteachers, recognised that they needed considerable technical and, indeed, personal support in learning how to manage change. Often it was through their close relationship with a particular SIO that such support was provided. It does seem, then, that if taken literally, the notion of 'maximum freedom' could actually be a means of limiting school improvement efforts" (Ainscow and Howes, 2001a p6).

I was the next new head at Masham School. I was appointed in 2002 and was faced with a school having started its improvement journey but being far from secure.

The overarching context was to manage the unusual amount of external scrutiny.

From June 2002 to October 2005 there were six inspection visits from HMI or Ofsted and the LEA were in school on a fortnightly basis.

Ofsted themselves commissioned research to ascertain the impact of inspection on helping schools to improve. In their study Matthews and Sammons (2004)

¹² This is the main standards measure used by governments since ERA. DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION. 2011b. *DfE: GCSE and Equivalent Results in England, 2010/11 (Provisional)* [Online]. Available: <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001034/index.shtml>.

highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of external scrutiny on school

improvement noting that Ofsted did not always work:

“The evidence from the sectors which Ofsted inspects suggests that there is no guarantee of improvement following inspection” (Matthews and Sammons, 2004 p24).

Although in general inspected schools do improve, they acknowledge that:

“...effective schools successfully combine common characteristics and that school improvement is a complex process: it takes time, energy and commitment and often benefits from external support. For schools in severe difficulties, the processes are likely to be particularly challenging.” (Matthews and Sammons, 2004 p25).

They quote a headteacher’s view from Fidler and Davies (1998) that echoed the position in Masham School:

“Although the stigma of being in one of the ‘failing’ or ‘serious weaknesses’ categories is undesirable it may be the only way in which a school has a good chance of redressing the situation. This is likely to be the case where a school has been in a poor state, for whatever reason, for a long time. The school may simply have lost the capacity to improve without a great deal of outside assistance”(Fidler B. and Davies J., 1998 p163).

The role of Ofsted in school improvement is not straight-forward indeed, in this context it meant virtually termly inspections with all the targets and pressures that accompany this. In June 2003 HMI visited as part of their programme of monitoring schools which faced challenging circumstances. The judgement was concern but provision was judged to be satisfactory. This was followed in November by a section 5 Ofsted inspection (Ofsted, 2005e) which though this Ofsted team found the school to have improved since its previous 1998 inspection judged the school to have “serious weaknesses” (Ofsted, 2003).

I had been in post for 19 months at the time of Masham School's next inspection and due to the judgement that leadership and management were strengths of the school I survived being removed by either the governors or the LEA. It is by no means certain that this always happens. It is common practice for headteachers in underperforming schools to be removed following critical Ofsted inspections. This reality for a headteacher in such schools was described by Matthews in the following manner:

"HMI reported serious concerns, particularly about the leadership and management of the school, and recommended a return visit. The LEA intervened and the headteacher resigned (Matthews, 2004b para 95).

My reality at this time was different from what Matthews described above. In fact the HMI deviated from the policy whereby the inspector's role was to judge not support (Ofsted, 2005a) and formed a relationship with me which helped the school tackle its underlying issues at an appropriate pace. The HMI in question telephoned me and gave me very valuable advice about what to do contrary to Ofsted protocols.

This is what is cited by Matthews as:

"The impact of HMI monitoring visits was described by one headteacher as 'necessary but painful'. The visits were seen to ensure that schools maintained a rigorous focus on addressing the key issues for action in their inspection report. Headteachers were unanimous in describing the professionalism of their lead HMI, who was well aware of the effect of the visits on staff and worked hard to minimise stress and give support. Contact from HMI between visits was also seen to be very helpful."(Matthews, 2004b).

Masham School was given a second chance and when the same lead HMI returned in January 2005 he was satisfied that the school was having an impact on addressing the underlying issues that were its barriers to progress.

In October 2005 the school was inspected under the then new Ofsted framework (Ofsted, 2005b). By this point the school had seen a rise in its local reputation. 287 families expressed a preference, 140 of whom were first choices. Results had improved to 27% (5 A* - C) in 2005 and most importantly four HMI judged the school to have made enough progress to be removed from its "serious weaknesses" (Ofsted 2005) category. They judged that all aspects were at least satisfactory and some areas were good:

"The school is providing an education which is satisfactory in all major respects and has some good features. Since the last Ofsted inspection of November 2003, when the school was identified as having serious weaknesses, it has made the necessary improvements to remove it from a category of a school causing concern" (Ofsted, 2005c).

Masham School's improvement experience would imply that 'turning a school around' is therefore dependent upon high quality external input (HMI), support from the LEA, a new or revitalised leader and the all-important 'magic formula' for school improvement. It was this formula that I wanted to look at in my school for both personal and professional reasons.

The sobering point, however, is that some schools are not always able to make enough progress in the context of Ofsted inspections to be allowed to remain open.

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A neighbouring school in the same town (Swinburne¹³) with the same LEA support (identical advisors even) the same access to HMI and a new head with outstanding credentials (trained Ofsted inspector consultant trainer for National College for School Leadership (NCSL)) during an almost identical timescale failed to 'improve' and this school closed in August 2006. The answer to why some schools improve and sustain that improvement and others do not formed my first and fundamental research interest.

As a postscript to this is the research undertaken by a team at Cambridge into eight schools (the octet) which were part of a government Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances (SfCC) scheme in the early 2000s. They examined in depth the impact of a range of "proven" interventions on some seriously challenging schools. Their results confirmed the experience of Masham School over a similar period. School improvement is a "complex and multi-layered issue" (MacBeath, 2007 p123) and even good intervention can have unexpected outcomes:

"The two schools who could be said to have embraced the project most fully...were by the end of the project the two schools in which student attainment improved the least" (MacBeath et al., 2007 p124).

One of these schools, The Ridings, was closed in August 2008 having failed to convince Ofsted, local parents or its LEA that standards were high enough.

Therefore it would seem school improvement is more complex than a 'quick fix' intervention using a series of tested strategies.

¹³ Swinburne is a pseudonym for a Borough Council area of about 100,000 people with seven secondary schools.

1.7 The Genesis of the Research Question

In my original research proposal the first iteration of the title was:

“Authentic’ School Improvement: Contextualising Effective Strategies”

My original research question was:

“How do schools improve and how can these improvements be sustained over time?”

By 2007 my research question had shifted to include my professional concerns about leadership. School improvement, though still present, was now seen through the lens of my role as an increasingly experienced headteacher and in addition undertaking doctoral research meant that the processes of reflection both professional and personal was of central importance as shown in the next iteration of the title:

“Authentic’ School Improvement. How schools sustain and embed improvement from the perspective of headteachers reflecting on their practice of leadership.”

The research question had now evolved to acknowledge the role of the headteacher in the context of school improvement:

“How does the role of the headteacher impact of a school’s ability to improve? and how does professional reflection support headteacher practice?”

I reflected on this change in my first progression report:

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“One [I] could reasonably argue that the general thrust of the question is unaltered. There is still a stated interest in authenticity, school improvement, and sustainability and the original proposal acknowledged the importance of leadership.

School leadership as a factor contributing significantly to school improvement was highlighted by a small scale orientation study conducted in my own school. All the published work on school improvement acknowledges that successful improvement is directly related to the leadership of that institution. I drew on the work of (Fullen, 2000, Fullen, 2003 , Harris and Lambert, 2003, Harris and Muijs, 2005) on the role of leadership in school improvement

(Marshall, 2006)

However, the differences are also significant. Authenticity has been linked to embedding improvement and the whole area of headteachers' views of how this improvement happens and how they reflect on it is now a central focus. There is also a movement away from coming up with effective strategies as a possible outcome of the research. The reason for this is connected to the conceptual framework that developed through the first phase of this research.”

From the Beginning and Back to the Beginning: “Authentic” School Improvement (Marshall, 2007)

My research question, given the realities of my roles as headteacher and as an emergent researcher, concerns an examination of how headteachers improved their schools. I was immediately drawn to research that sought to explain ‘improvement’ in terms of long term impact described as “authentic school improvement” by Hopkins (2001 p16) who saw school improvement as needing to be based on principles and values:

“those engaged in such improvement efforts do not just intervene in schools to carry through a particular change strategy; they are actively implementing improvement strategies that help both students and teachers to enhance their learning and achievements”(Hopkins, 2001 p16).

In 2006 the research the question (in bold) for the research proposal for my EdD programme stated that:

“The purpose of my research and contribution to knowledge is to answer the following questions: **What are the key drivers which are the basis for a school to make sustained systemic improvement? How does the specific context of a school influence these drivers? Are these drivers transferable and therefore will they work in other school contexts? All schools are obliged to be in the process of continual improvement** (Government, 2005) research has established some of the key drivers (Hopkins, 2002, Stoll and Fink, 1989) but practice tells us that school make progress with varying degrees of success (Ofsted, 2005d). Therefore I plan to identify what it is about a school’s particular context that makes some things help and others hinder school improvement” (Marshall, 2006a).

The focus at this point was to discover how different schools use specific strategies to effect improvement and why these strategies could be very different from each other and be dependent on the school’s particular situation. From a professional point of view in the story of my own school’s improvement journey these questions were of enormous personal and professional importance.

Between 2006 and 2009 the research was undertaken and the data collected. As a result of my experience in collecting the data the title of the study by 2009 had evolved into:

“Talking with Heads: Working with the ‘realities’ of headteacher experience”

This described what I was doing at the time as well as describing the intersection of the two roles of researcher and headteacher.

As I began to analyse the data I began to realise the importance of reflection as a process. Reflection impacted on both my roles and I realised that it needed to become a more central idea to the research. Finally the title became.

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The final research question was:

“How do Headteachers reflect professionally on their practice and is this reflection changed by ‘professional conversations’? What is the relationship between the way Headteachers reflect, the way they practice leadership and the way their schools improve?”

1.8 Sharpening the Research Question

The final iteration of the research question moved away from school improvement per se, towards an understanding of the challenge of educational leadership to the complexities of headteacher role in achieving sustained school improvement through reflection. The final question was therefore: what is the ‘reality’ of being a headteacher from a practitioner point of view within the context of reflective conversations with other headteachers? The main aim of this research was critically to analyse and explain the extent to which headteachers felt that being reflective sustains and improves their professional practice. Further, it aimed to explore the extent to which headteachers were reflexive in their practice of school leadership.

This dissertation was also about a personal journey to become a researcher into educational practice (Brailsford, 2010 p21) and to be able to offer robust research findings which could inform policy in the context of helping our education system to serve the needs of young people and address how we can sustain this improvement with potentially less resource.

This study may help headteachers learn to appreciate the unacknowledged resource of other headteacher colleagues in maintaining and enriching their roles as school leaders (Ragland, 2006). Although reflexivity is an academic concept and needs a working definition which is explored in Chapter 3, headteachers in this study recognised the process of reflexivity, though those without recent academic experience did not describe the process using this word. It is what Whitehead describes as the question all the teachers ask themselves "how do I improve what I'm doing?" (Whitehead, 2008 p4). As a result of this desire to analyse the value and function of this reflexivity this dissertation also seeks to show how reflexive practice supports headteacher practice.

1.9 The Issues Arising from Reflexivity in a Professional Context

Being reflexive is not an end in itself, it has the danger of being self-indulgent navel gazing which, in the style of Shakespeare's Hamlet, inhibits an individual from taking action. This must be guarded against.

On the other hand if reflexivity supports the core practice of being a headteacher and if this reflection, when entered into with other headteachers, enhances both individual reflections and encourages and contextualises leadership actions, then the application of reflexivity is actually a core skill as yet not fully captured in the national headteachers professional standards (DfES, 2004).

A working definition of reflection, as opposed to reflexivity or even reflection in action (Schön, 1983), might start with Socrates's "an unexamined life is not worth living" (Plato, 2007 p36) before moving on to the image of looking at oneself in a mirror in order to be more conscious of what one is doing and finally allows the individual to come to an understanding of how one might better take action in the world. Reflection refers to the act of analysing an action in order fully to understand and appreciate the learning within the situation. It is better when planned for, when one is aware of the process and has time to reflect on the learning after a passage of time.

The evolution of the research question has impacted directly on the methodology and the methods employed in this research so it is appropriate that an exploration of methodology should be part of the research aims. I wished to use the appropriate methodology to capture headteacher reflection at a deep level which impacts on personal and professional practice. The impact of a headteacher who engages in deep reflection relates to issues around the authenticity of such a headteacher which are discussed in chapter 3 and the methodology of this research which is discussed in chapter 4.

Linked to methodology there are additional objectives arising from my own developing awareness of the research context. These are to identify the impact of headteacher's 'conversations' on their own practice; and to reflect upon the impact of these "conversations" on my own professional practice; Bohm and Nichol (1996) note the importance of this type of communication:

"in a dialogue each person does not attempt to make common certain ideas or items of information that are already known to him. Rather it may be said that the two people are making something in common i.e. creating something new together" (Bohm and Nichol, 1996 p3).

This act of creating new knowledge is much more profound when we layer in Schön's (1983) analysis of what reflective practitioners do:

"a practitioner who reflects-in-action tends to question the definition of his task, the theories-in-action that he brings to it, and the measures of performance by which he is controlled" (Schön, 1983 p337).

So if the reflective practitioners are themselves leaders of the complex systems they direct and it is true that something else happens when these leaders reflect on their own practice; as a result of reflecting with another peer reflecting on their practice, the result, I will contend, has significant implications for school leadership and the sustainability of headteachers. Undertaking this research significantly impacted on my professional practice and the dialogues I have had since 2005 with my colleague headteachers has also impacted on them, as will be reported in chapters 5, 6 7 and 8.

1.10 Professional Reflection

During the course of this study the research process allowed me to enter into a coaching role with other less experienced colleagues and also allowed me to be coached by those headteachers with more experience in the realities of the role. More importantly the professional dialogues and the “conversational partnerships” (Rubin and Rubin, 2005 p79) that arose from these helped me “self-coach” by being able to reflect in a trusted professional context removed from the operational specifics of my school.

This process has been noted in the literature (Scott, 2004, Burgess et al., 2006), but is summed up well by a teacher researcher as:

“I would argue that teachers who explore their professional identity and professional learning through investigation and research of their professional history have more sophisticated understandings of professional development” (Campbell, 2002 p10)

The nature of professional reflection and the challenges of insider research are examined in chapter 3, but in this chapter I have outlined the drivers behind my personal decision to undertake a professional doctorate and where this sat within my professional context and the wider educational context of school improvement and leadership in the early years of the twenty first century (chapter 2). As the research took shape it became apparent that my interest lay in the relationship between headteachers and their schools as the possible ‘magic ingredient’ that determines and sustains school improvement.

As figure 1 showed I was immersed in the headteacher reality of improving my school and maintaining that improvement. It also became clear that the simple guide with advice that could be reduced to twenty glossy pages of 'top tips for action' (NCSL, 2002) could not offer solutions to all schools in all contexts because the nature of these contexts was too complex and varied:

"in reality, school improvement as a field of research has turned out to be a much messier area than suggested by the initial, and perhaps overly optimistic, forays into school effectiveness" (MacBeath, 2007 p8).

This idea of messiness was especially true for schools which were vulnerable but which had not yet reached the crisis point of terminal decline. As a researcher the specific situation of a new headship and a school which struggled to match the government's post ERA agenda on standards and accountability allowed me to focus my attention away from the vast area of school improvement into an examination of one central driver of school change – the role of the headteacher in maintaining momentum and the growing understanding of just how this is done.

Therefore this study moved towards an examination of what it is headteachers do in their schools to sustain improvement and be able to remain true to their moral purpose (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992).

1.11 Headteacher Access

As a colleague head I had excellent access to the other headteachers in the immediate locality. Being a headteacher also allowed me to collect the very rich qualitative data from these headteachers who were in the process of leading and

improving their schools. The research as represented by my intrusion was added to the many different things done by a head in a given day. The generic nature of the research also helped; all heads want to improve their schools, and so were ready to participate, it goes with the job description (Davies, 2005a p2). School improvement is something all heads have an opinion about and these opinions can be very different. Whilst there will be elements of commonality to all school visions there can be no right or wrong answer.

1.12 The Development of Models

Layder's (1993) research map is a model which will be adapted in order to illuminate the analysis of data in chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8.

Table 1a Layder (1993) Applied to the Broad Themes of the Dissertation

Level	Broad Theme in this dissertation	History
Context	School Improvement	
Setting	Leadership	
Situated activity	Leadership/Reflexive Headteachers	
Self	Reflexive/Meta-reflective Headteachers	

After (Layder, 1993 p72)

Another model that is central to an understanding of how the data in this study might reveal facets of the reality of headteacher leadership is the one offered by Bush (2011). The research area on leadership can lack clarity about exactly what is being discussed, therefore in this dissertation I will use the clear structure of Bush's (2011) three dimensions of leadership to help ground and categorise the domains of headteacher leadership. Table 2 shows the model which will be developed and

adapted to define both authentic school leadership and indicate the nexus of meta-reflective headteachers.

Table 2 Bush's (2011) Three Domains of Educational Leadership

<p>Leadership as Influence An inclusive definition which acknowledges power and intentionality and can refer to individuals and groups</p>	
<p>Leadership and Values An essential part of the definition acknowledging personal and professional values (Bush, 2011b p5-6)</p>	<p>Leadership and Vision An essential aspect of leadership which acknowledges direction especially powerful if connected to values</p>

1.13 Conclusion

The research began with a desire to help a new headteacher work out what he needed to do in order to improve his school. It evolved over time to focus on the leadership role of headteachers and then further to the nature and significance of being a reflective headteacher. Due to the longitudinal nature of this study it was possible to capture not only headteachers being reflective but also their active and reflexive engagement in the research process by looking at themselves as they strove to improve their schools.

The findings and conclusions of this research into the reality of being a secondary school headteacher in the second decade of the twenty first century will show how committed professionals used their core values and visions to improve their schools. It will further show how they used reflection and reflexivity, professionally and personally to sustain themselves and their schools.

Chapter 2 will examine the literature studied in the area of school improvement and school leadership which are central to the research question. It will show how the model described in table 2 will begin to develop my understanding of the relationship between school improvement and school leadership and describe the research landscape which will contextualise the data analysis in later chapters.

Chapter 2

School Improvement and Leadership

2.1 Introduction

Having established the aims and objectives of this research study in section 1.8, chapter 2 will investigate and explore the literature on school improvement and leadership. This conceptual and research base on school improvement and leadership will establish the basis from which the primary data (chapters 5 – 8) will be discussed and analysed. School improvement and leadership represent two of the most important 'realities' for a secondary headteacher (Department for Education, 2010).

2.2 Refining the Research Context of School Improvement

The research concerning how schools are improved has been developing for the last thirty years and grew from earlier work on school effectiveness (Wrigley, 2003 p3). It is not unproblematic and consensus on definitions in the literature have shifted and continue to shift as Wrigley (2004) demonstrates:

"In the 1990s, school improvement was overwhelmingly perceived as being the discovery of generic processes of school change: The field looks very different now. The greater understanding this brought of how to promote change – development planning, capacity building, distributed leadership – was a major breakthrough, but it is increasingly clear that this is not enough. Improvement requires a far broader understanding of society, schools and education, and a more rounded conception of achievement" (Wrigley, 2004 p5).

The earlier research into school effectiveness explored the differences within and between schools (Goldstein, 1997). School improvement research was focused on applying strategies and taking actions which changed the school into something more acceptable to the key stakeholders.

Given the professional and personal drivers discussed in chapter 1 for this dissertation, school improvement forms an over-arching framework within which other factors like leadership and authenticity exist as sub divisions (see figure 2). Figure 2 is a new model which describes the researcher's perception of the interconnectedness of the areas of literature explored in this dissertation.

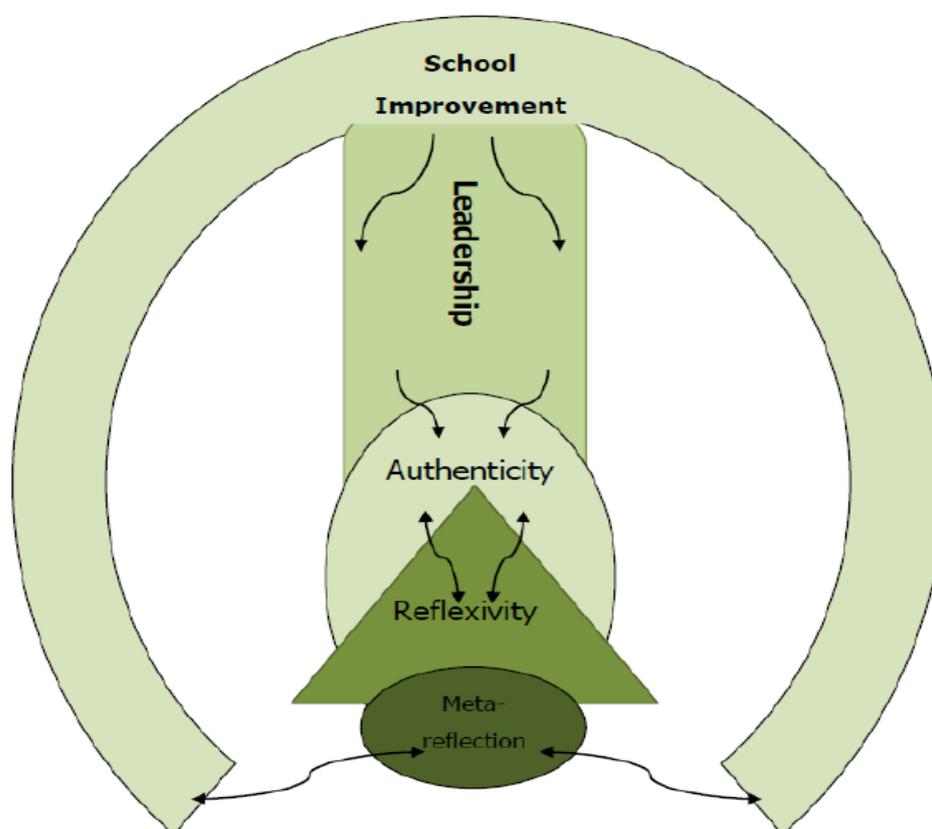


Figure 2

The relationships between the different literature reviews within this dissertation

The research proposal evolved from a wider study about how all schools improve in general in order to understand how a specific school might improve, through an examination of the particular aspect of leadership impact on school improvement, to finally focusing down to a scrutiny of headteachers' roles in particular. From this focus on headteachers the context narrowed further to explore the ways in which headteachers showed authenticity through the medium of reflexivity in order to arrive at a level of meta-reflection which in turn related back to how individual headteachers embarked on and refined the actions which actually improved their schools.

2.2 The Politics of School Improvement

It seems to be true that all political parties want our schools to improve and currently this improvement must be driven at the school level (The Education and Skills Committee, 2006, Department for Education, 2010). A good way of helping schools improve from a politician's perspective is to ensure that all schools perform at the level of the best schools; therefore the political parties have needed to gather information about how schools improve. Ofsted (2008b) has been one rich source of data for identifying the most improved schools.

Another source of school research was developed by The National College (NCSL)¹⁴, one of the few Quasi Autonomous Non-Governmental Organisations (QANGOs) to

¹⁴ The National College, then the National College for School Leadership was created by the Blair government in 2000 in order to improve the quality of leadership of headteachers in schools in England and Wales THE

survive the cull by the Cameron-led coalition government in the summer of 2010. The NCSL has commissioned a significant amount of research into the area of school improvement (Day et al., 2010, Earley et al., 2011). This research indicated that a school's improvement journey is a major characteristic of the headteacher's own development as a leader. This has been identified over many decades into school improvement research (Rutter, 1980, MacBeath and Mortimore, 2002, Smith and Tomlinson, 1990). Whilst there is a great deal of this research that is straightforward about what drives school improvement, the specific context of an individual headteacher's school makes the issue of school improvement at this setting level (Layder, 1993) more complex. Layder's research map (table 1a) has been adapted here (see table 3) to show how the model from table 1a can be adapted to apply to the research area of school improvement.

Table 3 The Layder (1993) Research Map Applied to School Improvement

Layder's Map	Aspect of School Improvement Research	History
Context	Government policy, Ofsted and external measures of school improvement floor targets for school improvement and performance	
Setting	Individual schools' improvement journeys	
Situated Context	The impact of individual headteachers on school improvement	
Self	The way school improvement impacts on individual headteachers	

After Layder (1993 p72)

Whilst research into school improvement over the last thirty five years and nearly twenty years of Ofsted working with underperforming schools has identified the

levers of school improvement (see tables 8a and b section 2.8) that will ratchet up attainment standards in schools, 'inadequate'¹⁵ schools stubbornly persist.

The imperative for improved performance is implied in ERA, but became overtly political with the Labour Party's manifesto commitment to "education, education, education" in 1997 (The Labour Party, 1997). The subsequent levels of public money that have been invested in education (Calveley, 2005 p34) since that election required improvements in the system in order for this expenditure to be democratically justified. If it could be demonstrated that schools have not improved since 1997, then the UK has squandered large sums of public money for no perceptible return to taxpayers, which implies a major failure of government policy. It is not surprising then that the context of improvement in education is highly political (Whitty, 2008).

This politicisation of education is not unique to the UK. Various Australian governments wanted to see the results of their extra spending on education (Walker and Stott, 2000) as did authorities in the United States and Canada (Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000). Politicians need someone to be accountable therefore headteachers become responsible for delivering the political priorities for school improvement which could be summarised as ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness ('Value for Money'¹⁶) of their schools (Barton, 2007). However this study will demonstrate in chapter 5 that for the headteachers in the data sample, in

¹⁵ Inadequate is an inspection judgement from Ofsted OFSTED 2011. The Draft Framework for School Inspection September 2011. Manchester: TSO.

¹⁶ Value for Money is another Ofsted judgement Ofsted (2011).

addition to providing good value for money and improved attainment improving the quality of the teaching and learning and overall student experience in the schools they lead, is also an essential part of their everyday experience.

2.2.1 Ofsted and School Improvement

The 2011 draft Ofsted framework (Ofsted, 2011) is very explicit on the purpose of inspections. They are to:

“provide parents with information; this informs their choices and preferences about the effectiveness of the schools their children attend or may attend in the future
keep the Secretary of State (and parliament) informed about the work of schools. This provides assurance that minimum standards are being met; provides confidence in the use of public money; and assists accountability
promote the improvement of individual schools, and the education system as a whole” (Ofsted, 2011 p5).

The framework goes on to summarise how inspection promotes school improvement:

- “setting expectations: the criteria and grade descriptors set out in the inspection framework illustrate the standards of performance and effectiveness expected of schools
- increasing the school’s confidence: by endorsing its own view of its effectiveness when that is accurate, and offering a sharp challenge and the impetus to act where improvement is needed
- clearly identifying strengths and weaknesses
- recommending specific priorities for improvement for the school and, when appropriate, checking subsequent progress
- fostering constructive dialogue between inspectors and those who lead and work in the school
- complementing the school’s self-evaluation and promoting its rigour, thereby enhancing the school’s capacity to improve” (Ofsted, 2011 p6).

This gives a very clear insight into what one might categorise as a mechanistic or managerial model of school improvement. The emphasis from Ofsted is on reaching externally set standards and helping schools become accountable for their own improvement. This type of improvement can be measured and reported on quantitatively.

Ofsted also acknowledges that schools do not only provide this quantitative evidence for inspectors but that the full picture of a school requires a much richer experience of learning which is the responsibility of schools and their leaders rather than the inspectorate (Ofsted, 2004). The emphasis of how we know schools have improved or what we describe as progress has changed several times since the ERA. Bearing in mind the three purposes of inspection (see above) the first is to provide information for parents, the second for government and the third is to make sure the system gets better:

“In education this was enabled by a combination of parental choice, devolved budgets and other organizational autonomies, per-capita funding, the provision of market information through testing and examination performances, published from 1992 on in the form of League Tables” (Ball, 2008 p187).

Whilst we will see later in this study is that the most significant stakeholder for the headteachers was the young people for whom they were accountable, children or young people are not mentioned in the Ofsted framework until page 5 (nearly 20% into the document) and even then they are referred to as belonging to parents. If we were to apply a business analogy the customers here are parents (voters) not young people.

However the research literature on school improvement does have a clear focus on pupils' progress both in absolute terms (levels of attainment given by Ofsted) and in value-added terms ,taking into account students' background and their initial attainment, (Bezirtzoglou, 2004 p3) most completely shown by analysis provided by charities like Fischer Family Trust (FFT).¹⁷

2.3 A Review of School Improvement Research

It can be seen that headteachers have a desire to improve their schools not simply because it is politically expedient to do so, but because there is a moral imperative to do so (Fullan, 2003). The research base acknowledges the myriad of ways that schools can and should get better (Wrigley, 2004). There was a desire to have an effect on school improvement before 1997 (Earley, 2000) and one would hope this will continue even if spending is cut as a consequence of the financial condition in the public services in 2010. The main purpose of schools is to educate young people and ensure that they are prepared for the world they will inhabit. This is a moral purpose and although undertaken by all school staff one that has particular resonance for headteachers (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992).

The field of school improvement research is multi-faceted (MacBeath, 2007 p8), but the research literature acknowledges the need for schools to have a clear moral drive to improve educational experience for young people (Fullan, 2003, Sergiovanni,

¹⁷ This charitable trust process large amounts of student level data in order to even out the differences made by factors like gender, socio-economic deprivation and ethnicity FISCHER FAMILY TRUST. *Fischertrust.org* [Online].

1992) which when coupled with the idea of sustained improvement moves us towards the position described as 'authentic' school improvement posited by Hopkins and others (Hopkins, 2001, Harris, 2002b). Such theorists have attempted to map the territory at a practical and conceptual level. The most significant distinction that Hopkins makes for 'authentic' or 'real' school improvement is that it should be systemic and sustainable rather than short-lived, though possibly dramatic, which is ultimately reversible (Clarke, 1998, BBC, 2007).

2.3.1 'Authentic' school improvement

The genesis of 'authentic' school improvement coincides with the early research into school effectiveness (Reynolds and Cuttance, 1992, Hopkins, 1987a) undertaken by Hopkins and others in Canada in the late 1980s. At this point the research field was described as school effectiveness and school improvement tended to be described as programmes for improvement (Reynolds, 1992). Hopkins' assertion was that at this time "school improvement" as a concept was not used in this country:

"School improvement and quality of education are terms that have, as yet not been assimilated into the common parlance of education in the United Kingdom" (Hopkins, 1987b p1).

The definition he uses here includes the two key words that lead to his later plea for 'authentic' school improvement:

" a systemic, sustained effort aimed at change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions...with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively" (Hopkins, 1987a p2).

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Nevertheless, there was a general acceptance in this text that there are specific drivers, which can be applied. His summation of the research at this point identified the following characteristics of effective schools:

Table 4 The Characteristics of Effective Schools 1

Eight characteristics of effective school (i.e. schools which are capable of improvement)	Four "process factors"
Curriculum-focussed school leadership	A feel for leadership (an acknowledgement of its complexity)
Support climate within the school	A guiding values system
Emphasis on curriculum and teaching (maximising academic achievement)	Intense interaction and communication
Clear goals and high expectations for students	Collaborative planning and implementation
A system for monitoring performance and achievement	
On-going staff development and in-service	
Parental involvement and support	
LEA support	

Adapted from Hopkins (1987a)

Even at this early stage Hopkins warned that a 1985 government document Better Schools (DES, 1985) used a narrow technical view of improvement with "its focus on outcomes"(Hopkins, 1987a p6).

Reynolds and Brighouse reviewed the field in the 1990s referring to Mortimore (1988) Rutter (1980) Smith and Tomlinson (1990) the characteristics of effective schools could be summarised as follows:

Table 5 The Characteristics of Effective Schools 2

From Rutter (Rutter, 1980)	From Mortimore (Mortimore et al.,	From Smith and Tomlinson (Smith and

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	1988)	Tomlinson, 1990)
There was good leadership from the head	Purposeful leadership of the head	Leadership of headteacher and Heads of Department
Opportunities for students to be positively involved in their school were encouraged		Positive feedback to students
Teachers provided good role models	Involvement of the teachers	Teacher involvement in decision making
There were positive uses of rewards	Consistency	Positive culture
Independent working was encouraged		
There was a focus on teaching and learning	Good teaching and learning including challenge, planning and assessment	Outcomes-led teaching and learning
There was a good school environment The balance of able and less able students leading to a positive culture of the expectations of academic success	Good communication between pupils and teachers and involvement of parents	A climate of respect and tolerance

Adapted from Reynolds and Cuttance (1992) and Brighouse and Woods (1999) omitting the role of the deputy and the structure of the school day as these refer specifically to primary schools.

By the early 1990s there was the development of a "practical no nonsense" approach to the field which ultimately found its apotheosis in the NCSL. Tim Brighouse writing in 1991 expressed this succinctly in his forward to 'What Makes a Good School':

"This book is not intended for academics. It is based on years of observation and shared experience rather than research."(Brighouse, 1991)

He outlines a series of observations about the necessary conditions of improving schools that he refined further in 1999:

Table 6 Brighthouse's (1999) Conditions for School Improvement

Brighthouse's Required Conditions	Environment – the ability to create a success climate
Leadership of the headteacher	Staff Development encouraging those who are committed to success for their students and themselves
The leader ability to create effective teams	Ensuring organisational systems are in place to maintain success
Focus on teaching and learning	The elusive factor
Collaborative and collective responsibility	Good community and parental involvement

From Brighthouse and Woods (1999)

It could be argued that Brighthouse's (1999) analysis of what he calls the "elusive" factor', later redefined by researchers like Smith (2008) and Fullan (2009) as 'context', includes within it an acknowledgement of a school's culture, climate, environment, and the messages conveyed by its leaders (Smith, 2008 p178).

In effect, the specific culture of a school and where the school is on its improvement journey defines the capacity of a school to improve. Brighthouse's example refers to an anecdote about a fifteen year old truant who described a good teacher as someone "who was interested in you...by what he did, not by what he said" (Brighthouse, 1991 p117). He goes on to try to define this context by asking a series of unanswered questions, the following of which captures the nature of his enquiry:

"Is it in the unpredictable thoughtfulness of senior colleagues who show they care? Is it the unexpected praise? Is it the celebration of an accumulated string of past successes which each and every member of staff knows must grow longer each year and to which they personally want to contribute?"(Brighthouse, 1991 p121)

Although there is an attraction in Brighthouse's (1999) broad-brush approach to school improvement for the working professional who has no time to read all the research,

we will see later in this study headteachers have no desire to have theory based on supposition and guesswork. Indeed some headteachers were alarmed at government policy appearing to derive from this type of supposition. An example of government policy deriving from such sources was the early flirtation with Swedish schooling (Gove, 2008) which was moderated by later research (Paton, 2010).

2.3.2 "Authentic" School Improvement as a Project

What Hopkins et al (1994) and others discovered from their research is that the drivers that work in the schools involved in the Improving the Quality of Education for All (IQEA) school improvement project (Hopkins, 2002) can be encapsulated in six core themes. Harris (2002a) comes up with a similar list of necessary features of a school, which is ready to undertake, successfully, a school improvement journey. This list echoes the early work on school effectiveness, but here they are used not just as a description of practice but as a plan to affect it.

Table 7 Factors that Improve Schools

(Hopkins et al., 1994 p194)	(Harris, 2002a pp11-13)
Staff development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff development processes are used to support individual teacher and school developments • Teachers are involved in each other's teaching • Where appropriate, external consultants are used to support teacher development 	Teacher Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing on supporting the teaching and learning at a classroom level • Developing teacher leadership
Involvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning • Use is made of cooperative learning approaches to facilitate student learning • Students, parents and governors are involved in the creation of school policy 	Leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing participatory leadership • Supporting accountability at all levels
Inquiry and reflection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a search for increased clarity and shared meanings • Reflection and review activities are used to monitor progress and enhance the professional judgement of teachers 	Context <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledging the uniqueness of the school • Working with the existing strengths whilst moving forward
Leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff throughout the school are encouraged to adopt leadership roles • Temporary systems of working groups are created • Individuals take on key roles in initiating change and supporting development work 	Student Outcomes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement in standards • Improvements in the human aspects of schooling
Coordination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efforts are made to maintain momentum • Links are made between formal and informal structures • Images of success are created 	Changing A School's Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development of trust between all stakeholders • Creating a holistic and shared view • Creating optimism
Collaborative Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning processes are used to legitimise and coordinate action • Resources for school improvement are specifically allocated" 	

(Harris, 2002a, Harris, 2002b, Hopkins, 2001, Hopkins et al., 1994)

The arguable authenticity of this approach is summed up by Hopkins with the metaphor that school improvement is a journey which all schools make towards improvement:

“‘journey’ is often used to describe the approach...capturing as it does the medium term, inclusive and at times uncertain character of educational change that has the enhancement of student learning and achievement at its core” (Hopkins, 2001 pxi).

2.4 Teacher-Led School Improvement

The concept of the teacher researcher is now a common feature of improving schools (Middlewood et al., 2005 p71) but this was also noted by Reynolds and Packer (1992 p173) and Badger (1992) who uses the teacher-researcher in his work on “disruptive” schools¹⁸ (Badger, 1992 p137). The complexity of school improvement is acknowledged by Mortimore (1992) but the imperative for school improvement is to give students a better chance to be successful. This has been further developed by Frost and others into the idea of teacher led school improvement (Mylles and Frost, 2006, Muijs and Harris, 2003). What this type of research adds to the reality of headteacher experience is that it makes the focus on the relationship between the learner and the teacher the centre of how schools improve. Further it shows how important it is for headteachers to recruit the “right” teachers and once recruited the need to develop these professionals to allow them to become leaders of school improvement (Harris and Muijs, 2005). The data in chapter 5 will show how important this is for the headteacher in this study.

¹⁸ We now describe these as challenging or failing schools HARRIS, A., CHAPMAN, C., MUIJS, D., RUSS, J. & STOLL, L. 2006. Improving schools in challenging contexts: Exploring the possible. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 17, 409-424..

2.5 The Accountability to Stakeholders for Improvement

It has been argued that school improvement in terms of accountability to stakeholders, politicians and their electors has been well established by the regular inspections heralded by ERA. And yet even in the early days of research into this area when Rutter (1980) identified the eight characteristics of effective schools, half of these were student focused (Rutter, 1980). Similarly, student learning was the central focus of the work undertaken in the late 1990s by Joyce, Calhoun et al (1999 p17). This work continued and, given the longer tradition, is better established in US schools (Reeves, 2004). An excellent example of this method of improving professional practice in schools is summed up by the following statement from Angelides, Leigh et al (2004):

“Schools wishing to improve the quality of their provided education can use this philosophy of professional accountability...they will gradually deconstruct their present knowledge to new more enlightened constructions” (Angelides et al., 2004 p483).

2.6 The Role of Whole School Teams in Improving Schools

The full engagement of the whole school team is a significant factor in the research literature on school improvement. An excellent example of this is the methodology adopted by Hopkins and his team in the IQEA work undertaken in many schools in the late 1990s (Hopkins et al., 1994 chapter 13). School improvement and especially the kind of improvement that is sustainable was never something that was done in isolation. Harris and Lambert (2003) describe it as being:

“a shared and collective endeavour that can engage all teachers irrespective of age or experience. The overarching message about effective...school improvement is one of building the community of the school in its widest sense, that is through developing and involving others” (Harris and Lambert, 2003 p8).

More recent school improvement projects also found that the impact of a team gave real impetus for how a school could improve MacBeath, Gray et al (2007) described this aspect as the creations of specific improvement teams:

“The creation of a School Improvement Group (SIG) was widely seen as the most successful aspect of the [school improvement] project.” (MacBeath et al., 2007 p91)

Many of the schools in the research would have met the criteria for being included in the schools that MacBeath, Gray et al (2007) and his team used¹⁹ and although none of the headteachers used school improvement groups specifically all appreciated the importance of winning whole school ‘buy in’ to make the improvement happen in their schools.

2.7 The Focus on Teaching and Learning for Students

A feature that is referred to in all research into school improvement is the attention that must be paid to the teaching and learning in the classroom. A good example of this is from Ofsted’s attempt to capture the best practice in school improvement over time. Ofsted’s 2009 report describes the importance of teaching and learning policies in what they found in twelve outstanding schools in the UK:

¹⁹ In 2002 Masham School had the designation of a School Facing Challenging Circumstances (SFCC). In 2003 this was replaced by the Leadership Incentive Grant (LIG) DFES 2003b. Leadership Incentive Grant Guidance. London: TSO. Three schools in Swinburne fell into this category based on examination performance in 2001-2.

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“Teachers are also told very clearly that they are not to spend the first lessons of the year on the type of routine activities common in schools at this point. They are told that their job is to ‘light fires’ and excite students about learning at the school” (Matthews, 2009 p20).

Fullan (2009) provides a useful bridge between school improvement and leadership. In his discussion of the need to act with resolve in the area of improving schools he describes students’ active engagement with teaching and learning as one of his four pillars of purpose. His perspective on the importance of students in the area of school improvement carries with it a passion that this dissertation found in the headteachers who were part of the sample:

“Students are partners in change rather than merely targets of change efforts and services...[they need to be] more involved in their own learning and learning choices, actively consulted about the quality and improvement of teaching and substantially engaged in the overall governance of the school and its development” (Fullan, 2009 p35).

This has been a constant theme since the earliest days of school effectiveness work (Reynolds and Packer, 1992) through the work of Hopkins (2002), Harris et al (2006), and Fullan (2009). Another aspect of school improvement about which there has been a substantial degree of agreement in the literature was the importance of the leadership of the headteacher. Tables 8a and 8b show the key drivers as suggested by the literature on school improvement.

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2.8 A summary of The Drivers of School Improvement

Table 8a Some Drivers of School Improvement from the Research Literature

Aspect	Research Base	(Hopkins, 2001) IQEA	(Fullen, 1999) (Fullen, 2003)	(Harris and Bennett, 2001)	(MacBeath and Mortimore, 2002)	(Harris and Lambert, 2003)	(Joyce et al., 1999)	(Harris, 2002a)
A focus on student learning including increased monitoring		Yes Propositions 1 5	(Fullen, 2003)	Yes (Fidler, 2001)	"monitoring process"	"Quadrant 4 improving schools"	"connected to the knowledge base on curriculum and teaching"	"the centrality of teaching and Learning"
Acknowledging in all aspects of leadership and management the importance of student learning		Yes Propositions 1 3	Yes Chapter 1 (Fullen, 2003)	Yes (Fidler, 2001)	"professional Leadership...co ncentration on teaching and learning"	"Quadrant 4 improving schools"	"connected to the knowledge base on curriculum and teaching"	"the importance of leadership in securing school level change"
Making the link between teaching and learning outcomes clear		Yes Propositions 1 6 and 5	Yes Chapter 1 5 and 6	Yes (Fidler, 2001)	"high expectations... concentration on teaching and learning"	"Quadrant 4 improving schools"	"an information rich environment"	"student outcomes driven"
A drive towards whole school consistency		Implied within the concept of "involvement" Propositions 1 4	Implied	Implied in "Home-grown features"(Fidler, 2001)	"shared vision and goals"	"Quadrant 4 improving schools"	"the caring community"	Implied
The quality of the of leadership and management		Yes Propositions 1 3	Yes Chapter 1	Implied in "collegiality"(Fidler, 2001)	"professional Leadership ... shared vision and goals"	"Quadrant 4 improving schools"		In terms of leadership at all levels

	Research Base	(Hopkins, 2001) IQEA	(Fullen, 1999) (Fullen, 2003)	(Harris and Bennett, 2001)	(MacBeath and Mortimore, 2002)	(Harris and Lambert, 2003)	(Joyce et al., 1999)	(Harris, 2002a)
Developing and sharing the quality of staff expertise, training and CPD		Yes "research based and theory rich Propositions 1 3 5	Yes Chapter 1 and 5	Yes (McMahon, 2001)	"learning organisation"	"Quadrant 4 improving schools"	"staff development embedded"	Teacher development highly important
Everyone being signed up to the improvement agenda		Yes Propositions 1	Yes (Fullen, 2003)	Yes (Fidler, 2001)	"shared vision and goals"	"Quadrant 4 improving schools"	"the caring community"	implied
The involvement of students in the process of improvement		Yes Propositions 1	Yes Chapter 5 (Fullen, 2003)	Yes (McMahon, 2001)	"pupils rights and responsibilities "	"capacity building in action"	"the caring community"	Implied
Co-ordinating our actions and keeping everyone informed		Yes Propositions 2	Yes Chapter 1	Yes (Fidler, 2001)	"shared vision and goals"	"Quadrant 4 improving schools"	"the caring community"	
Planning collaboratively		"systemic" Propositions 4	Yes Chapter 6	Implied in "collegiality" (Fidler, 2001)	"shared vision and goals"	"Quadrant 4 improving schools"	"connected to the knowledge base on curriculum and teaching"	implied
The involvement of the LEA		"externally supported" Propositions 1	(Fullen, 2003)	Yes (Fidler, 2001)		"contextualising school improvement"		

Source: (Hopkins, 2001, Fullen, 1999 , Fullen, 2003 , Harris and Bennett, 2001, MacBeath and Mortimore, 2002, Harris and Lambert, 2003, Joyce et al., 1999, Harris, 2002a)

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Table 8b Other Drivers of School Improvement from the Research Literature

(MacBeath, 2007)	(MacBeath, 2006b)	(Brighouse and Woods, 1999)	(Smith, 2008)	(Gray, 2004)	(Hargreaves et al., 2007)
Unrelenting focus on learning and teaching	The centrality of learning	The practice of teaching	Centrality of learning	Making it work for the learner	Improving learning for students
Good models of leadership	The authenticity of leadership	The exercise of leadership	Open and responsive leadership	Ensuring the balance of actions, organisation of authority	Leading change and accountability
Careful and phased management	The empowering of students	The practice of management and organisation	Learning conversations with students	Social organisation, work organisation	Empowering teachers to manage change
Engaging teachers	The involvement of teachers and their development	The practice of collective review	Learning conversations with teachers	Teacher satisfaction and efficacy	Action research at the classroom level
Creating can do and intervening early	The creation of a learning culture	The creation of a learning environment	Creating a culture and context for change	The empowerment and engagement of students	Creating reflective cultures
Reflective practice which reskills	High quality self evaluation	The promotion of CPD	See above	See above	The centrality of CPD
Working effectively with external partners	The confidence of external partnering	The encouragement of parents and community	Accountability to parents and local communities	Being accountable to one's community	Going beyond the school

Source: (MacBeath, 2007, MacBeath, 2006b, Brighouse and Woods, 1999, Smith, 2008, Gray, 2004, Hargreaves et al., 2007)

2.9 Summary of The Factors of School Improvement

Tables 8a and 8b trace the development of the research in the area of school improvement in terms of common themes. In summary schools apparently improve because:

- there are strong visionary leaders who believe the school can and will do better; there is a focus on developing staff into being open and creative learners who maintain the primacy of learning in their dealings with students (Harris, 2002b),
- the school is fixated on the ideas around improving learning and understanding how teaching relates to learning,

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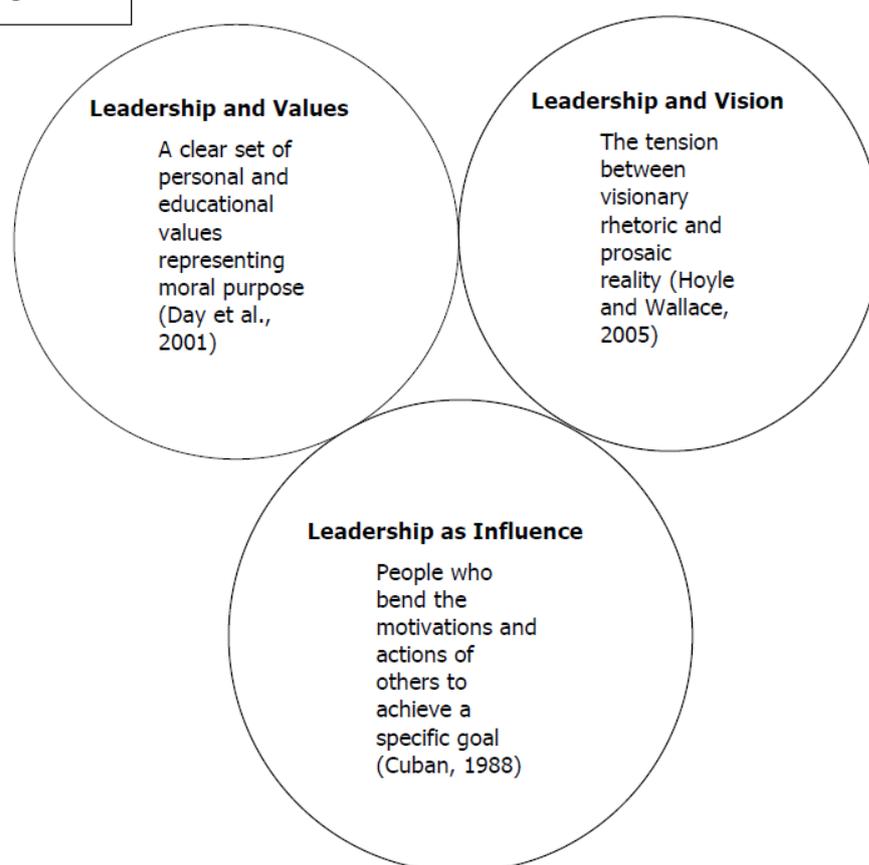
- there is a sense of team rather than an individual leading to a common purpose on improving student outcomes (Sergiovanni, 1992),
- students are convinced that they want to take on the responsibility for their own learning and share the positive ethos in the rest of the school (Harris and Lambert, 2003),
- the accountability includes parents and the community who also share the belief that improvement is not just possible but inevitable (Angelides et al., 2004).

Derived from these points it is arguable that the single most important aspect of school improvement is the quality of the leadership of the headteacher. This concept will be developed over the next four sections of this chapter.

2.10 Leadership as Influence

School leadership is another extensive area of research; the Bush (2011) model cited in chapter 1 helps focus the discussion onto the area of leadership which is critical to this research study. Figure 3 is an arrangement of Bush's three domains (see table 2) into a diagram which shows the relationship between each area. The circles show the close alignment of each domain, each one coherent within its area but touching each of the other areas. The degree to which these areas might overlap will be developed throughout the following chapters.

Figure 3



Bush's (2011) Three Dimensions of Educational Leadership

After Bush (2011 p5-8)

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An analysis of schools that faced very challenging circumstances ten years ago showed the importance of leadership in complex school contexts (MacBeath, 2007). This central role of headteachers has been articulated by many and all researchers acknowledge the ways headteachers initiate and maintain the momentum for school improvement (Harris and Lambert, 2003, Day et al., 2000).

Gunter and Ribbins (2002, Gunter, 2005) and Gunter (2005) provide a good conceptual framework for the discussion of school leadership. They attempt to map out the area of school leadership in order to “focus on the practice of leadership” (Gunter and Ribbins, 2002 p387) within a framework of knowledge creation. This resonates with the idea of leadership as influence described by Bush (2011). Their typology 2a (Gunter and Ribbins, 2002 p398) is of use in conceptually positioning this research study because Gunter and Ribbins explicitly acknowledge the tensions between the academic and practitioner researchers. Table 9 shows how their model can be used to analyse school leadership. They describe this process as a way to:

“enable the reviewer to gaze across the expanse of the leadership terrain and look at particular research, and use the knowledge domains to identify positions about what we know from past and current work, and what we need to know” (Gunter and Ribbins, 2002 p397).

Table 9 Gunter and Ribbins' (2002) Conceptual Framework for School Leadership

The 10 propositions	Conceptual Questions	Critical Questions	Humanistic Questions	Evaluative Questions	Instrumental Questions
Proposition 4 Leadership	<p>What are the ethical implications of abstracting leadership into organizational, instructional and personal categories?</p> <p>How do these categories relate to each other and what are the implications of this for the commitment of the headteacher to both the school and to the wider community?</p>	<p>Why is leadership being abstracted into organizational instructional and personal categories?</p> <p>What interests does this structure serve and how does it oppress or support educational professionals and the wider community?</p>	<p>How have headteachers experienced organizational, instructional and personal leadership?</p> <p>How might headteachers describe their experiences of other types of leadership?</p>	<p>How do we measure the impact of organizational, instructional and personal leadership on learning outcomes?</p>	<p>What are the key features of instructional leadership?</p> <p>How do we train headteachers to be experts in the design and operation of instruction?</p>

(Gunter and Ribbins, 2002 p399)

It is almost a truism for headteachers that school leadership is directly involved in school improvement and raising standards (Harris, 2005). School leadership has recently established a new primacy. It has emerged from several decades of being in the shadows of educational administration and management to enjoy its own time in the sun (Harris, 2005 p73).

The landscape is complex and has been colonised by a range of disciplines from business and education to life-coaching and spirituality. What does appear to be true across all these fields is the impact of leaders on those who follow them and how leaders affect their organisational contexts. Bennis and Nanus identify six core claims about business leadership:

- "Leadership is about character

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- To keep organisations competitive, leaders must be instrumental in creating a social architecture capable of generating intellectual capital
- We cannot exaggerate the significance of a strong determination to achieve a goal or realise a vision- a conviction, even a passion
- The capacity to generate and sustain trust is the central ingredient in leadership
- True leaders have an uncanny way of enrolling people in their vision through their optimism – sometimes unwarranted optimism
- Leaders have a bias towards action that results in success” (Bennis and Nanus, 1997 xi - xvi).

These claims also agree with the research on effective school leaders as reported by the NCSL on the characteristics of school leadership over a four year period (Leithwood et al., 2006) and (Day et al., 2010):

“Headteachers are the main source of leadership in their schools. There are eight key dimensions of successful leadership.

- Headteachers’ values are key components in their success.
- Successful heads use the same basic leadership practices, but there is no single model for achieving success.
- Differences in context affect the nature, direction and pace of leadership actions.
- Heads contribute to student learning and achievement through a combination and accumulation of strategies and actions.
- There are three broad phases of leadership success.
- Heads grow and secure success by layering leadership strategies and actions.
- Successful heads distribute leadership progressively.
- The successful distribution of leadership depends on the establishment of trust”

(Day et al., 2010 p3).

The two lists of claims have a striking similarity in spite of the research having been conducted in different contexts fourteen years apart. Indeed all five (Bennis and Nanus, 1997) claims are encompassed by the later research into school leadership.

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Harris warns us of the danger of focusing on the “what” of leadership rather than the “how”. The hero head and his (sic) gallant actions only give us a partial view of the impact of leadership on improvement:

“Leadership is defined chiefly in terms of its outcome; we know leadership only when we see evidence of its effects” (Harris and Muijs, 2005 p75).

Their view is that much of the research in this area only focuses on the leadership of the Headteacher rather than looking at leadership as a distributed phenomenon.

Harris and Muijs also warn that the empirical link between leadership and improved student outcomes is not robust:

“It remains a deep concern that relatively few studies of school leadership have established any direct causal links between leadership and improved student performance (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). A recent systematic review of the literature confirmed that effective leadership was an important factor in a school’s success but that its effect upon student learning outcomes was largely indirect” (Harris, 2005 p75).

In her analysis of the literature and conceptions surrounding leadership theory, she helpfully summarises the main categories as:

- “Managerial
- Transformational
- Interpretive
- Instructional

These lenses provide a framework for presenting and evaluating different leadership theories. They also offer the opportunity to reflect upon leadership research in the different phases of development” (Harris, 2005 p77).

The first of these describes managerial activity as being essentially technical or bureaucratic in nature rather than the leadership as explored by Bennis (2003 p4).

In this model, leadership is about behaviours or transactions:

"This form of leadership is one that emphasizes procedures and hard data to inform decision-making. Based upon an exchange of services for various kinds of rewards that the leader controls, the role of the transactional leader is to focus upon the purposes of the organization and to assist people to recognize what needs to be done in order to reach a desired outcome. It is clear that as a theory of leadership it fits well with well-recognized models of 'task' and 'maintenance' management models" (Harris, 2005 p78)

This model informed the managerialism of the 1980s and 1990s (Gewirtz, 2002) and still finds echoes in the target-centeredness of Ofsted and Local Authority accountability. The desire to create:

"no-selective, non-segregated, democratic schools characterised by modes of association, which give students, teachers and parents the opportunity to actively participate in decision making and which enable the values of equality, creativity, critical thinking and respect for diverse cultural identities to flourish." (Gewirtz, 2002 p181)

Moving past the managerial model of school leadership Leithwood, Jantzi et al (1999) examine the idea that leadership is 'instructional' (Leithwood et al., 1999 p8). There is a lack of explicit descriptions of instructional leadership in the literature and they suggest that there may be different meanings of the concept. Their definition is that instructional leadership typically assumes that the critical focus for attention by leaders is the behaviour of teachers as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of students. Over the past decade the idea of instructional leadership has become more widely accepted by practitioners and researchers alike (Smylie, 1995, Harris and Muijs, 2005, Harris, 2005) as Harris (2005) identifies instructional leadership as being:

"heavily classroom focused [but failing] they... to address second order changes such as organization building...[they consider] just one aspect of organizational development and change, i.e. the classroom, and

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neglect other potential areas of change within the school (Harris, 2005 p83).

Transformational leadership as described by Harris (2005) is also closely related to Bush's "leadership as influence" domain of leadership (Bush, 2011b p5):

"A recent overview of the research relating to transformational leadership has suggested that taken at face value, transformational leadership is strongly related to positive perceptions of the headteacher's effectiveness, organization level effects and student effects" (Harris, 2005 p79).

In this model leadership focuses on vision building, goal consensus and the development of the expectations of high performance or what Bush (2011) describes as the domain of leadership and vision. In addition there is need to develop people from supporting the individual to promoting and modelling intellectual values and practices important to delivering high quality learning and teaching or Bush's (2011) second domain of leadership and values. Internally this is manifest by creating a culture in which colleagues are motivated by moral imperatives and a sense of shared decision-making in order to create new solutions. Externally leadership must look to build strong relationships with the school's community (Harris, 2005 p80).

The idea of 'post transformational' leadership is posited by Day et al (2000) and others. The two most important aspects of this form of leadership are that, firstly, effective leaders are constantly and consistently managing several competing tensions and dilemmas and, secondly, effective leaders are, above all, people centred. This form of leadership starts not from the basis of power and control but from the ability to act with others and to enable others to act (Harris, 2005 p80).

The leadership style which is focused on the people is something that will confirm the analysis of the data described in chapter 6. The concept of distributing or distributed leadership (Harris, 2004, Spillane et al., 2001, Gronn, 2003) emerged as significant in the analysis of the dialogues with headteachers in chapter 6.

Distributed leadership was a strong theme in discussions with practising headteachers in terms of their understanding of leadership during the almost four years of the study.

In theoretical terms, the work of Spillane (2001) and Gronn (2003) fuelled the then contemporary debate about leadership and organizational development in schools. Their view of distributed leadership is predominantly interpretive rather than normative. Both Gronn (2003) and Spillane (2001) use distributed leadership in an analytical and descriptive sense to explore leadership in action, as a social phenomenon (Harris, 2005 p81).

Distributed leadership in theoretical terms means multiple sources of guidance and direction, following the contours of expertise in an organization, made coherent through a common culture (Harris, 2005, Arrowsmith, 2007). The danger here is that the real accountability lies with the headteacher and however sophisticated the distribution model, this study will show that the leadership of the headteacher has more direct overall influence in improving a school.

2.11 Leadership and Values

The NCSL's 2006 report showed the significance of school leadership within the context of school improvement. It identified seven strong claims which was revisited in 2010 and became ten strong claims (see above) (Day et al., 2010). However its 2006 research identified in its seventh claim:

“small handful of personal traits explains a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness” (Leithwood et al., 2006).

This finding does not seem to appear in other non-education research about leadership which tends to concentrate more on a leader's values or his or her effectiveness rather than this sense of the personal and small things having significance on effectiveness. American research into school leaders found that:

“the most successful school leaders are open-minded and ready to learn from others. They are also flexible rather than dogmatic in their thinking within a system of core values, persistent (e.g. in pursuit of high expectations of staff motivation, commitment, learning and achievement for all), resilient and optimistic” (Leithwood et al., 2006 p14).

This assertion is significant for the findings that are discussed in chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 because there is an implied sense of self-reflection as well as an openness to reflect with others. 'Good' school leaders model attributes like focus, determination and decisiveness (Smith, 2008). It is for such reasons that the leadership in schools is ultimately down to the individual headteacher and their confidence in taking the school forward:

“Leadership is about direction setting and inspiring others to make the journey for a new and improved state for the school” (Davies, 2005b p2)

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If Brent Davies' (2005) assertion is true then the interface between leadership and school improvement is the way in which school leadership can change for the better the educational opportunities for students. The assumptions here are that leadership is the prime mover of change; this change happens over time (journey indeed suggests a significant period of time); that the system is about the new (i.e. different from the old); and that the schools aspire to an improved state. However this improved state can only become a reality if leaders are ready and able to help the school undertake the journey. If school improvement has demonstrated anything then we must acknowledge that change (or transformation) is at its heart.

Although many researchers would argue that leadership at its best is transformational (Sergiovanni, 2007, Sergiovanni, 2000, Leithwood et al., 1999, Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000) and whilst acknowledging the developing concept of post transformational leadership (Day et al., 2000); the description of leadership as influence Bush (2001) has the very great advantage of accommodating both transformative and post transformative leadership. Ultimately the purpose of the leadership is to improve the life chances of the people in our schools which takes into account the idea of leadership distributed throughout the organisation:

"all transformational approaches to leadership emphasise emotions and values and share in common the fundamental aim of fostering capacity development and higher levels of personal commitment to organisational goals on the part of leaders' colleagues" (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005 p31).

For transformational leadership to be able to influence a school the desired transformation must be articulated by the school leader. The best description for this process is the third of Bush's (2011) leadership domains; leadership and vision.

2.12 Leadership and Vision

Having a vision is part of the most commonplace definitions of leadership. Vision marks out the leader and provides an organisation with a clear direction and understanding of the leader's stated values. There is research that shows the connection between a leader and the leadership characteristic of vision (Rhodes et al., 2008 p320). Bush (2011) comments that the idea of vision can sometimes be so generic that the concept of vision alone does not highlight a school's uniqueness. However the common aim to help all young people fulfil their educational potential is an important expression of the leader's core purpose as a headteacher in a secondary school. The requirement that all leaders must have strong visions has been part of the landscape of school leadership research for many years and the current researcher has had an interest in this area since the completion of his MBA (Marshall, 2001). This is well described by Middlewood and Lumby (1998):

"orthodoxy demands that leaders shall possess personal visions of a brighter future for themselves and their organisations, and will be able to communicate and demonstrate them with vigour, persuasiveness and conviction" (Middlewood and Lumby, 1998 p18).

2.13 Conclusion

School improvement is important because schools change people's lives (Brighouse, 2006) and the benefits of this improvement impacts positively on communities (Smith, 2008). It is also important because governments spend large sums of public money on the school system and want value for this investment. Schools improve because they improve the lives of young people (Hopkins, 2001) and a major driver of this improvement is the leadership of the headteacher. Leithwood et al (2006) identified an essential characteristic of headteachers who are successful in improving their schools in challenging circumstances. Open-minded flexibility, which is grounded by the core values (Leithwood et al., 2006 p14) creates the conditions where schools are improved. Arguably leadership of schools in challenging circumstances (SfCC) exposes the leader because of the external scrutiny that goes with this status (see chapter 1 section 1.6.). As Leithwood et al (2006) when describing the characteristics of successful leaders put it:

Such traits help explain why successful leaders facing daunting conditions are often able to push forward when there is little reason to expect progress" (Leithwood et al., 2006 p14).

The importance of leadership being driven by a leader's values, identified by Bush's model (see table 3 p37), is also an important aspect of the link between school improvement and leadership.

The next chapter will examine the manner in which the improvements led by headteachers impact on the individual headteacher at a personal level. For a system to change the people in the system must change also. It is therefore necessary to

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look in depth at the moral centre of headship and consider the authenticity of leadership in this context and identify the way this understood by the individual. This process leads towards an awareness of self and is linked to personal reflexivity. These two concepts of authenticity and reflexivity are other two important areas which link to school improvement and leadership. It is therefore important to explore the literature in these areas before proceeding to a discussion of methodology.

Chapter 3

An Examination of Authenticity and Reflexivity

3.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter the research literature indicates that leadership is a vital ingredient in the school improvement recipe (Fullan, 2000), but such is its importance that we now need to examine a specific type of leadership. In the same way that “authentic” school improvement (Hopkins, 2001) can have a bigger impact on schools and young people than unquestioning managerialism (Gewirtz, 2002), “authentic” leadership can have a bigger impact on headteachers than leadership theory alone.

3.2 Defining Authenticity

A simple definition of authenticity might begin with the following “of undisputed origin or veracity, genuine” (Pearsall, 2002 p89) but there is a sense of the authentic which seems to permeate all modern life (Guignon, 2004 p9). An online search of newspaper websites for the word authentic will result in thousands of “hits”. The majority of these references link back to this idea of true or real in the dictionary definition but many go further and begin to explore areas of deeper or moral purpose.

Similarly the search for the authentic has been the subject for scholars going back to Socrates. His expression that "an unexamined life is not worth living" (Plato, 2007 p36) found a resonance in the advice from Polonius to Hamlet "to thine own self be true" (Shakespeare et al., 2006 I iii 84). More recent conceptions of authenticity (Erickson, 1995, Harter, 2002) showed it rooted in the literature of positive psychology (Cameron, 2003, Cameron et al., 2003, Snyder and Lopez, 2002) and would be generally defined in this context as:

"borrowing one's personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, wants, preferences, or beliefs, processes captured by the injunction to know oneself and believe and behave accordingly" (Harter, 2002 p383).

This analysis of authenticity is useful because it refers to owning one's personal experiences (values, thoughts, emotions and beliefs) and acting in accordance with one's true self, expressing what one really thinks) as an act of sentience i.e. new born babies could not be authentic because whilst they act honestly, they are not yet able to choose to act and therefore be accountable for their actions (Harter, 2002).

As Erickson (1995) notes, authenticity is not an either/or condition, i.e., people are neither completely authentic nor inauthentic. Indeed, whilst they can be described as being more or less authentic or inauthentic from a developmental perspective, authenticity is something you grow into if you choose to do so.

A broader definition of authenticity is offered by Kernis (2003) in his discussion of optimal self-esteem. He sees it as "the unobstructed operation of one's true, or core,

self in one's daily enterprise" (Kernis, 2003 p1). For Kernis (2003), authenticity is wrapped up in our sense of 'real' self-esteem seen as genuine, true, stable, and consistent as opposed to the inauthentic which is characterised as tending towards the fragile defensive, and dependent. His four components of authenticity are:

- "awareness,
 - unbiased processing,
 - action
 - relationality"
- (Kernis, 2003 p4).

It is probably worth noting at this point that it is impossible for a human to process the world completely free of bias, but in order to ensure authenticity it is possible to acknowledge and identify the bias we all carry with us. Illes et al (2005) incorporated these into a model of authentic leader and follower development, creating the condition that in an ideal world an authentic leader leads authentic followers.

3.2.1 The Challenges of Being Authentic

Defining authentic leadership is not straight-forward. An example of understanding what one might describe as an authentic leader is an assessment of Tony Blair's actions in 2005 in the week of "live8" London's successful bid to host the 2012 Olympics and the London Tube bombings shows how authenticity is in the eye of the beholder:

"Critics of British Prime Minister Tony Blair often contend that because of his desire to maximize his personal appeal, Blair moves between different, contradictory selves, lacking any central personal beliefs. We would argue, however, that Blair's winning ways stem not from

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sacrificing himself on the altar of electability but rather from his consummate skill in managing his authenticity... Blair was able to communicate a core self; he always connected powerfully with his known personal passions—for pop music, sport, the elimination of poverty in Africa, and the defeat of terrorism” (Goffee and Jones, 2005 p9).

In this definition the veracity stems from personal passions. The authors here suggest that Blair’s popularity derives from his ability to connect his passions with those of an electorate and his core “authentic self” becomes the source of his “power”. Goffee and Jones (2005) also accept the tensions within claims that political leaders can be authentic by pointing out that:

“Many Americans revere the late Ronald Reagan for his authenticity as president—but he was also the first professional actor to make it to the White House” (Goffee and Jones, 2005 p8).

Their advice for those seeking to find authenticity is set within the framework suggested by Woods (2007):

Table 10 A Comparison of Woods (2007) and Goffee and Jones (2005) of Authenticity

(Woods, 2007 p5)	(Goffee and Jones, 2005 pp8-9)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>coherence</i> (a cohesive narrative which gives ‘an integrated image of the self’ (Ferrara, 1998 p87); 	Get to know yourself and your origins better by: Avoiding comfort zones.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>vitality</i> (sense of joyful empowerment, self-esteem, being alive and of progressing toward who one wants to be, which results from congruence of one’s present state with who one has been); 	Exploring your autobiography. Returning to your roots.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>depth</i> (capacity to know one’s own ‘psychic dynamisms’ and motivations and to reflect this in construction of one’s identity (Ferrara, 1998 p96); 	Getting honest feedback. Get to know others better by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building a rich picture of your environment. • Removing barriers between yourself and others. • Empathizing passionately with your people.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>maturity</i> (ability and willingness to come to terms with the 'real world' and be flexible, and to engage in reality testing rather than wishful thinking). 	<p>Letting others know what's unique (and authentic) about them. Connect to the organizational context better by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting the distance right. • Sharpening your social antennae. • Honouring deeply held values and social mores. • Developing your resilience.
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Woods (2007) referring back to Weber et al (1970) defines the authentic in terms of a return to an idealised state that in our modern context can only be (re)captured by conscious thought and actions:

"the authentic meaning which is implicit and pervasive to a pre-modern enchanted world can only be replaced in modern times by an authenticity constituted by consciously chosen ends and rationally selected means with an understanding of their consequences (the ethic of responsibility)" (Woods, 2007 p4).

We need to take care here that such lists are not seen as prescriptions for how to be authentic (which would rather defeat the purpose) rather than an analysis of authentic action undertaken by authentic people.

A good working definition of authenticity must encompass something that resonates for both the individual, that which improves or changes them, and at a public level for others to judge. A good example of such a definition was provided by Charles Guignon (2004):

"authenticity is a project about becoming the person you are"
(Guignon, 2004 p3).

His use of "project" is especially telling. It contains within it an implication of something undertaken over a period of time and a project that is about realising

one's own humanity has a flavour of the personal interest which could border on the obsessional and is at least about self-absorption. Guignon's (2004) discussion of the authentic tries to bring together the concept of a deep or true self and the use of self-reflection encouraging one to become a better person by being responsive to something greater than oneself (either in terms of society or God). What he usefully warns us of is the danger of thinking of authenticity as anything but complex and fraught with assumptions, all of which may contradict the apparent purpose of the search to be authentic:

"What exactly is this 'inner-self' that we are supposed to be true to...and how are we to know that what we find deep within ourselves is something to be embraced in public space rather than something to be worked over, concealed or replaced?"(Guignon, 2004 pp9-10)

He finally accepts that the value is found in the search for authenticity rather than the capturing of its essence into a definition that works in all contexts.

3.3 Authenticity and Sincerity

Guignon (2004) associates his work with Trilling's (1972) lectures on sincerity and authenticity across the fields of English and US literature. The addition of the synonym (sincerity) opens up a discussion from refining the sincere as that which has not been corrupted or adulterated (Trilling, 1972 p13) to seeing authenticity as synonymous with the inner truth within things which justify their own value (Trilling, 1972 p93).

Another significant aspect of authenticity is how the individual relates not just to him or herself but to others. Authentic action operates within a social context:

“Authenticity is not just genuineness and openness, though that forms a central part of being authentic, but it is socially situated. It involves helping others, relating to others, and caring for the authenticity of others around us. And moving outward further, it involves knowing who we are within our social world, how we are shaped by the world, and how we position ourselves in that world. Being authentic is being conscious of self, other, relationships, and context through critical reflection. As such, it is a journey of transformation and individuation” (Cranton and Carusetta, 2004 p288).

In this dissertation authentic will be defined as the desire to locate action at the heart of an individual’s moral core through the process of reflection both personal and professional within a professional context which ensures its place within the social setting of educational leadership.

Aligning definitions of authenticity more closely to this educational context opens up the importance of learning as a context in its own right:

“Authenticity’ here refers to the participants creating their own terms of action while generating specific meanings based on their own experience in a learning community” (Barazangi, 2006 p114).

Here Barazangi (2006) argues that personal authenticity is merely the first step towards a wider definition of what she describes as pedagogical authenticity where the desire to transform the personal intersects with the transformation of a system of learning:

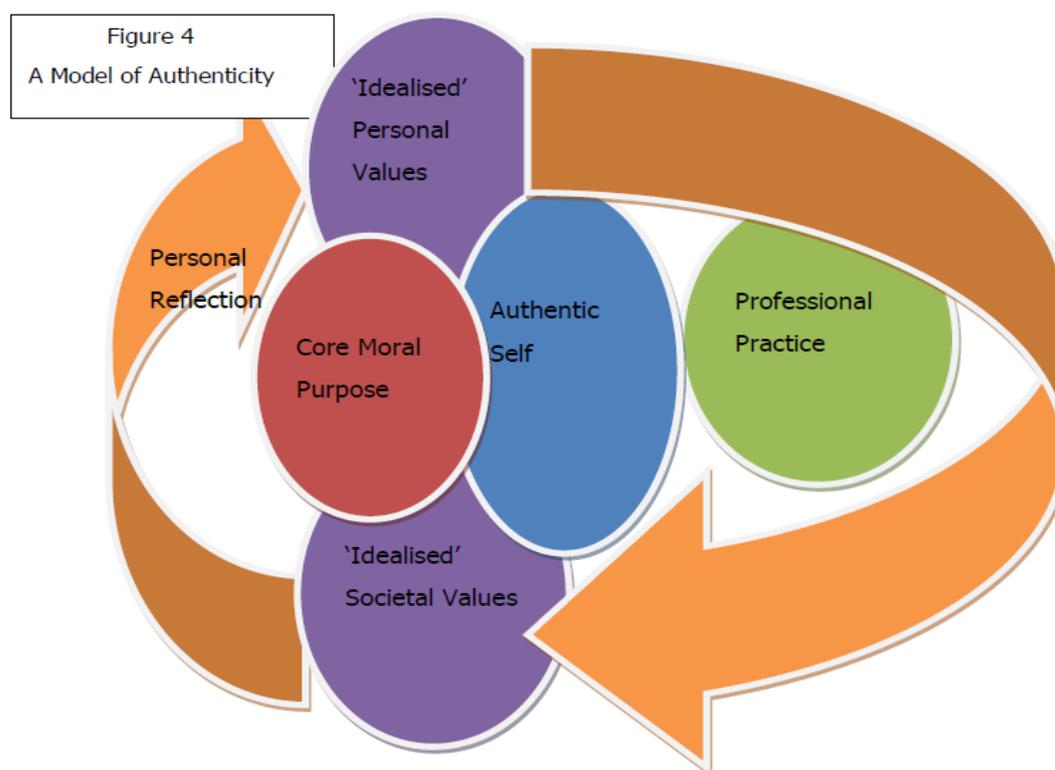
“The agency of the learner in her direct access to these principles vis-à-vis their rules of application is another feature of pedagogical authenticity” (Barazangi, 2006 p101).

Barazangi's context is within the ethical position of action research and authenticity is a comfortable bedfellow within this methodological tradition as will be further developed in the next chapter, but it is worth considering how we judge professional practice and the way this affects the definition of authenticity. Angelides et al (2004) posit that an examination of practice can improve schools they warn that such vignettes can affect authenticity:

"Although these sort of vignettes can stimulate teachers' interest for discussion, their hypothetical nature deprives them from being authentic or real, and vivid accounts of practice" (Angelides et al., 2004 p471).

Here the authentic becomes a synonym for 'real' or 'vivid' which takes us back to real or vivid for whom? A full definition, therefore, must also capture the personal the societal and the core moral purpose which is affected by both of these contexts. There is quite possibly the desire to improve, change or perfect a system within this definition, though the perfectibility here is for the individual. There is also a need to constantly check one's position in terms of personal and social factors. These two contexts, one internal and one external have an impact on the personal and create the environment where authenticity is more likely to be present. Woods (2007) argues that individuals seek to aspire towards idealised social and personal values (Woods, 2007 p296). The mechanism for this is the personal reflection leading to reflective judgements, which locates any action within the context of professional practice.

Figure 4 offers a model for how these aspects relate to each other. It attempts to capture in a diagram how authenticity can be described as a reflective practice which relates to societal and person pressures within a moral and professional context.



3.4 Authentic Leadership

The search for authenticity for an individual is all well and good but it becomes much more interesting when applied to the field of leadership. A business view from Goffee and Jones (2005) make the link between personal authenticity and authentic leadership explicit and mutually dependent:

"expression of an authentic self is necessary for great leadership"
(Goffee and Jones, 2005 p1).

Leadership has become another social commonplace, as argued above. If it is true that leadership is an essential element in helping schools to survive in a complex

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world of targets and accountabilities, then an authentic leader will be able to create a culture, which is informed not just by the high moral purpose of learning for the sake of seeking knowledge, but also create the social cohesion necessary for an evolved democracy.

For Gardner, Avolio et al (2005) authenticity, is defined as "self-awareness, self-acceptance, and authentic actions and relationships", but they feel leaders have to go further:

"authentic leadership extends beyond the authenticity of the leader as a person to encompass authentic relations with followers and associates. These relationships are characterized by: a) transparency, openness, and trust, b) guidance toward worthy objectives, and c) an emphasis on follower development" (Gardner et al., 2005 p320).

Remembering the point made by Goffee and Jones (2005) that leaders sometimes need to be multi-faceted but can do so authentically if they remain true to their moral core:

"The paradox in all this is that authentic leadership demands many different selves...authentic leaders change their hats to suit each occasion. In the light of this, many will dismiss leadership as little more than an act. Without sincerity, it would be and the ensuing damage to trust and credibility would be difficult if not impossible to repair. But authentic leaders rise above suspicion by ensuring that each self revealed is a genuine part of who they are" (Strategic Direction Editorial Board 2006 pp18-21).

This definition moves the argument on but makes the test for the authentic leaders less straightforward. There is a role to be played here by the members of the organisation itself. For Drucker "the only thing you can say about a leader is that he has followers" (Burkeman, 2010). The link between personal authenticity and

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authentic leadership and indeed a personal moral core is an essential aspect, but the identity of authentic leaders is still rooted in personal authenticity and authentic actions:

“authentic leaders are anchored by their own deep sense of self; they know where they stand on important issues, values and beliefs” (Avolio and Gardner, 2005 p329).

For Begley (2007) there is an added optimistic aspect to this kind of leadership but it is still rooted in core values (see figure 4). The advantage of this “improved” form of leadership is outlined also by Begley:

“Authentic leadership implies a genuine kind of leadership—a hopeful, open-ended, visionary and creative response to social circumstances, as opposed to the more traditional dualistic portrayal of management and leadership practices” (Begley, 2007 pp163-4).

This is a development of earlier thinking from Begley who sees leadership as more of an art than a science describing as “the artistry of leadership” (Begley, 2001 p364).

What is interesting about this discussion is that it crosses the boundaries of professional disciplines. For example in the area of social work Rodgers (2006) offers the following passionate plea to be authentic:

“Bringing your authentic self to the workplace and to your leadership [is like] refusing to park your personality at the office door. Knowing yourself and your value – what you are good at, what you care about, what pushes your buttons and what gives meaning to your life. Using all your parts – your head, hands, heart and soul – with grace and dignity” (Rodgers, 2006 p7).

It is apparent that authentic leaders need to be multi-dimensional and operate at an individual and personal level. Such leaders are deeply aware of how they think and

behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others' values and or moral perspectives, knowledge, and strengths with an awareness of the context in which they operate. These leaders are characterised by attributes such as confidence, optimism, resilience, and an active sense of high moral purpose (Avolio and Gardner, 2005 p321). It is important, therefore to ensure that authentic leaders are always aware of how they are analysing the responses from all the people within their organisations in order to avoid "conceptual ambiguity" as described by Cooper et al (2005).

3.4.1 Some Tensions within Authentic Leadership

This relationship between the person and the societal is however, not without its tensions especially when we get to the process of reflection. This unease is captured by Fendler (2003), who suggests:

"These constructions of reflection interweave a complicated reliance on the authenticity of an inner voice and denunciation of the socializing influences that shape our knowledge and experiences" (Fendler, 2003 p20).

Nevertheless we can be sure that an examination of authenticity requires clarity in terms of this relationship between the individual and the individual's relationship to others (society). Authentic leadership then becomes a crucible for examining motives, values and influence within the context of power. Goffee and Jones's (2005) assessment is that successful authentic leaders are those individuals who are able to square the circle of personal and societal authenticity:

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“Authentic leaders use their personal histories to establish common ground with their followers. The desire [is] to establish his bona fides with his employees as a regular, approachable guy” (Goffee and Jones, 2005 p5).

There is an obvious danger here that an authentic leader might actually be inauthentic but a very good salesman. Goffee and Jones’s (2005) check to this is that for them the attribution of authenticity is made by others not the leader who may wish to claim to be authentic:

“No leader can look into a mirror and say, “I am authentic.” A person cannot be authentic on his or her own. Authenticity is largely defined by what other people see in you and, as such, can to a great extent be controlled by you” (Goffee and Jones, 2005 p1).

Therefore the mediating interaction of other people within a professional context of reflection is a significant dimension of becoming an authentic leader. There is a need to find a place where an authentic leader can observe his or her own authentic reflection. Finding this “place” where school leaders can reflect in such a manner is central to the findings in chapters 7 and 8.

From the discussion it is clear that authentic leaders are not born but are created by the individual’s desire to strive for personal authenticity and apply this authentically in a work setting. For them the test of whether this is real lies with the people who are led:

“If a leader is playing a role that isn’t a true expression of his authentic self, followers will sooner or later feel like they’ve been tricked” (Goffee and Jones, 2005 p3).

3.4.2 Defining the Authentic Leader

Authenticity, becomes part of the basic list of qualities that good leaders need to show (Iles and Preece, 2006). These characteristics form a definition of sorts:

“For some this notion of authenticity embodies certain ideal character traits – such as courage, integrity, clear-sightedness, steadfastness, responsibility and communal solidarity ” (Lawler, 2005 p225).

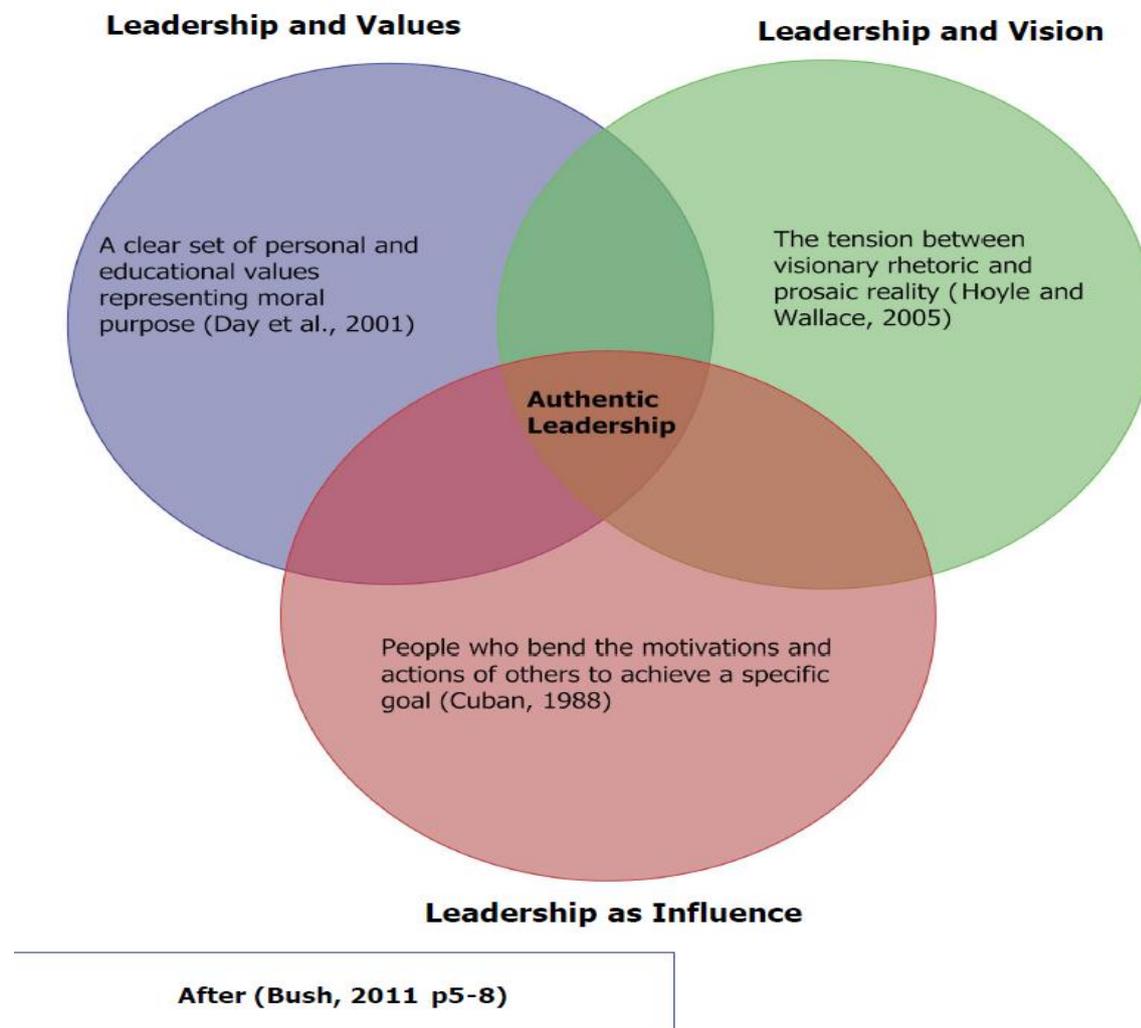
Lawler (2005), citing Guignon (1986 p88), acknowledges that authenticity has an existential quality, but it is important that one does not allow so broad and all-encompassing definition as this for fear that it loses its meaning.

Drawing upon previous literature the definition that I will use during this dissertation is that authentic leaders are individuals who have personal authenticity and can be judged to lead in a manner which brings out the authenticity in others. They do this by acknowledging their personal histories, experiences and learning. They also use both personal reflection and professional reflexivity in order to check that their actions remain in line with their core personal values, self-images and the societal needs of their professional lives. Their authenticity is characterised by their belief that the exercise of leadership is a form of service to those that lead and that their real legitimacy comes from the trust given by their followers.

The following diagram adapts the original Bush model (see figure 3) by making the three domains proximal. This creates a Venn diagram which allows the area where the three domains overlap to become visible. I contend that it is in this area that authentic leadership is found.

Figure 5 Authentic Leadership (Bush (2011))

Finding Authentic Leadership



If Yukl (2006) is right when he asserts that:

“Influence is the essence of leadership” (Yukl, 2006 p147)

Then the authentic headteachers will influence the stakeholders in their schools through their vision mediated by their values. When this is achieved and through the reflection of others (Goffee and Jones, 2005) the zone of authentic school leadership is revealed.

3.5 Personal Reflection and Reflexivity - Defining the terms

If reflection and reflexivity are to be authentic then they are likely to also be personal. A way of looking at this is to consider the visual conundrum in which you catch yourself in a mirror looking at the reflection of yourself in mirror ad infinitum. However, it is essential that a clear understanding of this process is arrived at because this common practice is the way leaders assess their authenticity (Bhindi and Duignan, 1997, Shamir and Eilam, 2005).

The role of being a modern school leader encourages a level of reflective practice. This is well established and indeed could be considered compulsory in that the national standards for being a headteacher require it:

“Regularly reviews own practice, sets personal targets and takes responsibility for own personal development” (DfES, 2004 p8).

It has become an orthodoxy within the NCSL (Pavlou, 2004) to encourage and foster personal reflection but the literature in this area is extensive (Moore et al., 2002, Stroud, 2006).

Another useful starting point for pinning down personal reflexivity can be found in work around creativity and team work (Schippers et al., 2007, West, 2002).

Reflexivity here, whilst acknowledging the individual aspect focuses on the group:

“the extent to which group members overtly reflect upon and communicate the group’s objectives, strategies, and processes” (Schippers et al., 2007 p190).

Their definition begins further to map the territory:

“reflexivity is thought of as an iterative process consisting of several components (reflection, planning, and action/adaptation, e.g.(West, 2000)) and the reflection component is assumed to have three levels of depth (shallow, moderate, and deep; Swift and West (1998)” (Schippers et al., 2007 p190).

For Swift and West (1998) to be reflexive is to be constantly aware of one’s position in terms of reflecting on action and planning. For Swift and West (1998) and Schippers et al (2007) the attempt is not just to codify the concept of reflexivity, but attempt to find degrees of reflexivity in order that one can be more effective in reflecting on and planning for actions.

This definition whilst not perfect does raise one of the real challenges with reflexivity that it can sometimes be used as a ‘catch all’ term to describe something ‘received wisdom’ accepts is good for you. It would be almost impossible for a teacher in a school seeking a promoted post not to be able to describe to the panel how they are deeply reflective in his or her practice in the same way that 20 years ago every teacher could describe their pedagogical position on mixed ability teaching.

Is reflexivity then, “all things to all men”? The Biblical reference is illuminating:

“I am no man’s slave, but I have made myself a slave to all, in order to win the more for Christ. To the Jews I have made myself as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those who live under the law I have come as one under the law, in order to win those who are under the law — not that I myself am under the law. To those who live without the law I have come as one without the law, in order to win those who are without the...To those who are weak I have made myself weak, so as to win the weak; in fact, I have become all things to all people, in

order that, one way or another, I may rescue some of them" (1 Cor. 9:19-23, Bruce, Expanded Paraphrase) (Ellison, 1970).

For all the theological arguments about the actual meaning of this passage Paul's chillingly practical take on how to convert people does add to the debate and is very similar to the Goffee and Jones's (2005) discussion of Tony Blair (see 3.2.1 above). This is interesting because although it exemplifies a good definition of inauthenticity it does point to that aspect of reflexivity which is becoming commonplace. It is almost a prerequisite to being a certain kind of researcher and important in validating a reflexive methodology e.g. (Macpherson et al., 2004, Etherington, 2004).

Swift and West (1998) also locate reflexivity in teams rather than individuals but again this does not match my practice though this may be related to my current position in my research. In an attempt to capture something about the culture of a school my shift has been from the institution as a reflection of individuals to the individual as a representation of an institution.

3.5.1 Professional Reflexivity

The concept of reflexivity is very common across all the social sciences: psychology, social work, health and counselling. Although most writers are keen to not conflate the concept of reflection (a warning given by Gardner (2006)) with that of reflexivity some like Etherington almost imply that reflexivity is the next stage of individual reflection (Etherington, 2004). Her definition:

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“researcher reflexivity [is] the capacity of the researcher to acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts (which might be fluid and changing) inform the process and outcomes of inquiry. If we can be aware of how our own thoughts, feelings, culture, environment, social and personal history inform us as we dialogue with participants, transcribe their conversations with us and write our representations of the work, then perhaps we can come close to the rigour that is required of good qualitative research” (Etherington, 2004).

Indeed one could argue that those who wish to choose to study for a professional doctorate also choose to study the relationship between research and practice (Hellawell, 2006).

It appears that the research methodologies in nursing are similar to education in that they both desire to be transformative and also share the tensions between outsider positivistic research paradigms and insider realist paradigms (Freshwater and Rolfe, 2001). Research in nursing reveals a rich vein in the area of reflexivity Freshwater and Rolfe (2001) offer the following:

“On a very basic level reflexivity simply means turning back on itself. This meaning can be seen in for example the knee jerk reflex arc...[for] some writers reflexivity is taken to mean the process of turning thought or reflection back on itself and by other it is taken to mean the process of turning action or practice back on itself” (Freshwater and Rolfe, 2001 p529).

This definition captures much of the complexity of being reflexive whilst encompassing a straightforward sense of the experience of being human.

Metaphors in this area abound. Fendler (2003) describes it as a hall of mirrors. He refers back to Schön’s (1983) work on professionals’ reflecting on practice:

“Schön advocates practice-based common knowledge and rejects scientific or intellectual knowledge that might appear too “theoretical”

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or disengaged from "solving the messy problems that practitioners face in the 'swampy lowlands of practice'" (as quoted in (Zeichner, 1996 p221). These days the meaning of professional reflection is riddled with tensions between Schön's notion of practitioner-based intuition, on the one hand, and Dewey's notion of rational and scientific thinking, on the other hand. These tensions between intuition and science are combined with Cartesian impulses toward self-awareness"(Fendler, 2003 p19).

The warning here is that research of professional practice without reflexivity is dangerous because the act of looking at practice changes practice whether we intend it or not. Savin-Baden (2004) describes reflexivity from a personal viewpoint:

"Thus reflexivity for me is about situating my/self in the research and the processes of research in ways that acknowledge and do justice to my personal stance and to the personal stances of those involved in the research... For me reflexivity is about disclosing my value-base to those who participate in research. It is about working with people, doing research that is collaborative and sharing perspectives in the process of doing research" (Savin-Baden, 2004 366).

Here the definition moves to take in the positioning of the researcher in the act of research but holding true to an authentic view of self (Walker and Shuangye, 2007, Starratt, 2007, Bhindi and Duignan, 1997). It is worth noting that Savin-Baden (2004) also see it as collaborative activity. This definition resonates with the way my research illuminated my "lifeworld" (Habermas, 1984 [1981]) and practice.

Hellawell (2006) offers possibly the most useful perspective by focusing on the conscious and deliberate act of self-scrutiny whilst undertaking research in terms of the insider/outsider relationship. The relationship here is with the organisation with the insider possessing "intimate knowledge of the community and its members" (Hellawell, 2006 p484) and the outsider attempting to avoid polluting their objectivity. In practice of course both inside and outside perspectives offer valuable

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insights into the object of the research. The metaphor of the same researcher “can slide along more than one insider-outsider continuum and in both directions during the research process” (Hellawell, 2006 p489). Hellawell (2006) is especially useful when both analysing and reflecting upon my own research sojourn. It is in effect the reflexive engagement with one’s own research which allows one to perceive the subtle shifts from inside to out which enriches both the participants and the quality of the interpretations of the data:

“Even for those students who consider their research to be at the extreme outsider end of a continuum, some analysis by them of why they have this perspective may be just as fruitful in its enhancement of reflexivity. In reality, some of these students may well decide after some due reflection that there are, in fact, a variety of continua to consider, and that there are disguised insider elements in their research after all” (Hellawell, 2006 p493).

A definition which blurs the distinction between reflective practice and reflexivity is offered by Bolton:

“Reflective practice and reflexivity need to be a deeply questioning enquiry into professionals’ actions, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values and identity in professional, cultural and political contexts. The forms, values and ethics of institutional organizations and structures need to be critiqued to create radical movements for change” (Bolton, 2006a p203-4).

Archer’s view of reflexivity is much more all-encompassing and comes from a sociological standpoint:

“At its most basic, reflexivity rests on the fact that all normal people talk to themselves within their own heads...these activities...range over a broad terrain which...can extend from daydreaming, fantasising and internal vituperation; through rehearsing for some coming encounter, reliving past events, planning for future eventualities, clarifying where one stands or what one understands, producing a running commentary on what is taking place, talking oneself through

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(or into) a practical activity; to more pointed actions such as issuing internal warnings and making promises to oneself, reaching concrete decisions or coming to a conclusion about a particular problem” (Archer, 2007 p2).

This kind of definition explains what might be described as a reflexive instinct (which will be demonstrated was an important theme within the sample of headteachers in this study (see chapter 7)), but is useful to examine what Archer (2007) identifies as different levels of reflexivity. Her study assessed reflexivity in a range of people (46) to ascertain the degrees to which people are reflexive. The following table shows the levels and percentage of respondents at each mode of reflexivity:

Table 11 Archer’s (2007) Modes of Reflexivity

Modes of Reflexivity	% in Archer’s sample
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fractured Reflexivity Those whose internal conversations intensify their distress and disorientation	22
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meta-reflexivity Those who are critically reflexive about their own internal conversations	23
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autonomous Reflexivity Those who sustain self-contained internal conversations	27
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicative Reflexivity Those whose internal conversation requires completion by others	21

(Archer, 2007 p93)

A combination of communicative reflexivity and meta-reflexivity became central to this dissertation in terms of the way the methodology evolved and the analysis that was applied. This will be described in much more detail in chapter 7.

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And so we come to a definition which seeks to capture a sense of authenticity (a key aspect of reflexivity) and a reflective relationship with the philosophy of Habermas.

In describing how we reach *verständigung* (understanding):

“we can claim that an utterance is a sincere or authentic expression of one’s own subjective experiences. That is,...it is possible to reach agreement about disputed claims by way of argument and insight without the recourse to force other than that of reason or grounds...there exists a ‘reflective medium’ for dealing with problematic validity claims” (Habermas, 1984 [1981] pxiii).

Reflexivity is this “reflective medium”. It is the act of becoming authentic which itself is defined in terms of reflecting on one’s own actions, professional practice and research activity. It is the process by which we can check our actions and intentions in conjunction with other people in our lives and other people within our professional and research contexts. It is rooted in the desire to liberate and change and is a deeply political act on both a personal and professional level. It is rooted in ethical values and relationship with self and knowledge creation. It lends itself to narrative and the process of iteration which shifts its meaning at its most outer edges and checks the sense of authenticity at the individual’s centre. The criticism of Habermas’ (1984[1981]) position described by Carr and Kemmis (1986) that “it is not sufficient to recover the idea of self-reflection by an emancipatory interest” along with other shortcomings identified by Bernstein (1975) might perhaps miss the point. Habermas (1984 [1981]) may not fully address the philosophers or “concretely exemplify critical social science but merely discuss its possibilities” (Carr and Kemmis, 1986 p150).

3.5.2 Political Problems with Reflexivity

This political and transformative aspect of reflexivity is important in the context of authenticity. Pryce (2002) makes the same point from the nursing when he argues that reflective practice must be transformative and always contextualised by change and the creating of new knowledge from professional knowledge and professional experience (Pryce, 2002). This view resonates with the sense in which an authentic school leader improves professional practice is relevant here if we accept improvement as not the process to make better or more efficient but to transform and liberate. This is more authentic and transformative when working with young people who are in schools which “stretch the capacity and capability” of their communities, teachers and students (MacBeath et al., 2007). In these contexts leaders who do not aim to contribute to the positive improvement of students’ life chances are guilty of being inauthentic as will be demonstrated throughout the rest of this dissertation. This research programme has in a very real sense been a journey towards authentic leadership via reflection and reflexivity.

3.5.3 Personal Reflexivity

The following was written at about half way through the doctoral process, is written in the first person and is an example of the process of personal reflection leading to professional reflexivity. A central part of this study is the reflexivity of the researcher headteacher. The following extracts attempt to demonstrate this reflexivity over time during the completion of the research.

My Position as a headteacher within my own research

I am classically an insider as described by Hellowell (2006). I know my context intimately. If I'm honest I am probably obsessed with my context which may be the very reason why I need to be on an EdD programme. I love what I do as a Headteacher and often get very irritated by Headteacher colleagues who complain about the pressures and accountabilities of being a secondary Headteacher. This is not simply through the lens of idealised schooling; my experiences as a head have had some truly terrifying moments and several mornings when I might well have returned home that evening no longer having a job. I have had to cope with adverse Ofsted inspections, budget deficits, staffing meltdowns, hostile local press, abusive and violent parents and children teetering on the edge of control. But through it all it has been the most fulfilling thing I have ever done. I am in a position to emancipate not just the young people I serve but also the adults I can influence on a daily basis. One must guard against simple indulgence (Moore, 2007) describes his own research journey into his own practice in the voluntary sector as committing sin.

"I realized it was not sufficient for me to simply be reflective and acknowledge that the way I saw the board operating was a social creation. I had to look beyond my perceptions in order to critically question the reasons why I perceived the board that way and how I had come to regard my constructions as being the truth."(Moore, 2007)

During a conversation yesterday with a Headteacher colleague whose school has just been put into the Ofsted category of special measures I reflected with him on how I led my school through a similar trial and the only advice I gave him was for him to be himself and trust his own moral and professional instincts in the face of the onslaught of advice and support that will inevitably follow his unfortunate decision. I said he should talk to everyone and listen to everything but act when the actions align with his core values. The only support I offered was to be one of those people to whom he may wish to talk and indeed offload to if necessary. If his school was to survive it would because he believed in it and was prepared to do all and everything to make it happen. Finally if he was to be able to do this he had to remain true to himself and use those people he trusted implicitly to check that he remained true to who he was and where he was going. In effect I described what I believe it is to be authentic.

(Marshall, 2006c)

3.6 Reflecting on Insider and Outsider Research

An American study looked at how insider research transformed knowledge, the lives of students, their schools and the professional's life (Anderson and Jones, 2000). An interesting perspective on this dichotomy between insider and outsider was exemplified by Anderson and Jones (2000) who looked at a range of insider studies of American administrators' doctoral studies within their own institutions:

"In their interviews, published work, and dissertations, administrators referred to dilemmas that they encountered in doing research at their site. They talked about dilemmas such as juggling the researcher and practitioner roles and having an insider's knowledge but needing the distance and objectivity of the outsider and obtaining important data that might be inappropriate" (Anderson and Jones, 2000 p440).

Anderson and Jones (2000) demonstrate how reflexivity pervades practitioner research this same understanding will be demonstrated later in the context of the researcher headteacher's roles as both practitioner and researcher.

3.7 Exemplifying the reflexive Process

An example of how researcher reflexivity impacted on researcher headteacher's practice and how reflecting on this impacted on this dissertation comes from a report written approximately halfway through the doctoral process and shows how reflexivity at this point changed the direction of the research.

I began with a small scale study based in my own school looking at what it was we did as a school to improve (Marshall, 2006b). Reflecting on this piece of work and the research process led me to believe that I wanted to avoid the problem identified with researching within one's own institution. I did not believe that it was possible for me to be able to get past my role and status as Headteacher (Hellawell, 2006). This resulted in my decision to move my pilot work to other schools in the area and I began with a school which had had a similar recent history, having also been in an Ofsted category and successfully come out of it. What I had expected was to become the outsider and therefore give weight to outcomes of the research. I had expected that, the same, or similar aspects of school improvement would be present in this school, and I would be able to "prove" (or not) the validity of the research that I had reviewed around school improvement drivers (Hopkins, 2001, Ainscow and Howes, 2001b, Earley, 2000, Beresford, 1998).

In my own school all the senior leadership questionnaires had been returned, most of the middle management ones and some from the classroom teachers. This was hardly surprising as Hellawell (2006) points out my staff could no more ignore my power position as their "boss" any more than I could take off my own skin and not be their head when asking them a question.

The Pilot Study

The schedule of the pilot study research saw me administering 60 questionnaires to my first school with a completion deadline of three weeks (just after the Christmas holiday). This was completely consistent with the small scale study and was the next logical (sic) step. What happened however was that only two responses (completed) questionnaires were returned by the deadline. One of these was the headteacher (who was acutely embarrassed by the low level of interest in this work) and one of the headteacher's senior colleagues who was studying for a master's degree. The Headteacher was very supportive of my work. He was my gatekeeper a key role in gaining not just access but in creating the culture in which the research could happen described by Calveley (2005).

Four more forms were subsequently returned but it became clear that I was not going to have enough data to draw any conclusions.

The subsequent step was to interview a selection of staff in the school and I had decided to use all the respondents as my subjects. In terms of the research my position had shifted due to the "realities" that were "emerging" on the ground.

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Preliminary analysis of the first interview, using this data gathering instrument threw up some very interesting data and created in me a self-reflective loop. I noticed that my contributions were very much part of the interview. In effect I was having a professional conversation with a fellow head, which was at least in part related to my own school's sustained improvement journey.

I had become part of my own research inadvertently. It was not my intention to do either action research or participant research though action research is grounded within the Frankfurt School which is the basis for critical theory based on Habermas' work.

"emancipatory action research is a collaborative, critical and self-critical inquiry by practitioners"(Cohen et al., 2000 p232).

The field work had helped me understand what critical theory meant in practice. This was no longer the adoption of a neat theoretical framework but the description of how I operated in the world. It became necessary to go to the original text. At this time my German is not good enough but the translations produced by the Polity Press, allow an access to the source much closer than the commentators.

Habermas states that one of the tasks of the critical theorist is to:

"become conscious of the self referentiality of its calling; it knows that in and through the very act it belongs to the objective context of life that it strives to grasp" (Habermas, 1987 [1981] p401).

My decision to begin with the head of my pilot school also helped me realise that I was hearing a very authentic slice of what was sustaining the improvement in this school. This was confirmed when I began to analyse the transcript. This is described by Savin-Baden (2004):

"This kind of reflexive interpretation involves situating ourselves not just in the stages of the research but also in relation to the data we have collected. This may sound obvious, but too often we ignore our own stances and perspectives and act as if we are sitting outside the transcriptions looking in on the perspectives of participants" (Savin-Baden, 2004 p367).

During the initial analysis of the interview I became aware of a number of instances where I intruded into the data. My initial reaction to this was that I had simply conducted the interview badly and inadvertently dominated the conversation. It was only in the process of actually transcribing the interview that I began a reflexive loop which helped me to realise that part of my purpose was not just to identify what other heads had done to sustain improvement in their schools but to reflect with these heads upon what I had done in my school and examine in a collaborative way how I attempted to sustain improvement in my own school. This insight came from my reflexive engagement with the data itself, what Savin-Baden (2004) called "situating one's self in relation to the data" (Savin-Baden, 2004 p365).

This revelation changed not just the whole nature of my pilot study but also affected my own conception of the kind of headteacher I was. Reflexivity requires others views and I used a number of significant others to get a clearer view of how to adapt my research. The first and most significant were my supervision team who could see a clearer focus in my description of my research intention. The second were members of my EdD cohort who helped me reflect on the emerging themes from my early analysis. The third came from an audience (including faculty members and the public) who attended a seminar on my work to date.

Figure 1 shows how I captured this and how it differs from the earlier iteration (figure 2).

Headteacher Reflexivity

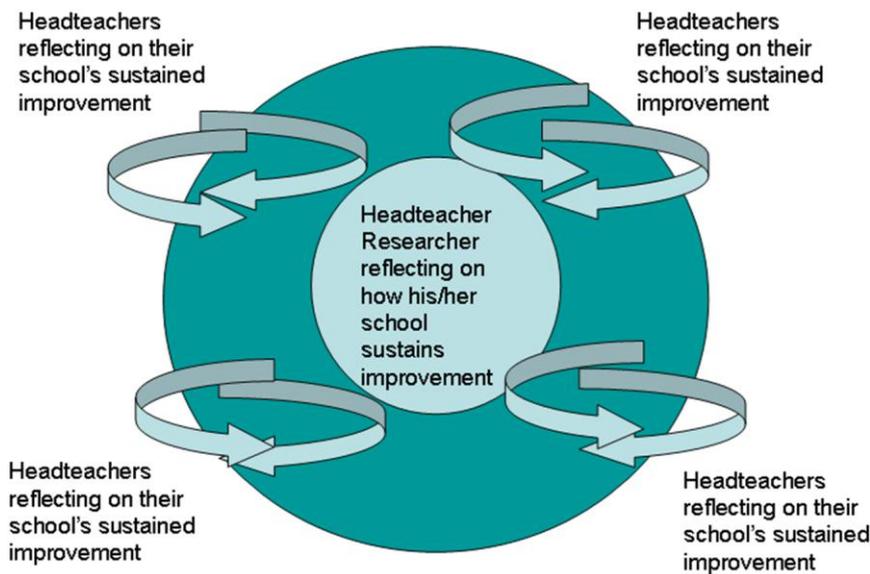


Figure 1

Field Work as Planned

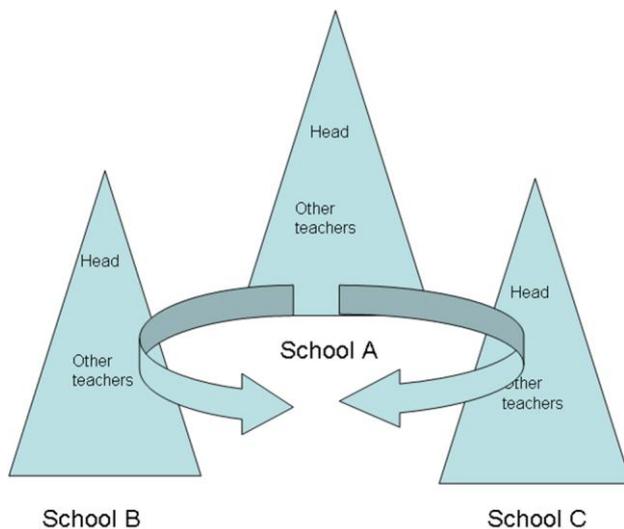


Figure 2

The Change in Me

"In some cases this breakthrough into reflexivity has been something akin to a religious conversion in the suddenness of the revelation and its long-lasting consequences."(Hellowell, 2006 p492)

This process has changed me. I now keep a reflective journal and I am aware of checking my own actions in terms of their authenticity. My values, position and purpose in what I do and how I do it have never been clearer and I cannot conceive that I could ever go back to the way I was. Whilst I am aware of mixing religious traditions I find the concept of mindfulness helpful,

"Mindfulness - An approach to life based on the understanding that the
- present is the only time that any of us have to be alive
- to know anything
- to perceive
- to learn
- to act
- to change
- to heal" (Kabat-Zinn 1990)

"Mindfulness is about being fully awake in our lives, paying attention with intention and without judgement. This accesses our own powerful inner resources for insight, transformation and healing."(Research, 2001-2007, University of Bangor, 2007)

As I reflect on this reflexive piece I am struck by just how humbling it is to be engaged in researching one's own practice and how truly terrifying it is to realise how this process changes the research, the professional and the person.

I end with a film reference. What cannot be captured is the authenticity of this man's voice but what does come across is how the transcription is more profound than what one first hears; a fitting conclusion I think.

"Truth of the matter was, stories was everything and everything was stories. Everybody told stories, it was a way of saying who they were in the world, it was their understanding of themselves, it was letting themselves know how they believed the world worked; the right way and the way that was not so right" Harry Crews (Douglas, 2005)

(Marshall, 2006c)

The well-established literature of reflexivity (Arber, 2006, Hellowell, 2006, Savin-Baden, 2004) is summed up well by Foley as:

“highly autobiographical reflexive practices, in the hands of an unskilled or egocentric practitioner, can degenerate into self-serving, narcissistic, heroic portrayals of the ethnographer” (Foley, 2002b p475).

Partly this danger can be avoided by being aware of its existence and ensuring that any auto-ethnographic aspects of research are grounded in illuminating the data not the individual. A further discussion of this and how it relates to ensuring a rigorous methodology is found in chapter 4.

3.8 Meta Reflection

This research looks at the way different headteachers reflect on their own practice and whether they believe it to be important in supporting them in their roles.

Chapter 9 will show that there has been an enriching aspect of this process in the impact these research conversations have had on the researcher headteacher.

Developments in professional reflexivity as a result of the discussions had with other headteachers and reflexive analysis of the reactions to the process began to reshape the definition of reflexivity.

A way of capturing this reflection of a reflexive response and its impact on authentic leadership was to describe this as a meta-reflective level of unconscious awareness.

It could be argued that this is the logical development of the interactions between

reflexive research, authentic leadership and reflexive practice. Watson (1998) coined the phrase meta-reflection in the context of nursing. Her caring-healing model that springs from this process also drives towards an authentic centre:

“Therefore... we are invited personally and professionally to engage in our inner and outer work, exploring our inner journey towards the deeper level of the work. It is through such inner work that we are more able to witness the process and contribute to a transformation of the outer work...we can tap into a level of reflection that asks moral questions” (Watson, 1998b pvii-viii).

Watson (1998) believes that reflexive practice is the essential core of nursing practice taking Schön’s metaphor of mountain and marsh to describe the tension between knowledge and practice she argues that what she describes as meta-reflection can unite these two polarities:

“we can reconsider theory and reflective practice activities at a meta-reflective level that we may see some common ground, that might unite the mountain and the marsh allowing for a new landscape” (Watson, 1998a p215).

She goes on to suggest that it is only when we get to this level that:

“reflective practice inquiry leads to other developments and the emergence of new models that are actually transformative” (Watson, 1998a p217).

She finally goes on to show how this process happens in the context of research and demonstrates the link between authenticity, reflection, reflexivity and meta-reflection:

“Through reflective caring practices we allow ourselves to step back, observe and reflect upon our acts and actions, to describe, connect with them at a deeper level of ‘seeing’...we are invited to draw upon intuition, to unravel the moment and learn from it, to make explicit, symbolic, even metaphorical, something that was tacit implicit and

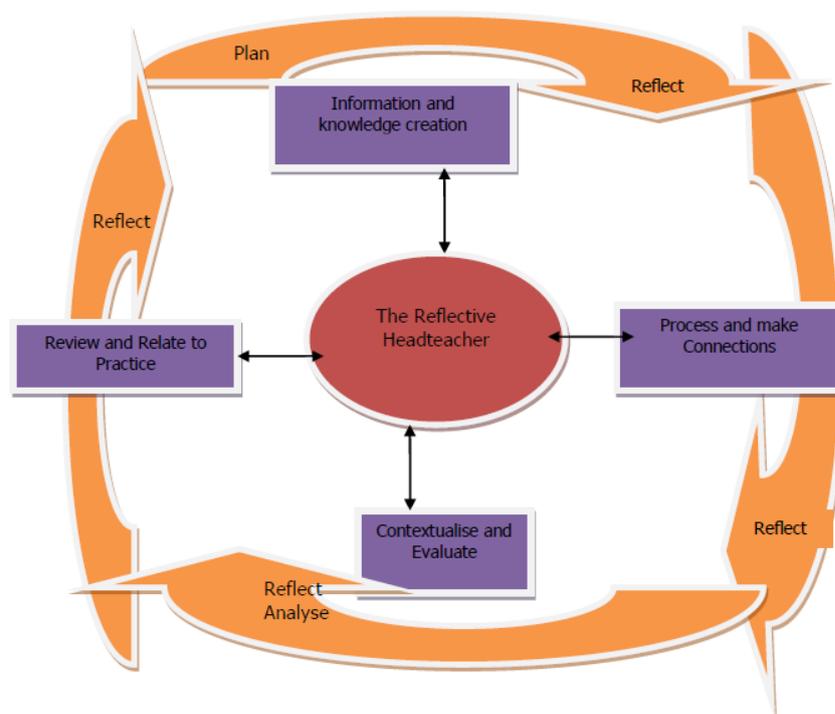
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spontaneous but nevertheless was a knowledgeable action, capable of knowing and learning about at a deeper level" (Watson, 1998a p217).

This process of diving into the reflexive flow is fraught with risks, but the potential benefits are also considerable. For Watson in her professional context it is about the reconnection of the individual nurse to their patient in terms of caring theory but by extension it is also about the way two professionals can use dialogue and mutual reflexivity to create new knowledge for themselves and their professional context. Further it allows these individuals to create a rapport which transforms the professional landscape to a shared authenticity where the forces of external accountability are replaced by a personal moral purpose.

Watson's model when applied to an educational context reveals some interesting possibilities. A possible model of this is described in figure 6

Figure 6 An early description of a headteacher's reflective cycle



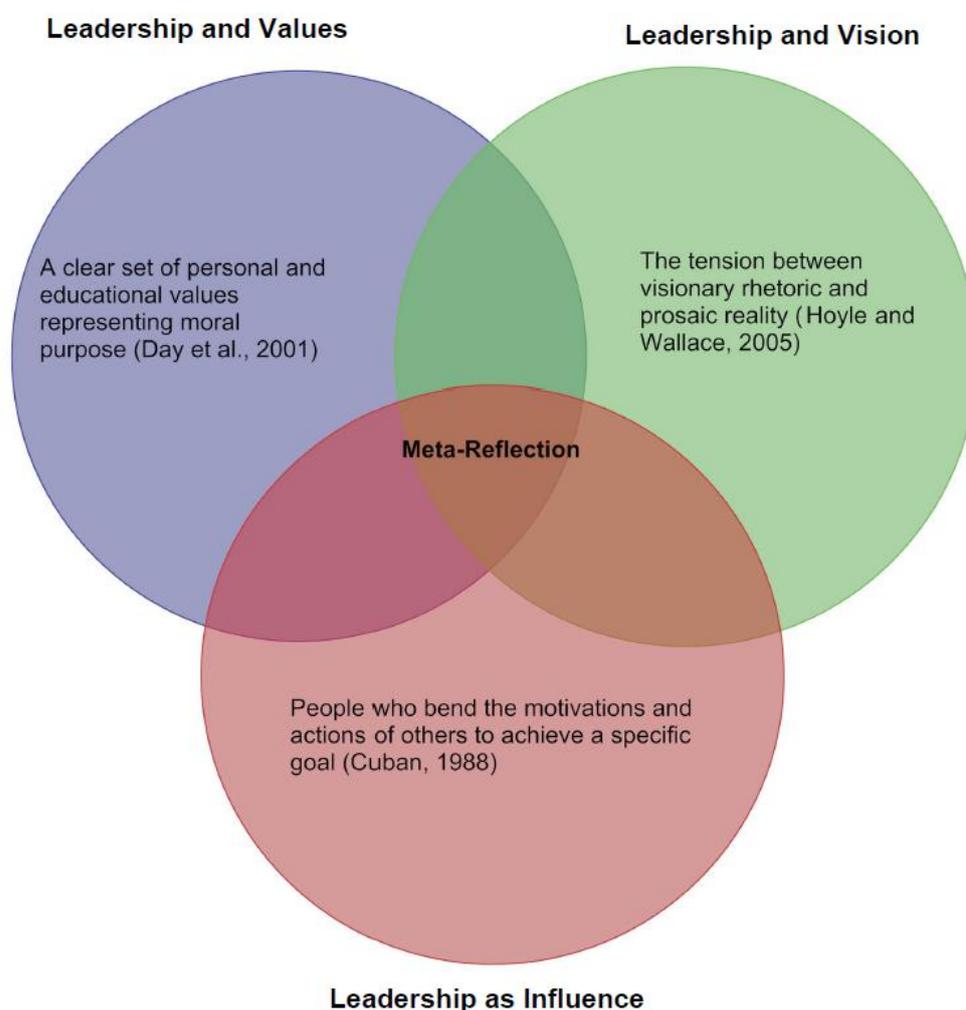
Marshall after (Prinsen and Verkoulen, 2002)

The experience of reflection undertaken by headteachers can be described by a self-reflective cycle (this will be analysed in chapter 8). The information explicit in the research conversation, depending on its context, can either create knowledge or link to existing knowledge. This is then processed in part at the time and in part after the dialogue has finished. This meta-reflective process allows both or one of the practitioners to make appropriate connections to other knowledge, past actions and intended actions. Meta-reflection then allows the knowledge to be contextualised and internalised. Ultimately new or deeper understanding is evaluated in terms of how important it is and stored for further possible use. Finally the information or knowledge is reviewed and related back to practice and applied where appropriate.

3.9 The relationship between meta-reflection and Bush's model of leadership

If we now attempt to apply the emerging model of meta-reflection onto the existing model of leadership domains (see figure 3) we need to add the element of meta reflection. In figure 7 the concept of meta-reflection has been added to the model. The placement of meta-reflection onto the version of the Bush (2011) model as a Venn diagram at the centre where values, vision and influence intersect shows the relationship between the three domains and reflection. Leaders who are reflective understand the significance of these domains on their own leadership (Branson, 2007b) and the act of being reflective is central to their professional practice (Diggins, 1997).

Figure 7 The relationship between meta-reflection and Bush's (2011) model of leadership



After (Bush, 2011 p5-8)

This demonstrates how when professionally reflective practitioners are driven by their values (moral purpose) understand their ability to influence others and can articulate a vision they should be able to reach this meta-reflective level. It is possible to take this further, however, and suggest that practitioners can assist each other in getting to this level by a consciously reflective conversation (Russell and Kelly, 2002b). Finally, if it is true that headteachers are reflective by their nature as

the analysis of the data in chapter 7 will show the insights available at this meta-level can allow them to operate more effectively in their professional roles (see chapter 8).

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the relationship between headteachers and authenticity. Authenticity can be defined as referring to a personal state but in this research it is better described as being closer to what researchers describe as the moral purpose of headship (Sergiovanni, 1992 p89, Sergiovanni, 2001 ch 4, Begley, 2006 p573). The examination of the moral centre of headship (Fullan, 2003) leads to an examination of the authenticity of the individual and by extension their leadership. The process by which this happens is personal reflection and by extension professional reflexivity. These self-monitoring "systems" within an authentic context can operate at a number of levels. The simplest manifestation of this in an educational setting requires teachers to reflect on their practice in order to improve performance which is repeatable (i.e. the teaching of a lesson or the review of a decision to improve upon performance). As the empirical data in chapter 7 will demonstrate there is the possibility of developing of a deeper reflexivity which allows for the improvement of practice in more complex settings towards a new definition of meta-reflection which creates the possibility of improving practice in even more challenging 'future' contexts. The following chapter will discuss a range of methodological and epistemological aspects that have shaped this dissertation.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to describe the methodological framework used in this dissertation and describe the methods used to collect and analyse the data to answer the research questions.

This is an example of practitioner research. Its methodological approach is within a realist tradition. This is a qualitative enquiry using a critical theory perspective. This dissertation explores the research questions by using participative action research methods. It also takes an unusual longitudinal view which does not rely on a base line but revisits the participants every 8 months over a 44 month period. It is also located in dialogic tradition whereby the participants co-create meaning within their shared professional context.

There is throughout an explicit awareness of a reflexive context of practitioner research. A summary of this approach is provided by Gergen (1991):

“the term reflexive applied not to one researcher, but to relations between and among investigator and research participants” (Gergen and Gergen, 1991 p93)

In order to show the reflexive journey of the headteacher researcher later in this chapter the reflexive nature of how the research methodology evolved will require the use of the first person viewpoint. An understanding of reflection, reflexivity and

finally meta-reflection are essential aspects of how this research study was undertaken and contextualises the findings derived from the research study.

Due to an interest in reflexivity (i.e. being aware of the researcher in the research) this chapter also explores the relationship between positivist and constructivist paradigms before analysing the methodology of participative action research.

This research is a longitudinal study which uses the same respondents over a four year period. Analytical tools including Layder's (1993) research map will show how this shift over time gave new insights into the way professionals reflect in practice.

4.2 Refining the Research Questions

Chapter 1 described the evolution of the research questions from exploring how schools improve and trying to analyse the specific strategies that maximise the chances for this improvement, through an iteration which acknowledged the centrality of leadership in the process of school improvement to the ultimate refinement of the focus which looked at how headteachers reflect and how this reflection within a context of a professional dialogue has had impact upon how schools improved and how they sustain improvement.

As was stated earlier (p31) the ultimate aim of this research was to analyse critically and explain the extent to which headteachers, working in English secondary schools in the first decade of the twenty first century, felt that being reflective sustained and

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improved their professional practice. It also aimed to explore the extent to which headteachers were reflexive and how they were reflexive in their practice of school leadership. This question required an examination of individuals and their perception of themselves and the professional world they inhabited. Cohen and Manion (2000) describe the inappropriateness of a positivist methodology for this type of examination:

“positivistic social science...fails to take account of our unique ability to interpret our experiences and represent them to ourselves” (Cohen et al., 2000 p25)

Therefore this led to the adoption of an epistemological framework that took a realist approach from a social constructivist view point rooted in the philosophical work of Habermas (1987 [1981]). The concept of an emancipatory paradigm is often used by educators who believe that the process of education can liberate young people (Leonardo, 2004). This epistemology has remained consistent but this chapter will show the evolution of methods in this research study alongside the development of the questions. This adjusted approach resulted in the collection of rich qualitative data which have addressed the research aims and articulated the value and function of headteacher reflexivity which will be discussed in the data analysis chapters (5, 6 , 7 and 8). These data will show how reflexivity supported headteachers' practice by giving them the mechanisms by which they could verify the actions that would lead to their schools' sustained improvement.

4.3 Theoretical Background – A Critical Realist Approach

4.3.1. Exploring and Rejecting a Positivist Paradigm

The nature of my original research focus was concerned with how to improve schools which would certainly examine some quantitative data to show how schools have made progress. However this research also had an interest in how improvement had an impact on learners over the long term. The temporal nature of research makes positivist approaches less consistent with what becomes an ever shifting series of complex data which moves in and out of different focuses. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) describe this social constructivist view in terms that resonate with the relationship between the desire to research into practice and also research into how headteachers improve their schools:

“Qualitative researchers stress the social constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied.”(Denzin and Lincoln, 2003 p13)

In 2005, following the small scale pilot study undertaken in Masham School, the research study was designed at this point to analyse a specific cohort of headteachers across a range of schools looking at the process of school improvement in these schools. The series of interviews was to be of a large sample of headteachers (up to half of Houseman Local Authority or over 70 secondary schools) in order to capture a sense of what this representative group of mixed headteachers with a range of experience, types of schools and different positions on their school improvement journey considered to be the key drivers of improvement. The data collection was designed to capture how they felt about their roles and

experiences. The focus of the analysis was to be on how they reflected on their practice and how this impacted on the participant researcher.

Originally this positivist perspective had its attractions. There would have been a large representative sample and therefore, robustness about any generalisations that would have been made from this extensive and therefore reliable base. It certainly would have established a comprehensive rational edifice as described by Cohen et al (2000 p37). However although this had its attractions as a method it was ultimately only part of the process of discovering the design which best suited the final research question and which was most consistent with an epistemological framework rooted in Habermas.

Below is an example of the participant researcher's thinking at this early stage, when the question was still more focused on school improvement rather than the nature of headteachers' leadership.

"a range of research methods. Quantitative and qualitative methods will be used to collect data. Questionnaires used by Beresford (2001) will be used to identify individuals and semi- structured interviews will be used to enrich the school's context... My research tools will include the use of questionnaires (refining data-gathering methods from the pilot study). The sample will be of three secondary school who have shown improvement as described by Ofsted and by the judgement of the Local Authority who will be sustaining this improvement." (Marshall, 2006a)

This shows the then openness to mixed methods and case study and the clear intention to examine improvement in terms of the metric data that is more normally used by Ofsted. This approach was rejected when the research question was

refined to focus on the contribution the leadership of headteachers to school improvement.

4.3.2 Moving Towards a Constructivist Paradigm

The original research interest was in school improvement but even in its first iteration it was framed in what Hopkins (2001) described as “authentic” school improvement. In the research proposal of 2005 there was a clear reference to the theoretical framework which would have to underpin an interest in the authentic:

“My starting point is the concept of real or authentic school improvement developed by Hopkins (2001). This uses an adaptation of Habermas’ tri-paradigmatic framework focusing on critical theory (Habermas, 1968). The moral and political context of this model upon which current school improvement practice is grounded will be discussed. The established theoretical and practical framework to my research question will allow me to examine how context affects certain improvement strategies.” (Marshall, 2006a)

The epistemological standpoint was from Habermas because his emancipatory paradigm was critical if the concept of authenticity were to be explored. From the day to day experience of the practitioner’s view of school improvement the straightforward use of metrics to measure improvement did not capture the full reality of the experience of improving schools. Authenticity was also an underpinning principle of Hopkins’ (2001) work which had been a critical text in helping to shape the original research proposal.

4.4 The Epistemological Framework

From this interest in Habermas came a focus on critical theory, phenomenology and action research. Each of these research traditions has influenced the final research design. Manning (1997) sums up the nature of the research process that is central to this research study:

“The inquiry process must be as complex as the human process under study if it is to achieve ‘*verstehen*’ or understanding at the level of human meaning making.”(Manning, 1997 p112)

Asking the research question was “as complex as the human process” and it began to turn a purely practitioner-based interest in being a more effective headteacher into a scholarly investigation of how headteachers (including the participant observer) operate within their professional contexts. An increased understanding of this epistemology led to a deeper awareness of the impact of Headteachers’ impact of school improvement in their own schools. The movement here is to a focus on identifying how headteachers sustain the processes that lead to on-going improvement rather than only the resulting outcomes.

Habermas’s three domains of knowledge helped to narrow down the relationship between the types of research methods:

Table 12 Habermas’ (1984 [1981]) Three Domains of Knowledge

Type of Human Interest	Kind of Knowledge	Research Methods
Technical (prediction)	Instrumental (causal explanation)	Positivist Sciences (empirical-analytic methods)
Practical (interpretation and understanding)	Practical (understanding)	Historical Sciences (hermeneutic methods)
Emancipatory (criticism and liberation)	Emancipation (reflection)	Critical Social Sciences (critical theory methods)

After (Carr and Kemmis, 1986 p136, Tinning, 1992, MacIsaac, 1996)

Carr and Kemmis (1986 p9) interpreted Habermas and appropriated his theory of communicative action into the area of education research in order to support teachers in their engagement with their professional activities. Whilst both Habermas and Carr and Kemmis do not argue that these three domains are hierarchical there is a clear implication that emancipatory knowledge had more resonance for reflective researchers. Habermas discussed the split between academic theory and action by describing the process when theory is applied to action and changes both the action and the theory itself. This happens at the point of self-reflection:

“critical social theory...knows that in and through the very act of knowing it belongs to the objective context of life that it strives to grasp” (Habermas, 1984 [1981] p401)

Carr and Kemmis take this further and make explicit the link between the search for educational knowledge as being also the search for the knowledge of the educator (Carr and Kemmis, 1986 p145). This was the tension between undertaking research into how schools improve and actually being part of the system which attempted to improve a school. An understanding of this resulted in the researcher becoming a participant in the study. This reflective process also had the advantage of analysing from an insider's point of view how a leader operated as a researcher and exploring the co-relation between leadership, research and school improvement. Habermas' model of how we create knowledge and meaning both personal and societal, it could be argued, is the basis of later work in professional reflection:

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“the context of its emergence [knowledge] does not remain external to the theory but takes this reflectively up into itself”(Habermas, 1984 [1981] p401)

Education or educational research therefore, tends toward the emancipatory and critical because in order to support learning in others one needs an ability to be self-reflective and critically aware (Liston and Zeichner, 1987, Lee and Loughran, 2000).

As Schön confirms teachers can be emancipatory:

“...when a teacher begins to think and act not as a technical expert but as a reflective practitioner...poses a potential threat to the dynamically conservative system in which she lives.”(Schön, 1983 p323)

Educators are emancipatory when they become aware of the tensions in the system and how they reflect their own professional knowledge onto it:

“As teachers attempted to become reflective practitioners, they would feel constrained by and push against the rule governed system of the school, and in so doing they would be pushing against the theory of knowledge which underlies the school” (Schön, 1983 p334)

Hopkins (2001) also uses this paradigm to describe the kind of school improvement which first piqued my research interest.

Table 13 Technical, Practical and Emancipatory School Improvement

Perspective	School Improvement orientation
Technical (empirical-analytic)	School improvement is often: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • short term • Bureaucratic • Policy based • Characterised by narrow outcome measures
Practical (interpretative and situational)	School improvement is often: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process based • Culture focused • Characterised by creating a harmonious school environment
Emancipatory (critical and liberation)	School improvement is often: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authentic

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• About empowerment• Characterised by student learning
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Adapted from Hopkins (2001) after (Aoki, 1979)

The emancipatory perspective encapsulates all the important features of how headteachers describe their realities later in the data analysis chapters of this dissertation. Similarly there is the identification of authenticity and empowerment which are central features of the chosen methodology.

4.4.1 The Critical Perspective

The critical perspective was chosen for this dissertation because of the participant practitioner's interest in school improvement. During the process of the research the researcher's own professional practice as a leader developed and resonated with a critical and emancipatory view.

The educational context of the 1990s and 2000s and government policy during these decades ubiquitously²⁰ used the idea of transformation. School improvement, leadership and even educational research here had to be systemic i.e. like Hopkins' (2001) "emancipatory" perspective and unlike his "technical" and "practical" orientations. In this model every aspect of the school's organisation, its values, assumptions, workforce and buildings need to be transformed. This perspective was part of the New Labour agenda (1997 – 2010) and could be seen particularly in the

20 There are many examples of the then Department for Education and Skills using transformation but the most important was from Charles Clarke (the then Secretary of State) DFES 2003a. A New Specialist System: Transforming Secondary Education. Nottingham: TSO.

area of its policy Building Schools for the Future (BSF)²¹ and its conception of NCSL.

In this context school improvement operates on the basis that it is 'right' when all aspects of the organisation and its stakeholders feel satisfied with the outcome.

This type of school improvement is sustainable if the leadership is distributed along with the accountability. External advice checks the matrix of the school and helps the school note the impact of different aspects of actions taken and outcomes achieved.

Although it might be argued that the critical perspective encourages "authentic" school improvement it is part of a bigger theoretical framework that informs the educative process:

Through a consideration of value-laden forms of analysis and theoretical perspectives, our students may come to make choices related to their possible agency as teachers and as participants in social change.(Beyer, 2001 p152)

It is not a political standpoint anymore. The desire to improve social mobility fits not just with the previous government's agenda²² but also with the new coalition government (HM Government, 2011) and their take on the educational agenda going forward into the 2010s. Indeed we could add a post emancipatory gloss of school improvement demonstrated in the coalition government's 2011 education policy (Department for Education, 2010)²³ which appears to be a combination of technical aspects and emancipatory aspects given that much of the White Paper, The

²¹ BSF was a capital building programme designed to rebuild (or significantly refurbish) all secondary schools DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION. 2011a. *Building Schools for the Future* [Online]. Available: <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/schoolscapital/funding/bsf>.

²² This is a core aspect of the Labour Government 1997-2010 THE LABOUR PARTY 2010. The Labour Party Manifesto 2010. London.

²³ This became the Education Act 2011 DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION 2011c. Education Act 2011.

Importance of Teaching (2010) is focused on standards (with its “technical” orientation) but much of it is also focused on liberating schools from central government bureaucracy and regulation (with its emancipatory orientation).

Table 13a School Improvement as Envisioned by 2011 Education Act

Perspective	School Improvement orientation
Technical/Emancipatory Democratic accountability and liberation	Characterised by outstanding teaching Characterised by quality outputs judged by parents Free from bureaucracy Diverse and respond to local needs

4.5 Phenomenology

In examining the appropriate methodology it was important to acknowledge phenomenological research methods which informed the final research design. The study over time became more ethnographic in that it involved:

“extensive field work...pursued in a variety of social settings that allow for the direct observation of the activities of the group being studied, communications and interactions with the people and opportunities for formal and informal interviews” (Moustakas, 1994 p1).

Building on theorists like Hursell (1950) Moutakas (1994) having explored a range of approaches offers a research design in which to frame the research question. He firstly suggests that the question must originate in the researcher’s autobiography (Moustakas, 1994 p103) and whilst this chapter establishes that the question has an autobiographical characteristic and that the findings show an impact on the participant researcher, the final study is about the relationship between personal reflection and school improvement.

There is significant similarity in this research study's final design to Moutakas' (1994) design. Moutakas offers advice about the methods of data collection which was followed in this study:

"developing a set of questions and topics to guide the interview process. Conducting and recording lengthy person to person interview[s]" (Moustakas, 1994 p103-4)

What developed from these ideas is consistent with a phenomenological approach but is better described within the traditions of Action Research (AR). It was important for consistency of ideas that if the research was to be emancipatory then it should change or at least positively affect practice. This brings us to an exploration of Action Research and Participative Action Research.

4.6 Action Research

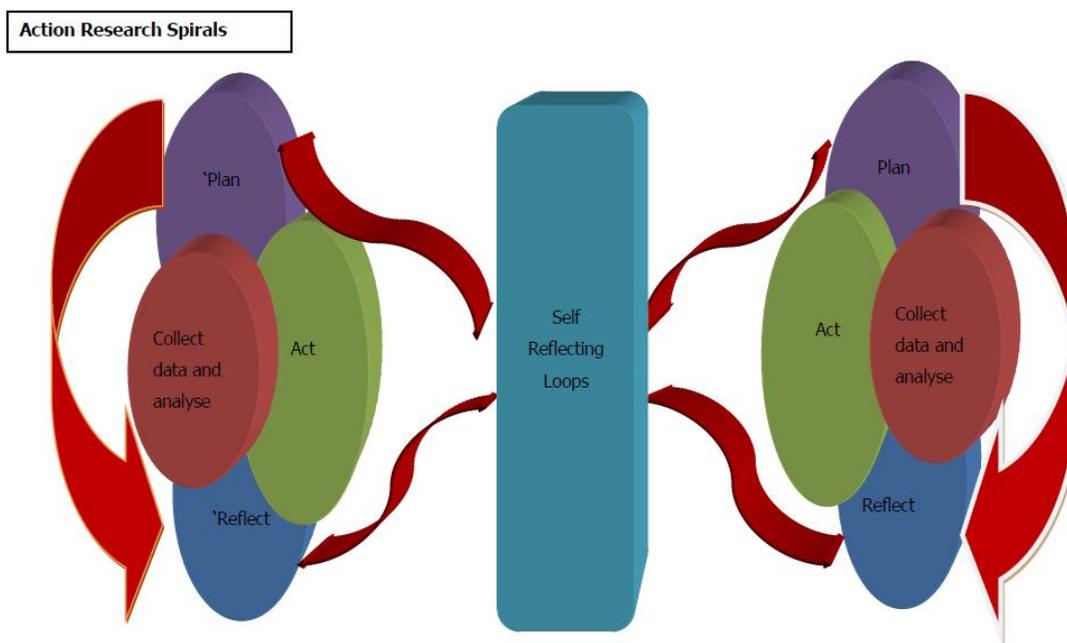
There is a long tradition of British education research located in the Action Research methodology as noted by (Zeichner, 2001) and the language used throughout is consistent with the key concepts that are emerging in this research study (Reason, 2006).

This research became a participative enquiry set with the tradition of AR and can be defined as research activity which starts in 'the field' not the laboratory or as Reason and Bradbury (2001) describe it as a:

"family of approaches to inquiry which are participative, grounded in experience and action oriented" (Reason and Bradbury, 2001 pxxiv)

The phrase was coined by Kurt Lewin (1946) who described the nature of action research spirals which are described below:

Figure 8 Action Research Spirals



After Lewin (1946)

The standard model of action research in operation uses the four stage process of planning, acting, analysing the collection of data or evidence, reflecting on impact and beginning the planning process into the action loop or spiral. This is found across disciplines and in a range of academic and professional contexts where the technique is applied to improve classrooms (Altrichter et al., 1993) and save the planet from climate change (Pretty et al., 1994).

Double loop learning is closely related to the action research spirals described in figure 8. Double loop learning described by Argyris and Schön (1974) is particularly relevant for the action research as it encourages the practitioner to consider the

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impact of his or her values on his or her paradigmatic view of the world. This in itself is important if the promise of change implied by action research is to be fulfilled.

Action Research has become the dominant methodology for social scientists exploring education. The General Teaching Council for England (GTCE)'s Teaching and Learning Academy has an explicit requirement for teachers to be involved in action research (GTCE, 2009, GTCE, 2006). The same could be said for the NCSL's approach to teacher development (Day et al., 2010, Riddell et al., 2009).

Action Research acknowledges the issues of bias and partiality and the desire not only to understand one's own professional practice but to develop and change this in order to improve or add knowledge about this professional practice. AR allows the researcher to examine the relationship between knowledge and practice within a disciplined academic process. Carr and Kemmis (1986) have one of the most comprehensive definitions which is often quoted by other action researchers:

"Action research is...a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out" (Carr and Kemmis, 1986 p162).

One could legitimately argue that any practice-based doctorate is a "form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants". Participative Action Research (PAR) is by its nature emancipatory and seeks to improve the situation and the researcher:

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“(PAR) attempts to disrupt traditional power bases by working with people in the construction of research to answer their particular questions and thereby develop knowledge that honours and promotes their capabilities rather than solely those of expert outsiders (Lind, 2008 p221)

This approach therefore appeals to those educators who are drawn to the critical perspective. Jean McNiff (1988) describes action research as encouraging:

“the teacher to be reflective of his own practice in order to enhance the quality of education for himself and his pupils” (McNiff, 1988 p1).

Or as Jack Whitehead puts it “[teachers] are imagining solutions and acting and evaluating the outcomes of their actions” (McNiff, 1988 p ix)

The research question in in this study is about the experience of being a headteacher in the context of the post ERA accountability and freedoms. In order to capture this experience a qualitative approach based on interviews and followed up by additional interviews became the methodology most likely to result in data that illuminated this experience.

Narrative also has a place in the way I collected my data. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) cover this area and describe the very partial way narratives work whilst describing the power narrative has in our lives and experiences:

“life...is filled with narrative fragments, enacted upon by storied moments in time and space and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000 p17).

Grounded theory is also consistent within narrative enquiry. The traditional limitations of this approach, with data only being collected by interview and limiting

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the number of interviews, are rightly criticised by Charmez (2003) who also helpfully navigates between the Glaser and Strauss and Corbin debate:

“every qualitative researcher should take heed of [Glaser’s] warnings about forcing data into preconceived categories through the imposition of artificial questions however although [Strauss and Corbin] write of the ‘reality of the data’ they are the narrative reconstructions of experience not the original experience itself” (Charmaz, 2003 p284-5).

Virtually all the studies that look at this area of school leadership use one form or another of grounded theory as their methodology. There are many examples of this (Robrecht, 1995, Wrigley, 2004, Wrigley, 2006a, Rennie, 2000) but Wrigley argues that the problem of school improvement is the paradigm we use to look at them. He proposes that sustained leadership is at the level of community. The self-reflecting understanding of what a community needs and how it perceives its school will result in positive change but this data emerges from the community and is not imposed on it:

“The new head... spent time sitting around pubs and cafes engaging in anonymous conversation.(Wrigley, 2006b p280)”

“Such reflection is not about improving practice, particularly when doctoral students are at a stage in their careers where they are already highly experienced practitioners, but rather it is about gaining a deeper and more profound understanding of the practice setting.” (Burgess et al., 2006 p5-6)

Given the nature of complexity that is being assumed it is not surprising that I took the realist view expressed by Layder (1993) where, as he puts it, reality is interwoven in different dimensions of social reality (Layder, 1993 p7). His research map highlights the advantages of adopting the role of “The Participant Observer”.

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As a traditional sociological method this sees the researcher becoming immersed in the group he is researching in order to gain:

“the trust of the people in the group the participant observer is initiated into the values, routines and social meanings that group hold dear”(Layder, 1993 p40)

This research did not require an infiltration of the social group of heads because the participant researcher belonged to this group of headteachers before any research questions were asked. This is a version of the classic insider researcher paradigm:

“It is about working with people, doing research that is collaborative and sharing perspectives in the process of doing research” (Savin-Baden, 2004 p366)

It is also about the positioning of the researcher in the act of research holding true to an authentic view of self (Walker and Shuangye, 2007, Starratt, 2007, Bhindi and Duignan, 1997). It is worth remembering that this collaborative research is also reflexive. The nature of this reflexivity for the researcher was a key part of the eventual design.

Hellawell (2006) offers possibly the most useful perspective by focusing on the conscious and deliberate act of self-scrutiny whilst undertaking research in terms of the insider/outsider relationship. The relationship here is with the organisation with the insider possessing “intimate knowledge of the community and its members” (Hellawell, 2006 p484) and the outsiders attempting to avoid polluting their objectivity.

The use of insider research in this dissertation does not refer to the researcher headteacher working in his own organisation. This possibility was rejected early on because the power relationship of the role of headteacher skewed the early survey data that was collected. This is insider research in the sense that the practitioner researcher headteacher was an insider (i.e. a participant) in the local system and community of headteachers in Swinburne (rather than a single organisation) but Hellawell (2006)'s observation offers an important insight into this relationship.

Most significantly insider research can be characterised as "interventionist" (Coghlan, 2007 p296). This methodology has changed the researcher's practice in the same way as the data and the interpretation of it has changed how the researcher practised the art of being a headteacher in his other role. The design therefore is very much rooted in a view of knowledge that sits comfortably within the tradition of action research.

Whitehead (2008) described action research cycles emerging from the kinds of question teachers ask themselves "how do I improve what I'm doing" (Whitehead, 2008 p4). A version of these action research cycles was described above (see figure 8) Lewin (1946) shows the use of the concept of the reflecting professionals (Schön, 1983) but what the methodology has illuminated is how a deeper reflective engagement can be made when headteachers engage in professional dialogues with other headteachers.

4.6.1 Practitioner Research

As was established in chapter 1 (sections 1.3 – 1.5) that this study is practice-based and because the headteacher research is still a practising headteacher is by definition practitioner research. There is a growing tradition of 'practitioner research' as a sub-set of Participatory Action Research (PAR) especially in the social science areas of health, social care and education (Sanders and Wilkins, 2010, McLeod, 1999, Menter, 2011). Fox et al (2007) describes succinctly the difference between the more 'traditional' action research approaches that Stenhouse and Ruddick (1979) revolutionised by putting the practitioner at the heart of the research enterprise:

"the practitioner researcher is not the same as being an academic researcher...[they] embed the research within practice in ways that academic research[er] cannot" (Fox et al., 2007 p1).

This dissertation draws heavily on this tradition and where the practitioner brings:

"...expertise in research methodology and theoretical perspectives...[and] the research process is seen as a collaborative partnership" (Fox et al., 2007 p51)

Fox et al (2007) also show the link between PAR and practitioner research:

"For practitioner researchers PAR is very attractive...It ensures that colleagues are directly engaged in the research and allows the practitioner researcher to facilitate the process." (Fox et al., 2007 p54)

4.6.2 Participative Action Research

Steier's concept of reciprocity (Steier, 1991b) was a useful way of describing the relationship between the participant headteacher and the other headteachers in this study. They were in many ways "reciprocators" which acknowledged the central

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importance all the headteacher dialogues had in terms of learning for all the participants:

“It marks perhaps the most striking outcome of taking (self)-reflexivity seriously in research. That is by holding our own assumed research structures and logics as themselves researchable and not immutable, and by examining how we are part of our data, our research becomes not a self-centred project but a reciprocal process” (Steier, 1991b p7)

The danger of justifying a methodology which appears not to mind having no reference to objectivity is that it is a risk that the researcher disappears into self-reflecting spirals which illuminate little but the subject at the centre of the reflection. Although this research avoided the highly autobiographical, the reflexive engagement used encouraged this manner of engagement with the other participants and one’s own life-story:

“highly autobiographical reflexive practices, in the hands of an unskilled or egocentric practitioner, can degenerate into self-serving, narcissistic, heroic portrayals of the ethnographer” (Foley, 2002b p475)

Partly this danger can be avoided by being aware of its existence and ensuring that any auto-ethnographic aspects of this research are grounded in illuminating the data not the individual. Fendler (2003) also warns of the dangers of allowing an autobiographical approach to trap us into stereotypes, something she considers is especially risky for teachers:

“autobiographical identification circumscribes what it is possible to think and authenticates some particular ways of being a teacher while it obliterates others and confounds the possibilities for thinking outside existing categories of thought (Fendler, 2003 p23).

It is therefore important to contextualise this research within the existing concepts of insider or participatory action research and move away from the more extreme form of auto-ethnography described by Steier (1991b). However the evolution of the methodology from 2007 did move towards ethnography (see figure 9). The advantages of the participant researcher being actively involved and understanding the effects of the research process on their own practice is commented on by Allan (2006) who describes it from her nursing perspective:

“It was specifically the relationship between participant observation and interview data, which is central to ethnography, which proved so important for the data analysis...the research relationships developed in ethnography offered the potential for change in ... practice through reflection with staff in the field” (Allan, 2006 p400)

Ethnographic approaches to data (Day, 2002, Dausien et al., 2008) did help refine the final research design especially as this was informed by a reflexive process for the participant researcher and headteacher. This could almost be described as emancipatory participant action research (Kemmis, 2001 p92) within the tradition of critical ethnography described as obligating:

“the researcher to embrace her/his personal indebtedness and responsibility towards other individuals. As we shall see, being a knower/witness with a personal, cultural history (Foley, 2002b p475).

The other end of this spectrum is Participatory Action Research (PAR) which captures the action research cycle and the location of the researcher in the research.

It is certainly the case for the participant headteacher that this methodology resonates in terms of personal growth and professional development:

“PAR methodology used as professional development has many components worth discussion. The emancipatory element was

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reflected in the Co PAR participants' enthusiasm, which resulted in three members motivated enough to participate again in 2005–06. This methodology also emerged as a way to enlist educators in a cycle of action and measurement—resulting in increased belief in their own expertise" (James, 2006 p532).

Therefore the methodological standpoint of this study, whilst moving towards auto-ethnography is anchored by a need to have impact within the professional context of the participant researcher which is more consistent with action research in general as described by Reason and Bradbury (2001):

"Practicing ethnography means shifting one's notion of center and periphery and coping with the complexity of multiple centers with multiple peripheries" (Alsop, 2002 p1).

Early analysis also helped refine the final methodology and added the aspect of reflexivity into the process. As Foley (2002a) suggests:

"greater reflexivity will provide a firm reliable foundation for an objective social science" (Foley, 2002a p163).

The following figure 9 is a description of the final position from which the research design derived. The movement from 2005 to 2009 represented an acknowledgement of the process of reflection of the participant headteacher's professional practice and how it was revealed in the data. It resonated with the spirals described in figure 8 but is more rooted in the professional context of the realities of being a headteacher and the use of reflection in practice to improve personal performance.

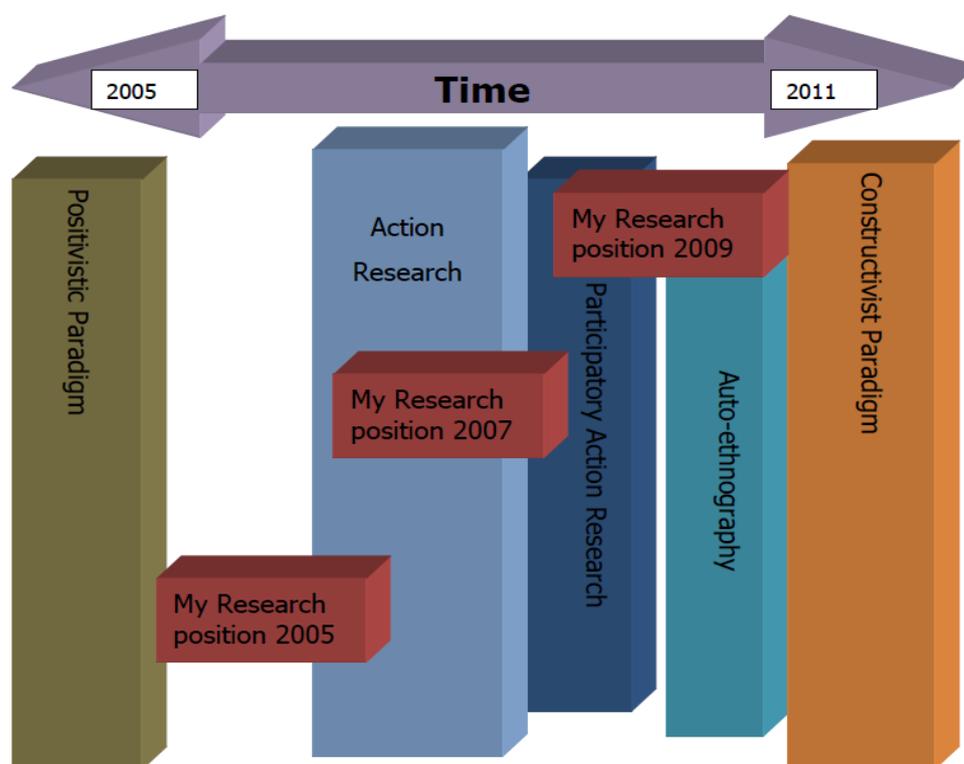
Figure 9 A Research Continuum Locating My Positions Across Time

Figure 9 shows how the participant researcher's research position evolved through the study. The position was more concerned with metrics and other quantitative data at the beginning in order to be able to measure how schools improved. As the research moved into a more qualitative study of school leadership it became focused as an action research study with an element of participation. This moved further towards a constructivist paradigm as the study continued to evolve and analysis of the early interviews showed how significant the participatory aspect had become. This was always a practitioner research study but by 2009 it had become a participatory action research study with strong aspects of auto-ethnography for the participant headteacher/practitioner researcher.

4.7 The Research Design

As has been shown the design of this research developed alongside the evolution of the research questions but from the start of the data collection it has been essentially a participatory action research enquiry. Like Lykes (2001) this enquiry:

“ seeks to incorporate the best...practices from participatory action research to enhance the participants capacity to facilitate personal and community change” (Lykes, 2001 p369)

This was always in part a study into the practice of improving schools and since the challenges thrown-up by the pilot study it centred on the role of headteacher in improving schools. The participation of the researching headteacher became a central part of the methodology and as the concept of reflexivity added to the PAR model.

4.7.1 A Longitudinal Approach

The second iteration of the research question (2006) asked how improvement was sustained over time and therefore it was appropriate and necessary for the data collection to take place over several years. The twenty five conversations that form the data for this study took place from September 2006 to November 2009. This data was developed from a semi-structured investigative interview (Rubin and Rubin, 2005 p6) to headteacher dialogues that could be described as conversational partnerships (Rubin and Rubin, 2005 p79). The participant researcher returned to the other six headteachers approximately every eight months. The semi-structured interviews (see appendix 1) evolved into dialogues which were more wide-ranging than the first few interviews. The themes of school improvement, the nature of

being a headteacher, sustainability (personal and professional) and reflection (see appendix 3) were always part of the conversations and these professional interests became a structure of these "reflective conversations" (Schon, 1983 p132).

This research was longitudinal, though not in the sense that the research had a fixed point from which to project. The interviews were conducted over a four year period. This approach coupled with the participant's role as a researcher was crucial in allowing reflexivity over time to become a major aspect of the study and created the source data from which it was possible to capture the reflective and reflexive process of this group of headteachers.

4.7.2 The Sample Choice

The sample for this study consisted of the headteachers of seven secondary schools (including myself as a participant researcher) within the same town with a growing population of approximately 80,000 in 2005. One headteacher retired during the study and his successor joined the study after the first round of interviews. There was a culture of good collaborative working between these schools and a history of partnership working which was productive in delivering the government's 14-19 agenda during the period of the field work. All the schools (with one exception, a Voluntary Aided faith school) were in Local Authority control and always had been. Standards of attainment have risen sharply in all of the seven schools where standards were low in 2005 but by 2009 all performed almost at or above the

national average. In order to preserve the anonymity of the participants all headteachers have been assigned male names.

The sample was in a sense opportunistic given that the participant research had easy access to this sample of individuals. However it was also a deliberately chosen discrete group of all the headteachers working in Swinburne, a defined geographical area sitting within the large shire County of Houseman. One advantage of this sample was its 'containable' size (seven secondary schools) which meant that given the longitudinal nature of the study meant that the data sample of planned interviews was manageable. Another advantage was that all the participants shared not just their professional context as headteachers but shared a common local context to how they experienced their realities of headship. These advantages meant that there was a coherence within and across these conversational partnerships (Rubin and Rubin, 2005 p79).

There was an enthusiastic participation from the headteachers which allowed for very rich data about the personal reflections of the headteachers in this study.

There was no attempt to produce a representative sample of participants randomly generated to match the headteacher population as a whole. Therefore my approach was based on "purposive sampling" (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The community of headteachers in Swinburne was generous and supportive in giving access over time and there was evidence that all the headteachers relished the opportunity to talk about their experiences of leadership with another headteacher. This was also

found in other headteacher-based studies with much larger sample sizes (Flintham, 2010).

4.8 Methods - The Data Collection 2005 - 2009

The data was collected at the beginning of the study by using semi-structured interviews with headteachers within a metropolitan area. As the study progressed these became less structured conversations with the same group of headteachers. The research took the form of semi-structured interviews with these headteachers from 2005 to 2009. As the question became more refined, it became clear that there was a specific and important role played by the headteachers in terms of allowing research into their schools to take place. This was also noted by Calveley (2005) and the researcher's role as a fellow headteacher was an aid to this process. It was clear in 2005 that the heads had the role of "gate-keepers" (Barbour and Kitinger, 1999 p30). This was true in three senses; headteachers controlled access to the data of the school's improvement journey other, than that within the public domain; they also controlled access to the staff in a school and thirdly they gave access to the personal stories of each of the headteachers.

From 2006 onward the focus of the study and therefore the collection of the data narrowed down to interviews with the headteachers as it became clear that the researcher's role as a headteacher meant that it was difficult to speak to another colleague from another school as but a headteacher. Therefore this headteacher role determined the power relationship between the researcher and the respondent

who was not a headteacher which might possibly skew the data because of the power inequality within the relationship. Whereas the relationship headteacher to headteacher avoided this unbalanced power dynamic and although there was the potential for local politics to have an influence on the data this danger was mitigated by the relationship that the participant observer had formed with the other headteachers over the almost four year period of the study.

All bar five of the interviews were recorded and transcribed (see appendix 4). Five interviews were not recorded due to technical or logistical failures with equipment or people and these interviews were written in note form in the research journal (see appendix 6). Three of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher the other seventeen were transcribed by an academic secretary. Transcripts (see appendix 7) were shared with the participants during the study and all headteachers reviewed their previous interviews as part of the continuing professional conversation with the participant researcher.

In all bar one example (see appendix 4), the interviews took place in the offices in the schools of the headteachers in the sample. Interviews lasted for between one to two hours.

The set schedule (see appendix 2) was largely adhered to but over the three years five interviews did not happen at the correct point, due to illness, or work commitments from one of the headteachers at the time. Ultimately the total sample was 25 interviews rather than the originally intended 30 (see appendix 1).

4.9 Limitations of the Methodology

The challenge with practitioner research and PAR is to use the involvement of the participant in a way which enriches the data without slipping into anecdotalism or becoming too involved and losing the research focus (Chataway, 1997).

Winter (1982) warns of the dangers that all forms of Action Research can have around validity. The analysis of the data in chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 will show how the longitudinal relationships that were fostered between the participants created rich qualitative data. As chapter 9 demonstrates this study does have findings which contribute to the generality of research in school improvement and leadership.

There were some other issues with this type of research for example illness and unavailability but generally all the participants (though extremely busy people) found the time to spend one to two hours per interview over almost four years in order to take part in this research study. Whilst there are well established practice protocols about headteachers giving access to another headteacher colleague, the data shows that these headteachers derived value from being part of this research project and looked forward to the interviews. By examining how headteachers' reflected on their own practice in a dialogic manner I suggest that each participant had the opportunity to reflect more deeply on his or her professional practice simply by the process of being part of this study.

4.9.1 Validity

Establishing validity must always be a concern for the practitioner researcher and in this study this issue was addressed by the process of "internal validity" described by Dadds and Hart (2001). This process is also described as allowing for the:

"practitioners to treat all assertions as conjectures to be tested in experience" (Mason, 2002 p2).

The validity of what was said by the headteachers was checked by what had been said by these headteachers during previous conversation. The professional relationship between the practitioner researcher and the other headteachers especially as a fellow practising professional, helped the researcher understand and assess what was being said.

Whenever it was possible (if the previous interview had had been transcribed) the transcripts were shared with the participants it what they describe as "a process of respondent validation" (Dadds and Hart, 2001 p36). At the beginning of the next cycle of interviews there was explicit reference to the previous interview and in the case of the final round of interviews to emergent themes were examined and discussed (see chapters 7 and 8).

4.10 Analysis of the Data

The data was analysed at a number of levels. Consistent with the participative nature of the enquiry the first analysis was done by listening to the interviews

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several times. This is what Ritchie and Spencer (2002) refer to as being part of the qualitative researcher task:

“Before beginning the process of sifting and sorting data the researcher must...gain an overview of the body of material gathered...[this] involves immersion in the data” (Ritchie and Spencer, 2002 p312)

The second level of analysis that was applied was the examination of the transcripts or notes of the interviews to get a feeling for the way the data showed common themes or topics. This was done as an adapted version of what Miles and Huberman (1994) describe as exploring and describing and ordering and explaining (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

The third level of analysis applied was to use Layder’s research map (Layder, 1993 p71) which was adapted to help illuminate the very rich qualitative data that came from the conversations with the sample of headteachers. Layder’s research map helped to distinguish between the macro level of context at a societal and values level, through setting at an institutional level to the situated conversational level and finally the micro level of the self and personal identity. This framework illuminated the themes that emerged from the multi-dimensional nature of the data. Layder’s research map also helped clarify the self-reflecting spirals of headteacher reflexivity and showed how these fitted together ultimately moving towards the concept of meta-reflection within education.

4.10.1 Layder's (1993) Research Framework

To recap briefly, Layder's (1993) map distinguishes between the macro level of context at a societal and values level, through setting at an institutional level to the situated conversational level and finally the micro level of the self and personal identity. This research framework illuminates the themes that emerged and shows how the multi-dimensional nature of the data and the self-reflecting spirals of headteacher reflexivity fit together and point towards a new definition of meta-reflection within a specific educational context.

Table 14 shows an adapted version of Layder's (1993) research map which is being used to show how the themes and types of reflection in this research are classified in the analysis outlined in this chapter. Layder's (1993) original map (see tables 1, 1a and 3) has been adapted and in table 14 shows the addition of the level of the inner self and Layder's (1993) concept of history being replaced by time to represent the longitudinal nature of the data. The adaptation arose from early analysis of the data using the original model and the new level refers to the emerging concept of meta-reflection.

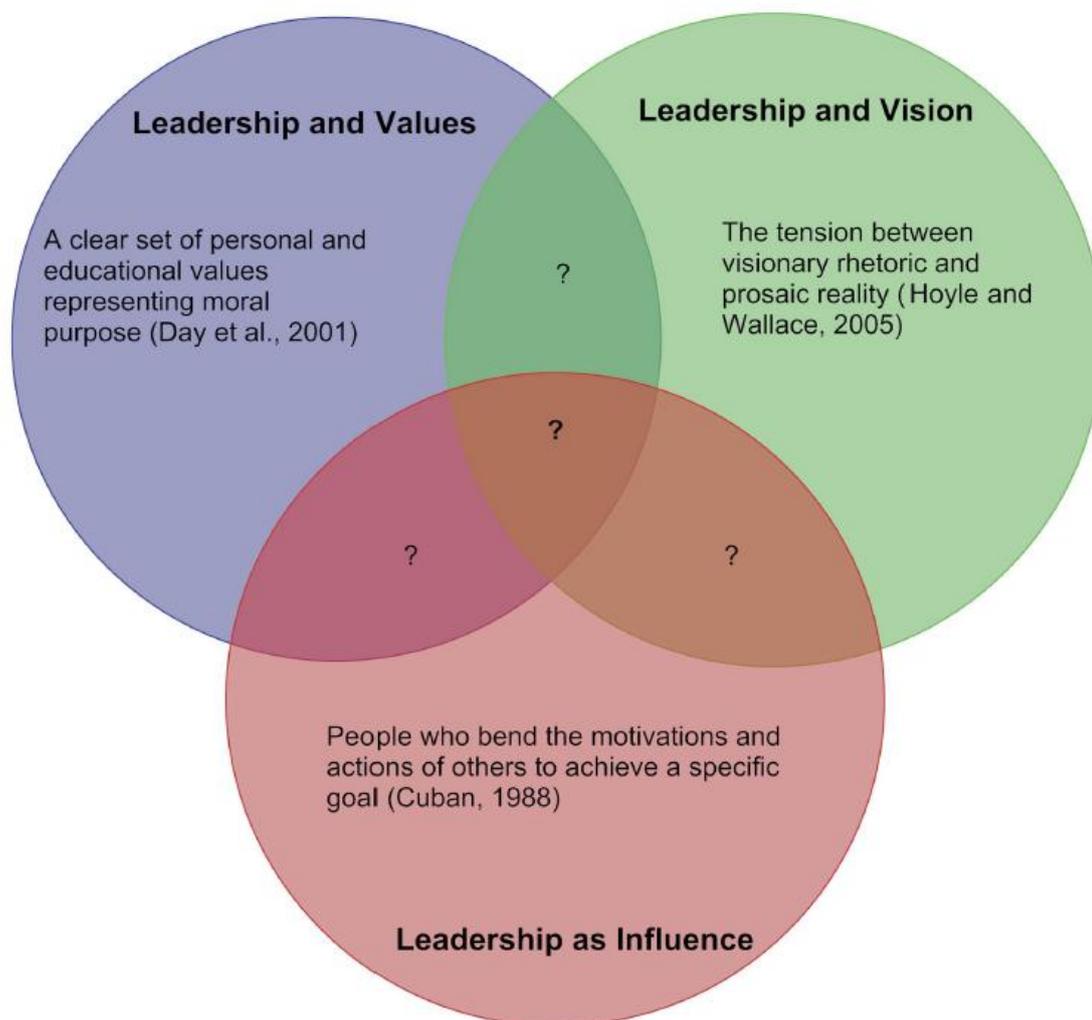
Table 14 An Adaptation of Layder's (1993) Research Map

Layder's Map	Research focus in this study	Theme	TIME
Context	Government policy, Ofsted and external measures of school improvement National Standards for Headteacher	School Improvement	
Setting	Schools in the sample, individual schools	School Improvement and Leadership	
Situated Context	headteacher dialogues	Authentic Leadership, Reflection	
Self	The reflective practitioner	Reflexivity	
Inner-Self	Reflexive Practitioner	Meta-reflection	

After (Layder, 1993 p72)

4.10.2 Bush's (2011) Model of Leadership Used as an Organisational Tool

A fourth level of an analysis and data organisation has been the use of Bush's (2011) model of leadership. This level ties together the themes of school improvement, leadership and authenticity by using the interfaces between the three domains of leadership shown in evolving from figure 3 to figure 7. Figure 10 offers the model as a Venn diagram with the interfaces between the domains empty. This diagram will be completed when the data is analysed in chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8. This structure has been very helpful in identifying themes and patterns as well as the relationships between different concepts that were of central importance to this study.

Figure 10 Bush's (2011) Model as an Organisational Tool

After Bush (2011 p5-8)

4.10.3 Analysing Reflexivity

Reflexivity is of central importance to this dissertation. Archer offers a coherent hierarchy of reflexivity which will be used to analyse the data in chapter 8. Table 15 below offers a helpful series of definitions that capture the complexity of how reflection and reflexivity operate.

Table 15 Archer's (2007) Analysis of Reflexivity

Archer's Reflexivities	Implication for self-reflection
Fractured Reflexivity	Having great difficulty or being unable to self-reflect
Autonomous Reflexivity	Using internal dialogues to self-reflect
Communicative Reflexivity	Using other people to self-reflect
Meta-Reflexivity	Using self-talk and other people within a moral context in an ethical manner

Adapted from (Archer, 2007 p93, Porpora and Shumar, 2010)

4.10.4 Displaying the Longitudinal Nature of the Data

In order to show how the data relates to time in this study the quotations from the interviews will be displayed in the following manner. Firstly the identity of the headteacher (a fictional first name has been used to retain the anonymity of the headteacher), followed by a fictional identification of the school (a letter from A-G), followed by the number of the interview which showed when this took place (the lower the number the earlier the interview). Any names used in the transcript have been changed for pseudonyms. Finally, the page number in the transcript or notes show how far into the interview the comments came from and therefore to which part of the conversation they refer. The transcripts of the longest interviews do not exceed 25 pages.

4.11 My Reflexive Research Journey

The next few sections use a first person voice for two reasons. The first is in order to capture the reflexive nature of my methodology (Day, 2002). As the research evolved the methodology was adapted and my methods adapted as has been shown above. It moved away from semi-structured interviews into wider ranging

conversations and finally became a very personally reflective process. During the analysis I realised that this process had also happened to some of the headteachers in my research and that it was possible to describe this insight as meta-reflection. The second is to capture the narrative nature of the research as a longitudinal study over several years. This research was not merely an attempt to capture a moment in time but an attempt to capture how time changes both the research and the researcher. This approach is not without precedent Wadsworth (2001 p163) describes this as reclaiming the I as a "node" or "knot" which resonates very much with my relationship with methodology.

4.11.1 Discovering the Authentic

As chapter 3 makes clear the importance of how headteachers became (or were already authentic) had initially been an interesting question for me but authenticity also emerged as I continued to conduct the research. It was becoming clear that the relationship between the insider headteacher (me) and my colleagues was of greater importance than the search for the mechanisms of school improvement. The research became a reflexive study in how headteachers used reflection in their professional practice to enhance their desires to improve their schools and maintain their personal and professional balance which allowed positive change to be sustainable. It was how they kept their own reservoirs of hope topped up (Flintham, 2010). The data widened to include my own reflective journal and field notes (see appendices 6a-d) collected at the time of the interviews which acted as a triangulation point in the search for capturing the process of headteacher reflection.

The final round of interviews were used to share and check the interim findings and resulted in the formulation of the meta-reflective cycle.

Other headteachers in the sample also kept reflective journals. They did this in uniquely personal ways; some keeping a commonplace book, others a professionally focused diary. These other journals have not been included and although they were referred to by some headteachers in the interview transcripts they are not part of the data for this study, although they form some part of the thinking around the reflective practice of these headteachers.

I will now show the reflexive impact on my methodology as both my research questions and methodology evolved. In short there was a narrowing of the focus from looking at all aspects of school improvement to analysing the personal and reflexive journeys of headteachers. This matched my deeper understanding of the research process and the changes in me.

I will refer to early iterations of my thinking about methodology during this section. In order to aid clarity when I quote an early version of my own writing this will appear in a box. All other quotations will appear without these boxes.

Having completed some of the field work and analysed the data I needed to develop my methodological thinking. This is captured in my first progress report which also shows how I attempted to use my previous writing as an example of where my

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considerations on methodology had got to. In effect this is an example of my own reflexivity operating to move forward my research.

The following comes from 2007 the point at which my methodology began to come into focus:

I had prepared a detailed interview schedule which had been through various iterations and pilots. Going into the interview I had decided that a semi structured approach would fit best with the research intention. This is well described as

Type of interview	Characteristics	Strengths	Weaknesses
Interview Guide Approach	Topics and issues are identified in advance in outline form interviewer decide the exact pattern of questions	The outline increases the comprehensiveness of the data and helps consistency logical gaps can be anticipated and filled interviews remain conversational and situational	Important salient topics may be inadvertently omitted. The interviewer may allow the conversation to move into areas which make comparability difficult

(Cohen et al., 2000)

Preliminary analysis of the first interview, using this data gathering instrument threw up some very interesting data and created in me a self-reflective loop. I noticed that my contributions were very much part of the interview. In effect I was having a professional conversation with a fellow head, which was at least in part related to my own school's sustained improvement journey.

I had become part of my own research inadvertently. This is well described in Kemmis and Taggart (2003). It was not my intention to do either action research or participant research though action research is grounded within the Frankfurt School which is the basis for critical theory based on Habermas' work.

"emancipatory action research is a collaborative, critical and self-critical inquiry by practitioners"(Cohen et al., 2000) p232

The field work had helped me understand what critical theory meant in

practice. This was no longer the adoption of a neat theoretical framework but the description of how I operated in the world. (Marshall, 2007)

The location of this study was by this point moving almost past participant action research towards auto-ethnography (see figure 9).

4.11.1 Reflection and Reflexivity

Another important aspect of the research was the increasingly important process of reflection and reflexivity, in capturing and examining the professional learning for individual headteachers and how this impacts on school improvement. This position of self in the process that characterises my research was well described by Savin-Baden (2004).

“Situating our self in research is always a complex activity, partly because our perspectives change and move as we undertake the research and partly because of the way we interpret data and make sense of people and their contexts. This kind of reflexive interpretation involves situating ourselves not just in the stages of the research but also in relation to the data we have collected.(Savin-Baden, 2004 p367)

Bearing this in mind I return to a description of my methodology in 2007 to show how the evolution of my methodology has been stimulated by the field work.

“My research area is concerned with looking at the various studies which attempted to examine what it was about schools which helped them improve. Without exception they found a fairly short list of characteristics that improving schools shared (see research review below). I therefore wished to know which of these characteristics were most significant in improving my school. I also had an interest in the views of the different groups who had been affected during the school’s two year (sic) improvement journey. I decided for the purpose of this study that time was a factor if I was to “capture the moment” (see below). My research question is likely to lead me towards the model of case studies described by (Bassey, 1999)

"theory seeking and theory testing case study...as contributing through "fuzzy" generalisations"(Bassey, 1999)p3

However this small scale study was used to examine how a traditionally quantitative tool like questionnaires could be used to inform a case study approach. The requirement was to collect data which would allow me to test out whether the drivers identified by the literature review were supported by my staff. I was also interested to find out whether specific groups of staff within the organisation had different views of which drivers had the largest impact on our school improvement. I rejected a major statistical analysis because my primary concern was to use the analysis of the questionnaire to point me towards key individuals (or groups of individuals) who would be best suited to help me derive rich contextual information and be able to discover whether the proposition that school improvement is not context specific is true.

My Methodological Paradigm

The paradigm that best describes my current view is captured in the discussion of feminist research in (Cohen et al., 2000). They describe three paradigms normative, interpretive and critical (adapted from Habermas (1968)). In the critical paradigm they describe an approach to studying behaviour as

"small scale research, political, ideological factors, power and interests in shaping behaviour, ideology, critique and action research,...transforming action and interests,...[and] practitioner researchers [with] emancipatory interests"(Cohen et al., 2000) p35

I chose to conduct my small scale study using the data collection methods of a questionnaire. This was produced as a result of the literature. The items were my summary of the aspects identified as being essential in helping schools improve. In one way it was appropriate for me to use a questionnaire as my data gathering tool because I was attempting to collect fairly simple information within a context that was open to finding out the answer to "how did we do it?" Denscombe stating that questionnaire are appropriate in the following contexts.

"...when what is required tends to be fairly straightforward information – relatively brief and uncontroversial;
When the social climate is open enough to allow for full honest answers;
When respondents can be expected to...understand the questions"(Denscombe, 1998)

However Denscombe also suggests that such a quantitative tool usually tends towards researcher detachment,

"The whole point...is to produce numerical data that are objective in the sense that they exist independently of the researcher." (Marshall, 2006b p10)

(Marshall, 2007)

This reflexive concern is not motivated solely for personal reasons Russell and Kelly (2002a) suggest that all researchers use reflexivity to analyse data:

“no method of research inquiry can substitute for the need of researchers to engage in a reflexive relationship with data” (Russell and Kelly, 2002a par 30)

4.12 Towards Meta-Reflection

In the following three chapters of data analysis I will show how the data sample captured aspects, both explicit and implicit, of how different headteachers reflected on their own practice and demonstrated the importance this reflection was in supporting and sustaining them in their roles.

In terms of methodology this has implications both in terms of a constructivist epistemology and also in terms of how these headteachers were altered as part of the research process in which they participated for over three years. This change in the participants and their realisation of this is especially important in longitudinal research:

“If research represents a series of extended conversations...then it is incumbent on researchers to be reflexive about what we do with the results of our research as we have been in all the prior conversations...it requires the researchers be mindful of themselves, the participants, their audience and the uses to which their might be put” (Russell and Kelly, 2002a par 38)

This process was found to be personally enriching for all the participant headteachers. The research conversations (Fenimore-Smith, 2004) also had an impact on me as a researcher as I became part of the research (Russell and Kelly,

2002a). It has helped me professionally in the discussions I have had with other colleagues engaged in the same professional activity but also in terms of my own reactions to the processes of reflection at a meta-reflective level of unconscious awareness (Watson, 1998a). The most startling realisation for me over the last seven years is how this has allowed me to develop as a researcher and the way the two roles of headteacher and researcher have become integrated into a unified practitioner researcher.

Burge, Laroque et al (2000) also use the concept of meta-reflection, though their usage is concerned with on-line professional development the process they describe resonates with the definition of meta-reflection that is used in this dissertation.

They first acknowledge the difficulty they experienced in making meta-reflection an explicit aspect of their analysis but realised that this needed to go further in order to fully comprehend the data:

“We have tried to reach past the expected professional façade...and examine our intrapersonal professional feelings and thoughts. We have explained the difficulties of carrying out deliberative reflection on action and listed insights in the commentaries. Now it is time to step back even further—to comment on the whole reflection and identify its usefulness.” (Burge et al., 2000 p92)

This study used the actual dialogues as the basis of the meta-reflection (in audio and written transcript form) whereas Burge, Laroque et al (2000) focused on their own personal writing:

“...we now engage in the self-discipline of writing-in-order-to-think; never an easy or fast task, not the least reason being that it takes time and sustained effort to pull and push tentative ideas through all the

cognitive filters of our past experience, biases, and habits" (Burge et al., 2000 p92)

Therefore by analogy, this study will engage in the self-discipline of 'talking-to-reflect'.

4.13 A Meta- Reflective Framework

The sample of headteachers in this study reflected routinely on their own professional practice (Sergiovanni, 2001). Much of this process happens explicitly and is often done in conversation with others (Shaw, 2002). For me this is what I do with my deputies at our daily briefings reflecting back to each other recent experience. In the field work many heads described a similar process.

Jean Watson (1998b) coined the phrase meta-reflection in the context of nursing. Her caring-healing model that springs from this process also drives towards an authentic centre:

"Therefore... we are invited personally and professionally to engage in our inner and outer work, exploring our inner journey towards the deeper level of the work. It is through such inner work that we are more able to witness the process and contribute to a transformation of the outer work...we can tap into a level of reflection that asks moral questions (Watson, 1998b pvii-viii).

This type of reflection and a model to describe it is developed in chapter 8 but meta-reflection represents for me the end result of a developing methodology that evolved throughout the seven years of this study.

4.14 Conclusion

In this chapter I have reiterated my research questions and shown how the data was collected and analysed to reveal how headteachers reflect at deep levels to sustain their own professional practice. I explored these questions from a critical theory perspective using a multi-method qualitative research approach. The methods employed were largely action research and participative action research, but also had aspects of narrative enquiry and ethnography (see figure 9). As a practitioner researcher I then explained how there came to be a reflexive impact on my methodology as the research questions were refined from the looking at all aspects of school improvement to focusing on the personal and reflexive journeys of headteachers. I then moved on to provide a rationale for my selection of the headteachers interviewed, so as to form a purposive but non-probability opportunity sample (Miles and Huberman, 1994 p27). Fourthly, having critiqued alternative potential methodologies, I detailed the qualitative interviewing method of data collection which was selected as my preferred approach, and the ethical considerations taken into account when embarking on it. I considered the use of the transformative conversation (Shaw, 2002) as the central reflexive core of this interview process. Finally, I considered the analysis of the emerging data using meta-reflection as a specific category (Watson, 1998a) and explored the issue of the validity of the emerging outcomes, in particular the way of avoiding subjective anecdotalism by using my own insider knowledge and the importance of a longitudinal approach. I also considered the issue of reliability and concluded by providing a reflexive account of my own experience base and value system as the

lens through which I perceived the interview process and its outcomes, and which may have impacted upon this research.

In the next three chapters the data will be analysed by exploring the four main themes that emerged from the data. These themes derive in part from the Bush leadership domains model (see figure 3). These are: school improvement, school leadership, headteacher reflection and reflexivity and finally headteacher meta-reflection. Layder's research map (Layder, 1993 p71) has been adapted to allow the data to be organised. This organisation aided the analysis of the very rich qualitative data that came from 25 conversations with headteachers stretching over the almost four years of this research study.

Chapter 5

Data Analysis: Theme 1 School Improvement

5.1 Introduction

It is not surprising, considering the macro context (Layder, 1993) of the research, that school improvement forms a major theme in the data (as indeed does leadership, both at a theoretical and practical level) and could have been predicted to form a significant aspect of the themes that all the participant headteachers discussed at length. There is also a clear link back to the main aims and objectives of this study; school improvement is a major reality of a headteacher's current experience.

What is more interesting is the nature of the reflexivity present in the data. It is likely that this is a result of the reflexivity inherent in participatory action research (Reason and Bradbury, 2001 p425-6) but it appears in all the interviews to some extent and is very well developed in about half of the sample.

This reflexivity is more surprising because it appears that for the group of headteachers for whom reflection came more naturally there was evidence that they were able to access a deeper level of reflexivity which could be described a meta-reflection. This kind of reflection allows the professional not simply to reflect in action (Schön, 1983 p128) or even to engage in double loop thinking (Argyris and Schön, 1974 p19) but to use the presence of a fellow headteacher to stimulate

reflexivity in action which suggests that practitioners can assist each in getting to this level by a consciously reflective conversation (Russell and Kelly, 2002b). There will be an attempt to show how the data suggests that when reflective headteachers enter this meta-level the insights available to them allow them to operate more effectively in their professional roles. The data will be analysed using two models: the first one has been developed from Bush's definition of educational leadership (Bush, 2011b p5-8) into the model described in figure 10 (p138), the second is a research map devised by Layder (1993 p114) which has been developed to apply to this research (see table 14 p138).

It is clear that there is a highly political context to school improvement (The Education and Skills Committee, 2006, Department for Education, 2010). NCSL have also established through a significant amount of research into school improvement (Day et al., 2010) that indicates that a school's improvement journey is a major characteristic of the headteacher's own development as a leader.

Whilst there is a great deal about school improvement research (Rutter, 1980, MacBeath and Mortimore, 2002, Smith and Tomlinson, 1990) that is straightforward the context of the headteacher's specific school adds to the complexity (Busher and Barker, 2001, Davies, 2007). The headteachers in this sample discussed school improvement in the context of their own schools and leadership and this chapter is the analysis of the theme of school improvement.

5.2 The Bush (2011) Model and School Improvement

An analysis of the data quickly showed that there was a relationship between the concepts of "leadership as influence"(Bush, 2011b p5) and "leadership and vision" (Bush, 2011b p7) when applied to school improvement. It is the interface between these two domains that shows where school improvement can happen. It is not the only domain that can affect schools and help them improve but it helps clarify the data collected in this study.

Figure 10a describes this interface and helps put into context the nexus of leadership and school improvement.

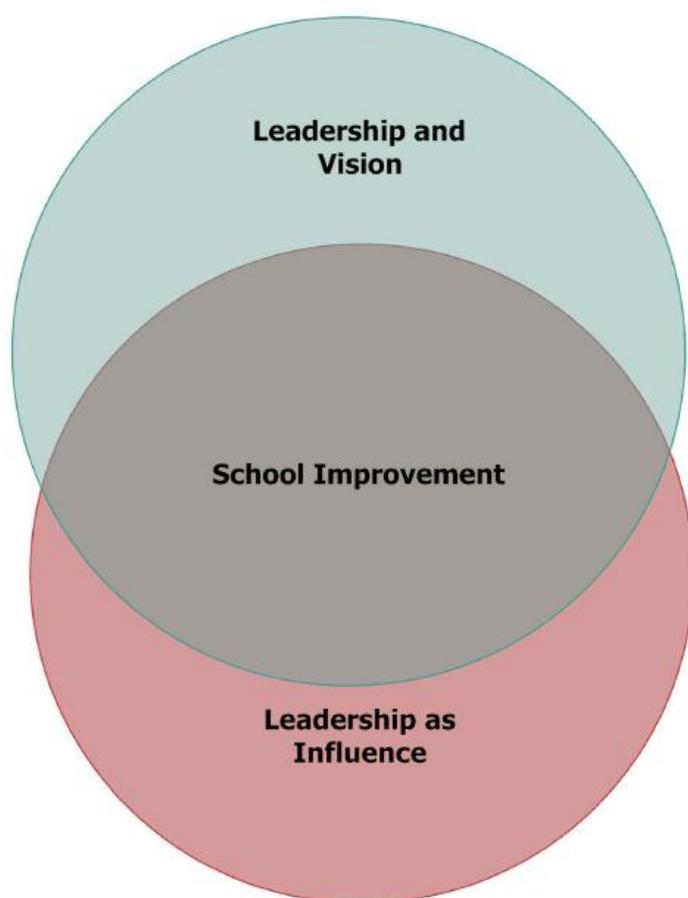


Figure 10a The Bush (2011) Model and School Improvement 1

5.3 Headteachers' Understanding of their Central Role in the Process of How Schools Improve

The adaptation of Layder's (1993) research map (see section 4.10.2) is used to look at this theme in terms of the contextual and setting levels. The "situated" and "self levels" (Layder, 1993 p72) are more useful when looking at headteacher reflexivity, authenticity and meta-reflection later in the analysis.

The connection between the headteacher and his or her ability to improve his or her school was best expressed by an experienced headteacher about his role:

"the focus of the school and your role as Head has evolved into you becoming the centre of your school – part of its story" (Headteacher Philip School D Int 5 p6)

The identification between role and school is not just a matter of focus but a question of evolving into being part of one's school. Evolution is the gradual change of an organism's characteristics over time and the evidence in this study suggest that schools become part of the headteachers that lead them in the same way as the headteachers become part of their schools:

"there are days when I really can't stand it but like all significant relationship there's love and hate" (Headteacher George School A Int 2 p5)

5.3.1. Contextual Analysis of School Improvement: Accountability

When specifically asked about the way headteachers improved their schools all participants understood their accountability to be the main driver of change (Smith,

2008). At a contextual level the government have been clear about the accountability of headteachers in ensuring that the education system improves (Bolam et al., 1993, Department for Education, 2010). It is not surprising that this is well understood by headteachers but the data shows how headteachers internalise this accountability.

This was implicit in all the responses but best summarised by the following headteacher:

“the part that [I am] most proud of is that [my school] has sustained its improvement. That is the bit that you would say, when I look at School A I know that’s the bit that we do really well and always have done well even before I joined.” (Headteacher George School A Int 2 p5)

There was a real sense of pride and achievement that underpinned this comment which was typical of all the headteachers’ attitudes to their view of their schools’ continued improvement. It also confirms that this sample of headteachers had heeded the warning to respect and work with the prevailing culture (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992). In spite of the pressure that results from accountability headteachers commonly expressed how much they valued their role in school improvement, for example:

“...it is deeply frustrating nearly all of the time but it is a great job and I can’t imagine doing anything else”
headteacher Thomas School E Int 2 p4

Levels of headteacher satisfaction have become a research interest of NCSL who have been commissioned by the government to ensure there are ways of bridging

the demographic gap which threatens to leave the country without enough suitably qualified headteachers in the next few years (Birney and Reed, 2009).

This research suggests that headteachers understand the nature of their accountability. At this contextual level the reality that one may lose one's livelihood is a constant reality. This was often referred to flippantly and in passing but it was always present:

"...if I'm still here after our next Ofsted"
(Headteacher Robert School F Int4 p1)

"I intend to stay, if my governors continue to believe in me, for another two years"
(Headteacher Percy School B Int1 p1)

Whilst none of the headteachers in the sample did lose their jobs during this study the threat was felt by all colleagues many of whom knew two ex-colleagues of schools locally that had closed since 2002:

"...I saw Alex last week he was looking well but Ambergate School closing nearly killed him, he become toxic no one would touch him with a failed Ofsted on his record"
(Headteacher Percy School D Int 2 p1)

" ...we are all only our next inspection away from being asked to resign..."
(Headteacher Philip School D Int 2 p1)

There were several references to government policy in the data, most notably the rebuilding of the secondary schools' estate begun by the Blair Government called Building Schools for the Future (BSF) (Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2010). Whilst this

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was at the time of the research perceived as generally positive many heads were uncertain about the plans becoming a reality:

"...well if BSF happens..."
(Headteacher George School A Int 2 p6)

"...if we spend as much time building things as talking about them I would feel happier"
(Headteacher Philip School D Int 2 p9)

"it's been 3 years and not a sod has been turned"
(Headteacher Robert School F Int 4 p2)

For some schools the impact of this government policy was negative. This takes us back to the accountability felt by heads about their school continuing to improve even in the face of the distraction posed by something as intrusive as BSF:

"headteachers in later waves continue to take on a high degree of responsibility for engaging with the programme, indicating that headteachers may feel the need to engage more directly in order to achieve specific outcomes for their school" (Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2010 p54)

This headteacher however felt more responsible for the impact on his school even though he was at the same risk as the rest of his staff:

"everything looked good and hopeful and it really was you know the roses coming out and then as we went into the Autumn and things started to change in terms of BSF and it became very clear what was going to happen there was the hitting the rocks you know and you had to make one or two tough decisions about staff"
(Headteacher Benjamin School B Int 2 p2).

For one headteacher BSF represented all that was interfering and over centralised about government initiatives to support school improvement:

"we had to go to the point where we were saying no we are not going with this, we are not sacrificing the future of the school for a £20

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million one off investment. It said a lot about the mind-set of the authority that they couldn't believe that" (Headteacher William School C Int 1 p3)

The subsequent government cancelled the BSF programme on the grounds of cost and in response to sentiments similar to those expressed by Headteacher William. The impact of a policy designed to inject capital investment was generally positive for the schools in the sample, but it was ultimately considered to be a distraction from the centrality of being a headteacher:

"I was totally side-tracked by the BSF stuff, all my energies emotional energy, strategic energy went into that how I managed this and I took my eye off [my Ofsted inspection]" (Headteacher Benjamin School B Int 3 p4)

Other aspects of government policy also appeared in the data, but headteachers seemed mainly interested in how they would be able to implement policy in ways which would not harm their students:

"keeping away from National Challenge is the first thing to avoid that could really push the school backwards" (Headteacher Philip School D Int 2 p6)

In summary we can see that at a contextual level the data in this study confirms the published research that headteachers readily articulate their understanding of the central role they play in school improvement in terms of accountability and responsibility. Headteachers operated within the political discourse created by government policies in the best interests of the learners for whom they were ultimately responsible regardless of their personal politics. This was expressed succinctly by this headteacher in his final interview:

"...there are certain things in the role of Headship that I wake up some mornings and I have no opinion on, but by the end of the day I will have an opinion on it, and that to you may be a pragmatic view and may change but that day, you know"
(Headteacher Philip School D Int 5 p2)

5.3.2 Setting Analysis of School Improvement: Responsibility

At the "setting level" of the model derived from Layder's (1993) research map, the school as institution sits in the centre of the analysis. We would expect this institutional level to be the richest vein of data around headteacher responsibility due to the nature of the role. Headteachers are often identified with their school and certainly the press blame the failure of a school on the existing headteacher. This is partly due to the clear agenda from Ofsted that the failure of a school to improve (or continue to thrive) is a result of the failure of leadership in a school:

"In all but a few cases the headteacher is new to the school either just before or just after the inspection. The change of headteacher has given the school the impetus to develop and improve the quality of the education provided for the pupils. The new headteacher has brought renewed drive and enthusiasm. In schools removed from special measures the headteachers have played a vital role in sustaining the improvement of the school" (HMCI, 2001 p8)

Therefore, when discussing school improvement at an institutional level the nature of headteachers' leadership must also be discussed. The theme of leadership is picked up later but when headteachers talk about how they improved their school they are also often talking about their own leadership. This was described by a headteacher as follows:

"...we all know how that [school failure and the removal of a headteacher] happens because these are the institutions we all work

in but at the end of the day it's a failure of my organisation that, that happens so I am accountable and responsible for it and I am thinking something's going to happen, and there is always that something what have I missed" (Headteacher Thomas School A Int 2 p8)

This is was a very typical view and was a subtext in all the data as if all

headteachers are given a personal copy of the sign on Harry Truman's desk.



Figure 11 The desk sign from the Harry Truman Museum

We need only look again at the National Standards for Headteacher to appreciate that there is little for which headteachers are not responsible (DfES, 2004).

The act of improvement is in some ways an act of change (Hopkins, 2001 p37). It was clear from the research that in their schools, headteachers have a sense of responsibility for the progress made and are acutely aware of any circumstances where progress may not be made. The words "my school" and a general sense of ownership runs through all of the interviews and is used by all headteachers. Two good examples of this were from two of the longest serving heads:

"There are bits when it is about defending turf we all understand that sense of 'my school' thing" (Headteacher John School A Int 1 p24)

"we have too many people doing their own thing it's about my standards I thought it was about our standards and then to rearticulate what they are and to hold people to account" (Headteacher William School C Int 1 p8)

What is clear is that at both the contextual (i.e. external to the school) level and the setting (i.e. internal to the school) level headteachers take on the responsibility to identify with their schools and possibly by extension, if all schools have to be involved in improving and sustaining improvement possibly headteachers are also in the business of self-improvement as well.

There is a distinction in the data from headteachers of the schools who felt they were making better progress on their improvement journey and those who still needed to be careful not to slip back. All the headteachers were very much actively involved in their school every day with students and staff:

“So this is actually working with kids from the day they arrive here if not before and [you]say this is your potential, let’s not talk about when we are going to leave at the end of year 11” (Headteacher Thomas School E Int 1 p6)

“but my agenda was children. They weren’t getting a good deal. And the other thing was I have this thing if you make a promise to parents you have to fulfil it, you have to honour it day in and day out” (Headteacher William School C Int 1 p2)

5.3.3 –Responsibility and Accountability: Choosing the “Right People”

At an institutional or setting level the creation of the institution for which one feels ownership is by appointing people to the school. This idea of propriety also extends to the relationship between headteachers and their staff. A headteacher who at the time was in his first year of appointment described the importance of staff in helping improve schools in the following manner:

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“So I think probably the first thing for me if you are looking at sustaining improvement in a school is establishing a teaching staff which first of all works to a very high standard” (Headteacher Robert School F Interview 1 p2)

Perhaps the most important responsibility that headteachers have is to be able to assess how the teachers who work for them relate appropriately to the young people in their care (Brighouse and Woods, 1999). Getting the staff right means there is a much greater chance of getting the learning right and giving young people a consistent experience.

Clearly this extends to recruitment and retention of staff; it is an axiom among headteachers that employing the right staff is the most important thing a headteacher ever does and the consequences of getting it wrong can be devastating on a school and the young people whom it serves:

“whenever I employ staff I do make the point very, very clearly that you have to be yourself if you come to this school. The gift that you bring is yourself and I want you to be that person in the classroom, in the corridor” (Headteacher William School C Interview 1 p22)

“I brought in this most dynamic senior leader best appointment I’ve ever made.” (Headteacher John School A Interview 1 p9)

The data indicates that the establishment of this ‘staff’ is neither accidental nor ever a finished process. Indeed the value heads put on being able to recruit good teachers to help them improve their schools is richly described in the data:

“[What headteachers must do is keep the] teaching staff engaged and on a constant learning curve so that they can feel that they are themselves learning and getting something from it. [Then they] are enthusiastic [and] enjoy working with the youngsters” (Headteacher Robert School F Interview 1 p3)

There is also the pressure on headteachers to address underperforming staff and be accountable to external scrutiny (MacBeath, 2006b).

“I think all staff get frightened when you say that they want you to challenge poor teachers” (Headteacher John School A Interview 1 p5)

Headteachers needed not just to know their staff well and be able accurately to assess their strengths and weaknesses, but they also needed to ensure this judgement is in line with external arbiters like Ofsted:

“[Ofsted] were happy to say this school does know its staff and we got the turnover you know where we have got good teachers in the staff room that makes the difference.” (Headteacher Thomas School Benjamin Interview 1 p19)

It was clear from the data that this need to keep staff enthusiastic and positive in their dealings with young people was most keenly felt by heads. Inertia in professional development is damaging to children and schools in general.

(Brighouse, 1991) Part of getting the people right is to be able to make timely judgements and deal with teachers who are unable or unwilling to make the appropriate adjustments to the educational contexts (locally and nationally) that they find themselves in:

“most of the staff wanted to do a good job and knew what the criteria were for success they bought into it and it allowed me the opportunity to go and to affirm people and to develop a culture where people actually wanted to go the extra mile increasingly. Once that happens it then became a question of reinforcing them and it allowed us to move into a new phase as a school where we could work through staff and use staff as the key to school improvement” (Headteacher William School C Int 1 p3)

In many ways the most important people for a headteacher to get right is the leadership team that support them. It was a common feature in the data that

headteachers were especially sensitive to the quality of their senior teams and their sense of accountability.

"I would make sure that I knew everyone who was meant to be on their job particularly the senior team initially and I would go through the management structure to make sure that everybody was on the ball, you know, what are they doing how do we know, where is the impact I would certainly do that and as I say I would probably be a little bit harder nosed to the people who are in positions of responsibility to know what they are doing, are they doing things right, is there an impact and if so tell me what it is and how we can measure it you know because that's how we are measured
(Headteacher Benjamin School B Interview 3 p22)

The importance of senior teams is also represented in the data. All headteachers reported having special relationships with their teams in general and with individuals specifically:

"the relationship with the leadership team alone has an enormous impact on your effectiveness as a Head and the journey you have as a Head and your effectiveness because you don't have to like each other to be an effective team but the relationship with the senior team is crucial (Head Philip School D Int 5)

"...Carol [his deputy] is an essential part of how we get through the hard bits..."
(Headteacher Benjamin School B Int 3 p7)

This very strong link between creating the correct staff team at all levels and creating in and through that team the correct culture to continue to improve a school is developed further in the following section.

5.3.4 The Nature of the Creation of a Shared Culture of Improvement

It is not simply about choosing the right staff to begin with because in most contexts headteachers have to improve their schools with the staff they already have

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(Calveley, 2005 p97). The pressure to keep staff refreshed and ready for the challenge was made clear by headteacher Robert:

“[there is a] high degree of difficulty in recruiting high quality staff who would stay at it and who retained their enthusiasm and love of teaching” (Headteacher Robert School F Interview 1 p1).

Headteacher Robert was very clear about the importance of alignment with a culture of change and improvement. Headteacher William knew this and also articulated and the personal implications for individual headteachers having to make hard decisions for the good of the school community:

“I knew that not everyone would buy into that and therefore I was very consciously going about removing staff from the school and I think in the first three years probably about 70% of the staff left and that was very, very hard because that is not naturally the way in which I work and I think if I got a knife in my back it could be one of about a hundred people who stuck it there” (Headteacher William School C Interview 1 p1).

This need for staff alignment to change culture was confirmed consistently across the sample and was clearly a conscious act of leadership. The headteachers here were explicit about accepting the responsibility for establishing the principles which underpinned the individual members of staff for whom they were responsible. This is the basis for the “people wisdom” described by Davies (2005b p23). Two different headteachers gave examples of the focus that headteachers need to give to the induction of new staff:

“I took a tremendous amount of time directly and through the leadership team in the induction of new staff into the values and expectations so effectively every new member of staff was at one with my views of what the school was going to become” (Headteacher Benjamin School B Interview 3 p3)

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“the increasing number of new staff allowed a situation to develop where the culture changed but I can still remember when I was changing the school day staff threatening to go on strike having meetings off site and very difficult confrontations with people who were determined not to change and I equally was determined not to be stopped in making improvements for the school” (Headteacher William School C Int 3 p2)

Headteachers however are not all knowing, indeed this study is an examination of the ways headteachers use their professional context to access inner reflexive resources in order to understand professional situations and inform their actions. The data shows that because the leader is immersed in the culture that they are attempting to create, they do not always know that the culture has been established:

“...for the first time ever I realised that the new culture had been established and that there were sufficient staff who subscribed to the agenda and who wanted to make it happen and it then became a process of consolidation and affirmation” (Headteacher William School C Int 3 p5)

This same headteacher was also clear about the need to keep the culture of a school constantly under review, his metaphor implying that there is always a required tension if school improvement is to be sustained. It also explains the aspect of headship which makes it (however good one’s leadership team) a lonely place:

“when I review my time here even now I would say its elastic the culture of the organisation is elastic and it will snap back to what it used to be if you ever let go” (Headteacher William School C Int 2 p8)

5.3.5 The Complex Phases of School Improvement

If it is true that school improvement is desirable, or even a political imperative, then there is an interesting question as to whether the process of improvement in schools is simple or complex. If school improvement is simple, it might be expected that the process of rigorous external inspection (Ofsted) and strong legislative powers (ERA) to intervene in those schools would have resulted eventually in there being no failing schools. However, as described above, schools not only continue not to improve but some oscillate between success and failure, hence the search for sustained improvement. This is not to say that Ofsted has not produced some very useful research into how this process works in very challenging schools (Matthews, 2009), but after nearly 20 years of this inspection process the government still believes progress in school improvement is not significant enough (Department for Education, 2010 p56).

The headteachers in this study reflected this tension between the simple/straightforward sense of improvement and a more complex and multi-faceted form of improvement. There was a split between those headteachers who had been in post for several years and those who were relatively new to headship. The analysis shows that the more experienced headteachers described school improvement as being part of a process sometimes of interconnecting strategies for example:

“The second stage of the Headship was challenging those issues, consequent to that I had quite a high staff turnover of people for a bit and all the challenges that go with that as you know being stuck around whatever current government target there is and being stuck

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around that level and all the issues that go with it. That's number two and number three was taking over School H [a school that closed just before the research study began], and number four is setting it up as we are now and if I was staying I would be into number five.
(Headteacher Philip School D Int 5 p5)

Another very experienced practitioner described the process of headship in the early years of one's post in terms of the reality television show "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire". There is a section in this game show when a contestant can choose several options to either obtain or check the answer to a question in order to win money:

"Is that really like phoning a friend the concept of Millionaire is fantastic because it is about pitting yourself against the challenge so your credibility is lying out there? So are you...putting your credibility in the hands of 200 strangers? When are the audience important? or not and when do you ask them? When it's straightforward or more complex? When do you phone an expert? How do you choose them? And [what] if your knowledge is conflicting with their advice? ... I think it is a bit like this (it sounds silly but) leading an institution you've got all those bits. Because Chris Tarrant is saying to you here is a question and here are some possible answers, and that's what you've got as a head. So today you've got a question and you've got possible answers on what basis do you make the decision? When do you decide to ask someone else's advice? When do take it? Who do you ask?"
(Headteacher John School A Int 1 p21)

This acknowledges the complexity in terms of the information available to the leader about a range of decisions he or she is required to take, but the most resonant part of the data is the last question, "who do you ask?" which according to the field notes was intended to be rhetorical but in the analysis began to represent an important aspect which united the themes of school improvement, school leadership, authenticity and reflexivity.

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The external asker of questions has many guises Brighouse and Woods describe the "critical friend" as asking:

"the right sort of question at the right time to pitch collective expectation just ahead of collective self-esteem" (Brighouse and Woods, 1999 p18).

Beyond the external there is also a collaborative nature to find the right person to ask. Sergiovanni (1992) suggests this comes from within an organisation. He makes the point about the concept of "purposing" which he defines as "the vision of the school leaders and the covenant that the school shares[with its internal stakeholders]" (Sergiovanni, 1992 p73). This idea was certainly present in the data and a covenantal contract like the one he describes was expressed by headteacher William:

"We are all in this together the staff who work here ask the questions we need to keep refreshed" (Headteacher William School C Int 1 p5).

In its most simplistic terms school improvement can be reduced to the judgements that immediately tip schools into an Ofsted category i.e. "how close are your standards to the national average?" and "how good are your levels of behaviour and attendance?" Whilst this reductionist view is unfair to the professional service provided by the HMI, if these questions cannot be adequately answered the more interesting questions do not get asked. Nevertheless experienced headteachers viewed the drivers that sustain schools in a more rounded sense:

"I think there are long term factors there which are wider because you are talking about attitudes to learning and so on of students and staff which needs to be developed in a much wider way than just focusing on standards" (Headteacher John School D Int 5 p15).

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Another example of this suggests that it is an awareness of the complexity of how schools improve which enables schools to thrive:

“so the question there is that actually we kind of know it’s more complex than that and that’s why our job is sometimes harder than just drive the standards and if we only drove the standards we would miss – it wouldn’t work, well it would work to a point maybe, but it would collapse” (Headteacher Percy School G Int 5 p15)

Both these comments also emanate from a deeper moral purpose which is a well-established theme in the literature of leadership perhaps best described as:

“...having a system where all students learn, the gap between high and low performers becomes greatly reduced and what people learn enables them to become successful citizens” (Fullan, 2003 p29).

In the data this same purpose was described with passion from a practitioner who lives this moral imperative with his staff, students and community every day:

“I think too that the purpose of Education, broadly, is something that I find very stimulating the idea that we are here to improve the life chances of young people seems to me to be a fantastic cause and a moral purpose” (Headteacher Benjamin School B Int 1 p4)

This cannot be a simple process although the “new” headteachers in this sample understood where to start:

“Well bearing in mind that I haven’t been in post for a year and...this is my first headship, I like the fact that it is a very dynamic job, it is a people centred job there’s all sorts of things around it” (Headteacher Benjamin School B Int 1 p5)

This implies that school improvement in some respects is simple if it were not for the complication of the people and their organisations into communities of learners (Schon, 1987 p4). This desire to become organised into these communities stems from people’s natural ability to reflect and to learn to trust others we find ourselves

with, an almost as an evolutionary instinct (Hutchison, 2011 p439). Another

headteacher in early headship described improvement as being able to:

“look at the school as it is and say ok where are the bits that are going well we need to do more than that if we have some examples of things that are not going well we need to pick up the best practice from elsewhere and bring it in we need to have the courage to say to someone ok you have got a good creative idea I want you to go and run with that and come back with some suggestions and we can see where we can go...” (Headteacher Robert School F Int 1 p3).

This courage that a new headteacher identified is fed by his or her moral core and an awareness of how other interested partners add to the mix that becomes the way an individual school improves. This also links neatly to the way school improvement can be sustained by headteachers. For the more experienced headteacher who has been through the phases of school improvement (MacBeath, 2007) the solution goes back to integrity and young people:

“It’s the moral integrity, I only want for the children in this school what I want for my own children nothing less is ever good enough and its that thing that exercises my consciousness every single day, the promise you make to parents has to be the reality” (Headteacher William School C int2 p2)

The headteacher’ role, therefore, must be to hold to this moral integrity and deliver what is a complex process in terms that not only stakeholders understand but that resonates with the inner moral core of the leader.

This leads into the area where leadership as influence interfaces with a school leader’s values and vision which will be discussed in chapter 6.

5.4 Conclusion

In summary the analysis of the theme of school improvement used Layder's research map to examine the context of the data which concentrated on government policy, other national initiatives including the NCSL and Ofsted. All the interviewees had clear views about this national context but dealt with these pressures pragmatically and remained focused on their individual schools.

At the setting level of the model the school or institution dominated the analysis.

The data showed that headteachers were most happy about looking at the schools both in terms of collaboration and competition. The analysis of the data then moved towards headteachers' personal values.

Our journey into the data continues looking firstly at how school improvement is actually sustained by individual headteachers for several years and examines what might be some of the reasons headteachers remain in post in what are often challenging schools when one might expect career pressures to encourage them to move sooner.

In the next section there is an examination of the situated context of the actual conversations headteacher to headteacher and an exploration of how headteachers define leadership. Overlaying this is Bush's (2011) model of the domains of leadership which illuminates how headteachers used influence to lead in their schools. The data will show by an examination of how headteachers express values and vision the manner in which they lead their schools. The concept of leadership

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shown in the data is as complex as the research literature described in chapter 2 and gives an analysis of the day to day realities of current secondary school headship.

Chapter 6

Data Analysis: Theme 2 – The Leadership of the Headteacher

6.1 Introduction

The premise of this chapter is that the leadership of schools is important. One of many examples from the literature is from Sergiovanni (2000) who asserts that schools:

“need special leadership because schools are special places... [they] respond well to the unique political realities they face” (Sergiovanni, 2000 p165)

This is also supported by Bush (2011) and the analysis in this chapter will show how headteachers vocalised their understanding of the importance of both vision and values in the operational “day to day” leadership. Layder’s (1993) research map is also used to delineate the different levels at which headteachers operate in their practice of leadership in their schools.

The data in this study from the approximately fifty hours of conversations between headteachers found Sergiovanni’s (2000) assertion to be well founded. His argument for this special case is based on his view that whilst businesses have to operate with a wide range of stakeholders, an appeal to only a few of them is required for the organisation to be successful. Schools, on the other hand, face the challenge to appeal to all the stakeholders at the same time even when different stakeholders apply contradictory and conflicting pressures on the school. The rewards for getting leadership in schools right, whilst it might not lead to great

personal gain, is more than compensated for by the knowledge that success is measured in terms of a positive impact on the lives of young people.

6.1.1 The Bush (2011) Model of Leadership - Values and Vision

In figure 10a the two domains of leadership as influence and leadership as vision were highlighted to help analyse the data from the sample. In this chapter the importance of values and vision is focused upon in order to reveal the way headteachers describe their satisfaction with their roles and the manner in which they are able to sustain the pressure of headship for several years.

Figure 10b shows the crossover area between vision and values that informs the on-going discussion of headteacher realities in this chapter.

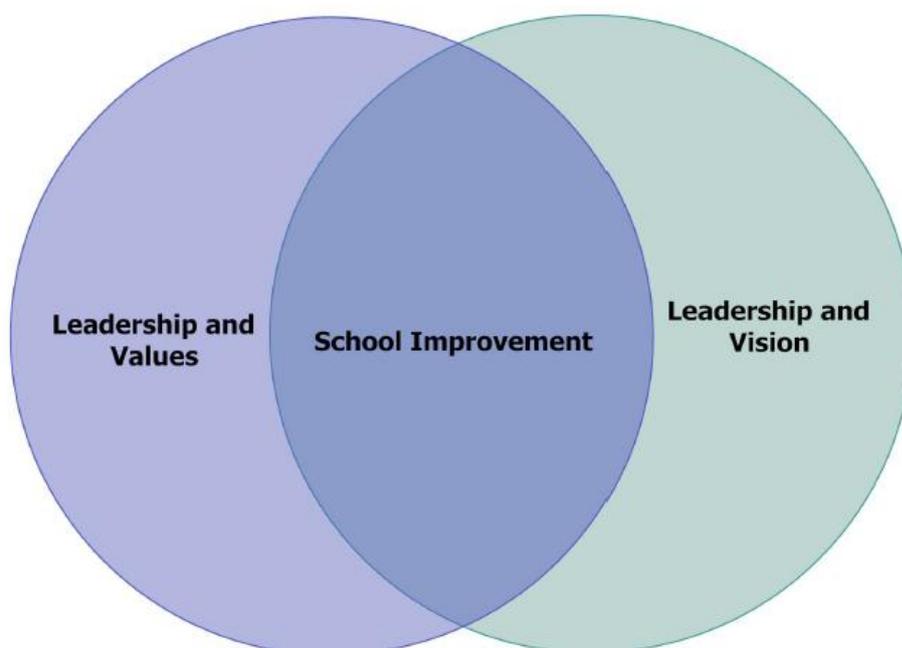


Figure 10b The Bush (2011) Model and School Improvement 2

6.2 Values and Longevity of Leadership

A discussion of values and how it linked to vision to achieve school improvement was very strongly represented in the data. All headteachers made explicit reference to both values and vision and those headteachers, like headteacher Robert, who were new to the role realised that an understanding of values and vision would improve with time:

“...I think partly I know that I need to be here for a significant period of time” (Headteacher Robert School F Int 1 p3).

This sentence was from headteacher Robert in his first term. There is a significant amount of data suggesting that being a headteacher and improving a school in a sustained manner cannot be done quickly. There are many high profile examples of “turning schools around” quickly which have failed in the long term the most celebrated being The Ridings School in West Yorkshire which despite a “hero” being brought in from a neighbouring school (Clarke, 1998) did not stop the school closing (BBC, 2007). The book which charted the “transformation” described a year which stabilised the school but did not change enough of the things that were beyond the superficial to allow the school to thrive in the long term. The data in this study suggests that if headteachers are serious about sustaining the improvements in their schools for the long term they need to be committed to staying in the school for a significant period of time. It builds on the sense of propriety discussed earlier (see Section 5.3.2) and gives stakeholders confidence about the continuing progress of the school.

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An experienced headteacher described the importance of values and being “part of his school” in terms of the cultural drivers of school improvement that can sustain improvement (Hopkins, 1987a p2):

“If attitudes to learning and attitudes to school and values and all those things [that] are important for kids to achieve, well then it takes a long time for that to be developed” (Head Philip School D Int 18)

Another experienced headteacher in the study, who was at the point of moving into another role out of his school, described the association a headteacher feels for his or her school in the following manner:

“I think where I’ve got away with it [leaving one’s post on one’s own terms] I’ve been around for 15 years they know I’m not going anywhere they know I have my heart at School A (Headteacher John School, A Int 1 p5).

The exact amount of time that a headteacher should remain in post in his or her school is interesting and the research is continuing to refine the answer to this sort of question (Earley and Weindling, 2007, Ingate, 2010a). All the “experienced” headteachers in this study would have fallen into the sixth stage of headship described by Earley and Weindling (2004 p29) but whether they had revitalised themselves in the way Flintham (2004 p17) described did not form part of this study. What the data did display was that headteachers in this sample understood the relationship between sustainability and intellect:

“what gives you that kind of succour what refreshes you it is like that kind of intellectual thinking” (Headteacher Benjamin School B Interview 3 p20)

It was also clear that experienced headteachers had an awareness of the concept of a "shelf-life" (Earley and Weindling, 2007) and had considered the precariousness of their publicly accountable positions:

"but I do know that the friendship and the networking that I have sustains me, it gives me the courage to say well fair enough I will continue to be different, I will continue to do it my way and when the time comes to be got out or to be tripped up at least I have a network of friends there who will carry me through the difficult times and see me through the exit door" (Headteacher William School C Int 2 p5).

The most experienced head had been in post for more than fifteen years and had consistently had his school judged "outstanding" by Ofsted. During a dialogue towards the end of the research study headteachers William and Percy discussed how long headteachers could remain in post and retain being effective in their roles. His comments about the longevity of headteachers are very clear:

"...what makes a difference, and we have been to presentations ourselves haven't we? where these Sigmoid Curves are presented with a seven year cycle to Headship, after which your effectiveness is diminished well I don't buy into that, OK I'm at the end of fifteen years of Headship and I still think I have lots of energy lots of ideas" (Headteacher William School C Int 4 p13)

This headteacher's clarity and belief in what he was doing was striking at the time of his interview and his confidence about the future would fit into the recent practitioner research done by Ingate (2010a) which is part of the NCSL's drive to close the demographic gap. Munby (2010) Stroud (2006) and Woods (2009) also researched into how experienced headteachers perceived their roles. They found that for some headteachers there is no dip in enthusiasm; they "never decline and do not need revitalising by an external source" (Stroud, 2006 p101). Of the four most experienced headteachers (those in post for more than eight years) two (John

and Philip) had the intention of moving towards a role which could be described as "system leadership" (Ingate, 2010a p22). This form of leadership is characterised as being beyond a single institution and refers to federations and trusts made up from different stakeholders (Hopkins and Higham, 2007). The other two headteachers (William and Percy) remained committed to sustaining their schools in the current context. This is not to underplay the pressures that make some headteachers become "stumblers" (Flintham, 2010 p65):

"talking about sustaining leadership, sustaining Headship, making it more than a seven year [stretch], if that, or burnout..I mean the demands are huge" (Headteacher Robert School F Int 4 p13)

The real value for a school is found when an experienced headteacher who is very realistic about his or her faults stays in post for a substantial time without losing his or her passion for being a headteacher. One of the headteachers in this sample was such a head:

"I do genuinely believe that for there to be real and substantive change and improvement...over the long term, it is through tweaking but it also requires stability of leadership and I think that is part of the challenge of today's educational environment. So much mitigates against that there are so many pressures which reduce the tenure to much shorter time-spans and its always that you [governors or the LEA that] have to change the Head" (Headteacher William School C Int 3 p7)

A practitioner report for NCSL in 2009 describe such individuals as "enchanted headteachers" (Woods, 2009 p4) which seems very appropriate.

6.3 Vision and the Culture of Improvement

An extension to the theme of culture that emerged in the analysis was the way in which a headteacher's vision became a more generalised concept and widened out to capture the majority of staff and other stakeholders who could then buy into this belief in the school's capacity to improve (Harris, 2005). Vision was also an important domain in the Bush (2011) model (see figure 10b) and the interface between values and vision the data in this study shows is a fertile site for school improvement.

Heads could also see the evidence of where the impact of this alignment with the new vision of learning began to work for the school. The journey from 'your school' to 'our school' which coincided, for headteacher William, with an expression of authenticity:

"you need to have integrity and every layer in a school community becomes the nature of the people that you are here to serve and children are the greatest discerners of who is a bluffer and who is being true in the person that they are" (Headteacher William School C Interview 3 p7)

For headteacher William this focus on students gave him strength but many headteachers felt separated from their staff by need to focus on values and vision. This theme of how headteachers felt isolated and how they managed these feelings will be picked up later, but suffice to say the deep personal support that all professionals need to sustain them, according to these data, does not come from outside the school structure but from the people within it:

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"I find remarkably that staff are very sensitive and supportive of me and that has moved me on many occasions" (Headteacher William School C Interview 1 p7)

"but I would rather have the staff on side and committed to the school than staff who don't like being there" (Headteacher Philip School D Interview 1 p5)

This capacity of school leaders to be both firm and robust in their high expectations but also making very personal connections with their staff was described by Leithwood et al (2006).

The need to hold steady in the face of pressure is a theme commonly expressed by a number of the headteachers in the study. There is strong evidence from the data that headteachers coming in new felt the need to change their school quickly and this was often manifest in their dealings with staff (MacBeath, 2007):

"what you do is confront the problem not the person and I use that with children all the time all the time to a certain extent with staff as well and that's started to rub off on different members of staff as well" (Headteacher John School A Interview 1 p15)

The data shows a clear relationship between how headteachers use their vision to create a culture to improve their schools. They also work hard to encourage the people they lead to also align their personal visions of school with this "new" vision. Finally they keep the pressure on in order to maintain and sustain improvement:

"...this culture that we have now that we have moved to, everybody sees that's the norm, that's the way it always has been, but it wasn't" (Headteacher William School C Interview 1 p19)

For headteacher William, sustaining school improvement has become the new "norm" and his staff have aligned their vision to this "reality" which itself has come

from headteacher William's vision for his school. He continued fascinated by capturing the reflective moment of understanding of noticing the impact of his own leadership:

and it absolutely fascinates me you know the longstanding members of staff who have gone through all that who buy into what we have now...and I don't understand that, I find that fascinating.
(Headteacher William School C Interview 1 p20)

An awareness of how school culture interacts with the wider community culture outside the school was also identified by headteachers:

"Because you have to change the culture and not just the culture within the school but the culture of parenting and the behaviours outside the school and that is where the long term challenge is for sustainability in a place like Ethrington" (Headteacher Robert School F Int 1 p5)

This need to go beyond the school's boundaries is what Fullan (2003 p49) describes as the societal level of change and was succinctly summed up by a headteacher as:

"creating a whole culture shift...that takes a much much longer [time]and to me the sustainability there, is in developing a truly extended school with resources and facilities that are actually open to your parental catchment so that you are drawing parents in you look at possibly working through all models you get them engaged from the earliest stages with reading with kids and possibly improving their own literacy skills" (Headteacher Robert School F Int 1 p7)

6.4 Leadership as a Political Activity

There can be little doubt that the leadership of schools is a highly political activity in both local and national terms (Berliner, 2005 p37). Layder provides for this in his research map but this also resonates with Bush's (2011) definition of "leadership as

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influence" (Bush, 2011b p5) Steve Munby's 2009 speech to the annual conference of the NCSL as its Chief Executive described leadership in the following way:

"As leaders in today's complex world, we have many different but critical roles to play – as leaders of people, as leaders of organisations, and as leaders of the wider system and community. Together, we are helping to lead the futures of millions of children and young people in this country" (Munby, 2009).

The understanding of the enormity of this responsibility (the futures of millions of children and young people) was clearly understood by all the headteachers in this study and all found this truth to ground their practice – it was why they came to work.

These micro and macro political realities of leading schools were very clear in the data and different headteachers had different strategies for managing the tensions caused by this type of external pressure on their core values:

"I think that good headteachers...are good at interpreting legislation interpreting innovation and then manipulating it to best meet the needs of their community I really do believe that and that means shaving things off and maybe distorting what the original intent was but often for a very good purpose"
(Headteacher William School C Int 2 p 22).

This takes courage and confidence and yet the attitude underlying this type of response was more common than the alternative i.e. to follow government policy to the letter or worry about the appropriate interpretation of a given policy. The more experienced headteacher William actually considered this characteristic to manipulate a policy initiative as a sign of being a "good" headteacher but this was also linked to serving the needs of the community that the school served. The moral

purpose here is clear and this headteacher believed that this act of subversion was for a higher moral purpose. This appears close to what Hoyle and Wallace (2005) describe as "principled infidelity" (p158) which they define as headteachers attempting not simply to be subversive, but to maintain true to their values.

Another example of the political pressures of headship was from the other end of the experience spectrum. There is here a rare sign of the stress involved in the job which will be discussed later in terms of the impact of headteacher to headteacher dialogues:

"I just felt as though I was constantly being knocked on the head. ...You put the radio on in the morning and hear from the government what are we supposed to do next, you know the teenage pregnancy one, every blooming thing under the sun is my fault, so I feel like one of those children's toys where the head pops up and you hit it with a hammer and then another head pops up and...I am being bashed over the head by government initiative after government initiative"
(headteacher George School A Int 2 p1)

This ability to cope with the external political pressures of the role, described by Smith and Cooper (1994) as the ambiguity of the leadership role which can result in personal and institutional stress, may explain the absence of high levels of stress that one may expect to find in a random sample of headteachers during a highly politicised period of education policy.

Another example of occasions where external pressures are articulated in the data was from a headteacher who had to deal with his school closing as a result of a reorganisation (related in part to the BSF process that was happening across the

district during the time of the study). He was fairly new to the post and described his experience of leadership in the following manner:

“the challenge for me, and it was a significant leadership challenge you know, you are not just talking about results you know and creating a better school and trying to develop an ethos..[and] trying to hold something together in balance for everybody and give everybody a perspective on it, [improving the school] saying don't worry I will do the best I can for our community and be as constructive about this [the pressures of all the stakeholders] as I can” (Headteacher Benjamin School B Interview 3 p5)

This same colleague was acutely aware of what was at stake and the responsibility that went with his role, as he made clear headteachers choose to be headteachers. Headship rarely happens accidentally or as headteacher Benjamin put it:

“you don't back into a Headship you really don't” (Headteacher Benjamin School B Interview 3 p22).

However, this headteacher also relished the challenges that went with his role even in difficult circumstances not of his own making:

“I like being at work I like going to work I like everything about it I like being the head” (Headteacher Benjamin School B Interview 3 p14)

This study found that whilst headteachers understood the enormity of the role they really enjoyed the reality of being a headteacher:

“This is the best job in the world I can't imagine doing anything else” (Headteacher Benjamin School B Int2 p3)

“I see it as a spiritual obligation” (Headteacher William School C Int2 p3)

“...there are the really bad days but I love it” (Headteacher Robert School F Int2 p3)

“heads are heads aren’t they? and you’re a grown up head now because you believe it don’t you? it has nothing to do with what is written on the door it is what you know”
(Headteacher Percy School A Int1 p1)

This last comment was almost a throwaway comment at the beginning of an early interview meant to reassure a colleague who had been recently promoted to headship and was still unsure of his right to be in this position of school leadership. It was said by the researcher headteacher in a humorous vein and received by the other headteacher in a similar manner. However, it does speak to the nature of school leadership and captures that essential requirement to lead – a belief that you are the right person to be doing this for the right reasons in the right school – what Fullan (2003 p45) called the moral imperative of school leadership.

6.5 Leadership and the Reflexive

During the analysis of leadership it became apparent that the interface between the data, headteacher Percy and the researcher headteacher (the last two roles being contained within the same person) began to reveal the landscape of reflexivity which is further developed in chapters 7 and 8, but the following offers a glimpse of such moments:

On the one hand this last comment could be considered deriving from a sense of smug collusion between two headteachers better expressed as in “I don’t need to explain to you what this thing called headship because it is obvious and we know what it is we do.” It could also imply that the characteristics of “this leadership” is part of a secret passing on of “knowledge”; and that once initiated one recognises other initiates implicitly. The role of the researcher as one of the headteachers in the study is interesting here because it is the personal reflexivity that points to attempting to define the process of school leadership. It is interesting, however, that the amount and quality of these data shows how the role and responsibility of school leadership can be described in ways that resonate in the research literature on leadership, authenticity and reflexivity.

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It is also helpful to look more closely at the final phrase of headteacher Percy's comment "it's what you know". There is a sense in the context of the conversation that this refers to the professional knowledge and personal qualities of being a headteacher. One may be called a headteacher but this is not the same as being a headteacher. What other headteachers can recognise in their peers is related to an understanding of the job they do and how they do it. At the very least it confirms Earley and Weindling's (2004) definition of "self-awareness" (Earley and Weindling, 2004 p12). This very specific relationship encapsulated in headteacher to headteacher dialogues is examined in more detail below.

The data points to the complexities of modern headship and the tension within the leadership role that is described by Trilling:

"It accords with the firmly held belief that beneath the appearance of every human phenomenon there lies concealed a discrepant actuality and that the intellectual...advantage is to be gained by forcibly bringing it to light" (Trilling, 1972 p142).

The discussion of leadership in chapter 2 identified some key characteristics one should expect to find in conversations with headteachers about how they sustained improvement in their schools:

"the most successful school leaders are open-minded and ready to learn from others. They are also flexible rather than dogmatic in their thinking within a system of core values, persistent (e.g. in pursuit of high expectations of staff motivation, commitment, learning and achievement for all), resilient and optimistic" (Leithwood et al., 2006 p14).

Whilst, this list would describe in the author's terms the very best of leaders, all the headteachers in the study showed most of these characteristics, at least one showed them all and three others showed a large number of them.

What is also clear in the data is that the headteachers' views about their own leadership fell very easily into Bush's (2011b) framework. The advantage of this framework is the broad areas offered by the definition. His description of the three dimensions of leadership is recognisable by the practitioner as well as the academic.

Bush's original model has moved on from figure 3 and also from the partial models of figures 10a and 10b and now sits as a Venn diagram with school improvement at its centre (though without the adaptations made in figures 5 and 6 see Chapter 3). Figure 12 brings together all of these interfaces and shows the centrality of school improvement in relation to leadership domains.

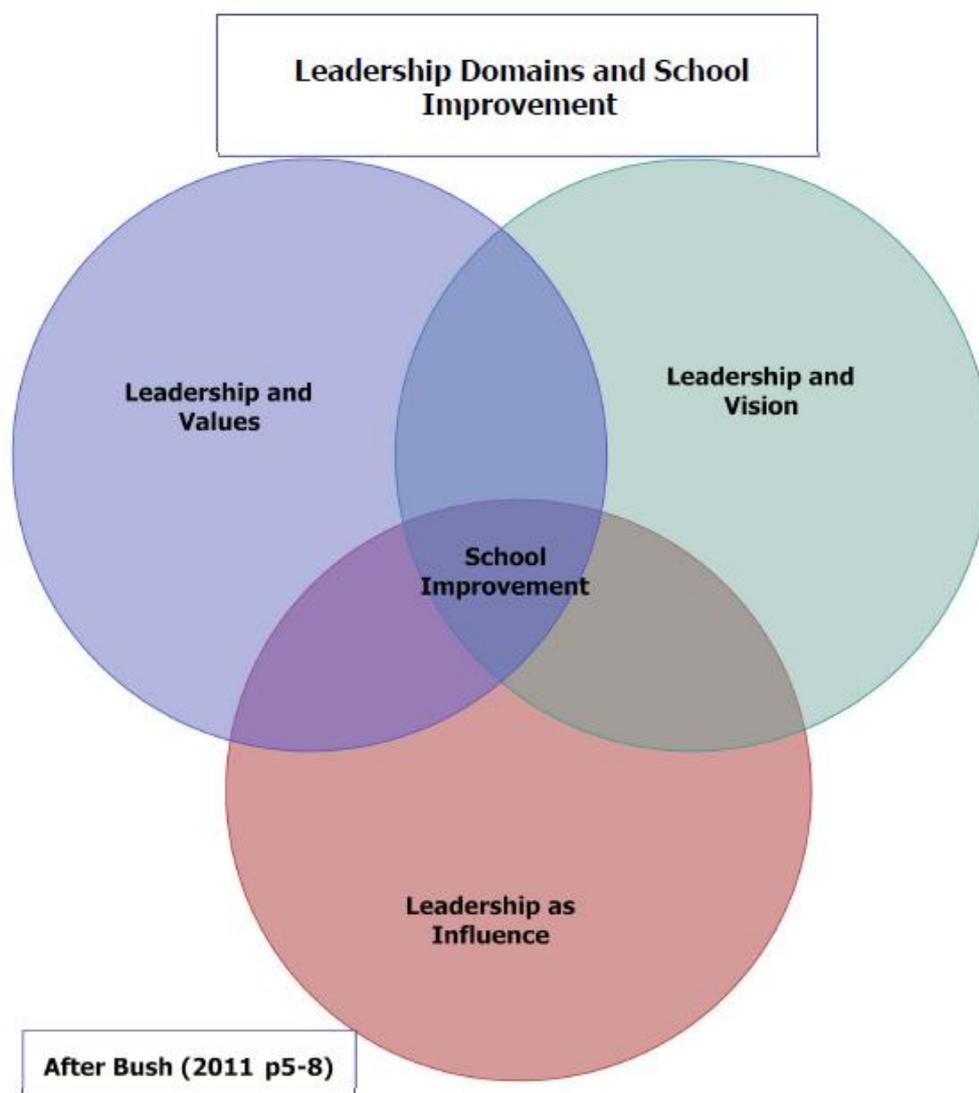


Figure 12 Bush's (2011) Leadership Domains and School Improvement

In addition to Layder's (1993) research map these dimensions of leadership also offer a useful way of linking the data to a deeper level. This analysis enables the researcher to check whether this sample is in line with previous research in this area. The role of headteachers in school improvement is complex and dynamic and the analytical tools used here allow for deeper insights which shifted towards an

interest in the role of reflection, reflexivity and meta-reflection in leadership and school improvement.

6.6 Leadership and Values

Discussion of values was never explicit in the early interview schedule, but they emerged as the methods of data collection evolved into a more open dialogical structure. The later conversations with headteachers were unstructured enough to allow for values to be brought up by any of the headteachers. What was interesting was the number of explicit comments and implicit allusions made about values given that this was not a specific research objective. Sergiovanni (2007) argues that this is inevitable if one is to examine the leadership of school improvement and especially sustainable improvement that Hopkins (2001) describes as "authentic" and Sergiovanni describes as "binding and bonding".

Table 16 Sergiovanni's Value Added Leadership

Value added transformational leadership	Leadership as 'binding and bonding'	Arousing awareness...that elevates organizational goals to the level of shared covenant and bond together leader and followers in a moral commitment	Cultural leadership Moral leadership Covenant building followership	Moral involvement of followers
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(Sergiovanni, 1990 p39-40)

For this part of the analysis each of the headteachers is referred to in turn identifying an example of their explicit comments about values that underpinned

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their practice as leaders. This also relates to Bush's (2011) leadership and values as well as Layder's (1993) "self" level.

Headteacher John only appeared in the data on one occasion because he left to take a leadership role at a system level, (Higham et al., 2009 p144) but was clear about his core motivation in terms of values:

"you've always got [to have] the best interests of the school at heart' I said yeah and that's it is the only way in which it can go. You have to be driven by the stuff that matters." (Headteacher John School A Int 1 p9)

Although this headteacher's replacement was different in nearly all respects they shared the ability to articulate core values:

"Which is why you have to trust your own instincts the things you know are really important" (headteacher George School A Int 2 p2)

Headteacher George's use of the word "trust" links back to Sergiovanni (2007 p137) who says trust is a prerequisite for vision. Headteacher William uses trust as part of the link between his role and that of his staff:

"it's down to me, and there's a tremendous sense of trust in me and I want to be do a good job [for the staff]" (Headteacher William School C Int 3 p6)

The next headteacher was also less experienced but could very readily articulate the importance of his values:

"you know, that we [headteachers] need to be like the centre of a storm ... so I would like to think that I am approachable, calm and reflective although people do not necessarily need to see that. I think that people like to feel that they can approach you and I think it is about being fair and being seen to be fair listening as much as you talk

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and being open to hearing others' views and a genuine collegiality in that you are interested in what other people think" (Headteacher Benjamin School B Int1 p4).

The most experienced headteacher was the strongest and clearest about being able to articulate his values. There are countless examples but the most telling is in the first interview where these values have moved from the personal to the institutional and then on to the community:

"...almost a rigour being brought back into the way that we would work and also trying to establish this idea of a collective set of values...we found that we were creating a situation where we were very supportive of each other but at that point what had been clearly established was what the school was about what its values were and what its expectations were in a very black and white way what it was you had to do to be successful...a genuine sense of believing that it is an open community that we have shared values and an appreciation of one another" (Headteacher William School C Int 1 p3-4)

What was most convincing about this headteacher was the certainty of how his values informed his actions. This fits with what Hargreaves and Fink describe as "sustainable leadership [which] doesn't equivocate" (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006 p27). The second most experienced headteacher described his values in a more implicit way, though he also frames them in terms of others buying in:

"The thing that was important was that we developed a sense of shared focus on what we were trying to do in terms of consistency of approach and what we were trying to develop as a school" (Headteacher Philip School D Int1 p2).

Resonating with what Harris (2002a p11-13) says about developing participatory leadership. Headteacher Philip is more explicit in his last interview:

"...you [have to] come up with a sense of right and wrong don't you, to deal with it [headship], you know, and a route through[in order] to

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deal with it [leadership] but core values are grounded aren't they?"
(Headteacher Philip School D Int5 p4)

This is not dissimilar to a business description of values and leadership offered by Bennis and Nanus (1997 p203) who link vision, values and support for the workforce implied here. The next headteacher was also more implicit about values in his first interview but the moral imperative is still clear:

"You have to keep reminding yourself that certain things matter"
(Headteacher Thomas School E Int1 p8)

Getting alignment of one's personal values and the institutional values of the school one leads is in some ways the "holy grail" of leadership. This is described in Earley and Weindling's chapter on "Outstanding Leaders":

"...all the school leaders were clear that they responded to the changes they thought were important and necessary, fitting them into their own priorities for the school" (Earley and Weindling, 2004 p57).

Headteacher Benjamin describes the same process and adds his belief that this is a creative act in the vein of (Lambert, 1995 p62):

"to manage this [becoming a headteacher in a new school] has been in itself a kind of creative act how do you manage this how do you manage it and align it with your values "
(Headteacher Benjamin School B Int p3)

The penultimate head in the sample was the least experienced and he frames values in a more theoretical manner:

"To me the head is... the established the trusted leader moving things forward not the fount of all knowledge but the person who gels everything together and makes sure that the various elements and strands are actually working and that people can look to and know on a personal basis, driven by values like learning people and potential"
(headteacher Robert School F Int1 p10).

Headteacher Robert's use of the term "trusted leader" echoes Sergiovanni's concept of servant leadership (Sergiovanni, 2007 p57). For the final headteacher in the sample (the participant headteacher researcher) there is an example from a discussion about the qualities of leadership that had been found during the early visits in this study:

"[headship] is about ways of having core values about ways of articulating them clearly and simply and having them coding other things you know what I mean, it's about generosity of spirit it's about openness of spirit" (Headteacher Percy School B Int1 p3).

As Day et al found headteachers' values is the third of his ten claims about successful school leadership described as "key components to success" (Day et al., 2010 p7). This current study strongly supports his findings.

6.7 Leadership and Vision

Whilst Bush (2011b) is cautious about the ubiquity of headteachers' visions (p7) the data in this study found vision to be crucial in sustaining school improvement, all headteachers in the sample showed this adroitness to manage both the local and the national political agenda and used their expressions of their visions to support this activity.

Inevitably for headteachers relatively new to the role their experience as deputy headteachers appears in the early interviews in this sample. What this gives is an insight into the relationship between a headteacher's vision as created when they

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are appointed to a school and another senior leader who is part of delivering a different vision as part of a team:

“I wasn’t always entirely comfortable with all the talk about visions. A few years ago vision was my Achilles’ heel when I was a deputy” (Headteacher Benjamin School B Int1 p2).

This headteacher over the years of the study developed a very clear and deep vision rooted in a moral purpose and reflective practice:

“We have to get it right, these children need us to do our jobs better than we think we can do them” (Headteacher Benjamin School B Int4 p2).

Another newly appointed headteacher was a little more certain about his ability to produce a coherent vision:

“what actually made the real difference in my last school was the head and I coming together and my curriculum vision and her willingness to chance it” (Headteacher Robert School F int1 p 20)

It is also interesting that the vision described here was partial – curriculum not whole school.

Only one of the schools in the sample was a faith school and the headteacher was very clear about the advantages this gave him in terms of establishing a clear vision for his school:

“that faith schools are empowered by this idea of a common purpose of vision and I can say to parents if you don’t like that don’t come here” (Headteacher William School C Int2 p9).

There are some interesting side issues around spiritual leadership (Luckcock, 2007 p20) that are thrown up by the data which will be discussed in terms of authenticity later.

The criticism made by Bush (2011b p7) about high sounding visions which run the risk of endangering the real moral purpose of leadership is contrasted in his analysis with what he describes (quoting Hoyle and Wallace 2005) as prosaic reality. There is a danger that Hoyle and Wallace (2005) are missing the point about what a vision is for in the context of school improvement. Their argument that all visions are "isomorphic" (Hoyle and Wallace, 2005 139) misses the point about the relationship between the vision and the headteacher as a person. After all, one might argue that all business mission statements are the same because they aim to make profit for their shareholders. An interesting example of the empirical research in this study was that of a headteacher struggling with these very prosaic realities:

"the two things that preoccupy me are how I run my premises, you know if you could see the state of my premises you know without a premises manager you haven't seen my listed asbestos which is a sight to behold" (Headteacher Thomas School A Int2 p2)

Rhodes et al (2008) suggests that for practitioners at least the connection between a leader and the characteristic of "has vision" is strong (Rhodes et al., 2008 p320).

This does not, however, take away from headteacher George's vision to give the young people in his care the very best opportunities for learning:

"one of the highlights for me was a year 11 child came to us year 7 a lot of hard work went in just getting him so that he can comply with rules and they moved his foster placement and he went to a children's home and came back to us terribly defiant and trying to get other

children to be defiant with him all the work we had done undone they moved him again to another children's home and we had a wobbly patch but we started to get him on track this time last year" (Head George School A Int 1 p5)

A reality well known by a headteacher in small schools is that the role is necessarily inclusive i.e. it may require you to be anyone on your staff (Wilson and Brundrett, 2005 p45).

6.8 Leadership as Influence

With the exception of the most autocratic or coercive style of leadership, the art of leadership is the art of influence and persuasion (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). This was described as affinitive or democratic leadership in the training programme for headteachers run since 1999 by the NCSL (The National College, 2010b). This is summed up well by Hammersley-Fletcher and Brundrett (2005) whose study of primary headteachers' experience resonates well with this study:

"Many headteachers talked about an important element of their role being the ability to spot potential in staff and directing, or gently steering them in directions that would expand these abilities, and keep them interested and lively minded" (Hammersley-fletcher and Brundrett, 2005 p64).

Another good example of this resonance was from the headteacher who also implies a view about distributed leadership and indeed contingent leadership (Bush, 2011b p164):

"[it] does make sense, you have the right people, you trust them and you let them get on and you keep a light check you know I see them regularly (Headteacher Benjamin School B Interview 3 p17)

Influence is also about self-knowledge at an institutional level. This is well described

by Headteacher Thomas:

“They (Ofsted) were happy to say this school does know its staff and we got the turnover you know where we have got good teachers in the staff room that makes the difference.” (Headteacher Thomas School E Interview 1 p19)

The large number of stakeholders that need to be influenced and brought into alignment with an individual headteacher’s vision and values are well described by this headteacher:

“working with your governors how to write a SEF, counselling...none of it covers the business side of things” (Headteacher Thomas School E Int2 p2).

Finally, the study showed that headteachers fall into the dimensions of leadership identified by Bush (2011b) and the data confirms that they are able to articulate clearly their leadership characteristics as defined by the diagram in figure 12.

6.8.1 Headteachers confidently engaging in professional conversations

A distinctive feature of being human is our ability to communicate (Pinker, 1995).

This is manifest in this sample as headteachers engaging readily in talking to each other:

“To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth.” (Bakhtin and Emerson, 1984 p293)

If this is a basis of being human the way we engage in dialogues is also linked to the way we learn and think. There is research that suggests that dialogues between teachers is fundamental to how teachers think, grow and develop as professionals

(Penlington, 2008 p1307). It is not surprising therefore that this "truth" is an aspect of how headteachers operate in this sample.

In general, headteachers in this study were confident in moving forward in their role and feeling equipped to be able to take on the challenges of headship. It is of course possible that the very nature of the dialogues (one headteacher talking to another headteacher about their role in the same district area) might create a situation where headteachers will present a confidence that may not be real.

However the longitudinal nature of the study allowed for this to be adjusted for in the sense that a trust was built up between the researcher and researched which promoted high levels of honesty and candour for all the headteachers in the sample.

This is well documented in research literature (Gefen, 2000 p727) as is this principle being a prerequisite for complex social interaction (Luhmann et al., 1979 p37).

Indeed many of the responses in the later interviews were of such candour it would not be appropriate to include quotations from the conversations in an academic study for several years.

This study started in 2006 and took three (almost four) years to complete the field work. Collecting the data was not just an academic activity, though it began as one; it became a personal resource and the most profound professional training that could be imagined. This aspect of the data will be examined in chapters 7 and 8, but the actual dialogues with headteachers for headteachers have a special significance. Many headteachers in this study made reference to talking to another

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headteacher. Headteacher William describes the importance of these dialogues clearly:

“you need to be able to talk those [feeling isolated and under pressure] matters through. And there is no one else, I think I have said this before, there is no one else understands the situation as well as other headteachers” (Head William School M Int 4 p2)

This need to talk was confirmed by Flintham’s (2010) research which charted such dialogues (head to head) in a much larger sample and with an international perspective:

“Headteachers... have to be proactive in seeking out such reflection and networking opportunities...they should be legitimised as a normal part of the leadership entitlement package.” (Flintham, 2010 p181)

Flintham’s study asked 150 headteachers in the UK, Australia and New Zealand (Flintham, 2010 p7) to consider “critical incidents” in their headship careers and to think about how they sustained themselves in this context. The research is close to the methods used in this study in that both use conversations between headteachers to form a data set from which to draw conclusions about the nature of the role of being a headteacher. Flintham’s work differs from this study in that he looked at faith schools and schools facing challenging circumstances whereas this study looked at a complete set of “ordinary” headteachers in “ordinary” schools in an “ordinary” town, but there is an alignment of views that both studies suggest which is that headteachers talking to other headteachers is good for the personal well-being of each of the headteachers and the well-being of the schools they lead (Flintham, 2010 p4).

Starratt also has an interesting view of the power of the conversation in supporting schools to improve:

“...the work of the administrators in the cultivation of meaning, community and responsibility. This work consists of conversations with internal and external constituencies and, in the light of those conversations, the preliminary work of exploring and clarifying the central focus of the school” (Starratt, 2003 p174).

Looking back at the data, all the headteachers were positive about the conversations they had and indeed looked forward to the next meeting:

“Thank you, you just don’t get the chance to talk in this way normally” (Headteacher Thomas School E In4 p5).

“make sure you mention to [the PA] when you arrange our next session” (Headteacher Robert School F Int3 p28).

The amount of access granted to the interviewing headteacher over the three years was significant. Headteacher’s time, especially in the school day, is precious and their PAs will protect the headteacher unless it is made clear that certain appointments must be prioritised.

There is a large research base which justifies the use of dialogues or conversation in creating a level of shared meaning essential to being a successful person and indeed being part of successful organisations. Bohm and Nichol describe the core humanity of dialogue as:

“Thus in a dialogue each person does not attempt to make common certain ideas or items of information that are already known to him. Rather it may be said that two people are making something in common i.e. creating something new together.” (Bohm and Nichol, 1996 p3)

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There is well established view that conversation help improve business organisations. One such text is Scott's *Fierce Conversations* the second principle of which is described as:

"No one has to change but everyone has to have the conversation. When the conversation is real, the change occurs before the conversation is over." (Scott, 2002 p xv)

An interesting way of looking at how important conversations are in the business world is Perkins' metaphor:

"metaphorically conversations are the virtual neurons that bind individuals into a larger-scale cognitive collective" (Perkins, 2003)

This metaphor along with the idea of real or authentic conversations or dialogues will be returned to in the discussion of authentic leadership. It is true however that headteachers appeared to gain a professional perspective when talking to other headteachers in this study. Another example of this was the introduction of School Improvement Partners²⁴ (SIPs) (DCSF, 2006) which gave headteachers the opportunity to work with practising headteachers rather than external consultants or Local Authority advisors. Two of the headteachers in the study worked as SIPs and what they both valued was the opportunity for the conversations between headteachers that this government initiative offered:

"So I think you need to step out – you need that objectivity I think talking to other Heads is good but I don't think it is essential but I think you are right if you take the SIP thing... the conversation is different than if it was another Head so I think there is value"
(Headteacher Philip School D Int5 p14)

²⁴ School Improvement Partners were introduced in 2007 for LEAs to appoint appropriately qualified people to act as professional 'critical friends' for headteachers DCSF 2007. The Education (School Improvement Partner) (England) Regulations 2007. This requirement was repealed in 2011 DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION 2011c. Education Act 2011.

For the other SIP the conversations between headteachers was an essential element and he spoke about this in terms of intimacy:

“It’s interesting you know the SIP is a lost opportunity when it was first envisioned my understanding was that it was meant to be an engagement between a practising Head and someone who would have had that experience and may still be a practicing Head and for there to be that level of intimacy and through time the building of confidence the intimate sharing of the pressures and the realities and unfortunately it has become more of a measuring stick again” (Headteacher William School C Int2 p2).

This comment also refers back to the earlier point about headteachers making themselves accessible to one another especially when the professional relationship had been established.

A common thread which runs through all of the interviews is this readiness to talk to another headteacher, especially when this colleague was not there in any formal context. This supports the findings in Flintham (2010):

“All heads had key messages regarding the value of professional development when reinforced by strategic reflection opportunities and an infrastructure of peer support in sustaining both themselves and future generations of headteachers.” (Flintham, 2010 p171)

The dialogues that form the bulk of this study are these “strategic reflection opportunities” and the longitudinal nature of this research became “an infrastructure of peer support” though this was not its original intention:

“as a Head there are times you are going to have to make the tough decisions or to say ‘you were late again this morning can you please be on time for briefings’ they don’t like being picked up on things but you have got to do that but I accept that now and I think I have learnt a huge amount in the couple of years here and it has been

management on the edge almost because of what has happened to us but nevertheless it has been hugely developmental for me and I think I have another headship in me" (Headteacher Benjamin School B Interview 3 p14).

When headteachers talk to each other they top up each other's reservoir, to use Flintham's metaphor, and they remind themselves and the colleague they are talking to about why their job is so important:

"You know all the things that we do as heads not just, oh this is going to be a 9 to 5 that will see me out, it's not that at all is it wanting to make a difference in children's lives" (Headteacher Benjamin School B Interview 3 p15).

6.8.2 Headteachers Lead by Sharing

This whole study exists because headteachers readily share their experiences with each other and invest their time in conversing with other headteachers. This reality of headteacher experience has been noted in the Beacon School programme (Brundrett et al., 2003 p150) a forerunner to the current push towards Academy Schools.

There are at least two distinct levels of sharing that came up in the data. The first is sharing in the sense that schools are open to share their buildings and resources with the communities they serve. This was described succinctly by one headteacher when talking about parents as:

"Parents make a choice and with their engagement the sharing of public and educational resources enhances both the families and the school" (Headteacher Robert School F Int1 p15).

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Another example of this was from a headteacher who knew that the next level of school improvement was to bring the community into the school and address the parents' education needs:

"Because you have to change...the culture of parenting and the behaviours outside the school and that is where the long term challenge for sustainability [is]" (Headteacher Thomas School E Int2 p8)

Sergiovanni (2000) argues that this is in fact how schools improve and sustain improvement. He frames this as:

"Shared commitments pull people together and create tighter connections among them and between them and the school" (Sergiovanni, 2000 p23).

This idea can be extended to resources between schools so that a wider community could benefit from the investment made of both sites. Later in the same interview the headteacher described this as:

"I am fiercely in favour of as much sharing as we can" (Headteacher Robert School F Int1 p15).

Sergiovanni (2000) would describe this as one of the six change forces, namely an example of the professional force which ties professionals together to "build a professional community that is used to compel change" (Sergiovanni, 2000 p154).

The other more important sense of sharing is in the sense of sharing with other headteachers to make one a better leader. A good example of this was a headteacher considering what the dialogues in the study were actually for:

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"now I don't know exactly what it is like here but I know what it is like in my place and that sharing of perspective and understanding and reflection of what we do around what we do isn't about coaching and teaching because they are nonsensical models it is about simply allowing, you see if I talk to you about your school I get a perspective on my school, and it's long term because it sort of says yeah ok and at some point that will stay with me and be useful" (Headteacher Percy School G Int2 p1).

This idea is further developed by many headteachers but the relationships which are formed need to be outside formal structures and be allowed to develop naturally to engender the "trust" that this headteacher values so highly:

"and I have got a very intimate and trusting relationship with her [his Chair of Governors] now and I can share anything with her and I value greatly what she has to say because I know the terms in which it is made which is one of two headteachers sitting actually saying I have got a problem or I think I have got a problem can you help me? or I was thinking of doing that what do you think? or is there a good practice somewhere else we can go and see?...and that wouldn't be achieved through formal structured meetings"
(Headteacher William School C Int2 p2)

What both these two quotations point to is the power of the headteacher to headteacher relationship when allowed to develop in a non-competitive context.

This support should not be underestimated in terms of its importance for headteachers. One of the sample was accustomed to meeting other headteachers at national conferences and understood that the informal nature of, say a round of golf, could create the context of professional learning and sharing:

"when you are playing golf you are going round with 3 other Headteachers and you are talking all the way through it and listening and learning and making friendships it's just sharing and laughing and then when we do sit round and one person will say well this is one thing that has worked really well in our school this year and sharing and it's surprising how powerful it is" (Headteacher William School C Int4 p 20)

This sharing is based on a shared trust, one of the essentials that Novak (2005), describes as collaborating with other professional in the context of trust as one of the branches of his tree of "invitational leadership" (p45-46). An important aspect of the last quotation is the use of the word "surprising". In this study none of the headteachers had an explicit understanding or expectation that there was mutual support to be gained from having conversations over time but by virtue of all of them continuing to be part of this study over a very busy three year period the power of this sharing had impact on all the headteachers to some extent and significantly on nearly 60% (see 7.7) of the sample.

Another example of this need to share and how sharing supports the core of leadership is in providing an alternative voice and a check to an individual headteacher's moral compass:

"the value of that sharing and conversation is that it is a support network, you know its people you can turn to and you can say to them, 'I'm not doing that', and they can say whatever they want to say and perhaps they will privately say well good for you,"
(Headteacher William School C Int4 p6)

Despite perceived reality of maverick headteachers (Hobby, 2002, Hofkins, 2002) this study indicated that headteachers valued professional input from their peers and when this was voluntary and not overly structured.

6.9 Re-Defining Authenticity in the Context of the Data

Kierkegaard described the search for authenticity as:

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"the thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live or die" (Kierkegaard and Dru, 1938 p15)

Golomb equates the desire to be authentic as a human instinct:

"the very attempt to become authentic, express courageous determination not to despair or to yield to the powerful process of levelling, objectification and depersonalisation. To be human is to search for one's true self and to yearn for authentic relations with others" (Golomb, 1995 p204)

The important aspects of this definition that is seen in the data are characterised by the words "courageous determination" and the desire to relate authentically to other people. These words would fit with much of the research into leadership both in schools and business (Glickman, 2003, Staub, 1996). In chapter 3 authenticity was defined as:

"... a project about becoming the person you are" (Guignon, 2004 p3).

The danger is that whilst there is a "common sense" understanding of what Guignon and Golomb mean we need a definition which is more helpful in identifying specific behaviours that can be observed in headship. Guignon refined this idea as an attempt to:

"find the true self behind all social masks" (Guignon, 2004 p126)

Another way of looking at authenticity is to look to the business world where authentic leadership can mean effective and therefore profitable companies. If one is to find the authentic leader we should expect the following:

"Authentic leaders act on that awareness by practising their values and their principles, sometimes at substantial risk to themselves. They are careful to balance their motivations so they are driven by these inner values" (George et al., 2004 p100)

As has been shown these headteachers were comfortable to do the right thing for their students that was in line with their values in the face of political directives that they were happy to subvert to bring them in to line with their core moral purpose.

6.9.1 Authentic Headteachers

The role of a headteacher is in many ways a political one (see section 6.2) and the danger is that political expediency and practical requirement trump the moral purpose inherent in being responsible for shaping the learning of young people.

Therefore the authentic leadership of the headteacher should ensure that the correct balance of the pragmatic and the moral is maintained. The data are rich in this area of explicit moral purpose and there is an awareness from headteachers that could be described as authenticity:

“there is an absolute importance of integrity and it is moral integrity but I don’t mean that in terms of living a saintly life because we are all human and we all trip up at different points but I do mean in terms of being at one with yourself and being that person and not trying to be someone to please the local authority, to please the diocese, to please powerful members of the teaching staff or powerful lobbies from the parents or whatever but to have the courage to stand up above all of them and say well this is who we are and that’s the way it is and to accept that that comes with great challenges and demands on you at times that can drain you
(Headteacher William School C Int2 p10).

Here we can see many of the particulars offered by Golomb (1995). There is fearlessness even in the face of the most powerful of stakeholders; the clarity that an individual must remain true to themselves and not give in to despair; an acknowledgement that there is a shared humanity; an understanding of the

importance of relationships and that the struggle can drain even the most robust of individuals. This is a strongly authentic voice describing the realities of being a headteacher.

It was a universally common theme that emerged from the conversations with all the headteachers over the course of the study that they could all articulate the core moral purpose, values and personal drivers that motivated them in maintaining their headship (see 6.2 above).

Some headteachers showed this level of “authenticity” more readily which appears to be linked with their propensity to be reflexive which will be discussed in 5.3 but such was the strength of the moral purpose that was articulated by all headteachers over all the interviews there appears to be a connection between the ways headteachers lead their schools and authentic leadership behaviour in this sample:

“I think too that the purpose of Education, broadly, is something that I find very stimulating the idea that we are here to improve the life chances of young people seems to me to be a fantastic cause and a moral purpose” (Headteacher Benjamin School D 1nt1 p6).

It is interesting that this is expressed given that the sample of headteachers was opportunistic rather than chosen for their leadership qualities. Flintham (2010) looked at why headteachers left headship early and identified three characteristic groups, Striders, Strollers and Stumblers all of whom had consistently strong moral purposes (Flintham, 2003 p4 and 8). Although the data sets for Flintham’s report and this study are different two important aspects are very similar. The first, the average age of the headteachers which in his case was 52 in this study it was 54

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and the average numbers of years of experience in his study was 10 and in this one 7 years. This implies that age and experience are possible determining factors in whether headteachers are more or less likely to be authentic in their leadership. This would need to be researched further to establish whether this is true for younger or less experienced headteachers.

Another example of this "authenticity" was expressed by a headteacher in terms of belief:

"I have a belief that the only moral purpose around what we do as headteachers is to make it work not just for us in a year (quick fix) but in that kind of deep and meaningful way"
(Headteacher G School A Int 1 p2).

Whilst one could argue that "kind of" implies a certain vagueness "deep and meaningful" could come from a range of definitions of "authentic leadership" (Begley, 2001, Hopkins, 2001, Avolio and Gardner, 2005, Terry, 1993).

It was evident across the sample that the headteachers were not interested in quick fixes and during the three year project only one headteacher changed (a retirement into a system leadership role connected to a local group of headteachers). The schools they led, with one exception, all faced the possibility of negative Ofsted inspections and most performed under the national average in terms of standards over the period of the study. Given all this the realities these headteachers experienced meant that they were committed for the long term and discussions of improvement were as much about the things that matter but are not measured as they were about the narrower measure of standards. What Thompson (2001) calls

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“authentic, standards-based reform” and its evil twin “test-based reform” or more specifically “high-stakes, standardized, test-based reform” (Thompson, 2001 p1).

Linked to this idea of giving the project of headship enough time to get the job done is (Fullan) view about courage in leadership and this characteristic is part of the armoury of the authentic leader as described by the headteachers in the sample:

“... it’s having the vision and having the courage to see it through without being big headed and without being pompous”
Headteacher John School A Int 1 p4).

For these heads part of their moral purpose which could be seen as authentic is to do with this idea of seeing things through. This speaks to the idea of personal risk and requires a combination of confidence and humility found in much of the business literature (Collins, 2004, Goleman, 2004). Some heads talk not just about their own authenticity but the capacity they believe lies in all of us:

“I fundamentally believe that everyone of us knows how to improve ourselves” (Headteacher John School A Int 1 p2).

This view that headteachers know the secret of how to improve themselves is linked to these leaders improving their own schools. Thus for the school leader to be an effective improver they need to be an effective person grounded by and immersed in their values and situated in the social contexts of their schools – an authentic leader.

This was summed up by headteacher Philip:

“but for me to be an effective Head now it is going around talking to people about we are a values driven school, have you sorted out the curriculum yet for next year what is the principles behind it”
(Headteacher Philip School D Int2 p14).

Here the phrases that repeatedly appear across the sample are “values driven” “talking to people” and questioning the “principles behind” things. This is the language of authentic leadership from headteachers (with the exception of the researcher) unfamiliar with the academic concept of authenticity.

6.10 Conclusion

The data from this study provided robust structures within which to situate and analyse headteachers’ conversations about school leadership. Layder’s and Bush’s models have helped illuminate the data in the area of leadership literature. The need for headteachers to have professional conversations about what they do and how they do it is shown to have a link to the way these headteachers describe the way they sustain improvement in their schools. Headteacher William describes this reality towards the end of the research when he said:

“if you are a strong leader and you are prepared to follow your intuition, your instincts. If you’re prepared to be different and to put the barriers up to things that you think are not in the interests of your school or its community” (Head William School M Int 4 p1)

All the headteachers in the study clearly expressed the importance of moral purpose in their leadership. The analysis has shown how this links to authenticity. This will lead on to chapter 7 which examines the data in term of reflexivity.

Finally Whitehead (2007) offers a view of the authentic leader couched in unusual terms for research into school leadership – love. Whitehead (2007) bases the

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concept on Platonic logic (p4) and this has a particular resonance in this study exemplified by the following observation of one of the headteachers:

“I will have a conversation with them and say look its not changing but behind me my psychological advantage is that I know that that is very much simply an extension of our values and expectations of loving one another and loving yourself and actually that’s it everything else emanates from that” (Headteacher William School C Int2 p4)

The movement here is from values via conversations into an understanding of one’s humanity at a very personal level. This is reflexive and an example of double loop thinking (Argyris and Schön, 1974) but because it is generated within a professional dialogue it hints of the meta reflection that will be discussed in chapter 8.

Chapter 7**Data Analysis: Theme 3 – Authentic School Improvement through Headteacher Reflection****7.1 Introduction – The Reflective Spectrum**

Previous chapters have examined the relationship between the literature and data collected in this study in the areas of school improvement and leadership. There has also been a discussion of the literature on authenticity and reflexivity and this chapter will move on to the analysis of the data in terms of how headteachers reflected on their roles and attempted to improve their school.

One could describe reflection as a continuum ranging from the simple review of actions to reconsider choices made (Day, 2005 p581) through a careful consideration of possible actions rooted in our values (Argyris and Schön, 1974) to the reflection in action identified by Schön (1983) to the reflexive (Arber, 2006) and finally the meta reflective (Watson, 1998a). If one applies the levels of Layder's (1993) research map to this spectrum chapters 7 and 8 analyse the data at the level of the situated and the self. Table 17 (below) shows the relationship between Layder's (1993) research map, the themes of this study and the literature defining reflection. Layder's original map (see tables 1 and 1a) has been further adapted in order to apply this to the area of reflexivity.

Table 17 Layder's Research Map Adapted to Show Reflexivity

Layder's Research Model	Research focus in this study	Theme	Defined by
Situated Level	headteacher dialogues	Reflection	(Pavlou, 2004, Stroud, 2006)
Self Level	The reflective practitioner	Reflexivity	(Diggins, 1997, Tillman, 2003)
Inner-Self Level	Reflexive Practitioner	Meta-reflection	(Swift and West, 1998, Schippers et al., 2007)

After Layder (1993 p72)

This chapter will analyse the data using this part of the model and lead to chapter 8 which will look at how some of the headteachers in this study went beyond the reflexive and the double loop thinking into a reflective state which allowed practice to be affected at a more profound and personal level than has been identified in the literature. In higher education reflexivity is an explicitly taught and studied phenomenon. This was described by Bleakley as:

"While reflective practice has been adopted as a central model across the spectrum of post-compulsory education, higher education in particular would be expected to examine critically and reflexively the notion of 'reflection' before pursuing practices of teaching and learning based on this premise" (Bleakley, 1999 P316).

Although Bleakley is essentially concerned with proving that reflexivity is an aesthetic act and contends that "'reflection' that grounds a critically reflexive practice in an aesthetic value complex" is the way to develop Schön's model of reflective practice (Bleakley, 1999 p315). His critique of Schön does capture the essence of why practitioners research into their own practice:

"Reflection needs body, passion, sensitivity to context, and, above all, begs for style, or, again, in Schön's word, 'artistry'. Reflection-in-action is a 'hands on' business, rooted in the immediacy and heat of practice,

the sticky moment of indecision, feeding on sudden shifts in circumstances - the unique and irregular - and forcing improvisation and risk" (Bleakley, 1999 p319).

Chapter 5 and 6 have shown the evidence of this body, passion and sensitivity to context in the responses from the headteachers, all of whom would recognise their day jobs as being full of "sticky moments" and "sudden shifts in circumstance".

Capturing evidence of reflection, then, will be sometimes identify these moments and shifts and because of the longitudinal nature of the study. This will sometimes happen over time and be fed back through the lens of memory and shared context.

Archer offers a perspective of just how close reflection and reflexivity are (in her definition):

"Undoubtedly, reflection and reflexivity have fuzzy borders and can shift from one to the other" (Archer, 2010 p2).

7.2 Headteacher Reflections

Chapter 3 explored the research landscape around reflection and reflexivity and Bolton's observation about reflective practitioners is helpful in sensitising us to what reflection in professional practice might look like:

"Practitioners engaged in effective reflection explore experience, values and professional identities, and express aspects within certain personal and professional bounds which they expect to be respected" (Bolton, 2006b p211).

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It was certainly true following the first round of interviews that the headteacher conversations perfectly matched this definition of experience, values and professional identities. A good place to start this part of the analysis is with headteacher William whose quotation concluded chapter 6:

"Alex [a national authority on school leadership talking at a conference] said something that really struck me [which] I thought was ridiculous at the time...he said a school will slowly become an extension of you and I thought how ridiculous, but I would say he is absolutely right I [now] completely agree with him and I can see [that] most in the shortcomings in [my] school ... are directly a reflection of my shortcomings (Headteacher William School C Int 3 p8)

This headteacher noticed something that whilst it was clear for another colleague it was initially rejected as being not applicable for him. That is, the application of the statement had no resonance for headteacher William – it was not a reflection of his professional reality. However, after time to reflect and process this observation about his professional practice, the statement did resonate – upon reflection this description of a headteacher now matched his professional experience.

This then, is an example of how headteachers reflect. Indeed this is a headteacher caught in expressing the process of reflection and becoming reflexive. Brannick and Coghlan (2006) in their attempt to define reflexivity in a business context accept that "the concept of reflexivity is vague" (p144) but they do describe it as a methodology which:

"...demands the conscious and deliberate inclusion of the full self throughout the research process; this involves continuous, intentional and systematic self-introspection" (Brannick and Coghlan, 2006 p144).

William showed this ability to consider himself and show his learning about himself over time and although it is unlikely he would use the term "research process" he might recognise the term "learning process" as more appropriate. Similarly he would be unlikely to approve of the term "introspection" preferring perhaps "meditation" or "consideration", otherwise Brannick and Coghlan's definition would seem to fit well.

7.2.1 Headteachers' use narratives to support their reflection

There is a strong link between reflection and narrative. Bolton (2006b) describes narrative as "an attempt to create order and security out of a chaotic world" (p204), but building on Ricoeur's definition of self-recognition (Ricoeur and Thompson, 1981 p24) Sparrowe describes how:

"Narrative can integrate how a person is the same person through changing and even conflicting decisions" (Sparrowe, 2005 p432).

How headteachers use narrative then, is important in how they reflect on their actions.

An example of this was headteacher John who responded to the question "how did you do it?" (when referring to achieving an Ofsted judgement of "good") with a narrative account full of vim and colour. His initial response was "I don't know" he then went on to explain what he thought happened. What helps him "know" is the story he uses to describe how he was able to sustain his school and himself over time:

"[it was] almost like a gentlemen's club where children were seen as necessary evils, not in a nasty way, not in a horrible way, because one of the things that always happened at Bicksley was that the relationships were always good, the staff student relationship has always been superb, otherwise I wouldn't have sent my kids there and my kids both had a good time there and they flourished because of that atmosphere "(Headteacher John School A Int1 p4).

This headteacher used narrative a great deal to put himself into context and reflect upon his actions in relation to others. Another example of this by the same headteacher later in the interview captured not just the action of his staff but the required speed necessary to implement those actions from his viewpoint. His narrative in this case became his reflection of his own actions:

"Jonathan was doing a good job with the curriculum, Jane had reorganised the pastoral [system] and everything in the garden was rosy, we had Ofsted in 94 and everything went through very, very well. We were coming up for Ofsted in 99 and I dropped the bombshell that I was not going to replace Gina which went down really well, you can imagine" (Headteacher John School A Int1 p6).

The headteacher here uses his narrative flow in a way described by Sparrowe to "open up the world for the listener to understand his world view" (Sparrowe, 2005 p433). The drama of headteacher John's narrative continues with a metaphor which aligns to Ricoeur's description:

"metaphor is the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to re-describe reality" (Ricoeur, 1977 p5).

The metaphor chosen here is of Second World War prison camps:

"...he became my mole, he became the guy who led the tunnel committee and we got underneath a lot of the structures that were there, and in my opinion, things that were in the way" (Headteacher John School A Int1 p5).

The headteacher in this context is the plucky British senior officer outsmarting the enemy in being one step ahead of the game. As a description of leadership this actually matches Bush's model of influence very well. The signal that the narrative is playing a significant part of this headteacher's reflective self comes from the final section of the interview when he reflexively looks back on his career at the school. He manages to encapsulate a sense of resignation about the future and the truth about the dynamic nature of the role of being a headteacher; he uses the metaphor of narrative and a direct rhetorical device:

"So what's the story? the story is constant change" (Headteacher John School A Int 1 p23).

This is an example of a headteacher being reflective about his own actions, but also being reflexive about his reflection with another colleague about those actions and somehow summing up the context of political realities of being a headteacher in a post ERA context. This links both ends of Layder's research map. The contextual-macro level and the self-identity level via the organisational (school) and situated self (the conversations) levels (Layder, 1993 p72). These are all unified by the reality of this headteacher's experience.

7.3 Reflexivity

Before examining self-narratives all of which are in some ways reflexive it is worth considering some of the issues with reflexive data analysis. Mauthner and Doucet warn of the perils of being constantly in one's own research as the "reflexive turn"

(Mauthner and Doucet, 2003 p416) whereas it is sometimes impossible to draw the distinction:

“Instead, there is an assumption built into many data analysis methods that the researcher, the method and the data are separate entities rather than reflexively interdependent and interconnected.” (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003 p414)

This is particularly the case in this study where headteacher Percy is a colleague and peer of the other headteachers, the researcher who frames the professional conversations, the researcher who interprets the data from these conversations and writes them up as a reflexive account of his own development as a researcher and a fellow headteacher. In spite of the dangers, the benefits of rich qualitative data informed by a practising professional who has a perspective of both the professional headteacher and research world are great and the following discussions of reflexivity and meta-reflection have had impact on headteacher Percy’s school and wider professional context.

7.4 Self Narratives - Experienced Headteachers

This study became a search not just for the drivers of school improvement or the mechanisms of sustainable leadership practices but for an examination of self for all the headteachers in the study. The nature of this examination was different for different participants. It was at its deepest for the participant action researcher (headteacher Percy) but all participants reflected on their own personal journeys and learning during the three years. It could be argued also that because the professional conversations gave them the opportunities to “double loop” back to

their core values and basic paradigms the leadership of these headteachers was also supported and possibly enhanced. Branson's study of Australian principals is a useful reference point here:

"enhanced moral leadership depends on the leader knowing how to interpret their personal reality" (Branson, 2007b p472).

Branson's (2007) research showed that headteachers used self-narratives as part of their professional conversations to understand their own contexts as school leaders in a more rounded way. Branson's research provides a good link between leadership, values and the inner or authentic self. He establishes the relationship between leadership and self-knowledge:

"comprehensive and holistic self-knowledge of the inner Self is necessary in order to enable values informed leadership" (Branson, 2007a p228).

This then leads on to a leader's values which he says "are normally unconscious dimensions of a person's inner Self" (Branson, 2007b p472).

This study had many rich examples of self-narratives which occurred in all the conversations across the three years. Each headteacher did this in a slightly different manner but each also displayed the "inner self" that pointed to their leadership authenticity. Many narratives described the impact that the headteacher had made in the school over time -or the story of that specific headteacher in that specific school. A very good example of this was headteacher William:

"the first phase is that I came into a school that believed it was successful, but where many of the indicators were pointing the wrong way the number of people applying to join the school had fallen

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dramatically. I think back in 1993, there were 40 people who applied to come to the school. The exam pass rate had slipped so that the three year 5 A to C was 45% and yet people were convincing themselves that this was a good school. I quickly tuned into the fact that this school was complacent and if it didn't transform itself it would have no future. At the time I was appointed governors basically made that very clear that this was make or break time. There was a culture in the school which was worrying; the pupils had gone on strike in the summer beforehand, they had gone out in the field and refused to work, there was no focus on the small things that make a difference, so behaviour was very poor, uniform was very lax, ... and a casualness and dirtiness in the school which reflected by this casual approach (Headteacher William School C Int 1 p1).

This could be characterised as the school improvement narrative. This very important story was in the repertoire of all the headteachers in this sample and tended to be told early in the interview process. What this narrative does is establish the relationship between the headteacher asking the questions and the headteacher being interviewed. It also establishes credibility and allows both parties to make an assessment of the authenticity of the other. Another example of the same narrative was headteacher Philip's account of where he was in his school improvement adventure:

"...that this is the fourth part of the existence of the school since I have been head, the fourth stage I suppose. The first stage was taking over, when there were about 600 kids in the school, the school was in a sense in inverted commas 'threatened with closure' because we had 77 first preferences' and there was talk about us closing at that time, so the first part of headship was to improve morale and to make people feel comfortable and confident about the school, so [there] wasn't the focus on exam results" (Headteacher Philip School D Int 1 p1).

The potential sense of impending doom is also a common feature of these school improvement self-narratives. Part of the reflection is that the actions of the headteacher needed to be robust in order to "turn around" the school. What is

interesting about this is that the headteachers in this study did not think of themselves as "hero" heads, on the contrary - this needing to make the changes that only a new outsider can see need to be made was part of the very ordinary reality of their headship experience. All new headteachers bring change (Harris and Lambert, 2003) and the opportunity for improvement, the self-narratives told by headteachers in this study show how the reflective process of the narrative structure allow headteachers to contextualise their roles as change-agents. It effectively allows them to stand outside themselves and analyse their own actions as one might a character in a novel.

Another example of a school improvement narrative was from headteacher John who was at the point of leaving headship when this interview was conducted:

"So when I took over I think my mission was - we were at a plateau, we've got a reasonably good atmosphere, we've got crap buildings, but that's part of what made it a good atmosphere, we were 'all in it together boys' sort of approach. I think in fairness the staff were looking for change and the staff expected change I'm told that when the staff were told I got the headship there was a great collective cheer in the staff room and everybody was pleased because I was up against two other people one of who was an advisor from [Tennyson] and another existing head and the other existing head came across as very aloof, very domineering very centralised and focused and I came across (because I can put the old...charm on if I want to) as an amiable idiot, which has always suited me as an option actually and learned that trick from an old advisor from [Eliot]...he'd sit down with you and say now tell me Percy what do you think about so and so and you'd suddenly realise 3 minutes into the conversation that that's a difficult question" (Headteacher John School A Int 1 p2).

From the point of the new headteacher having just arrived, his narrative acknowledged that the school was not in a terminal state. The good relationships and willingness that the staff had to accept change allowed this headteacher to be

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more of a mechanic who adjusts and tunes this engine of the school improvement car rather than scrapping it and starting from scratch. This type of school improvement was characterised by Hughes and Potter (2002):

“significant improvement is usually the result of a series of smaller steps. In isolation, the steps may seem inconsequential, but together they add up to something much more significant” (Hughes and Potter, 2002 p11).

What is interesting, however, is the way the narrative operates in several self-reflective loops. John reflected on his own perception of the staff when he was appointed, but also on their reported reaction to his appointment. This could be seen as self-serving, an example of one headteacher essentially bragging to another about how much his staff approved of him, but this view is then altered by the self-deprecating reference to being an ‘amiable idiot’. The most reflexive aspect comes from the remembered ex colleague whose apparently bumbling surface appearance belied an underlying ability to be a sharp operator and by extension revealed a truth about headteacher John that could have only been exposed by the narrative and context of the professional conversations. Thus, John re-learns something about himself (which is at least a double loop cycle if not fully meta-reflective) and Percy (the researcher headteacher) is allowed to reflect about how leadership is perceived by other staff and the use of techniques to discover hidden truths.

All the headteachers above were experienced in their role. On average they had been headteachers for sixteen years (nearly fourteen if Percy is included).

7.5 Self Narratives – Less experienced Headteachers

The remaining four headteachers (NB School A was led by headteacher John and headteacher George who replaced him during the study) have an average time as headteachers of just over 4 years in post as of November 2009. Headteacher George's self-narrative is more clearly personal (Layder's situated activity) rather than organisational (Layder's setting level):

"A, I never expected to be a teacher and B, I certainly never expected to be a headteacher. I came into teaching in my mid-thirties by accident because I took a job at St Aiden's School to run the school library and be an art technician because it fitted in with my children the head there found that by coincidence I graduated the last year you could teach without doing a PGCE" (Headteacher George School A Int 1 p1).

The extract above shows not merely a biographical detail of this headteacher but contextualises a self-belief in terms of the role. In this narrative the headteacher feels unworthy of the role due to a non-traditional academic background. Self-reflection led to a belief of being fortunate to become a headteacher and imply that this had been unplanned and serendipitous.

If one looks at a similarly inexperienced headteacher in this sample one can see no such lack of confidence in the interviews. The following extract from headteacher Robert is interesting in terms of what it tells us about the way people choose their narratives and what such a choice might say about them as reflective leaders. His response was to the question "and was that [the building works] as grim as it sounds?":

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"It wasn't as bad as it sounded, dusty, but quite interesting to watch and the kids were astounded at seeing their school arising around them so they enjoyed that part of it. The only really grim part of it was when one of the builders fell off a scissor jack and had to be heli-lifted off to hospital which was grim but aside from that it wasn't as bad as you might think because we were able to continue. The huts were pretty awful but it was better to do that, I am convinced, than transport the whole school off site" (Headteacher Robert School F Int1 p3)

Headteacher George's self-narrative not only showed a richer narrative, but it was also far more autobiographical. On the other hand headteacher Robert used his self-narrative to talk about the building process not the people. Indeed the person at the centre of the narrative was not himself but an unknown victim of an accident, his role in the narrative was that of the third person narrator (Ricoeur, 1992 p329). Headteacher Robert's narrative can be characterised as having the drama and tension of a fast moving script whereas headteacher George's story had no self-aggrandisement and expressed identity in a manner that could almost be seen to undermine one's authority as a headteacher.

Headteacher Benjamin was at a similar level of experience and he also used self-narratives. He managed to use a combination of personal self-narrative and career biography in talking about how he became a headteacher:

"my last two heads...were hugely influential, ...I've had them visit...I showed them around. My last head, ... was an inspiration, it was his first headship, but he came in as if he had been a head for many years it seemed to me he is an exceptional headteacher to me, both of them in their own way are exceptional headteachers and very different and as I was saying earlier on when you are looking at people particularly as a deputy head if you are fortunate enough to have a good working relationship as I have with those two heads you are learning from them, how...they do it" (Headteacher Benjamin School Int 1 p12).

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The reflection here allowed this headteacher to consider the respective qualities of two ex-colleagues he had worked with and from whom he had learned about his current role as a headteacher. In this extract headteacher Benjamin is remembering the experience of working with these “exceptional headteachers” and reflecting on how he had “shown off” his school to them. This personal reflection goes further and triggers the memory of his last headteacher arriving as a new headteacher. Headteacher Benjamin makes the explicit link between his former colleague’s experience of early headship and his own, but the reflection from the position of now being a headteacher means that the confidence with which one begins one’s headship has a special resonance. This is underlined by his final reflective comment about learning from them how to be a headteacher.

Another example of a self-narrative which uses reflection to look back was provided by headteacher Thomas. He was slightly more experienced (two years) than headteacher Benjamin and in this extract considers the differences between his current role as a headteacher and that of his previous role as a deputy head:

“I don’t think I do almost as much as I did when I was a deputy in some ways because when I was a deputy I was running around all over the place but I didn’t have that unbelievable pressure that the buck stops here. That sounds...nonsense...and I never believed I would say it but when I was a deputy I could do more things, I could do dodgy things round the back, I would get it done and tell the head. Here I’ve got everybody watching” (Headteacher Thomas School E Int 1 p2).

This self-narrative reflects almost wistfully on the role before headship, but crucially identifies a key difference in the area of accountability. This “unbelievable pressure” shifts the speaker outside of his own narrative as a reflection on his current role. It

could be argued that headteacher Thomas would not describe his accountability as headteacher in this way if not using narrative to reflect on his own practice. In this reflective context his emotions are expressed to show a perception of pressure that would not normally be seen and yet were completely understood by the Headteacher Percy (in both the researcher role and as an informed peer) who replied with a heartfelt "absolutely".

The moral or authentic core of headship discussed earlier can also be seen here. As a headteacher the "dodgy things" and the "round the back" deals are no longer available. The covert dealings of deputy headship are replaced by the transparency of headship due to the constant scrutiny and this exposed by the self-narrative within the context of a dialogue between the two headteachers. The relationship of trust that has been established is clear from the use of this type of language. The subtext here is that both headteachers remember the role of being a deputy and understand the context of the remarks made.

7.6 From Headteacher Self-Reflection to Reflexivity

The longitudinal nature of this research study and the chosen methodology encouraged reflexivity. This was well demonstrated during one of the last conversations in the study between the researcher headteacher Percy and an experienced headteacher who showed a great deal of evidence of double loop learning (Argyris and Schön, 1974) but little sign of meta-reflection. Headteacher Percy had asked whether headteacher Philip agreed with his assertion that all

headteachers were reflective. Headteacher Philip's response was to question whether or not time spent in post had an impact on whether headteachers could be "properly" reflective:

"Would the same apply to a school where the Head only lasted a year? (Headteacher Philip School D int4 p7).

Both headteachers then reflected on two examples of local headteachers who had stayed in post for less than a year and had been removed by their governors, the local authority or Ofsted. Headteacher Percy's response was a metaphor which summarised the issue for both professionals:

"My feelings are that this would be because their reflective instincts didn't let them work out how to engage that reflection - that reflective muscle - because otherwise you get checked, there are people you trust" (Headteacher Percy School D int4 p7).

In many ways this section and the one that follows is an examination of this "reflective muscle" what it does in term of improving schools or a headteacher's leadership and how it works.

7.7 Reflexive Coaching

As the study continued into its second and third years reflection became an explicit part of the data. An example of this was from headteacher Benjamin:

"so you are talking about being reflective. I have reflected quite hard on that and I was hard on myself... I believe in collegiality. I believe we work through people. I don't think heads can work alone, the old idea of the stand-alone head, you know the head is everything...those days are gone you know 'curtains for the hero head' is a headline from the TES (Times Educational Supplement) which you probably saw" (Headteacher Benjamin School B Interview 4 p3).

This reflection captures the thought process which shows this headteacher describing reflection as something which requires effort and operates in a professional context. However what makes this reflexive is the explicit acknowledgement of the involvement of others in the reflective process. The most significant comment is that "I don't think heads can work alone". The need for reflection to include others and indeed better if these others are headteachers with whom one has established a relationship based on professional respect and trust is not an isolated view in the data.

Headteacher Robert described this same phenomenon in the following way:

"...when I first arrived [in the area] conversations with [the other heads I trusted] were some of the few conversations I had which were actually grounded in reality, because they were grounded in a common understanding of what the challenges were" (Headteacher Robert School F Interview 4 p4).

In this quotation the headteacher is also referring to specific local contexts but he has value for how a reflection with other colleague headteachers helped ground him in the early years of his headship. It could be argued that this is also a form of co-coaching, a type of head to head mentoring within a practical professional context described by scenarios from initial teacher training:

"The skills of reflection, reflexivity and becoming a practical practitioner are paramount within [these] relationship[s]... This partnership develops and is developed by the professional roles played out by each participant (Punter, 2007 p124).

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There are two aspects which are relevant here in terms of peer mentoring for headteachers and this study. The first is related to the mutual benefit gained by both participants in this dialogue:

“The mentors acknowledge that “peer support is really a two-way contract”, providing direct benefits for them as well as the new heads:(Bush and Coleman, 1995 p66).

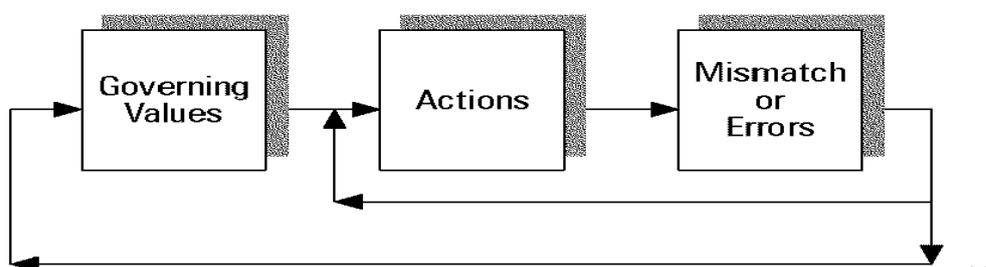
The second aspect defines part of the process that was central to this study.

Though it was not an original intention of the research there is evidence from the data that the use of this methodology (longitudinal professional peer to peer conversations) has been part of how the schools that were led by these headteachers improved over time:

“[there is] value [that]reflection has for assisting protégés to become autonomous, expert thinkers. A great deal of attention has been directed to the necessity of educational practitioners becoming more reflective about their work” (Barnett, 1995 p51).

Again the intention to contribute to creating expert thinkers was never an intention of this research but in creating the context where headteachers can reflect together there is evidence that at least some of the participants developed their ability to reflect because they engaged in reflective conversations. “Reflection is the catalyst for developing...autonomy and expertise in problem solving.” as Barnett (1995 p46) puts it. All the headteachers used reflection in this manner, indeed all showed the deeper reflection (figure 13) described by Barnett in the following way:

“With appropriate practice and time, individuals can “autonomously reflect” on their thought processes by engaging in the metacognitive process of double-loop learning” (Barnett, 1995 p49).

Figure 13 Argyris's (1974) Double Loop learning

(Argyris and Schön, 1974 p135)

What Barnett describes as a “metacognitive process” is especially evident in the headteacher conversations in years two and three of the study.

Another example of this from the third year of the study is from Headteacher William’s third interview. In a discussion about the importance of professional headteacher to headteacher conversation he described the process in a very similar manner to headteacher Robert:

“you can share things you can talk things through you can laugh with each other and very often find that you are encountering the same issues or similar issues and to have that empathy to have that reflected back and simply to put it in that shared domain for me has been hugely beneficial (Headteacher William School C Int 4 p1).

Here there is not only an appreciation of the commonality of headteacher experience but, the articulation of the process of reflecting back and shared collegiality. What is important here is how the connections between the headteachers have benefit for both individuals. It should be said that in terms of experience in this context the researcher headteacher (Headteacher Percy) had almost eight years of experience in post whilst headteacher William had almost eighteen years in post. This would

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suggest that the coaching or mentoring process for headteachers is not limited to new or inexperienced headteachers but within the appropriate learning structure happens as part of headteachers being reflexive with each other.

This double loop reflection, indeed moving towards professional reflexivity is also shown by headteacher Philip:

“I think the important thing is the reflection – if this is where you want to get to and you’re here, wherever here is, and using change to help you get somewhere is the important thing whatever the change is... but the important thing is having that sense of where you want to get to and with achievement with the culture and values of your school” (Headteacher Philip School D Int3 p6).

This is an almost textbook definition of double loop learning (Argyris and Schön, 1974) but what makes it reflexive is the context of this as a conversation with another headteacher. The reflection is within a professionally reflective process. That is reflecting back on one’s own double loop (reflective) learning.

The next section will show the sub-set of headteachers who demonstrated an even deeper level of reflection (beyond Argyris’s (1974) double loop learning on to a meta-reflective level where the reflection over time with a trusted peer enhances both the headteachers’ core values and has impact (it may improve even) their actions.

Figure 15 is the author’s adapted model of Argyris’s double loop which shows how meta-reflection enhances the process by use of peer reflection, trusted professional

dialogue and time to reflect on actions which shows the relationship between meta-reflection and double loop learning. This is further developed in section chapter 8.

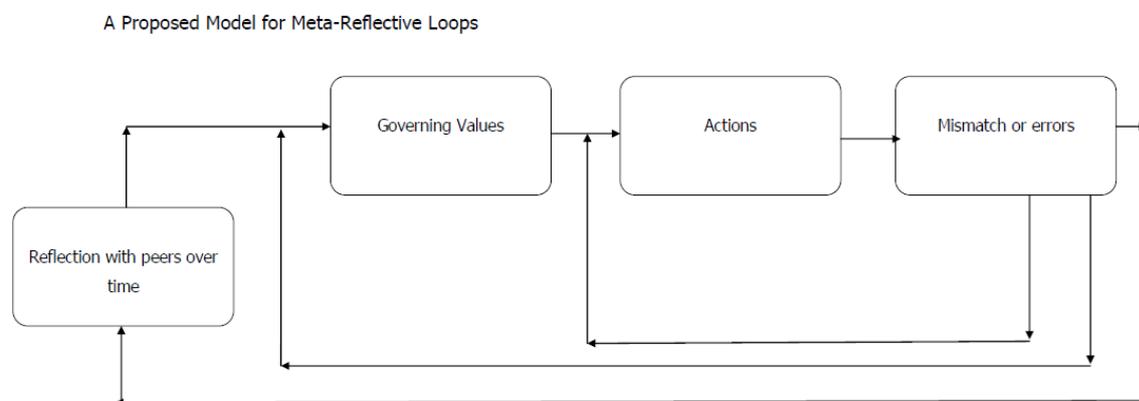


Figure 14 A Proposed Model for Meta-Reflective Loops

7.8 Other Forms of Reflexivity

A standard definition of reflexivity in social science research was described as:

“one element of rigour involves researchers being ready to give an account of the way in which their personal involvement in social and fieldwork relations shape their data collection, analysis and writing” (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2006 p147).

In the context of this study it is more usefully defined as professionals being aware of reflecting upon their actions within a research context. Reflection was an explicit part of the discussion between heads from the third round of interviews and therefore the data becomes increasingly reflexive if this definition is used. Another aspect of this reflexivity was found in a sub-set of the sample group of headteachers (almost 60% of the full sample). These four headteachers (Benjamin, William, Thomas and Percy) made references during the study to keeping some form of writing to assist them in their reflections. This was done by them and not at the request of the researcher, indeed references made to this writing are only part of

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the data when this writing occurs in the conversations. Nevertheless it gives an interesting insight into the type of reflection these headteachers used to help them improve their schools.

Headteacher Benjamin made several references to using a journal as part of how he sustained himself as a headteacher:

“it is like that kind of intellectual thinking and reading I still do...you know I keep a little journal I reflect on different kinds of leaders you know Shackleton, Kennedy, Marcus Aurelius whoever it might be”
(Headteacher Benjamin School B Interview 3 p20).

This shows the most reflexive process of the four examples. It is also the most “objective” of the four examples and is explicitly an intellectual act that is part of headteacher Benjamin’s on-going professional learning as a headteacher.

Headteacher Benjamin used his journal as a commonplace book looking very specifically at aspects of his role as a leader. The examples he gave are very general and professionally unspecific. This is also a literate activity and applies to his wider reading around the subject of charismatic leadership.

The second example was from headteacher Thomas. He was interested in the research study partly because he himself had ambitions to undertake postgraduate study (this has subsequently happened). The study coincided with him entering into his middle phase of headship (Ingate, 2010a p5) and he had collected data for his own use about the early years of his headship experience:

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“I have kept a diary of how it was during the first two years. There were some hairy moments I can tell you” (Headteacher Thomas School E Int 2 p2).

This example is more operational. This writing is a record of how this headteacher “did his job” during the first two years of being a headteacher. This record allowed headteacher Thomas to be reflexive. The professional here is using the writing as a fixed marker on which to reflect, and indeed measure future reflection. This has a very professional context and is very much about being a headteacher at a moment in this head’s career. The use of keeping a research diary was noted by Nadin and Cassell (2006) who argue that a reflexive diary can improve operational management.

The third example has a much more personal aspect to reflection and comes from the highly reflective headteacher William. The writing was referred to once towards the end of the study and was in the context of a moment of deep personal reflection on both career and personal experience:

“I like to keep a record of my thoughts to reflect back on my journey” (Headteacher William School C Int 3 p3).

The nouns “record” and “journey” here refer as much to his personal situation as his professional one, indeed for this headteacher the personal and the professional were almost synonymous and was also informed by his Christian faith:

“I think we genuinely have a flatness [of management structure] to what we do you know so that the person who cleans the toilet is every bit as important as the Head of Science or the Deputy Head or whatever and feels that their work is valued and it does make a difference that is very important to me, I’ve discovered and it’s not unrelated to the fact that you are attempting to be a Christian

community it's about everyone being equal in the eyes of God
(Headteacher William School C Int1 p4).

The fourth example comes from the researcher, headteacher Percy. This dissertation is itself a reflexive act, but within the study the research journal became an added layer of reflection and is part of the data set which is used more extensively in section 5.4 to demonstrate the process of meta-reflection and point to example of this from other headteachers:

"I am astonished how much clarity writing and especially and particularly handwriting gives me in trying to sort out my mind"
(Headteacher Percy Reflective Journal 2007).

The discourse here is separate from the research writing, though inevitably refers to it in the same way as Mauthner (2003) describes. An important aspect of it is that it is handwritten and has a deep personal relationship for this headteacher, probably closer in nature to the process used by headteacher William.

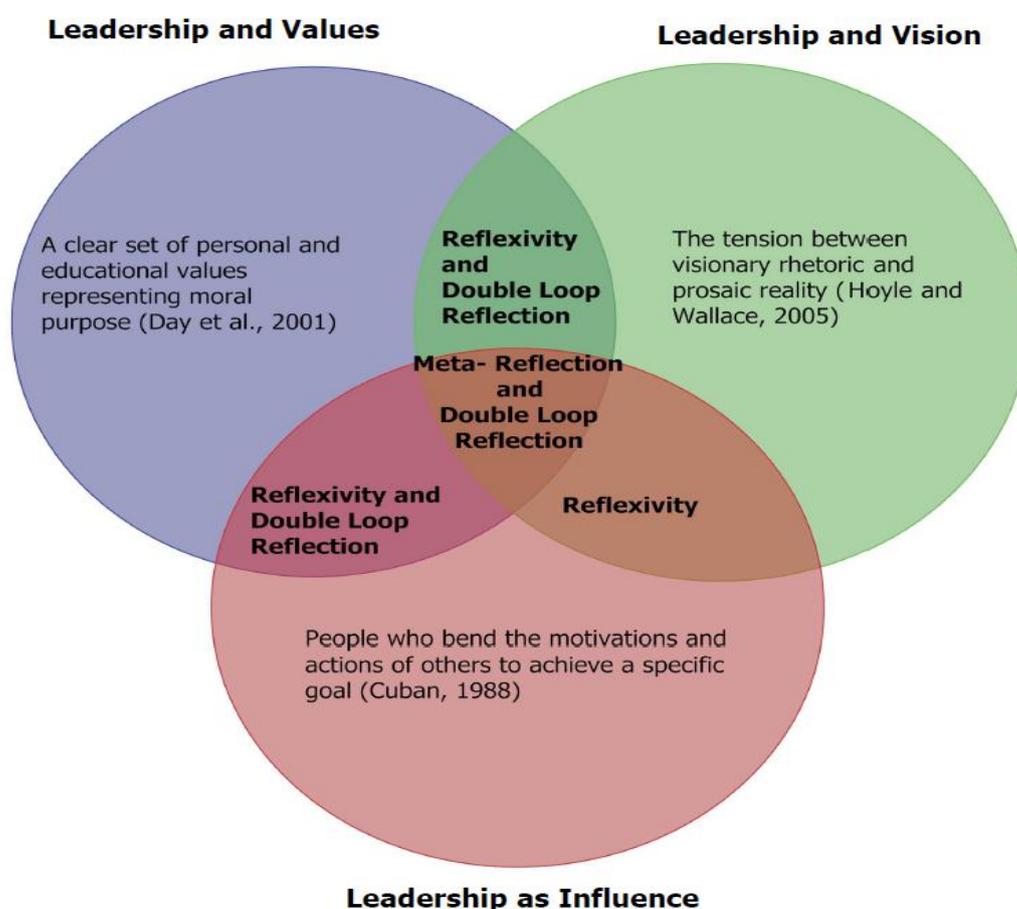
7.9 A Model of Reflexivity and Leadership

In chapter 3 figure 6 suggested a model of where meta-reflection met leadership. This model, however, was incomplete and areas of the overlaps were left blank. In figure 7 the concept of reflexivity that arose from the analysis of the data has been added in order to show where headteachers are reflexive and suggest why this type of reflexivity is so prevalent.

It should be noted that reflexivity occurs at the interface between any two of the domains, this is because each form a point from which the other aspect of

leadership can be reflected upon. Whilst overlaying reflexivity onto the adapted Bush model (see figure 12) seems convenient this research was designed to examine how authentic school improvement happened by analysing the realities of headteachers. It is this reality, clearly shown, in the data that is illuminated by figure 15. The experience of being a headteacher happens when the three domains are brought into close relationship and in the centre of this reality sits reflexivity. The reflexivity of all the headteachers in the study is discussed further in the next chapter (see 8.1).

Figure 15 Leadership and Meta-Reflection (Bush (2011))
A Model of Leadership and Meta Reflection



After Bush (2011 p5-8)

The data supports the inclusion of the Argyris's (1974) double loop learning is at the interface between values and the all the other domains whilst reflexivity sits between vision and values.

7.10 Reflexive Headteachers

Headteachers use reflective conversations about how their schools improve to help them stand outside their own professional practice and improve their judgement about the required actions that will have the biggest impact in their schools. In this way they showed double loop learning and extended this to their own reflexivity.

This next section seeks to demonstrate how reflection and reflexivity made impact on leadership decisions that were taken over the length of this study. Clearly this is the stuff of the "fuzzy generalisations"(Bassegy, 1999) and this research is not designed to prove that headteachers engaging in reflective conversations resulted in specific outcomes in specific schools, other than in headteacher Percy's school. Nevertheless, what is evident, and what the data does capture was the reported actions, often relating back to earlier conversations with the researcher, is that there are actions which are likely to have been affected by the reflexive engagement. The participative nature of the methodology also gives a reference point about how actions or intended actions were filtered through the reflective conversations themselves. There is a danger here of not heeding Bleakley's warning about reflection:

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“Reflective practice is in danger of becoming a catch-all title for an ill-defined process” (Bleakley, 1999 p317).

Even during the first round of interviews which were far more shaped as a semi-structured dialogue, headteacher Percy wanted to engage in a professional conversation:

“This is a conversation and I will take part in it as well” (Headteacher Percy School A Int1 p1).

This may be because of the prevalence of this type of approach to professional learning in education in a general sense. This is expressed by Penlington as:

“The activity of engaging in a dialogue with colleagues or experienced others is one that lies at the heart of many professional learning models for teachers” (Penlington, 2008 p1304).

Over time this methodological approach evolved into more open ended conversations:

“we’re going to have a conversation and we are going to wander off the point and we are going to talk about all sorts of things and if you want to stop just tell me” (Headteacher Percy School F Int2 p1).

“how do you believe schools sustain improvement that’s the theme of our conversation. It can go anywhere you want and I can share with you all sorts of things if you want, but we can just have a conversation” (Headteacher Percy School D Int2 p1).

The reflective conversations were of course between two practising professionals in the same metropolitan area and therefore they never wandered far from the themes of leadership, school improvement and being a reflective headteacher. Where they did wander to was the political context at the time of the data collection (Jan 2006 –

November 2009). An example of what Layder's research map would describe as a political context is from one of headteacher Robert's later conversations:

"I think it was Adonis [a schools minister at the time] or one of the ministers who were there as well, and all of the schools reported back. We took a group of kids who failed at sixteen and we did this, to which my immediate response at the end of the meeting was, to the minister, can you explain to me why everybody waited till the kids had failed at sixteen and why did nobody try to do something at fourteen" (Headteacher Robert School F int4 p9).

This is an interesting example of a twitch of the "reflexive muscle". The headteacher here reports back his admonishment to the government officials and reminds himself and the researcher of the very important moral purpose of being a headteacher and indeed the ability to be able to have an impact on the lives of young people. Another aspect of this contextual level was how the new building programme became an opportunity for the headteachers to lift themselves away from the petty realities of operational irritation:

"And also this whole BSF thing is a nightmare isn't it. You saw the email from [the BSF advisor]" (Headteacher Benjamin School B int3 p8).

The dialogues reminded the headteachers that a building programme, if reflected upon properly, between two professionals, can be transformative:

"I suppose it's the same thing we have been talking about with the organisational structures and the architecture for BSF it's human scale buildings and the deal we can give the young people isn't it?" (Headteacher Robert School F Int4 p10).

The rhetorical question at the end, cut to the heart of the issue and reality of headship.

7.11 Double Loop or Reflexive Learning

When headteachers in this study reflected back on their actions in a professional context with others they became reflexive. Sometimes this informed current or future actions sometimes it was just reflected on in the conversation. For these headteachers to demonstrate double loop learning, they needed to show that they had re-assessed their basic values paradigm that might have been called into question as a result of an action they had reflected on (Argyris and Schön, 1974). For the action to be reflexive in this study they needed to reflect on this process of double looping as part of the professional conversation. There were a number of examples from all the headteachers of this but the following examples all come from the final or penultimate interviews.

Headteacher Benjamin's theme was the recruitment of staff and he reflected on how having secured the correct people the school could move forward more confidently:

I guess just thinking back in terms of OK we have got staffing in place for next year we are looking forward to better results improved results in key stage 4. You know we are always going on about how much time it takes to interview but we all know how important it is to get the right staff for the children" (Headteacher Benjamin School B Interview 4 p11).

Double loop learning is shown by the return to the core value of the young people and to some extent the public accountability of results and appropriate structures to select staff. The context of this conversation was concerned with how headteachers managed their staff and the expectations from a range of different stakeholders. The professional reflexivity here is indicated by the relationship between both headteachers ('you know' 'thinking back') and the mutually understood fact that

selecting staff is perhaps the most important aspect of being a headteacher agreed by everyone in the study. (see Chapter 5).

Headteacher Robert reflected back on his three years of headship (which also matched the time frame for this study):

So that's been an interesting part of the journey because any of us can make mistakes but it's interesting it's when I've, (and your right about the instincts) the times where I have done things and I have had to go back have been where I have allowed other peoples judgements to overrule mine and they're the ones where I have gone back afterwards and changed what I needed to say and changed what I needed to do and said 'no sorry guys that was a mistake we shouldn't have done that'" (Headteacher Robert School F Int4 p8).

Here the reflexive aspect is clearer. It is almost because the researcher invited him to reflect back on his reality of headship that he arrived at these comments. They are true for him but are also shared by the researcher who understands the context because he had also gone through a similar process (i.e. the first three years of headship). The evidence of double loop learning is demonstrated by his reflection on the source of his judgements and his confidence to be able to evaluate past judgements in terms of the kind of headteacher he has now grown into.

Headteacher George's reflection like headteacher Benjamin is about the people.

This example is about the continuous development of staff (see chapter 6):

"if you are lucky, looking back, if you are able to develop people and there is that sense too of continuous professional dialogue with colleagues I find it very rewarding seeing colleagues that you can see developing in their own way it's how we make our schools better" (Headteacher George School A int3 p10).

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The reflexivity here comes from the dialogue of professional learning which is being used as the process of improvement and of course the backward looking reflection about this process. The context here was a response to the question from the researcher "what is the best bit about being a headteacher?". It also succeeds in being an example of double loop learning because the headteacher goes back to the core moral purpose of making schools better (implicitly, for students).

Headteacher Thomas's double loop and reflexivity is linked to an action which had been planned in a previous conversation and was being reflected back on as part of the on-going discussion of how each headteacher continued to improve their schools:

"I've actually made those changes here we spoke about before. I have created this Personal Development Faculty with Citizenship, Mentoring PSHE. It is taken more seriously now, we have got a non-teaching careers person and she has been trained, she was a learning support person who worked with health and social care and child care as well" (Headteacher Thomas School E Int3 p11).

Here the researcher headteacher is being used as a reflective sounding board.

Headteacher Thomas does not need or ask for the approval of headteacher Percy.

The dialogue is used more as a "catalyst for change" (Penlington, 2008 p1306) and the response was for headteacher Percy to share the changes he had made to structures in his own school. Again the added element is the reflection with another professional and the time to allow reflection itself to be reflected upon.

Headteacher William's reflection is in the wider educational context of what education is for. Almost without exception headteacher William brought his

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comments back to the core purpose leadership and indeed of being a morally centred individual. All the conversations were characterised by the exercise of a well-developed "reflexive muscle":

"the future...reality is that we should focus on communities and build on relationships and I believe that effective education only arises where you have communities where there are effective relationships, effective relationships are at the heart of any meaningful education" (Headteacher William School C in4 p12).

What needs to be unpacked here are a number of definitions. The first is communities, which in this context refers to the catchment area of Catholics served by the school as well as the cohort of all young people of school age in the geographic area around the school. There is also a sense to which there is also a community of educational professionals whose role is to create and support these relationships. The second definition is of "relationships". Headteacher William over all the conversations holds that the morally centred individual will form "authentic" relationships with students and adults which drive forward not just learning but the whole moral purpose behind what he calls "meaningful education". Branson describes this drive as:

"The leader's desire to nurture a moral consciousness should be fuelled by a desire to live a better life, to make the world a better place, to care about the difference between right and wrong, and to be passionately determined to make sound moral decisions. (Branson, 2007b p472)

There is a constant questioning of the paradigm in this context, not to change it but enhance and validate it. The reflexivity is based on the discussion about the fundamentals of education between two headteachers examining their own practice.

Headteacher Philip took over another neighbouring school (Kingswood School) during the study and the following comment was made during the conversation a year after the merger:

“That’s why I think I said to you when I spoke to you before the thing that I have noticed in my twelve years is that now I have got a few very able kids (but they are all ex [School H] kids) and I think I said to you before each year the ability profile is higher of [School H] kids than my [School D] kids in every single year so I have now got more able kids and it’s made me think – it’s made me appreciate the difference between a middle-class school and a working-class school” (Headteacher Philip School D Int3)

The double loop learning is clear here as he challenges how he needs to address the needs for the influx of more able students and the reflexivity is shown by the two time shifts. The first looked backward to previous conversations in the study the second (I would argue as a direct consequence of this) looked back on his career as a headteacher over twelve years. Each show how the reflexivity encourages the headteacher to reflect more deeply.

The final example is headteacher Percy, the researcher. Section 5.4 examines the individual reflexivity in more depth, but the following example comes from the penultimate conversation with headteacher Benjamin. At the beginning of the study headteacher Benjamin had only been in post for just over a year and the context of this comment was a reflection on how styles of leadership develop over the course of one’s career in headship:

“...what Heads have to search for you know is the type of head you want to be. You can be all sorts of different Heads, you can be super bossy you can be collegiate you can be all manner of things; the important thing is that you’re confident and you exude confidence so

that people see that. I would hope that I am more at ease with myself now than I was at the beginning, not that I think that I was particularly ill at ease but I must have been, you know, you show what makes you excited, excitement's great I can do excitement, but actually sometimes it's that calmness which I have had to learn so that other people can be better" (Headteacher Percy School B Interview 3 p16).

This meets the criteria for double loop learning in terms of the need to reconsider core values; in this case what sort of leader one should become and further the sort of leader headteacher Percy had been at various points in his headship. It is reflexive because the reflection examines a core purpose of leadership (inspiring confidence in others in order to focus on a common direction) for this headteacher. The context made it clear that these words were not meant as advice, though they clearly operate in some ways in the sense of coaching. The reflection, indeed reflexivity is by headteacher Percy for headteacher Percy. It is stimulated by the professional context and conversation with a peer but the learning is 'owned' by headteacher Percy.

7.12 Towards Meta-reflection

There are specific conditions that encourage reflexive thinking. Undertaking a professional doctorate would be a good example of such a context (Lenzo, 1995, Park, 2007). What has been interesting in analysing the data as the research moved into the second and third year was that these conditions were created by the professional conversations. It is not surprising that there is personal impact of reflexive learning for the researcher (Boyd and Fales, 1983) or that reflexivity has an impact in the area of academic research (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2006) but the data from

this study shows how such reflexivity has an impact on the professional contexts of school improvement and leadership.

There is evidence that the reflective muscle is strengthened and reflection deepened by being reflexive with other peers and that the actions and learning that individuals then take are affected by this reflexivity. The example above shows an example of this, headteacher Percy arrives at a deeper understanding of his actual leadership style (the excited energiser) and knows that a calmer approach also has its place in the leadership styles available to this headteacher. This is not just the "self-reflexivity" described by Wong (2009) but borders on self-coaching. This happened because the study focused on the experience of being a headteacher in its widest context, happened over three years and was within the context of professional respect and trust an echo of the recommendations made by Flintham (2010).

7.13 Conclusion

The data from this study clearly indicates that the reality of being a headteacher in English secondary schools in the first decade of the twenty first century is that they need to be a reflective professional who when reflecting with peers can improve his or her decision-making and actions within his or her school. Headteachers are very ready to engage in this reflexive behaviour and it seems to be connected to the way they develop in their roles. As with all reflexivity it can appear to be inconsequential (that is it might have happened anyway). However, this study suggests that even without the highly structured self-reflective practices of Branson (2007b) or Barnett

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(1995) headteachers can become highly reflexive professionals if they take the opportunity to engage in reflective professional conversations with each other. I suggest moreover that this is likely to make them more effective headteachers in their schools.

The final words are from headteacher Philip who responded to headteacher Percy's statement that heads are reflective in the context of the two headteachers who "failed" within a year, with the following:

"your principle [that headteachers are reflective] still applies to them, [the headteachers who failed] it went wrong. Or did it go wrong because they didn't have the ability to reflect? (Headteacher Philip School D Int4 p10).

Headteacher Philip was one of the most experienced and not the most deeply reflective headteacher in the sample but the question he left hanging may have significant implications for governors who appoint headteachers to their schools.

Chapter 8**Data Analysis: Theme 4 – Meta-Reflective Headteachers****8.1 Introduction - Starting with Reflexivity**

In chapter 7 it was established that headteachers in this study were not just reflective but also reflexive. Early analysis of the data in 2008 resulted in some emergent themes around headteacher reflexivity which were explicitly tested during the final conversations in 2009.

It could be argued that the question of reflexivity emerged from the research process itself. Headteacher John was only interviewed in the first round of conversations at the beginning of 2006 when the research question was focused on school improvement and leadership. At this point headteacher reflection had not been identified as an important part of the research study and yet the analysis of this interview (see sections 5.3.5 and 6.6) showed that headteacher John was also a reflexive practitioner.

There are a number of examples of the question used by headteacher Percy to check for reflexivity. A characteristic of all these questions was an implicit definition of what headteacher Percy meant by the term reflexivity:

“Headteachers develop their own style of reflexivity, which is of course reflection, which evolves and develops over time. So you reflect differently now...than you did when we first met, well not first met but when we first started this” (Headteacher Percy School F Int4 p1).

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“If you want to sustain your school’s improvement journey you have to form a reflection about yourself as a leader in context of your school...we don’t use the same words...So it’s the idea of – how to do it? To improve your school you have to have become, in your own way, a kind of reflective leader not a reflective practitioner because I think they are different” (Headteacher Percy School D Int5 p2).

The headteachers gave the following responses. These are shown in tabular form as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) in order to show how the replies related to each other:

Table 18 Headteachers’ responses to “Are you Reflexive?”

Headteacher	Response to question	Researcher’s comment
George	“Yes I think so” (School A Int3 p1)	This response hints at an uncertainty which was consistent attribute for this headteacher
Benjamin	“ Yes I do think Headteachers are reflective and increasingly they need to be” (School B Int4 p1)	Here reflexivity is reframed as reflective, though there is evidence of reflexivity and meta-reflection in the conversations
William	“I think it is inconceivable for a headteacher not to be able to reflect deeply on their role” (School C Int4 p1)	Here reflexivity is reframed as the ability to reflect deeply and like headteacher Benjamin he equates reflection to the role of headteachers
Philip	“No. I not would agree. The way that I take what you have said is that I have had at least four Headships [in the same school]...In my perception I have had to change because the school has changed and the needs of the school has changed” (School D Int5 p2)	This is one of the most interesting responses to this question. His instinct is to disagree and reinterpret the question by reflecting on his headship career (which itself is reflexive). Reflexive for this headteacher is about perception and change. Personal change is necessary if the situation of the school requires it. This does not mean any loss of authenticity necessarily, just a view that being reflexive is about very fundamental change and this change must meet the needs of the institution.
Thomas	“I agree with that you only have yourself to trust” (Headteacher Thomas School E Int 4 p1)	By contrast this headteacher’s response was to agree the definition with headteacher Percy and use reflexivity to check his personal authenticity.
Robert	“Yes I agree you need to be able understand your impact as a head” (Headteacher Robert School F Int 4 p1)	For this headteacher reflexivity is all about impact as a headteacher and most importantly being able to comprehend it for oneself.

8.2 - Going Beyond the Reflexive

In this section the data shows that some Headteachers are able to reflect in a manner which Bleakley (1999) characterised as "complex reflexivity" (p316). Further this study suggests that such reflexivity can have a greater impact on actions than his definition suggested. Although reflexivity usually refers to the self-examination of the researcher (Russell and Kelly, 2002a p2), the headteachers in this study became co-researchers or what Steier called "reciprocators" (Steier, 1991a p6). Therefore what happened by the last years of the study was that in some sense all the headteachers had joined headteacher Percy in becoming researchers into their own practice. They too began to notice how their actions and reflections on their action changed their behaviour as headteachers in their schools. If one posits for a moment a reflective state beyond reflexivity it is Archer who has an interesting view of how reflexivity has:

"...a self-referential characteristic of bending back some thought on itself" (Archer, 2010 p2).

She pursues this further to get to four categories of reflexivities captured in table 2.

These have been reordered to show different degrees of reflexivity:

Table 19 Archer's Levels of Reflexivity

Archer's Reflexivities	% in Archer's sample	% in this study	Implication for self-reflection	Implications for this research
Fractured Reflexivity	22	0	Having great difficulty or being unable to self-reflect	Not shown by any headteachers
Autonomous Reflexivity	27	100	Using internal dialogues to self-reflect	Shown by all over time
Communicative Reflexivity	21	100	Using other people to self-reflect	Shown by at least half the sample and possibly all the sample (see table above)
Meta-Reflexivity	23	57	Using self-talk and other people within a moral context in an ethical manner	Shown by over half the sample

Adapted from Archer (2007 p93)

8.2.1 - Beyond Argyris's Double Loop

This study is about the examination of the everyday reality of being a headteacher as opposed to an analysis of failing heads (Shepherd, 2010) or the lauding of super heads (Frean and Webster, 2008). The latter being what Argyris described as "the successful practitioner who comes to be revered by his fellow professionals" because the inherent weakness of such practitioners is that:

..."although he knows he is successful he does not know how to tell others how to behave equally effectively...if he has become dependent on his mystique he may also fear behaving in ways that could destroy the intuitive skills...such practitioners often resist being observed...[but] may be willing to describe the difficulties and challenges that face them as successful practitioners" (Argyris and Schön, 1974 p179).

As headteacher Benjamin suggested the hero head is dead (Barton, 2007). By contrast the reflexive headteachers in this study had no such "mystiques" to protect and headteacher Percy found them very willing to be observed in the act of doing,

and willing participants in co-discovering the reflexive processes they used to help sustain themselves and their schools. They did describe the challenges they faced but did so in the spirit of sharing these experiences in order that another headteacher might learn from them. This in turn takes us back to one of the original motivations for headteacher Percy undertaking doctoral study; that is the desire to offer other headteachers a practice based solution to the challenges of starting headship.

8.2.2 - A Model for a Meta Reflective Loop

From this point onwards it is more useful to refer to what Argyris (1974) described as "learning" as reflection. Schön and Argyris' definition certainly encompass reflection at its core because one cannot question one's personal value set or paradigm without reflecting fundamentally on one's self-image (Branson, 2007a).

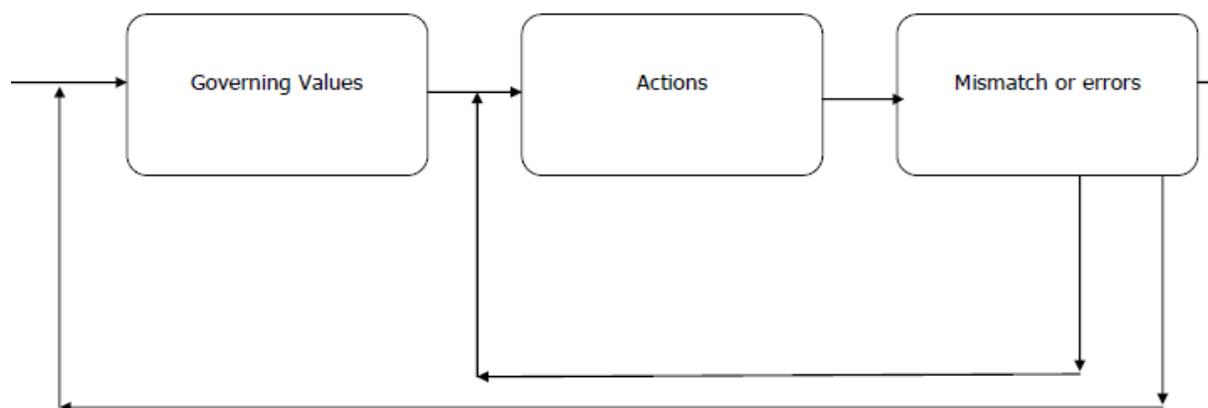
Argyris's (1974) Model of Double Loop Reflection does not imply a new orthodoxy it simply described the way one could evaluate a theory in action by going back to the concept of internal consistency. As Argyris says:

"double loop does not supersede single loop learning... [it] changes the governing variables...and causes ripples of change to fan out over one's whole system" (Argyris and Schön, 1974 p19) .

The double loop could be described in the following figure 17.

Figure 16 Double Loop Reflection

Where the → represents personal or professional reflection



After Argyris and Schön (1974 p19)

This would also fit with the definition of reflexive described by Archer's proposition

as:

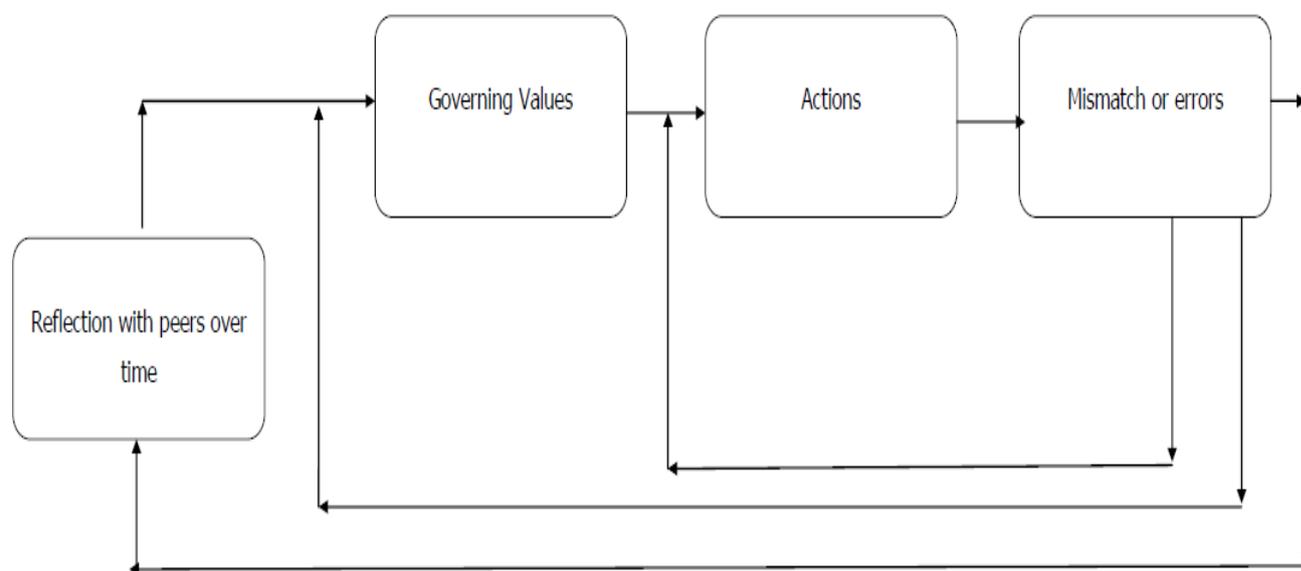
"the subjective powers of reflexivity [play a part] in influencing social action and are thus indispensable in explaining social outcomes"
(Archer, 2007 p5).

The analysis of the data in the study strongly suggested that the reflective processes of some headteachers showed they reflected in a manner that appeared to go beyond this double loop reflection. Whilst there was a great deal of evidence of the confirmation or indeed adjustment of their governing values in the conversations the whole process needed an addition to the model to describe properly what happened to headteachers in this study over the three years. In the same way that double loop reflection is not necessarily superior to single loop reflection adapting the double loop model is an attempt to describe what analysis of the data revealed rather than to suggest that the original model was flawed.

The following figure, then, does not describe a triple loop reflection, as one's core values should be irreducible (certainly for the authentic leader), but it does allow for the opportunity for deeper reflection due to the impact of a specific professional context and the passage of time and thus extends the model of double loop reflection. This proposed model for meta-reflective loops adds the two aspects of time and peer proximity that was a significant feature of this study. It offered a group of reflexive headteachers the opportunity to reflect at a meta-reflective level.

Figure 17 A Proposed Model for Meta-Reflective Loops

Where the → represents personal or professional reflection



An adaptation of Argyris and Schön (1974 p19)

8.2.3 - Beyond Schön's Reflection in Action

Schön describes reflection in action as a reflective conversation in which:

"the practitioner's efforts to solve the reframed problem yields new discoveries which calls for new reflection in action. The process spirals through stages of appreciation, action and re-appreciation. The unique and uncertain situation comes to be understood through the attempt to change it and changed through the attempt to understand it" (Schön, 1983 p130).

There is a great deal of evidence that the practitioner based reflection in this study was the main reflective process that the headteachers used. In this model the knowledge and ability to understand are within the professionals. Reflection in action allows this tacit understanding to become explicit and this happens because of the professional context in which the reflection occurs.

If we now add reflexivity to this reflective professional context and then add the important element of time to reflect we get something more akin to reflexivity in action. This term was coined by Archer who described it as an internal conversation which is used to process information in the following ten ways:

Table 20 Archer's (2007) Applications of Reflexivity

Mulling over	Planning
Imagining	Deciding
Rehearsing	Clarifying
Prioritising	Budgeting
Reliving	Imaginary conversations

After Archer (2007 p91)

For headteacher Percy all of the ten ways of reflecting were part of his reflexivity and learning processes. All the other headteachers used the processes 1-9, (see

table 3 but there was no evidence of the other headteachers using “imaginary conversations” as part of their reflection. This type of reflexivity was not explicitly referred to in the professional conversations. A case could be made that the maintenance of a reflexive journal implies using some imaginary conversations, however, the data does not show this indisputably.

Therefore, it is a reasonable assertion that this sample of reflexive headteachers engaged in Archer’s reflexivity in action. It would also be true that these headteachers would be meta-reflexive in Archer’s definition because they are:

“critically reflexive about their own internal conversations and critical about effective action in society” (Archer, 2007 p93).

The data, however, points to something beyond reflexivity in action. These headteachers had the opportunity to be reflexive with a reflexive researcher headteacher (headteacher Percy) over the three years of the study. This resulted in something definitely in the realm of meta-reflexivity, but different and not completely captured by Archer’s definition.

8.3 - Towards a Model Headteacher Reflexive Cycles

For headteachers in this sample the evidence of reflection in their professional contexts is reinforced as being both natural and necessary. The evidence further suggests that something else happens when headteachers engage over time in reflection with other headteachers. These two aspects, reflection over time and

being reflexive with colleague headteachers moves the analysis beyond the available models of reflection and reflexivity.

The analysis in chapter 7 showed the importance of headteachers engaging in professional conversations with other headteachers. These conversations are part of the everyday reality of being a secondary headteacher. When headteacher Percy asked the other headteachers "who do you talk to about leading your school?" many referred to their senior teams:

"I have an excellent senior team and two superb deputies who help me keep things in proportion"
(Headteacher Philip School D Int1 p2).

Others included LEA advisors, retired colleagues or their chair of governors:

"something I continue to do even with the new chair of governors - a weekly meeting I will give half a day to and I still find that is tremendously supporting, its strengthening because when you can talk things through in a very small time scale level then you can share a very large part of what truly is happening in the school and you also have the opportunity to walk the school with that person and to walk and talk and to respond to things that you see so that the governors truly have an intimate knowledge of the school" (Headteacher William School C Int1 p14).

Others referred to other headteacher colleagues at conferences and meetings:

"...well it's therapeutic because whatever issues you have there is somebody worse than you. There is that element to it as well isn't there? So I think it works both ways, I think I would say people [have these conversations] because I think it gives them a sense of place...as well [a sense of] the issues and...a sense of proportion, where things aren't so bad at all, but I think people do use it as an opportunity to promote themselves and find a place in the pecking order and people like to think that their school is doing, you know, curriculum change ... better than other schools there is a sense of that isn't there?" (Headteacher Philip School D Int4 p9).

There are two important points that are highlighted here. The first is the need for this headteacher to end with the question. This is part of the relationship between the two professionals. One is asking the other to agree with him that headteachers show off about their schools to other headteachers, but he is also explaining how this moderation of performance is helpful in gaining professional perspective and even new ways of operating. This level of reflection, whilst useful, does not get under the self-protective ego of the professional and therefore the most that can happen is either reflexivity in action or double loop reflection. When trust in the researcher and professional respect are added, without any desire to score points or position oneself, the opportunity for meta-reflection is possible.

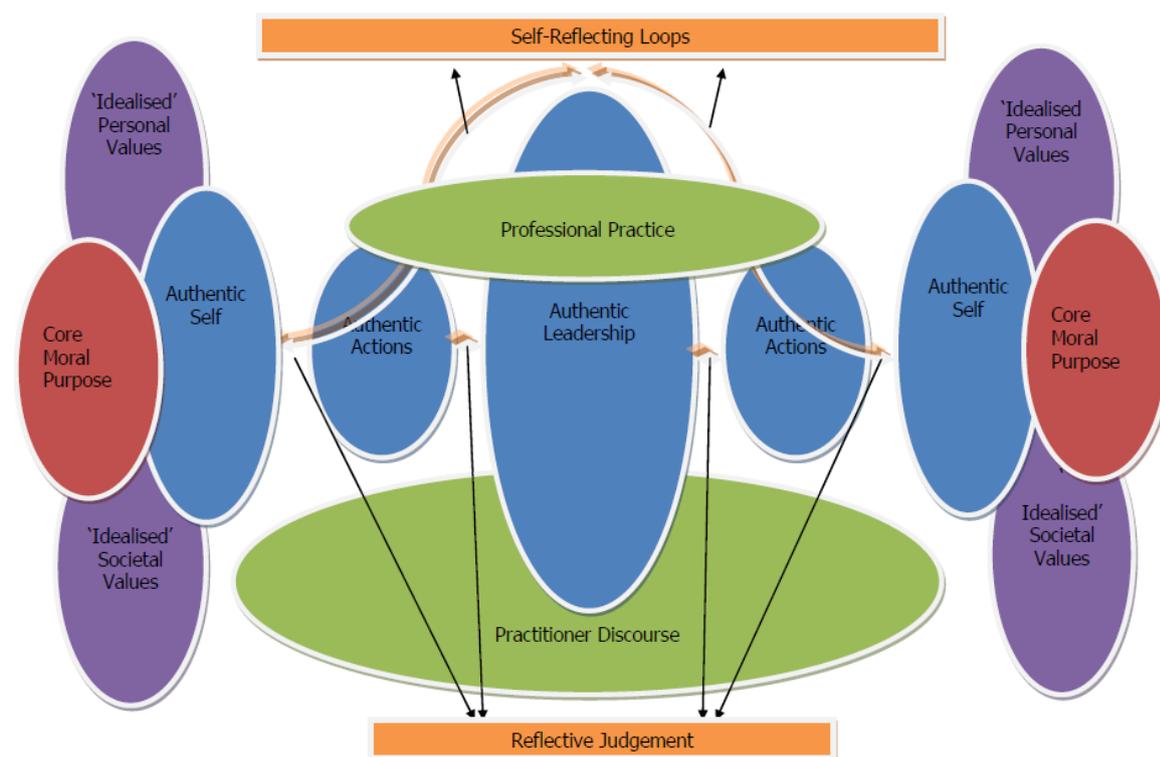
The casual remark that it is therapeutic for headteachers to talk to one another (especially in a professional trusting context) is important in how Headteachers sustain themselves and their schools. It is significant and well reported in the literature that headteachers can experience a feeling of being isolated and alone in terms of their role (Stroud, 2006). This study provides evidence that professional conversations can help headteachers feel less isolated and cope with pressure more successfully.

8.3.1 The relationship between action research spirals and reflexive cycles

We need to revisit the action research spirals described in chapter 4. There are many diagrammatic representations of the action research process (Checkland and

Holwell, 2007, Reason and Bradbury, 2001), but the following diagram (figure 18) is related to the subsequent reflexive loops that grew out of this research.

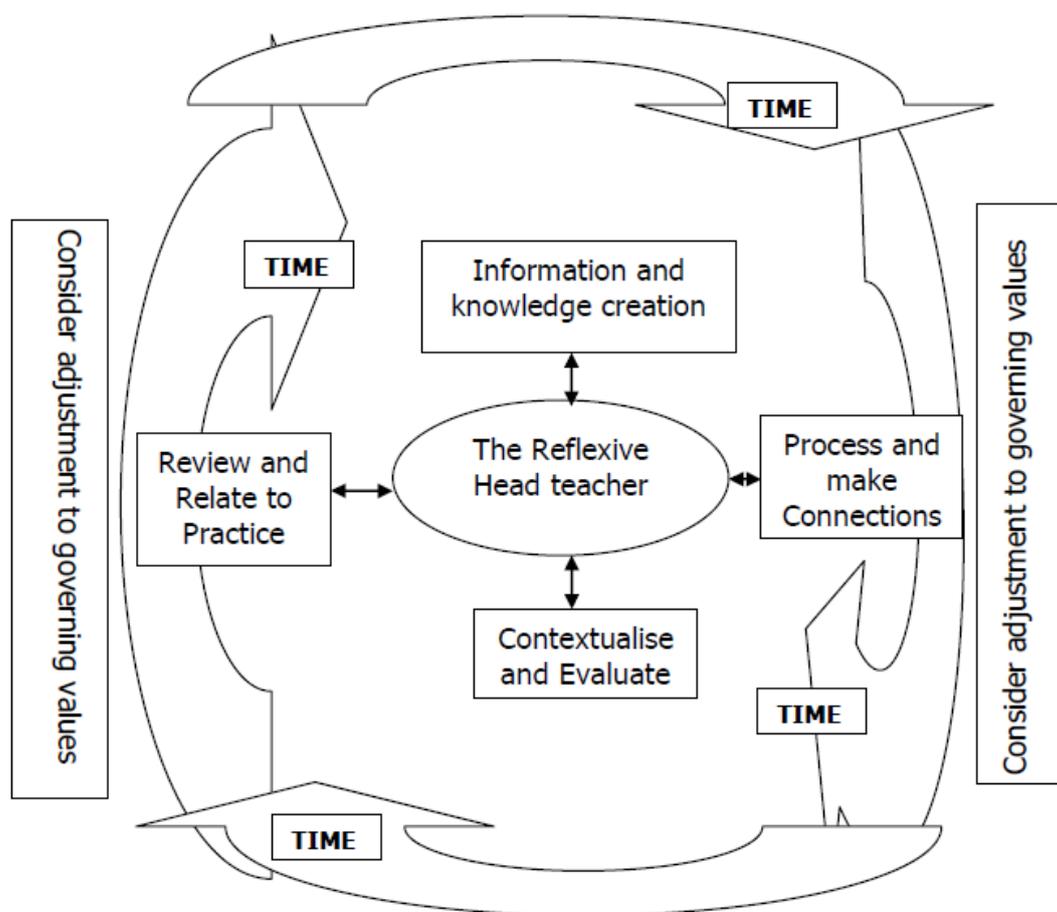
Figure 18 An example of Action Research Spirals and Reflecting Loops



This particular model (figure 18) captures the characteristics of action research (see also figure 8 above) which most aligns with the following model of headteacher reflexivity (see figure 19 below). Significantly this loop operates for an individual as well as two people in dialogue. The arrows indicate how the loops are reflexive and spark further sets of actions and reflection on those actions.

If this were the perception of the action research process for headteacher Percy it is easy to see how the next model of reflexive cycles evolves from this type of research methodology.

Figure 19 The Development of the Description of a Headteacher's Reflexive Cycle derived from the Research



The experience of headteacher reflection shown in the data can be described by this self-reflective cycle (see figure 19). The information explicit in the research conversation, depending on its context, may create knowledge or link to existing knowledge. This is then processed in part at the time and in part after the dialogue has finished. The temporal nature of this reflection is important. In some sense all

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reflection needs time to allow people to consider actions taken, or choices made.

The practitioner can make appropriate connections to other knowledge, past actions and intended actions. Following this, the knowledge is contextualised and internalised and evaluated in terms of how important it is and stored for further possible use. Finally the information or knowledge is reviewed and related back to practice and applied to practice where appropriate.

This type of reflective cycle (figure 19) has been used at an institutional level, for example school improvement plans (Davies and Ellison, 2003) and is expected as part of the evidence used by Ofsted to show how headteachers lead their schools (Ofsted, 2005e). What became clear during the interviews and over the three years was that something else was happening and the nature of the reflection did not seem to match the Argyris (1974), Archer (2007) or Schön (1983) 'models' of professional reflection. What appeared to be happening was a result of having two self-reflecting headteachers engaging in a professional conversation about their schools. Therefore, when two headteachers, who had formed a reflective relationship, reflected together there was an opportunity for them both to be able to reflect at a meta-reflexive level.

The self-reflective cycles encourage the reflective process to become reflexive and drive down towards an authentic "Self" (see above 6.6.1). There is a spiral into a level of reflection where the whole reflective conversation is itself reflected upon which enhances and enriches the context of one's own professional practice. This

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meta-level is characteristic of the role of being a headteacher who cannot escape being reflexive in some sense. Archer describes this as people using reflexivity:

“to make our way through the world. It is what makes most of us ‘active agents’, people who can exercise some governance in their own lives as opposed to ‘passive agents’ to whom things simply happen” (Archer, 2007 p6).

This meta-reflection operates at a sub-conscious level and continually processes information, emotions, relationships and moral purpose. This was not what headteacher Percy expected to come out of the research and of which he only became aware by analysing the longitudinal data. Headteachers who understand and accept this understanding seem to comprehend more fully the realities of being a headteacher because it helps them sustain their leadership. If headteachers become conscious of this process they become reflexive, if on the other hand headteachers have little or no understanding of professional reflection they are in danger of having what Archer describes as “fractured reflexivity” (Archer, 2007 p93) (see also the conclusion of chapter 7).

Meta-reflection as described in this dissertation does not appear in the research literature. The evidence from this longitudinal study suggests that meta-reflection is a reality for many headteachers in the town of Swinburne at least. Table 20 shows examples of headteachers Benjamin and William going through professional reflection, reflexivity and finally meta-reflection. This process is also described in figure 20 (section 8.7).

Table 21 An Evolution of Reflection

Head-teacher	Idea	Reflective: Interview 1 2006	Double-loop Reflexive: Interview 3 2007	Meta-Reflective: Interview 5 2009
Benjamin	Moral purpose	"it is something that I find very stimulating the idea that we are here to improve the life chances of young people seems to me to be a fantastic cause and a moral purpose" (Headteacher Benjamin School B Int1 p2)	"I think we talked before and we were talking about our own values the values that make us want to be head teachers, what happens when we become head teachers and as I was saying earlier align those personal values to our professional values and conduct and aspirations and hopes and so on" (Headteacher Benjamin School B Int3 p4)	"we have managed to guide everyone to a place where my values and the school's [values] are the same. It's funny but when I think about it I am very proud of how everyone's got on board" (Headteacher Benjamin School B Int5 p10)
William	Time in post	"It was a very difficult six years the first I'm not sure I particularly enjoyed doing the job and there were times when I thought we were not going to break through but some significant things happened" (Headteacher William School C Int1 p2)	"the challenge you see and that's why its more difficult because by maybe the tenth year you might feel fulfilled, you might feel that you have done everything you are capable of doing but you go back to those core beliefs" (Headteacher William School C Int3 p6)	"it took me time to actually understand how to be yourself and as you say going with that you do expose yourself and you have to accept you can't be all things to all people and that there will be times when you will be challenged and times more importantly when you are very deeply hurt, and times when because you are open it allows other people in maybe with a different agenda" (Headteacher William School C Int5 p20)

Table 20 shows how the processes of reflection evolved for these two headteachers over the course of the study. In the first headteacher Benjamin states how important he believes moral purpose to be in the first set of interviews a year on his reflection on the same subject has moved on and he clearly analyses his values' paradigm as well as referring back to one of the previous discussion on moral purpose.

Headteacher William, in the second example, begins with a straight-forward account of his early years as head before developing a way of looking back over his career and attempting to align his current state with his core beliefs. By the final interview for this headteacher he is able to articulate a definition of authentic school leadership which would put this utterance in the centre of the interfaces of Bush's domains model (see figures 5 and 7) and establish this headteacher as both authentic and capable of meta-reflection.

Headteacher Philip was a good example of a professional who was consciously aware. He was retiring from his role at the end of the academic year and the last year of the study and was asked by headteacher Percy "Do you think you will ever stop thinking about this?" (the role of headteacher):

"Maybe I'll wake up in September and it won't be there I don't know but I doubt it" (Headteacher Philip School D Interview 5 p20).

Although headteacher Philip was not in the subset of meta-reflective headteachers this is an example of reflexive thinking and had it been possible to return may well have found him also to be able to reflect in this manner.

8.4 Appropriating Meta-Reflection for Education

Jean Watson coined the phrase meta-reflection in the context of nursing. Her caring-healing model that springs from this process is analogous to authentic leadership but it is significant enough to reiterate her view of the closeness of having a moral centre and being able to be professionally reflective:

“...we are invited personally and professionally to engage in our inner and outer work, exploring our inner journey towards the deeper level of the work. It is through such inner work that we are more able to witness the process and contribute to a transformation of the outer work...we can tap into a level of reflection that asks moral questions (Watson, 1998b pvii-viii) .

If these moral questions cause the values paradigm of the reflector also to be brought into question this has a similarity to Argyris’s double loop reflection. Meta-reflection when applied to the professional practice of school leaders acknowledges Watson’s inner journey, but offers a context which extends this journey.

This study suggested that when professionally reflective practitioners were driven by a moral purpose they operated at a meta-reflective level, as described by Watson. However the data also suggested that practitioners engaging in consciously reflective conversations not only become reflexive (Russell and Kelly, 2002b) but can go beyond this given the appropriate professional relationship (neither friend or foe)

and the time for meta-reflection on the conversations in the context of their own schools.

Burge, Laroque et al (2000) also used the term meta-reflection. Their research underlined the powerfully personal nature of meta-reflecting:

“the reflective process is not a natural preference...For us, the process of reflection and analysis to write this article was akin to baring our souls—hardly something we do every day, as it took much time and not a little soul searching!” (Burge et al., 2000 p84)

For Bruge, Laroque et al (2000) meta-reflection impacted on their understanding of professional reflection within an academic context, this study applied meta-reflection to the professional practice of being a headteacher.

8.5 - Reflexivity in Action Headteacher Percy

Headteacher Percy was reflexive (given the nature of being the participant action researcher) but the degree to which his colleagues also shared this characteristic was more surprising. Archer’s sample showed between a fifth and a third showed high levels of reflexivity (see above table 11 p92). The data source for headteacher Percy comes in part from the conversations and in part from the reflexive journal (appendix 6) that were kept during the study. There was a great deal of data that could have been used but the following four examples under three themes seem to be characteristic of headteacher Percy’s reality of being a headteacher. Each one looks at impact and tracks back the possible sources of this decision into the data using the research notes as a triangulation point. At various points over the last six

years the distinction between headteacher and researcher for headteacher Percy has blurred into a single entity whereby there was always (so to speak) a reflexive parrot on the shoulder commenting obliquely on the actions of the practitioner and storing away data to be considered later.

8.5.1 Meta-reflection and the Impact on Critical Incidents – Curriculum, Changing the Structure of the School Day

The first example seems a little prosaic but this study is about the operational realities of headship as well as the transformational strategy. Changing the structure of the day for a secondary school, during the time of this research, was a significant organisational change and could not be taken lightly because there are a number of statutory consultations and notifications (see appendix 5) that had to be taken. However the students and the staff are the most important people who need to be on board with this sort of change. Headteacher Percy has seen his school grow from just under 600 students to just under 1000. The supervision of students for an hour in the middle of the day and safe places for the students to be during this time is a continual tension with ensuring that all students are ready for learning in the afternoon session:

“We need a timetable solution to the kids [at lunchtime] timetabling lunch into p4 and 5 and adding p6 would solve it and should work”
(Reflexive Journal November 2005)

Headteachers can change these sorts of things from their position but working out the actual cost benefit analysis is difficult because all internal stakeholders have strong views and most external stakeholder have no reason to care. If it goes right

the decision becomes collective, if wrong it can destabilise the school. An early conversation with headteacher William touched on a similar experience at School C:

“it was a nightmare...and saying that we are going to see it through and learn from it throughout the rest of the year [meant that]people said it’s awful, it’s worse than it was before and people said can you do something about it. But I loved the fact that they could say that [to me], the head of the 6th form came up with a new idea and we talked about it and thought about it brought it in right at the end of the school year and there was no ripple it was seamless there was no big reaction to it whatever, there was this trust that staff have that it was well intentioned” (Headteacher William School C In1 p19).

The context of this towards the end of a conversation about school improvement and not part of any interview schedule meant that this was the immediate source of any action by headteacher Percy. The challenge of what to do about lunchtime had certainly not gone away, indeed the need to do something grew over the next several years. As part of the professional doctorate the interviews were reviewed by headteacher Percy and so a reflexive relationship with the data began. It was as if the conversation was being replayed (of course this was literally true in terms of listening again to the data). This was reflection at a meta-reflective level.

8.5.2 Applying the Definition of Meta-reflection

If it is true that meta-reflection happened when reflexivity is applied to professional actions and this process happens over time then the above example is meta-reflection. The problem belonged to headteacher Percy and his school. It was never made explicit in any of the interviews, this was never the main purpose of the research, but this was an operational problem needing to be solved in School G.

This was a difficult problem for a headteacher to get a perspective from the usual

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professional processes because all the normal “conversational partnerships (Rubin and Rubin, 2005 p79) would have too much of an internally focused view (Donald and Ugur, 1998) when this particular innovation required an informed outsider’s view. Therefore what was required here was for the headteacher Percy to become his own informed outsider by using his headteacher colleagues to help him to consider the problem at a meta-reflective level. The category is different from other forms of reflection because of the time and the continual nature of the dialogues. All the headteachers developed a non-hierarchical and trusting context in which they were able to expose their thinking to outsiders and use their professional instincts to go back over a problem over a period of several months.

The impact of this meta-level reflection was to do nothing for eighteen months. The reflexive consideration on what headteacher William had said meant that headteacher Percy’s choice to spend more time considering changes and discussing models rather than just going ahead and making the change. The reflexive process here allowed headteacher Percy to take on board the experience described by headteacher William and process this learning into the context of School G. Choosing to delay was a result of the conversation as there were significant pressures from headteacher Percy’s senior team to do something about the shape of the day around lunchtimes. Much of this happened at a subconscious level in the way a computer might process information in the background. Clearly a range of other factors influenced this decision but headteacher Percy noticed this as part of his reflexive engagement with the data generated by the professional conversations and importantly to on-going relationships.

Although this topic was not revisited in the later conversations, the headteachers met on three other occasions to continue their reflexive relationship, it was an additional aspect of the information that headteacher Percy had to draw on whilst reflecting on what to do about the structure of the school day. Had there not been the opportunity to have had the conversation, or time to build up a relationship, or the time to reflect across several months it was very possible that the decision may well have had the same result in school G, as headteacher William's decision had in School C. Headteacher Percy also heard the narrative of headteacher William's experience four or five times as part of the transcription of the data which added to the level of reflexivity and therefore according to the model was meta-reflective.

After many months the final result of all of this meta-reflection was the introduction of a pilot scheme which allowed the headteacher to see the implications of a change of day without going through the enormous upheaval of using statutory instruments. This solution had the benefit of using the headteacher's authority for speed and the goodwill of the staff and students to ensure the consequences were not too disruptive to the learning.

The question is, however, what makes this meta-reflective? Firstly headteacher Percy used headteacher William in an external advisory role (an informed outsider) to allow him to consider all the possible solutions and to arrive at the most appropriate way dealing with change to the school day. Further headteacher Percy also used all the other headteachers in this same advisory role to help him process

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his decision making. This is not uncommon among professionals, but what makes this meta-reflective is two important features. The first is the embracing of time. Decisions often need to be made quickly and decisively and yet a desire to be “authentic” would imply that for decisions to have real impact for the long term they need to be more considered. The second is that the decision was still made by headteacher Percy; the advisory role of the other headteachers became a way of helping headteacher Percy give himself permission to consider an action more deeply and use the reflexive process to ensure that this decision was the appropriate action to be taken. This fits the definition of meta-reflection.

Secondly reflecting reflexively on the problem allowed him to recognise the confidence that headteacher William had communicated to him eighteen months before. He was able to trust his instincts and allow his staff to guide him whilst doing something about the problem and minimising the disruption to normal routines. William was not aware of the advisory role because he was present in a reflexive not literal sense. Headteacher Percy was able to use meta-reflection to reflect on the problem over a much longer term and trust a colleague headteacher who had attempted a similar change in a different way. There is transmission of learning and experience here, but because this learning is ultimately reflexive, Percy actually solved the problem for himself. Moreover, this solution had a more positive impact on School G because of a reflection over time on headteacher William’s experience of the same problem.

8.5.3 Impact on Critical Incidents - Transforming the Curriculum Model

The second example looks at curriculum development and changes to the curriculum model in headteacher Percy's school. Although curriculum was not explicitly on the interview schedule in the early interviews the curriculum was a common and significant topic of conversation between the headteachers in this study. If it was true that headteacher Percy needed the help an informed outsider to help him meta-reflect and then arrive at the decision to change of the structure of the day such an external role was essential in the next example. The curriculum change that was being contemplated by headteacher Percy in this example required more than one external view in order to trigger his meta-reflection. It would be safe to say that the idea of truncating a curriculum has been undertaken by very few secondary schools in the country²⁵. For example whilst Masham School in 2012 is in its fifth year of this innovation no other school in Houseman has a similar type of curriculum design and HMI in 2009 described such a decision as being very brave²⁶. In this context the only people who would be in favour of such a move would be the handful of headteachers throughout the country who have made this change. The data below is presented in tabular form to show the nature of the curriculum discussion. All seven headteachers have been included in this analysis (including headteacher Percy whose comments also relate to school B). The roles adopted by the headteacher comes from the researcher's own analysis and are used to show how each headteacher had very different positions on this curriculum development.

²⁵ Data is difficult to find in this area but headteacher Percy found 5 schools in the country who had truncated the curriculum in a similar way to his thoughts during this research.

²⁶ This happened during a routine subject inspection in 2009 of Masham School and was said by a history HMI who was worried about the impact on history standards in the school if time in the first two years in secondary school was reduced.

Table 22 Headteachers' comments on curriculum

Headteacher	Quotation	Curriculum Role adopted by Headteacher
John	"the next thing was the curriculum and we probably forced through curriculum change and heads of department who didn't like it left." (School A Int1 p4)	Curriculum autocrat
George	"I was really keen to get involved in the curriculum, but the job there was very much perceived to be pastoral and I am a great one for, I'm afraid I meddle with things, if I can see something I don't stop and think is that my job? I think I want to change it"(School A Int2 p2)	Curriculum champion a fixer of problems
Thomas	"...we've designed a curriculum to meet the needs of those young people, so they are actually working or they are on the right sort of core curriculum" (School E Int1 p5)	Curriculum designer attempting to match this to students' needs
Philip	"We are thinking as a big school rather than a 900 school with a bit added on. We are thinking right we are a big school how do we organise the curriculum? and we do it in a different way" (School D Int1 p12)	Curriculum designer attempting to match this to students' needs
Benjamin	"they talked about the curriculum and what they were doing with the curriculum" (School B Int2 p26)	Curriculum Expert sharing with others
Robert	"we are going for a fully integrated curriculum within each faculty to try to get as much cross curricular working as possible" (School F Int3 p1)	Curriculum designer and innovator
William	"for example we want to change our key stage 4 curriculum. We want to have more vocational representation there with progression into the sixth form at appropriate levels" (School C Int2 p16)	Curriculum designer attempting to match this to students' needs
Percy	"Not only because he wanted to pick my brains about curriculum, but he needed some advice..." (School B Int3 p23)	Curriculum Expert sharing with others

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Headteacher Percy's comments on curriculum were in part related to the conversation and often made reference to the political context in Layder's research map:

"...and it's because you know the government's recent nonsense, and they have so many of them, but the recent one..." (Headteacher Percy School B Int2 p1).

But as the interviews progressed through time one could see a theme around a curriculum development in School G begin to emerge. Interestingly, this aligned with the role Robert adopted (see above section 5.3.5).

Table 23 Headteacher Percy's comments on developing the curriculum

Quotation	Commentary
We are looking at some curriculum change around year 9 (School B Int1 p10)	Headteacher Percy uses the opportunity of a discussion about the curriculum to share his plans about a significant in policy. He is not asking for permission and the response to this comment was for headteacher Benjamin to talk about his own curriculum developments. What is happening here is headteacher Percy beginning to use the professional conversation to reflect reflexively on decisions and actions that will not affect the other headteacher but in some way because this has been shared with another professional the idea has been exposed to professional scrutiny. A process that may have a relationship to academic peer review.
...It's not without its problems teachers aren't keen on large scale change [the curriculum] (School A int2 p12)	In this situation headteacher Percy brought the curriculum issue into a discussion about managing staff morale and expectations. Two months had passed since the previous interview and the process of change had clearly moved on. What is captured here is a headteacher considering the practical implications of a decision, it seems has now been made. There is a reflexive opportunity taken to say to a peer things that perhaps this headteacher could not say to anyone within his own school at this point.

The curriculum development of truncating key stage three (KS3) curriculum into two years rather than the typical three was implemented by headteacher Percy in School G. As the interviews continued this became part of the dialogue between headteacher Percy and his colleagues.

Table 24 Headteacher Percy's comments on implementing the truncated curriculum

	Quotation	Commentary
1	"...because we have the truncated key stage 3 curriculum which we have to play with but we have SATS in year 8 and SATS in year 9" (School E Int4 p21)	As part of the conversations the reality for headteacher Percy is what his curriculum looks like. There is some information exchange in this context but this is also inviting the other headteachers to comment from their own experiences in their schools.
2	"We do a truncated curriculum...there are lots of ways you might want to truncate a curriculum and my only desire to truncate a curriculum is to start key stage 4 a year sooner" (School C Int4 p17)	Here there is more detail about the what and why of the curriculum development and the motivation behind it. Headteacher Percy is using this development to begin GCSEs and BTECs a year earlier. We see here evidence that other possible ways of truncating a curriculum had been considered and by implication reflected upon.
3	"the curriculum shift we did when we took out year 9 was much more profound" (School F Int4 p2)	By this stage headteacher Percy's reflection suggests that the change has indeed been radical and he compares the nature of this change to radical changes being considered by headteacher F

Table 21 shows the responses to headteachers Percy's comments about his curriculum.

Table 25 Other Headteachers' comments on implementing the truncated curriculum

	Quotation	Commentary
1	"What [The Director of Education] said was 'Sod the bloody SATS results if you are prepared to bite the bullet and take the flak you argue your case'" (Headteacher Thomas School E Int4 p21)	Headteacher Thomas gives words of encouragement but also underlines the possible negative consequences of such a change.
2	"Yes isn't that fantastic, even sat listening to you now I get the adrenalin going because I think well we are not thinking of doing that and maybe I should be maybe I should come and see what you are doing" (Headteacher William School C Int4 p17)	This was a very positive and supportive response. The greatest flattery that can be paid to a fellow headteacher is to copy a initiative.
3	"Mmm I am clearly the worst thing that has ever happened to [this school], they had, [the previous head] a lovely guy, who listened to an awful lot of people and was very conciliatory" (Headteacher Robert School F Int4 p2)	This self-deprecating remark from headteacher Robert belies the consideration of the idea of truncation. The "Mmm" suggests both thoughtfulness and the suggestion that this would not work in his school at this particular time.

In this example we see headteacher Percy using the professional conversations and indeed conversational partnerships (Rubin and Rubin, 2005 p79) to help him reflect on his intended actions, then be reflexive about these actions with peers. What makes this meta-reflective is the processing of this idea by headteacher Percy over the months having reflected on his colleagues' reflection of his possible actions.

There are also references made in his reflective journal about this time:

"There are far more options if we get students through GCSE early. We get the benefits of the retake improvement rather than the college. Upside better GCSEs of course there is a danger that this

might break the law. The implications of such a change are enormous" (Reflective Journal 2006)

The implications of this change were indeed enormous and there were significant challenges that had to be overcome to create the new curriculum. What Percy needed was to have raised this innovation with other headteachers who would also be aware of implications of such a change. Meta-reflection allowed this headteacher to explore how such changes might be received and most importantly check the reaction of other headteachers to ensure that it was possible. These peer professionals allowed headteachers to consider his decision more deeply. The further engagement with the transcript further deepened this process and allowed more time for this reflexivity to become meta-reflective. As a post script school G made the decision to truncate the curriculum for the year 7 cohort starting in 2007. This year's GCSEs were the highest in the school's history and 21% of the cohort also achieved at least 1 AS level

8.5.4 - Reflexivity in Action - From the Inside Looking Out Headteachers

Benjamin, William and Thomas

If it is true for a reflexive practitioner researcher that meta-reflection exists, is it important for this phenomenon to occur in others? It is for two reasons. Firstly this study has demonstrated that headteachers given the chance will readily be reflexive and therefore as part of this study they too have become reflexive practitioners looking at their own professional context. Secondly for Percy meta-reflection helped him sustain himself as a leader and his school as an institution which continued to improve. If this is part of a process that others might find similarly useful then it

should be shared with other practitioners in order to ascertain whether it is true in a larger sample.

There is no doubt that any insights for Percy into the realities of headship in the England in the opening years of this millennium have come from the reflexive conversations between headteacher Percy and his colleague headteachers and importantly the internal reflexive conversations described by Archer (2007). It was also important for the study to identify instances of reflexivity in other headteachers. This is a very difficult undertaking given the nature of reflexivity which sometimes is akin to the world of quantum physics, where to observe a thing is to change a thing (Rae, 2005 p61). This means that the emphasis must be put on the language used by headteachers and identify the reflexivity in the language used by them. Again Foucault offers important advice:

“Hence the necessity of converting reflexive language. It must be directed not towards any inner confirmation...but towards the outer bound where it must continually content itself” (Foucault and Faubion, 1998 p152).

8.5.5 Impact on Critical Incidents – Raising Expectations Headteacher

William

Headteacher Percy as the researcher is on firm ground in describing his own reflexivity and identifying the impact of this doctoral research on his own professional practice as a headteacher. It is inevitably harder to show this in others and explains why the research adopted an almost ethnographic approach in order to

be able to identify this deeper level of reflexivity in other headteachers.

Nevertheless, due to the longitudinal nature of the research there were indications that the sort of process that headteacher Percy noticed in his reflection and its relationship to actions were also true for other headteachers in the study. School C was by a significant margin the highest performing school in Swinburne in terms of Ofsted grading and academic performance. Headteacher William had been (and still is at the time of writing) the longest serving headteacher in Swinburne:

"I don't want to be an impediment to the school's progress that's why listening to you this morning you know it was interesting you know I was saying I want to get over 90% on that very narrow benchmark not because of that but because there is a message there with everybody moving up a notch and I was fascinated when you said 'I want 100%' because you're absolutely right and what you want know is that really affected me because it made me realise that, you know, I'm not aspirational enough you know I'm not looking to where I need to be looking and that will reinforce my own feeling of, you know, past my sell by date. It's interesting Paul, quite a few things you said this morning, because I listen very carefully because I look and I see the impact that you have made, not just in Masham's School but in education in Swinburne I think you have had a remarkable impact on the culture of education in Swinburne" (Headteacher William School C Int1 p10).

This quotation shows the potential benefit of being involved in a professional dialogue with a wide range of headteachers especially those whose schools are geographically close. Headteacher William had not been part of the close collaboration around previous educational initiatives like a sixth form consortium unlike the other headteachers in the study because as he said:

"if children come here from [a range of neighbouring towns within 20 miles of Swinburne] part of the problem is that if they then go and do their studies at school A or school B and school C [within the town of Swinburne] then parents will say that there is no point in my sending them to you because they might as well send them to a local school in

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the first place. It's very difficult to balance all of the pressures which are upon us I don't think that Catholic Schools easily fit neatly into this new educational model of collaborative working" (Headteacher William School C Int1 p12).

But without this collaborative working perceptions can get fixed and for example benchmarks might be set too low. There is also the genuine joy of being involved in a professional dialogue about the nature of headship and school improvement. Headteacher William's desire to listen and contribute is clearly a little related to his relationship to headteacher Percy but these colleagues only have a relationship as part of this research project and these words were said in early 2007. The evidence here suggests that this professional conversation will at least require William to consider how quickly the target of 100% needs to be met and by extension upward adjustments to other performance measures. This is not to suggest that headteacher William did not use professional reflection as part of his headship, indeed he helped organise reflective opportunities:

"Well that's an interesting one isn't it Paul because you probably know that the Catholic secondary Heads meet regularly and almost by default I am the chairman" (Headteacher William School C Int3 p1).

However the catchment area for a faith school is much larger than for a school solely based in a local area.

It is of no surprise then, that headteacher William positively engaged in the reflexive process as part of this research study and he was always ready to continue the discussions about school improvement, leadership and reflection. He was used to the process of professional reflection with other headteachers and had experience of

understanding that this type of reflective practice works better if it is not too controlled:

“I made the mistake of putting an agenda together for one of the meetings this year and people said well why? What we do is just meet and we sit and we talk and then we go for a meal and we talk over the meal and what it does it helps each of us firm up on how we feel to get a perspective on different issues that are relevant at the time and it’s a personal support” (Headteacher William school C Int3 p1).

We have in William a school leader who understands the power of reflexivity without using this term. Further this headteacher uses the other headteachers to reflect more deeply on his own practice and allow other colleagues the courtesy and space to do the same. The missing aspects for the definition of meta-reflection to apply to headteacher William as well as headteacher Percy is time and the way an action is processed more reflectively. For a moment we need to go back to headteacher Percy’s decision to radically change his curriculum model and headteacher William’s very positive and admiring response to this decision. It takes confidence and courage to swim against the flow to help improve their schools in a sustained way for the benefit of their communities and headteacher William felt that both he and headteacher Percy shared a maverick streak:

“Mmm we don’t conform” (Headteacher William School C Int4 p2).

William drew strength from the reflexive conversations and found a way of articulating his own definition of meta-reflection. This next quotation comes from the last interview. The context of these comments was a conversation about the way headteachers need to respond to political pressures by using their own moral compass, something emphasised in Branson’s research (Branson, 2007b p472):

“to have the courage to say no to some of the things that are coming on in schools, and the challenge to take things and to turn them to the advantage of the community in a distinctive way, you are always put out on a limb by doing that and there are some bridges that you have to die on because the issues are so important. I think that reinforces the importance of this dialogue because if you are a strong leader and you are prepared to follow your intuition your instincts if you’re prepared to be different and to put the barriers up to things that you think are not in the interests of your school or its community” (Headteacher William School C Int4 p3).

The question is would William have said this without the on-going reflexive conversations that became this research study? The answer may not matter because this was a highly reflective headteacher who displayed the characteristics of meta-reflection in a similar way to headteacher Percy.

8.5.6 Impact on Critical Incidents – Improving Standards of Attainment

Headteachers Benjamin and Thomas

Benjamin who was at the other end of the experience scale from William also displayed meta-reflective characteristics. One of the core differences between a headteacher and a deputy is the ability to conceive of and deliver a coherent educational vision for his or her school. Benjamin acknowledges during the interview that this was an aspect he needed to work on:

“I wasn’t always entirely comfortable with all the talk about visions. A few years ago vision was always an Achilles heel for me as a deputy and you could get side-tracked into thinking what is your vision for the school, because we can look at our schools in this town and see that whatever our vision for this school is, there is another political dimension here over which we have very little control” (Headteacher Benjamin School B Int1p2).

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If one looks at the development of how Benjamin talks about vision over the interviews we can see the process of his reflection, reflexivity and meta-reflection.

During the third interview he reflects on his previous head's vision:

"it [was an] extraordinary turn around...with all his kind of work it was his vision, his dream" (Headteacher Benjamin School B Int3 p4).

It was common in the study for headteachers who were less experienced often referred back to their previous headteachers as they were in some way putting their experience as deputies into a new context. Headteacher Benjamin was also readily reflexive (see table 1) and in the following example he reflects upon his own reflection of his developing vision:

"As I reflect on what I want for Hartsfield I know looking after the people are the most important part of what I do" (Headteacher Benjamin School B Int2 p5).

Vision by interview 3 had become more certain and more clearly articulated:

"I realised that it was important to me as head...that the important thing at the centre of this and the crux of this for this particular school was maintaining the morale of the staff and student morale as I consider where we are and what we do" (Headteacher Benjamin School B Int3 p1).

The vision here has become a tangible thing for Benjamin to capture in order to lead his school. He had, over the interviews, used the professional conversation and the opportunity to be reflexive to clarify for himself, a vision which he was able to express with confidence. Meta-reflection, given that this was achieved over time and was part of a series of professional conversations, supported headteacher Benjamin to forming something which may well have happened naturally but access to the meta-reflective process helped him check the validity of his vision with

another headteacher. Again Benjamin did not need to seek approval for this from Percy but the context of the study gave him permission to express this to himself, something rarely done by headteachers outside very formal contexts like interviews for a new post.

8.6 The Characteristics of Meta-Reflection

To recap it has to be seen that some reflexive headteachers can use a research process to reach a meta-reflective level. There are three aspects to meta-reflection which makes it different from reflexivity. The first of these is time. The research study happened over almost a four year period and the professional conversations between the headteachers revisited old themes as well as developing and introducing new ones. This reflection over time allowed for the headteachers to put the realities of their roles into perspective and consider the issues raised with one another more deeply. Ultimately this meta-reflective level allowed headteachers to assess themselves as individuals in relation to their core values:

“It goes back to core values because when we say reflecting back to you, you really draw your greatest strength from that touch back to who you are, what you are, to get this job, you know the kind of person you are that manifests itself in this particular instance as Head of the school and that’s how you know it’s the right thing to do”
(Headteacher Percy School B Interview 3 p15).

The second aspect of meta-reflection is allowing this reflection to happen in the company of other headteachers. Thirdly it was important for these headteachers to be reflective about their professional practice within an environment where they knew their fellow professional was not sitting in judgement over them but at the

same time they exposed themselves to the scrutiny of their peers. This peer to peer reflection encourages the individual headteachers to reflect much more deeply, in a sense using the professional conversation to process their practice at a meta-reflective level. Headteacher William describes what headteachers can do for each other in an almost cathartic manner:

“There is the learning from good practice; there’s the learning from what they are doing; how they are reacting to different initiatives; their view of things which helps to hone, refine and develop how you might approach something but again that collegiate approach non-threatening approach, you know the openness where you are sharing everything where you are sharing your own personal feelings your own personal hurts, your own personal worries and concerns, you know your own personal feelings of inadequacy” (Headteacher William School C Int 4 p1).

8.7 Conclusion – A New Model for Meta-Reflection

Finally, meta-reflection then has impact on the day to day practice of leading a school. The result of this deeper reflection improves the quality of the decision making by the individual headteachers. The evidence for this comes from the impact on Percy’s school as a result of meta-reflection.

During the six years of this study every school in the town of Swinburne has improved in terms of standards (see table 27 for the results of all the schools).

Table 26 GCSE Performance of schools in Swinburne from 2005 to 2011

School	5 A*-C 2005	5 A*-C 2005 including English and maths	5 A*-C 2009	5 A*-C 2009 including English and maths	5 A*-C 2011	5 A*-C 2011 including English and maths
A	47%	42%	64%	46%	82%	58%
B	35%	30%	60%	48%	75%	59%
C	65%	59%	73%	70%	76%	76%
D	38%	29%	59%	40%	75%	47%
E	32%	28%	55%	43%	70%	35%
F	45%	39%	52%	48%	63%	54%
G	29%	21%	66%	37%	83%	45%

(In order to preserve the anonymity of the schools these figures have been fictionalised but the % increases are accurate to these schools)

All the schools in Swinburne improved in these two measures over the years of the study and whilst school improvement is not caused by a single phenomenon the impact of the headteacher on a school's ability to improve is well understood and was demonstrated in this study (see chapter 6). It is therefore reasonable to argue that anything that sustains headteachers, or indeed challenges them and encourages them to reflect on how their schools improve must have had an impact on improving schools and performance measures like GCSE attainment.

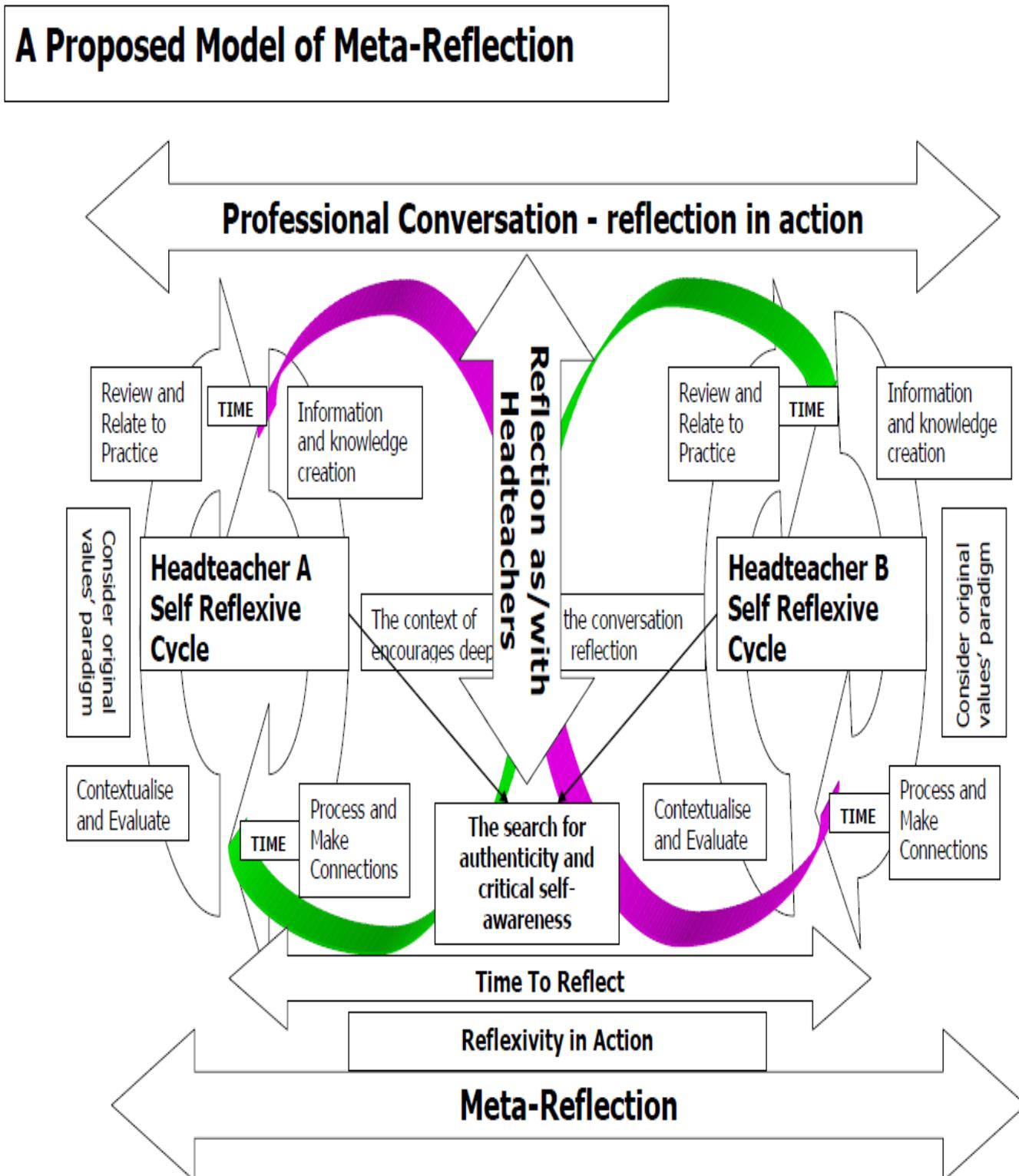
The data also suggested that at this meta-level the insights available to these headteachers allowed them to operate even more effectively in their professional roles because they were able to access their meta-reflective selves, which were informed by their reflections on their conversations with their peers over time.

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The following model is a description of how meta-reflection seems to work for these headteachers in a diagrammatic form (see figure 20). This represents a way of looking at how headteachers related to their peers over time and established a deeper learning which supported their ability to sustain themselves and their schools.

This proposed model for meta-reflection is described in figure 20. The reflexive headteacher cycles are the basis of the model which suggest a reflexive response common in professional dialogues (Scott, 2002). The starting point, therefore is Schön's reflection in action (Schön, 1983) which is what would be expected in a professional conversation between peers. The two headteacher reflexive cycles are a mirror image of each other and can and do operate independently (see figure 3). The core of the model is the reflexive conversation and the interactions between the headteachers represented by the coloured loops. The unusual feature is that this is done within a context of collaboration. These headteachers want to understand for themselves what it is they know about improving their schools and in doing so are happy to support the other colleague headteacher. They are co-researchers in this context exploring the realities of their roles within Layder's (1993) historical, political, institutional and personal contexts. Here the practitioners are reflecting in their role as headteachers and they are also reflecting with their headteacher colleagues. It is this central core that allows, via the cycles and most importantly the interaction between both headteacher cycles, into the authentic leader and at this level the ability to be reflexive (Archer, 2007).

Figure 20 The development of a Model of Meta-Reflection



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At this new level of meta-reflection the significance of the professional conversation changes. Action resulting from this meta-reflection is no more significant than any other type of reflection. The difference is the way the individual headteacher, in addition to the people he or she normally uses to help them be reflexive, (see above) has spent longer considering the action and also had the contribution of another reflexive headteacher. The model (figure 20) is designed to show the increasing reflexivity of headteachers who engage in professional conversations with other headteachers. It shows the role of the reflexive peer and the importance of time to review actions. It is this that moves the headteacher towards the meta-reflective level. There is no suggestion that meta-reflection is better or worse than any other form of reflection or reflexivity, merely that it was this process that was identified by headteacher Percy in his own practice and he subsequently saw in the data of the three other headteachers. Indeed the analysis suggested that almost half the sample used meta-reflection as part of their practice of being a headteacher.

During the analysis of the data of all the concepts and themes that have been discussed meta-reflection has sometimes felt like something insubstantial and half-formed. However the reality of headteacher experience and the direct result of having reflective conversations revealed insights like this from headteacher William:

“our intuition is informed by our daily experience, our daily contact with the school and by the reflections on that and our discussions about it and how we are doing and how can we do it better and I don’t care as long as we do that and we have the courage to do that and the openness of a dialogue where you can say anything” (Headteacher William School C Int4 p12).

Chapter 9

Conclusions

9.1 Introduction

This has been a very personal study because it has researched ordinary headteachers in their everyday professional contexts. The reality of being a secondary headteacher in 2012 requires a comprehensive understanding of school improvement and leadership. This study suggests that headteacher reflection and reflexivity can help headteachers perform better in maintaining school improvement and becoming more effective leaders (Day et al., 2010). It also suggests that some reflexive headteachers are able to use meta-reflection to enhance their schools and their personal performance as leaders (Boerema, 2011). The conclusion to this study should begin on a positive and personal note:

"I'm not that interested in why schools fail, I'm more interested in how schools continue to succeed" (Headteacher Percy School D Int3 p1).

For very understandable reasons much research has been undertaken to examine schools at both ends of the performance spectrum. On the one hand we have many studies of headteachers who are failing to lead appropriately and the subsequent damage to the young people and other professionals that is caused by such leadership (Calveley, 2005, MacBeath, 2007). The other well researched group are of "hero" heads whose leadership is analysed by inspectors and academics so that the template for outstanding school leadership can be used by 'lesser heads' who

can be inspired by the heroes' successes (Williams, 2008, Woods, 2009). As Kipling's *If* (1994 p605) might have said, both stereotypes are "impostors".

The reality of headship is actually to be found in the thousands of schools all over the country led by ordinary men and women trying to do the best job they can for their students, staff and communities. These are our real heroes and they are the subject of this almost four year study into some aspects of how these people manage their schools to deliver high quality learning to the young people who will inherit our country over the next generation. Not surprisingly the approach has been a realist study with all its complexity and contradictions.

By studying the ordinary one becomes aware of the extraordinary, but this type of study is a relatively rare feature in the academic literature of school leadership. This dissertation goes some way to address this deficit. Some sections (9.4 and 9.6) of this chapter will switch into the first person. This is done because an important aspect of this study is personal and reflection at a meta level in the way it has been described in chapters 7 and 8 can feel like trying to hold fog. The metaphors towards the end of this chapter attempt to make meta-reflection a little more corporeal.

9.2 Findings from the Research

Whilst the research question began looking at how schools improve it evolved into looking at how headteachers led their schools and finally into how headteachers

used reflective conversations to help them improve their schools (Ribbins, 2006).

The findings on school improvement and leadership confirmed those of many existing studies (Diggins, 1997, Earley and Weindling, 2004), however this work adds to the richness of the data by exploring the shared realities of the experiences of headteachers

9.2.1 School Improvement

This study confirms the findings of many others that the leadership of the headteacher is a very significant aspect of how schools improve (Leithwood et al., 2006, Day et al., 2010, Harris, 2003). This improvement is not merely in the area of standards but concerns the way the development of the whole young person is managed over the seven years of secondary school. All the headteachers in the study demonstrated that they felt fully accountable for the performance standards of their schools (including examination results and other key indicators used by Ofsted (Ofsted, 2010). At this contextual level the headteachers responded to the minor and major changes of educational policy (Layder, 1993) with a view to protect those moral aspects of their roles they valued (Fullan, 2003, Sergiovanni, 1992).

One of the key aims at the outset of the study in 2005 was to identify the drivers of school improvement in order to help headteachers understand how school improvement worked in their schools. The original working title for the research in 2005 was "Authentic" School Improvement: Contextualising Effective Strategies.' How headteachers improved their schools continued to be the focus and in 2007 the

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research was entitled "Authentic" School Improvement. How schools sustain and embed improvement from the perspective of headteachers reflecting on their practice of leadership'.

The professional conversations that make up this research study therefore found that in the area of school improvement that:

- In line with Harris (2002) and Wrigley (2006) Headteachers believed themselves to be central to the ways their schools improve. They accepted that they are ultimately accountable for this and accept both the credit and the responsibility for moving their schools forward (Fullan, 2000, Smith, 2008).
- This study also finds that headteachers believed that the core aspect of improving a school is to improve the quality of the teaching and learning in classrooms and other learning spaces (Stroud, 2006).
- Headteachers understood the importance of recruiting strong staff and building quality teams around them to both support the drive for improvement and grow the next generation of leaders (MacBeath, 2006a).
- Headteachers believed they encouraged students to align their values with those of the school and society in general (Gray, 2004).

- Headteachers strove to encourage independence in the students for whose learning they were responsible (Dehler et al., 2001).

As the research evolved into a longitudinal study, the focus moved away from the multiple drivers of improvement, which it seemed applied to all the headteachers in the sample, and began to focus on one of these drivers, the leadership of the headteachers. It became important to understand which aspects of school improvement need to be addressed first if a school was to improve. This in turn highlighted the role of the headteacher. The practice-based nature of the research led the practitioner researcher to become especially interested in the nature of leadership shown by the other headteachers in the sample and in his own role as a leader.

9.2.2 Leadership

In a similar way to school improvement research this study largely confirmed the findings from the existing literature. Therefore, in the area of leadership this research study confirmed the following findings. That:

- Headteachers in this study believed that they had a moral purpose. (Fullan, 2003)
- Headteachers readily engaged in professional conversations with each other (Goodfellow, 2000, Scott, 2002) which helped sustain them in their roles.

- Headteachers were ready to share their professional experience and expertise with others (Flintham, 2009).
- Headteachers tended to be authentic (Begley, 2006) in their leadership.

The longitudinal focus narrowed the study further to look at the process of how individual headteachers sustained themselves and continued to improve their schools. The very nature of a professional doctorate requires an acute sense of the reflexive and an unexpected finding from the study was the extent to which all the other headteachers in the research sample also showed themselves to be reflexive.

9.2.3 Headteachers and Reflexivity

The existing literature emphasises the importance of being reflective in the role of secondary school leadership.(Bleakley, 1999, Branson, 2007a) The need to be reflective was also the first recommendation in Daresh's (1997) report on improving US secondary school principals:

"If leaders learn to reflect on what decisions should be made and for what reasons, they are likely to become more adept at making effective decisions" (Daresh, 1997 p4).

All the headteachers in this study during the course of the research became not merely reflective but reflexive. They were able to identify themselves in the process of reflecting about their professional practice. In some sense, all became co-researchers into how headteachers operate as headteachers. The literature in this

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area is rich and the findings from these studies are generally confirmed by this study. However, the nature of reflection undertaken by this cohort of headteachers was in its own way unique because they became in some way co-researchers in attempting to solve the research question about school improvement, leadership and reflexivity.

This study found that:

- Meta-reflection could be defined as a longitudinal process of professional conversations between headteachers over time which allows some headteachers to assess themselves as individuals in relation to their core values and consider more deeply their future actions by using other reflective headteachers of equal power relationships (see figure 20).
- Headteachers use professional conversations with other headteachers to offer an external reference point from which to see their own schools (Flintham, 2010).
- Headteachers naturally use reflection of their professional role to help them improve their personal performance and the performance of their schools (Barnett and Mahony, 2006).
- Reflective headteachers may have a positive correlation with rising levels of attainment (Day et al., 2010).

- Reflective headteachers may stay in post longer (Ingate, 2010a).
- Headteachers are naturally reflexive when given the opportunity to be so (Branson, 2007b).
- Headteachers will readily take the opportunity to engage in professional reflective conversations if they are underpinned by mutual trust and in the context where the only person making evaluative judgements are the Headteachers for themselves (Flintham, 2010).

This study found that all the headteachers by the end of the study showed evidence in the interviews of reflexively engaging with the research process (see chapter 8). For the researcher headteacher (Percy) this reflexivity became a very practical tool in improving his professional practice. The act of doing this research into how headteachers' reflected meant that the nature of the reflection from the practitioner researcher changed. This was unexpected and had significant implications for the school in which he worked. What was even more surprising was that further analysis of the data revealed that this process appeared to have happened to other headteachers in the sample and thus the use of the term meta-reflection.

9.2.4 Headteachers and Meta-Reflection in this Research Study

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“Challenge serves to hold a mirror for the leader to see him or herself by introducing contradictory ideas and questioning tacit assumptions” (Boerema, 2011).

Although Boerema (2011) was discussing the experience of new headteachers, his metaphor and the principle underpinning it, holds true for all headteachers in that the mirror of reflection shows the practitioner what they need to see. Moreover this mirror, if focused enough, can question the core values paradigm that leaders hold and take them beyond the double loop of Argyris and Schön (1974) to a meta-reflective level where their personal and professional selves can ponder actions within the context of having time to consider solutions that may not always be readily available or act too quickly and endanger the efficacy of one's actions.

This study found that some headteachers were able to use their professional context to reach a meta-reflective level. Other researchers have coined the term meta-reflection (Watson, 1998a, Burge et al., 2000) and meta-reflexive (Cunliffe, 2003, Archer, 2007) but these definitions do not fully capture the nature of the practical application and context of the secondary school headteachers' reflection that this study examines. In the area of meta-reflection this study finds that:

- Headteachers used the professional conversations to access a deeper level of reflection
- Headteachers were able to use the developed trust between peer professionals to allow personal reflection to be augmented and improve decision making in their schools.

- Headteachers needed time and the context of the professional conversation to reach the level of meta-reflection. The research study itself became the vehicle of the meta-reflection.
- Headteachers used meta-reflection to help sustain themselves. Improving the nature of their reflective processes meant that they felt happy with the eventual decision that they arrived at.

This last point was not tested during the study but for Percy this was undoubtedly true and the following comment made by him was certainly not contradicted by his colleague headteachers:

“It’s what Heads do isn’t it? look forward. It’s the nature of the job to do the strategic stuff. So how do you get the capacity to look forward?...you know, where do you find the refresh button?”
(Researcher Headteacher Percy School B Interview 3 p11).

9.3.1 School Improvement

Based on the data collected in this study, it is reasonable to conclude that the core of the existing literature on school improvement was confirmed by these professional conversations with headteachers and that no new aspect of school improvement was identified by the analysis.

9.3.2 Leadership

It is similarly true that the general thrust of the literature on school leadership was confirmed. Clearly the preoccupations of this particular group of headteachers in these particular conversations between 2006 and 2009 were unique to them, but this study offered no new insights into the nature of school leadership. Indeed in the area of school improvement and leadership this study's contribution could be well summarised by Bush's comments:

"The role of the principal is widely regarded as central for school improvement and enhanced student outcomes...the position of the headteacher remains vital if schools are to be successful learning organizations" (Bush, 2011a p514).

However as the study began to delve into the reality of being a headteacher further interesting and novel results became apparent.

9.3.3 Reflexivity

In the right context (a dialogic relationship with a non-hierarchical peer) all secondary headteachers are prone to be reflexive. The data strongly suggests that headteachers are not only reflective but that they are also reflexive. Archer (2007 p93) suggested that only 27% of the participants of her study showed autonomous reflexivity and that 21% used communicative reflexivity, whereas 100% of the participants in this study showed both communicative and autonomous reflexivity. Further, whilst she found 23% able to use meta-reflexivity this study found over half the participants able to reflect in this manner.

Clearly those headteachers who had undertaken recent post graduate study were more familiar with both the term reflexivity and the process this described, but only a third of the sample in this study had such post-graduate experience and yet they all showed they were reflexive (see chapter 8 table 16).

9.3.4 Meta-Reflection

Over half of the sample of headteachers showed themselves capable of being meta-reflexive. It appears then that this type of reflective practice is present in a majority of headteachers. If they are offered the opportunity to have a series of professional conversations with a peer headteacher within a non-judgemental context and have time to reflect on these conversations some will become meta-reflective. This is important because this meta-reflection has real benefits for them and their schools. For this to have real benefit the relationship must be between peers. If the relationship between headteachers lacks equity or is designed to deliver objectives other than those agreed between the headteachers the result is a very different kind of "Talking Heads" (Swaffield, 2005) This was underlined by a study into supporting new headteachers:

"Many principals reported that an important element of support was being able to count on someone that was familiar with the principal's situation that they could call at any time" (Boerema, 2011 p562).

Alan Flintham (an ex headteacher) noted that these types of opportunities could be offered in a very cost-effective way (Flintham, 2010 p182) and would benefit the personal sustainability of all headteachers. Nevertheless, a conclusion from this study suggests that creating the opportunity for professional conversations could

also help to improve the quality of the education received by students and quality of leadership in our schools.

9.3.5 What is the Impact of Meta-reflection on School Improvement and Leadership?

In order to answer this question we need to look at the four schools where this study identifies improvement as small case studies. Table 27 shows the improvement in standards as measured by GCSE performance over the study, but there is something interesting about what these meta-reflexive headteachers also have in common which may be related to the way they seem to reflect on their roles as headteachers.

Table 27 The Possible Relationship between Meta-Reflection and School Improvement

Headteacher	School	Meta-reflective?	Years in post 2009	Still in post 2011	% increase in standards (5 A*-C) 05-11	
George	A	No	2.3	No	35	Average 27
Robert	F	No	3.6	Yes	9	
Philip	D	No	15.6	No	37	
Benjamin	E	Yes	4.6	No	38	Average 38
Thomas	B	Yes	5.6	Yes	40	
William	C	Yes	17.6	Yes	11	
Percy	G	Yes	7.6	Yes	62	

Whilst it might appear that there may be a link between the nature of a headteacher's reflection and the length of time they spend in post as well as the performance of their schools it should be remembered that the sample is very small and that an individual's time in post and single school's results can affect the

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averages. It might be that the longevity of the headship is also linked to the continued success and improvement in their schools but the research in this study merely raises the question that larger studies could answer and any implied judgement should be treated with caution. This phenomenon is however prevalent in the private educational sector but is spreading into the state sector with more headteachers staying in their successful schools for longer as was noted recently in the educational press:

“Another common trait among long-serving heads is that their schools tend to be successful” (Moorhead, 2011).

Three of the four headteachers who showed signs of meta-reflection were still in post six years after the study began. The average tenure in headship has recently slipped from ten to seven years (Ingate, 2010a p4) and yet for these headteachers it was over eleven years, whereas the average for the remaining group of headteachers in the study was eight years. Clearly the sample is very small, but for at least one headteacher meta-reflection resulted in him staying in his post for longer than he intended.

“I know you said that doing a doctorate changes you as a person I just didn’t expect it to change my job quite so much” (Reflective Journal 2006)

9.4 Original Contribution to Knowledge and Practice

9.4.1 School Improvement

This study was undertaken approximately 20 years after ERA and the rise of the managerial headteacher that it heralded. This study suggests that the present cohort of headteachers has moved past the definitions offered by Gewirtz (2002) and has managed to restore a belief in a public sector ethos and ground their values and visions to meet the needs of their communities rather than the external pressures of the government and Ofsted. This is not to say that they ignore these pressures, far from it, but they demonstrate an ability to use this pressure for their own moral purposes and primarily for the young people they feel they serve. Work by Ribbins (1997) looked at the impact of ERA on educational leaders 10 years after the legislation and this characteristic of being able to manage the tensions of external pressures and internal values was also present in his 1995 study.

Ribbins' (1997) study is useful in distinguishing the originality of this research. The 'conversations' described by Ribbins (1997) require the context of the headship to be outlined. This is because although one of the interviewers was an ex-headteacher and others ex-teachers none of them were practising headteachers at the point of the interviews. All the interviews in this study were conversations between headteachers who immediately after the conversation went back to their schools and carried on with their professional practice. Therefore the data that came from the interviews on how schools improve, whilst not striking different from what other researchers had found (Fullan, 2000, Smith, 2008) had a special resonance. This

study confirms that the research on school improvement does reflect the reality of being a headteacher for these seven headteachers

9.4.2 The Leadership of Headteachers

The contribution to knowledge in the area of leadership is similar to that of school improvement described above for the same reason. A participant headteacher researcher undertaking practice-based research into the reality of being a headteacher with other headteachers allows for the generation of rich and highly reflective data about how these professionals view their own and other headteachers' leadership. Leadership in schools is complex and factors like influence, values and vision are what determine one's style as a leader but what this study did find was that the capacity to continue the journey in their schools and ability continually to restore their belief in what they do was present in the sample. Therefore the confirmation that leadership was about influence (Bush 2012, Fullan 2003), was authentic (Begley 2006) and generous (Flintham 2010) has a deeper resonance because of the privileged relationship between practising headteachers. This is an important contribution to the field of leadership research and if one compares the contributions to the "interview partnerships" (Ribbins, 1997 p15) between the ex-headteacher talking to a current headteacher and the professional academic talking to a headteacher the type of contribution made by Rayner (1997) elicits a response from his headteacher more akin to the conversations in this research rather than the more typical types of academic to practitioner interview relationship (Gillborn, 1989, Derricott, 1974).

There is also something important about this study's description and analysis of the leadership of the 'ordinary' headteacher participants. This simple truth is often missed because we often do not notice the unremarkable leader and yet (given their number) they are the ones who make the system work and are in their own small ways remarkable for the small acts of heroism that this study showed over the years of its duration.

9.4.3 A New Model of Leadership?

This study began with the definition of leadership offered by Bush (2011) which examined the influence of leadership through the lenses of values and vision. The data from this study supported this definition very well. In an attempt to understand further the nature of leadership and to discover the source of authentic leadership this study has focused on the locus of meta-reflection. The model has been developed throughout the dissertation and now applies to authentic leaders who employ reflexivity and meta-reflection in an educational context. The further development of Bush's (2011) model of leadership which moved from definition (table 2), to a series of models (figures 3, 5, 10, 10a, 10b and 12) resulting in a composite model to identify school improvement authentic leadership and reflexive headteachers (figure 15).

In order to develop an alternative model it is important to acknowledge Ribbins (2007) work where he describes "conversations with a purpose" as way to "produce

rich and relevant data" (Ribbins, 2007 p207). The research in this dissertation sought to discover if, why and how headteachers reflected on their professional practice and thereby professional conversations became the central thrust of ascertaining answers to these questions. Ribbins (2007) warns of the dangers of such an approach especially if the data is only gained from interviews. As he says interviews should:

"find out what is in someone else's mind but not to put things there"
(Ribbins, 2007 p208)

He is also concerned about "faking" and avoiding the ethical problems of "chats". This dissertation addresses these concerns and may develop a different model by using the practitioner relationship between peers and revisiting the same participants over time to ensure the "authentic view and voice of the interviewee" (Ribbins, 2007 p208) is the basis of developing a model of leadership.

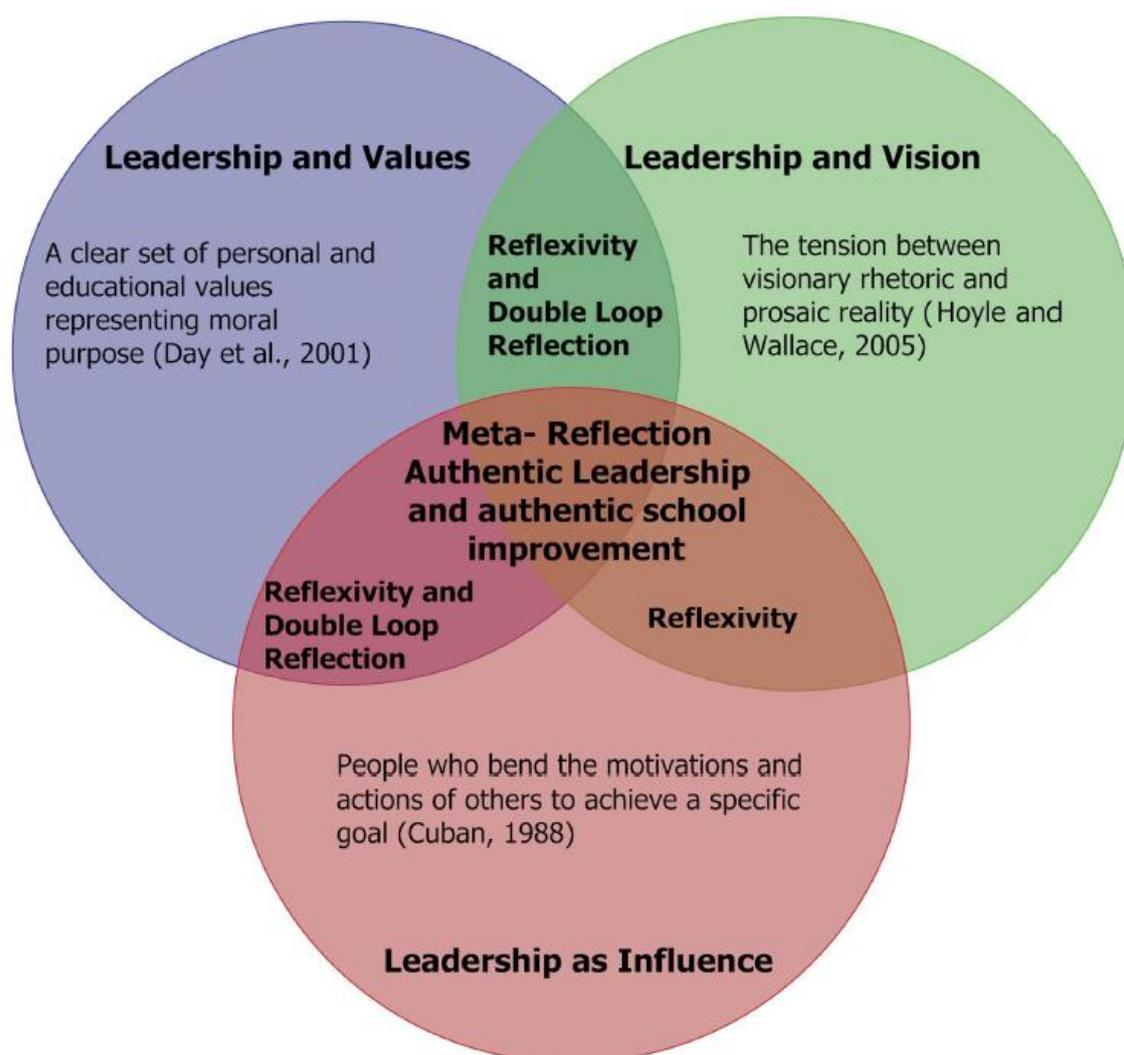
This study also found headteachers to be reflexive (table 17) and the model of meta-reflection (figure 20) illustrates why this is so common. The interface between the act of influence and either vision or values is likely to result in reflexivity. Authenticity appears to be far more likely when there is an alignment between values, vision and the action of being a leader (influence). One can be a leader without being authentic but this study implies that the process of reflection and becoming reflexive creates the conditions where authentic leadership can flourish.

This adapted model also indicates why meta-reflection might happen and why it can be found in dialogic modes of reflective practice. If a leader is authentic and has the

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courage and conviction to act in an empowering manner the meta-reflective instinct helps keep the leader grounded and allows the leader to check back to his or her own values, vision and actions in a way which does not affect his or her followership or compromise his or her authenticity. This is shown with reference all the previous figures culminating in figure 21.

Figure 21 The Connections between Leadership, Reflexivity, Authenticity and School Improvement



After Bush (2011 p5-8)

9.4.5 Contribution to Research Methods

The traditional approach to collecting interview data from headteachers has been described in a number of studies namely Earley, Nelson et al (2011) and Ingate (2010b). Semi-structured interviews are undertaken with groups of headteachers sometimes as a follow-up of questionnaires. Even when the researchers are headteachers themselves (Flintham, 2010) the methods follow this conventional process. This was not true in this study because the research methods became part of the reflexive engagement of the researcher and professional context of the study. Therefore the manner in which the interviews were conducted altered over the time of the study which resulted in the production of richer data relating to the realities of being a headteacher. This adjustment of traditional research methods gave the study a dynamic and responsive quality which allowed for the meta-reflection as described in figure 20. The personal growth described through in the reflexive (boxed) sections in this dissertation of Percy are further discussed and expanded in section 9.5 (below). Meta-reflection is not just a new concept to be reported in the third person but a very personal metamorphosis which has contributed to the practice of headteacher Percy.

9.4.6 The Development of Layder's (1993) Research Map

The adaptation of Layder's (1993) research map is another example of contributing to research methods. The original map has been developed to analyse data in an educational context. Below there are copies of tables 1, 3, 14, and 17 which appear throughout the dissertation. When put together one can see how the original idea in

table 1, itself a representation of Layder (1993 p72), has been adapted into table 3 where it is applied to school improvement. By table 14 the map is used to illuminate all the themes of the research and table 17 shows it adapted to explore reflexivity.

Table 1 Layder's (1993) Research Map

Level	Area addressed in this dissertation	History
Context	Shifting government policy, inspection regimes and stakeholder accountability	
Setting	How schools are led and improved	
Situated activity	Professional conversations between headteachers	
Self	The reality of being a headteacher	

After Layder (1993 p72)

Table 3 The Layder (1993) Map Applied to School Improvement

Layder's Model	Aspect of School Improvement Research	History
Context	Government policy, Ofsted and external measures of school improvement floor targets for school improvement and performance	
Setting	Individual schools' improvement journeys	
Situated Context	The impact of individual headteachers on school improvement	
Self	The way school improvement impacts on individual headteachers	

After Layder (1993 p72)

Table 14 An Adaptation of Layder's (1993) Research Map

Layder's Map	Research focus in this study	Theme	TIME
Context	Government policy, Ofsted and external measures of school improvement National Standards for Headteacher	School Improvement	
Setting	Schools in the sample, individual schools	School Improvement and Leadership	
Situated Context	headteacher dialogues	Authentic Leadership, Reflection	
Self	The reflective practitioner	Reflexivity	
Inner-Self	Reflexive Practitioner	Meta-reflection	

After (Layder, 1993 p72)

Table 17 Layder's (1993) Research Map Adapted to Show Reflexivity

Layder's Research Map	Research focus in this study	Theme	Defined by
Situated Level	headteacher dialogues	Reflection	(Pavlou, 2004, Stroud, 2006)
Self Level	The reflective practitioner	Reflexivity	(Diggins, 1997, Tillman, 2003)
Inner-Self Level	Reflexive Practitioner	Meta-reflection	(Swift and West, 1998, Schippers et al., 2007)

After Layder (1993 p72)

9.4.7 Contribution to Professional Practice

The dissertation has been structured to show the reflexive impact of researching my own practice of being a headteacher. At a personal level this process has had a profound impact on how I think about my professional role and how I operate as a headteacher in my school.

"The fundamental aim of action research is to improve practice rather than produce knowledge" (Elliott, 1991 p49).

The use of the word "profound" is not casually made and has been acknowledged by researchers like Frost (2007) who have seen the impact of practitioner action research on schools by teachers undertaking masters programmes are in no doubt that:

"practitioner research can be life changing for those who engage in it" (Frost, 2007 p173).

For doctoral level study the impact is more marked according to Drake and Heath (2011) who report of the impact on practice of a cohort of professional doctoral students within the same time frame as this dissertation. They comment that:

“there was no doubt that participants thought that undertaking practitioner research at doctoral level had an impact on an individual’s practice and the way people thought about their work” (Drake and Heath, 2011 p90)

These changes and therefore the original contribution to practice have happen to me personally and so I will revert to the first person in this and the last section of the dissertation.

As I outlined in chapter 1 (section 1.3) this research was personal and the impact of this research on me has been personal, but because I am also one of the headteachers in the study (Headteacher Percy) I am able to examine the impact of the study on my school (Masham).

9.4.7.1 Impact on the Professional Practice of the Practitioner Researcher (Headteacher Percy) and his school (School G)

As demonstrated in chapter 8 Headteacher acquired an entirely new way of processing the complex inputs that feed into the decision making for him as a headteacher. The operational practice of the day to day dealing with school issues (Flintham, 2003, Day, 2005) is complex and leaves little time for reflection. We know from research into practice by the National College (Leithwood et al., 2006,

Day et al., 2010) that reflection is essential if headteachers are to be effective what this study identifies is how this works for a headteacher who is undertaking doctoral study at the same time as leading his school.

I was able to gain access to my reflexive "inner voice" which supported and developed my professional thinking and gave me more confidence in decision making. The impact of this personal and professional reflexivity in my school was to encourage innovation in curriculum design which included changing the structure of the school day and the truncation and personalising of the curriculum offer for the students at Masham School. It is impossible to claim that this desire to innovate was solely caused by my research journey, but the reflexive journals that I kept which charts the reflexive relationship with my fellow headteachers and the transcripts of our conversations gave me a confidence to trust my instincts and find ways to push the boundaries of what was possible. This process of what I describe as meta-reflection allowed me to check my own authenticity and sustain my own practice as a headteacher for over ten years.

This is a significant contribution to my school which continues to thrive (two schools in Swinburne have closed during the seven years of this study) and is entering into a co-location which appear to be unique²⁷. No other school in Houseman has a curriculum like Masham which was described by Ofsted in 2012 as "innovative".

²⁷ The BSF project will co-locate Masham School with an 'all-through residential Special School designated for students with physical and neurological impairments (PNI). During the research for this project nobody (developers, LEA both headteachers) could find an example of this type of co-location.

9.4.7.2 Impact on the Professional Practice in Masham School

The impact of undertaking seven years of research as a practitioner who is always busy also had an impact on the professionals around me. Although this study did not seek to examine this phenomenon in great detail the impact on the continuous professional development of my senior team is striking and unlikely to be unrelated.

Since 2005, of the seven full-time members of my leadership team one is studying for a Doctorate in Education, one had completed an M.A. in personal learning, one has started an M.Ed. and four have completed or in about to complete postgraduate professional qualifications. The impact on headteachers was noted by a headteacher quoted by Drake and Heath (2011) who commented about his school and staff:

“I’m encouraging my colleagues to do more research, sharing a lot of the information I’ve written for the doctorate with colleagues” (Drake and Heath, 2011 p90)

9.4.7.3 Impact on Professional Practice of the other Headteachers in

Swinburne

If Mason (2002) assertion is correct and that that practitioner research is able to use experience to either:

“make sense of the past or inform actions in the future” (Mason, 2002 p2).

It can be argued that all the headteachers in the study as part of my practitioner research has been able to access this experience. What is clear from the data is that

this research has supported and encouraged the reflective practice of my colleague headteachers. This phenomenon was hinted at by Flintham (2010) but this study offers a much rich data set to support the importance of giving headteachers the opportunity to reflect on their own practice in the company of other headteachers. Flintham's (2010) concerns were with how headteachers sustained their personal capacity whereas this study hints at the possible connection between headteachers being reflective with each other and a positive impact on leadership and school improvement.

9.5 Future Research in the this field

As has been discussed in section 4.6 AR is designed to change the research setting. This study has also profoundly changed the researcher. More research is needed to explore this type of impact especially on practice-based doctoral programmes.

Further refinement of the model of meta-reflection and exploring other professional contexts where meta-reflection might occur is another important area for additional research.

The opportunities for headteachers to enter into dialogic peer relationships need to be developed and researched in order to allow for the conditions where meta-reflection assists in improving leadership and schools.

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More research into the relationships between researchers and their 'gate-keepers' should deepen the understanding of the process of school improvement and school leadership.

More fieldwork needs to be done on how 'ordinary schools' maintain steady improvement. We need a much richer definition of an average school in order to understand the real experience of school in this country.

More research needs to be undertaken into the experiences of school leadership in order to test and refine the emergent model of "conversational partnerships" (Rubin and Rubin, 2005 p79) in helping develop meta-reflection in professionals.

It is vital that a much larger sample of secondary headteachers are surveyed to understand whether headteachers are all reflexive given the right conditions and check how many might use meta-reflection as part of the learning processes.

It is important to understand whether this phenomenon of meta-reflection is limited just to secondary headteachers. Work would need to be done to establish if headteachers in other phases of English schools also shared this profile.

Additionally research should be done into other professional contexts. Does meta-reflection exist anywhere else where the conditions of professional conversations, a trusting non-judgemental context and time could apply?

Finally it would be interesting to know if this was restricted to the England and so research from other cultural contexts would show the nature of meta-reflection as defined by this dissertation.

9.6 Final Reflections on the Doctoral Journey

Finally we need to consider the nature of the reality of being a headteacher in an English secondary school today. I think this was very well expressed by headteacher

William:

“we have also got a problem with the perception of headship which is causing a lot of people to say no thank you and I don’t want to be part of that, because it’s got to be the best job, I know it’s very demanding but it’s got to be the most rewarding, fulfilling and uplifting experience, I mean it’s the privilege of it and I just want to keep reviewing my own effectiveness” (Headteacher William School C Int4 p2).

In many ways he was the most reflective (and the leader of the most successful school) of the whole sample. He had managed to become meta-reflective without any recourse to a professional doctorate but understood very well the reality of being a headteacher. I think he would concur with the following quotation from Emerson:

“None of us will ever accomplish anything excellent or commanding except when he listens to this whisper which is heard by him alone”
Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) (Emerson, 1891 p645)

For me the seven year journey that brings me to this point has resonated in my professional journey and that of my school. When I was appointed to my first headship in January 2002 I inherited a school which was effectively in special

measures (Ofsted, 2005a) and had all the characteristics of a school struggling to escape from its challenging circumstances. I survived two Ofsted inspections in 2003 and 2005 which saw the school removed from the category of serious weakness. (Ofsted, 2005c) In 2005 I began this professional doctorate to understand and process how the school had improved and offer to another headteacher coming into a school context like the one I had found some advice on what to do and how to do it.

As I reflect at the end of this chapter I would offer the younger me Emerson's advice to listen and trust the whisper. By 2011 my school has had another inspection (Ofsted, 2008a) which indicated some improvement and has managed to raise standards (see 9.3.5 table 27) to levels many would have considered fanciful in 2002. The school will move into a purpose built new school (the last remnant of Building Schools for the Future) in September 2012. This research study has undoubtedly helped me find the space to listen and understand the whisper. I know how to access my inner compass and run in the dark. I have learned the value of my colleagues and their unique professional insights which in turn have deepened my own understanding for the reality of the roles we share and love. I live the reality of secondary headship every day and I am thankful for the opportunities it offers me to reflect on the complexities of how professional conversations have helped me sustain my school and my own enthusiasm for leading my school for over ten years.

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I would like to end with one final metaphor Bolton (2005) acknowledges that the use of metaphors in reflective practice can help clarify the intangible:

“metaphors can allow a grasp of the ungraspable, make visible or audible that which is normally invisible or inaudible” (Bolton, 2005 p122)

This is post script to the conversations I had with my headteacher colleagues over the years of the study about what meta-reflection actually is for me as a practising headteacher. Last week I met headteacher Thomas at a Swinburne headteachers' meeting exploring the ramifications of the 2011 Education Act and, as is often the case with my colleague headteachers, he asked me about this research study. The reason for his enquiry was not merely politeness but relevant for him because he had also begun his own doctoral journey, looking at headship and mental breakdown. Our discussion came to a question that will be familiar to any researcher “so what was it you found out then?” I began to describe the process of meta-reflection which, as is very common with headteachers, was met with nods and smiles of agreement and then he said this:

“So it's like the way computers run programs in the background chugging away until they come up with the answer?”

“Yes I said that's exactly what it's like.”

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Appendices

Appendix 1 The Interview Schedule (2005)

Aim to gain access into the school's culture in order to ascertain enough data to make a judgement on how much sustained school improvement is present.

I therefore need to use the questionnaire prompts in order to encourage the respondents to give me the insights they have into their school to open the inner doors

The Gatekeeper - Headteacher

Phase	Question	Prompts	Purpose
Pre interview	Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Have you read and are you happy to sign the context document? Have you any questions about my research?		Permissions and confidentiality
Warm Up	I would like to check some general information about the school	How many students on roll? How many teachers? How many staff in total? Are you happy with the standards in KS3 and KS4? How many of your staff have completed NPQH?	Setting the context collecting and checking basic data
	Do you enjoy your job?	How many years have you been in post? How do you sustain yourself? What are your ambitions for yourself? What are your ambitions for the school? Have you done any NCSL leadership programmes?	Personal background continuity of leadership
Main	What is your view	What do you get out of	Leadership

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	of leadership?	<p>being head? How would you describe your leadership style? What factors help you be an effective leader? What factors hinder you from being an effective leader? What support do you get from your SLT? What is your relationship with your governors?</p>	
	Tell me what school improvement means to you	<p>LA believes this is an improving school why do you believe they think this? What do you believe has improved your school? The research literature suggests there are key drivers of school improvement do you agree with them? Which ones do you believe are most important in this school? Why do you think this school is making sustained improvement?</p>	School Improvement
	Do you think this is an improving school?	<p>Do you think things are improving on the whole? What examples could you give me? What whole school initiatives have been implemented this year? Were they successful? What was your involvement? What will (would) you do next?</p>	Developments
	Tell me about teaching and learning in this school	<p>How does the school show the importance of this in your view? Do you think T and L is</p>	Teaching and Learning

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		improving?	
	What is your view about staff development?	How important is the continued learning for the staff in the school? What have you learned recently? What courses or programmes have you been on? Do you want to have more training?	CPD
	Do you think good communication in a school is important?	How effective are the communication processes in this school? Do you feel people are involved? How good is consultation? Do you have a view about distributed leadership? How important is teamwork and collaboration in this school?	Communication and involvement
	What contribution do your governors make to school?	Are they critical friends? Do they support you as a head? Do they challenge you appropriately? How involved are they in the strategic running of the school? Are they involved in the leadership of the school?	External Relationships
	How important are external relationships like SIPs, Ofsted consultants and LA?	Where is the school in the Ofsted inspection cycle? Do you think this helps or hinders school improvement? What is your relationship with the LA? How useful (or not) have	External Relationships

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		<p>they been in supporting you to improve the school?</p> <p>Are there other important external visitors that have helped the school?</p>	
Cool Down	<p>Would you like to add anything you think I might have missed?</p>	<p>Do you think the questionnaire/survey accurately describes the main drivers for school improvement?</p> <p>Do you wish to add anything?</p>	Other Factors
End	Thank you		

Questionnaire for all other staff

Phase	Question	Prompts	Purpose
Pre interview	Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. Have you read and are you happy to sign the context document? Have you any questions about my research?		Permissions and confidentiality
Warm Up	Tell me a little about your role in school	How long have you been teaching? How long have you been at this school? Do you have a leadership function?	
	Do you enjoy your job?	What do you enjoy about your job? Or how did you find yourself in this place here and now? How do you sustain yourself? What are your ambitions? Do you feel involved in this school? Would you like more involvement? What do you like about the leadership in this school? What challenges would you identify for the leadership of this school	Personal background Leadership perspective
Main	Tell me what school improvement means to you	What do you believe has improved your school? The research literature suggests there are key drivers of school improvement what do you think these might be? Which ones do you believe are most important in this school? Why do you think this school is making	School Improvement

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		sustained improvement?	
	Do you think this is an improving school?	LA believes this is an improving school why do you believe they think this?	
	What is happening in school at the moment that you think will improve things?	Do you think things are improving on the whole? What examples could you give me? What whole school initiatives have been implemented this year? Were they successful? What was your involvement? What will (would) you do next?	Developments
	Tell me about teaching and learning in this school?	How does the school show the importance of this in your view? Do you think T and L is improving?	Teaching and Learning
	What is your view about staff development?	How important is the continued learning for the staff in the school? What have you learned recently? What courses or programmes have you been on? Do you want to have more training?	CPD
	Do you think good communication in a school is important?	How effective are the communication processes in this school? Do you feel people are involved? How good is consultation Do you have a view about distributed leadership? How important is teamwork and	Communication and involvement

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		collaboration in this school?	
	What contribution do the governors make to this school?	Are they critical friends? Do they support you as a head? Do they challenge you appropriately? How involved are they in the strategic running of the school? Are they involved in the leadership of the school?	External Relationships
	How important are external relationships like Ofsted, consultants and LA?	What is your experience of Ofsted in this or any other school? Do you think this helps or hinders school improvement? Have you had very much to do with external consultant or LA subject advisers or officers?	External Relationships
Cool Down	Would you like to add anything you think I might have missed?	Do you think the questionnaire/survey accurately describes the main drivers for school improvement? Do you wish to add anything?	Other Factors
End	Thank you		

Appendix 2 The timing of the data gathering

1. October – December 2006 - The Benchmark

School	Head teacher	No. of years in post	School Type	Current (05/06)Ofsted grade Leadership
A	John	12	Community	2
B	Benjamin	1	Community	3
C	William	15	VA	1
D	Philip	13	Community	2
E	Thomas	3	Community	3
F	Robert	0.3	Community	3
G	Percy	5	Community	3

2. October 2007 - First Orientation

School	Head teacher	No. of years in post	School Type	Current (05/06)Ofsted grade
A	George	0.9	Community	2
B	Benjamin	2	Community	3
C	William	16	VA	1
D	Philip	14	Community	3
E	Thomas	4	Community	3
F	Robert	1	Community	3
G	Percy	6	Community	3

3. April – July 2008 – Research Relationship Building

School	Head teacher	No. of years in post	School Type	Current Ofsted grade
A	George	1.3	Community	2
B	Benjamin	2.6	Community	3
D	Philip	14.6	Community	3
Benjamin	Thomas	4.6	Community	3
F	Robert	1.6	Community	3
G	Percy	6.6	Community	3

4. October – December 2008 – Research Relationship Refining

School	Head teacher	No. of years in post	School Type	Current Ofsted grade
A	George	1.3	Community	2
B	Benjamin	2.6	Community	3
C	William	16.6	VA	1

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D	Philip	14.6	Community	3
E	Thomas	4.6	Community	3
F	Robert	2.1	Community	3
G	Percy	6.6	Community	3

5. December 2008 – March 2009 Checking the Early Results

School	Head teacher	No. of years in post	School Type	Current Ofsted grade
A	George	2.3	Community	3
B	Benjamin	3.6	Community	3
C	William	17.6	VA	1
D	Philip	15.6	Community	3
E	Thomas	5.6	Community	3
F	Robert	4.6	Community	3
G	Percy	7.6	Community	3



Interviews that were missed and rolled into the next session

Appendix 3 The Research Question October 2007

An investigation in the process of sustaining improvement in secondary schools: How headteachers achieve this through critical reflection.

The Interview Schedule (Rubin and Rubin, 2005)

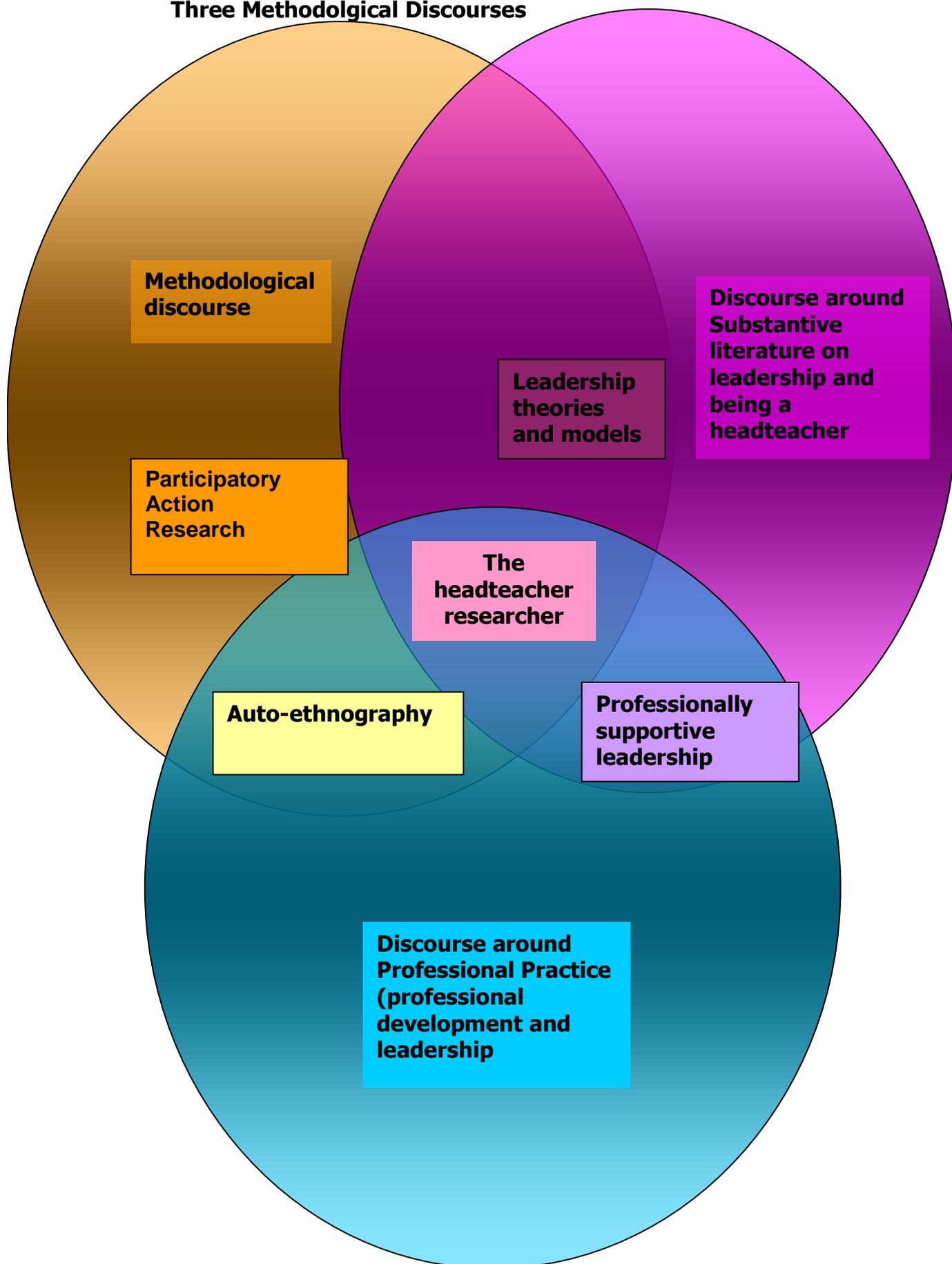
Source of question	Area linked back to the research question	Areas for coding	Main Scaffolding Questions	Follow ups and Probes
The literature recognises the important role the leadership of the headteacher has in school Improvement	What is the headteachers view of improvement in their school?	How would they characterise improvement in their schools? What is their view of the impact of their own practice in any aspect of school improvement they think significant?	What areas of your school are you most pleased with at the moment? Why is this? Have you set goals for yourself to measure improvement?	Does your notion of improvement match those of the external gatekeepers? How do you feel about your progress to date?
There is an increasing concern (NCSL and government) in sustainability	Do they consider aspects of school improvement in their schools to be sustainable?	What are these aspects? How are they different from non-sustainable ones? How do headteachers sustain themselves?	Which aspects of your school are most sustainable?	How are you sustaining your own practice
Hopkins notion of systemic school improvement	How do headteachers embed notions of school improvement?	What aspects of school improvement do headteachers think are embedded in their school? What is the evidence for this from the headteacher's perspective?	Is this new phenomenon or have you been developing this for some time?	Would you describe this as school improvement

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		How do headteachers sustain improvement in their schools?		
The literature on leadership suggests that reflective leaders have more impact	How do head teachers reflect on their own professional practice?	How do they describe this reflective practice? What are the underlying beliefs that inform head teachers when engaged in reflecting on practice?	On a personal level how do you evaluate your impact on your school?	Would you use the term reflective? How often do you do this?
	What are the implications on practice of a headteacher's reflection?	Do headteachers use reflection in their work? From the perspective of the headteacher has this manifest?	How does your reflection on what you do impact on your practice as a school leader	Has reflection changed how you operate as a head?
	"Is this headteacher critically reflective?"	Is there evidence of the respondent looking at practice and not just describing it? How are their values shown in their responses? Do their values shift over time? Are their beliefs affected by their reflection	Would you consider yourself to be reflective?	What reflective practices work for you? Do you encourage this in others?

The highlighted areas are looking at process and will be measured over time to capture how head teachers impact sustained improvement in their school.

Three Methodological Discourses



Appendix 4 Example of a transcript by the researcher

Interview with Headteacher John

11th February 2007 9.30 – 11.15 at Masham School

Percy	What sustains whole school improvement. This is a conversation and I will take part in it as well. I'll give you the context my research question is how schools sustain improvement, not how schools become improved schools (I think I kind of know how that happens) but how they maintain it because I have a belief that the only moral purpose around what we do as headteachers is to make it work not just for us in a year (quick fix) but in that kind of deep and meaningful way. Now the reason why you're very interesting is because (and I won't contaminate the data) but is certainly emerging (and I will do all the heads in Stevenage) so this pilot bit of the study which will be exactly the same as the full study...	
John	[lots of mms and a repeat of "the full study"] right	
Percy	...will get some emerging themes and it's really about what you have found in your role at [name] for all the years you've been there that made the school continue (and I suppose that the real joy of yours is that you can say you didn't expect Ofsted to say your school was good	
John	No	
Percy	And yet actually it was so in other words you had clearly managed to (you've not taking it from special measures and made it good but your school was always at least satisfactory the very difficult bit of being good	
John	yeah	
Percy	With probably the real intention of making it outstanding how did you do that?	
John	I don't know I think again the context is when I (it's 15 years in August) I think when I took it over I had a reasonably (in Ofsted terms it would be a coasting school) it was satisfactory it was never better if memory serves me correctly we were getting in the region of 27 to 33% 5 A to Cs 900 (909) kids on board a small 6 th form and if I was being really really critical I would say it was run almost like a gentlemen's club where children were seen as necessary evils not in a nasty way not in a horrible way because one of the things that always happened at Barclay was that the relationships were always good the staff student relationship has always been superb otherwise I wouldn't have sent my kids there and my kids both had a good time there and they flourished because of that atmosphere. So when I took over I think my mission was: we're at a plateau we've got a reasonably good atmosphere we've got crap buildings but that's part of what made it a good atmosphere we were all in it together boys sort of approach. I think in fairness the staff were looking for change and the staff expected change I'm told that when the staff were told I	

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	<p>got the headship there was a great collective cheer in the staff room and everybody was pleased because I was up against two other people one of who was an advisor from the [name] and another existing head and the other existing head came across as very aloof, very domineering very central focused and I came across (because I can put the old Devon charm if I want to) as an amiable idiot which has always suited me as an option actually and learned that trick from an old advisor from [name] (old Ted Clark) he'd sit down with you and now tell me Percy what do you think about so and so and you'd suddenly realise 3 mins into the conversation that that's a difficult question</p>	
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Appendix 5 Regulations for Changing the School Day**Revised – June 2007****The school day - procedures for changing session times and the length of the school week**

If a school wishes to extend, shorten or otherwise alter the timing of the school day it must follow the procedures laid down in the Deregulation (Length of the School Day) Order 1996 which came into force from 1 November 1999.

Although this guidance only formally applies to the governing body of community, voluntary controlled or community special schools the DfES suggests that it is followed by the governing body of foundation and voluntary aided schools.

Where the change affects the start and finish times of the school day this can only be introduced at the start of a school year and at least three months notice must be given, following the necessary consultations.

For all other changes (i.e. changing the times of the midday break.) these can commence at the start of the school term and a minimum 6 weeks notice must be given. The procedures are summarised below.

Step one: Consulting the LA, headteacher and staff

The regulations require that the governing body must first consult the school's headteacher and, although there is no legal requirement to do so, the DfES recommends that the governing body should also consult all staff that will be affected by the proposed changes.

(In practice most proposals to change the school day are likely to be proposed by the headteacher.)

The governing body should also consult the local authority (LA) about any proposed changes. This means School Transport team and the school's SIP/ SDA about their plans. The need to inform the school's SIP/SDA on any proposed change is to ensure that the length of the school week meets the recommended weekly lesson times as set out in the DfES Circular 7/90 details of which are set out below, and also to offer any other advice about the restructure of the school day.

The County Council Transport Co-ordination Centre need to be informed of any proposed change to ascertain whether or not the change would increase the cost of any contracted home to school transport. If the change results in an increase in the cost to the LA, the Essex Scheme for Financing Schools states that the increase may be charged to the delegated school budget where the governing body has failed to consult and reach agreement with the LA before making a decision to change the school times..

NOTE

For changes that will increase the cost of contracted home to transport notification of the decision to change the school times will need to be communicated to the Transport Co-ordination Centre by the end of **January** for changes that will come into effect from the next September. If such prior notification is not received the additional costs arising will be charged to the delegated school budget as set out in section 6.2 (xi) of the Essex Scheme for Financing schools.

Step two: Preparing a statement

If, after this initial consultation, the governing body decides to proceed it must next prepare a written statement setting out the changes they are proposing to make and when, if implemented, the changes would come into effect. If the LA has made any written comments in response to the initial consultation that fact must be reported in the statement, with the LA's comments appended in full.

Step three: Telling the parents

The governing body must send a copy of the statement (and appendix if necessary) to all parents, together with notice of the meeting referred to at 'Step 4' below, and to all persons employed at the school. It must also be available for inspection at the school. The statement must be in such language or languages as the governing body consider appropriate or as the LA may direct.

Step four: Arranging a meeting

The governing body must arrange a meeting at which all parents, the headteacher and others whom they wish to invite; have the opportunity to discuss the proposals. A minimum of two weeks' notice must be given. The governing body must consider any comments made at the meeting before deciding whether to implement the proposed changes.

Step Five: Giving notice

If, finally, the governing body determines to change the session times it must inform both the LA (as above) and parents, giving a minimum of three months' notice of its decision where the changes affect the start and finish times of the school day, and as stated above these can only be introduced at the start of the school year.

6 weeks notice must be given for all other changes, as outlined above.

Length of the school week

Schools, with the exception of nursery classes, must meet for at least 380 half-day sessions in each academic year. The weekly lesson times (see Circular 7/90: Management of the School Day) as recommended by the DfES are as follows:

Reflective Conversations with Headteachers: Exploring the Realities of Leadership in English Secondary Schools

21 hours for pupils aged 5-7
23½ hours for pupils aged 8-11
24 hours for pupils aged 12-13
25 hours for pupils aged 14 -16

These timings do not include time for daily collective worship, registration or breaks.

The Power to Innovate

Some schools and LA's wishing to test innovative approaches to raising standards might find that they need to challenge existing legislation. If that is the case then it may be possible to exempt a school or LEA from that legislation for a time-limited period.

The "Power to Innovate" allows schools or LA's to apply to the Secretary of State to lift regulatory requirements for a time-limited period, in order for a school or LEA to pilot a specific innovative proposal. The Power is intended to ensure that no opportunity is lost to respond to innovative ideas to raise standards for all children.

In order to apply for the Power to Innovate, applicants will need to know which specific piece of legislation they wish to apply to be exempt from.

Applicants will also need to:

- provide evidence to show why they believe their proposal could raise educational standards;
- consider the likely effect of the proposed pilot on all the children who may be affected by it;
- consult with all appropriate people who may be affected by the pilot;
- consider how the pilot will run for a time-limited period;
- plan how they will monitor and evaluate the pilot.

The Innovation Unit will be able to provide you with further information, they can be contacted at Department of Education and Skills, Innovation Unit, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT. Telephone 020 7925 5801.

www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/innovation-unit

**Contact: Communication Officer, Schools, Children & Families
01245 436242/ 436188**

Appendix 6a Extract from research (notes) journal

	<p>It could be true of all teachers it could also be true for all leaders</p>
	<p>All head teachers of self reflection have some form</p> <p>What happens when two headteachers talk to each other operates at a number of levels in terms of self reflection</p> <p>The surface level is a conversation depending on the subject of this conversation this may also operate at a deeper level which connects with the headteachers internal self reflective cycle e.g. school performance or an Ofsted inspection at a meta level the whole conversation is processed by the internal self-reflective cycle which feeds back into the conscious mind. This enhances the sub-conscious reflection adding a deeper and richer context to the process of reflection on one's professional practice</p>
	<p>It is characteristic of the role you can never escape it. It operates at a sub-conscious level and one processes information, emotions, relationships, planning and problem solving constantly</p>
	<p>To understand this is to understand the role the acceptance of it is to become a headteacher</p>

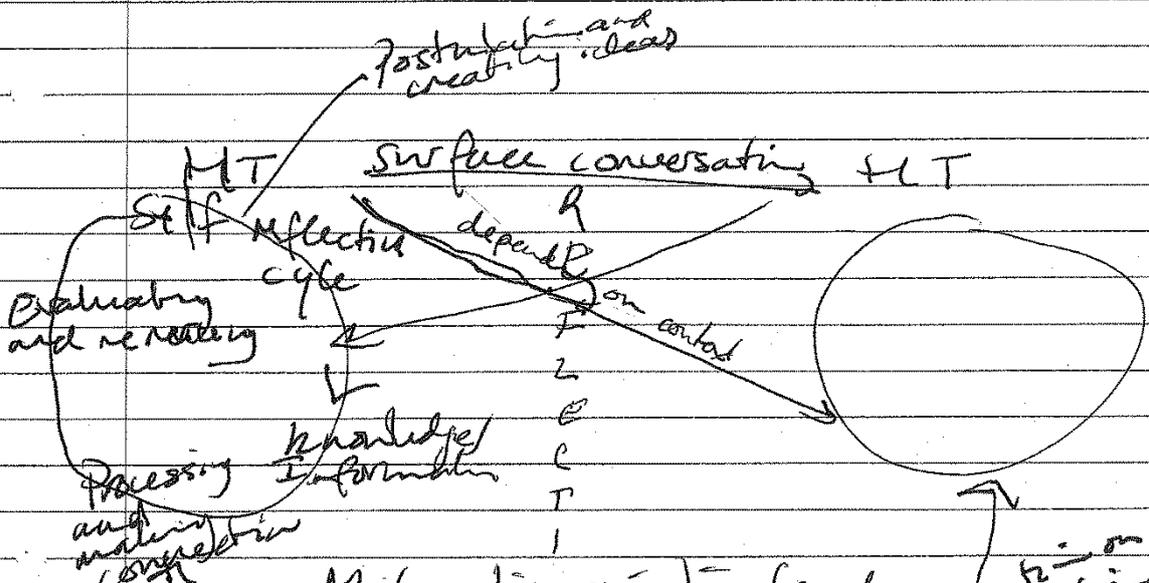
Appendix 6b Extract from research (notes) journal

How do I know this is true?

It happens to me.

Example from the research data

There are further hints from other parts of the data



Health-educ/nursing/comm

Watson Jean
 Transforming
 nursing through
 reflective practice
 1998

Chris Johns
 Dawn Freshwater

Appendix 6c Extract from research (notes) journal

	<p>Interviews with Eddie Gaynor Thursday 11th December 2008 2.10pm at Heathcote School.</p> <p>Agree your own experience of the different leaders the have inspired you leaders you want to emulate this is synthesised a kind of borrowing and making it your own I learned as much from an informant head as the best. All heads are totally unique people since can hear they were sometime or how would you have done this assimilating + synthesising playing the sedulous ape (RWS) by borrowing the best literature political historical models WCSL I keep allowing for leadership as much as facted allow space to lead</p> <p>Learning from mistakes - happy to learn from this</p> <p>'If you action inspire the Claney Adams</p>
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Appendix 6d Extract from research (notes) journal

the next level of archaeological depth as a turn from reflective practice towards contemplative practice to mindful practice to conscious-intentional caring-healing practice for self.

Therefore we are invited personally and professionally to engage in our inner and outer work, exploring our inner journey towards the deep heart of the work.

It is through such inner work that we are able to witness the process and contribute to a transformation of the outer work.

... we can tap into a level of reflection that asks moral questions

Post modern nursing
 transpersonal
 on to logical
 caring-healing
 model

Appendix 7a Extract from Interview Transcripts

1st Interview with Headteacher William at School C Nov 15th 2006

Percy	<p>The research is really fascinating because one of the factors that has led me to, I'm interested in how schools do it but I am also interested in what I do as a practitioner that's why I'm doing a Doctorate in Education otherwise I would do a PhD in Gregorian practices in the 14th century but this requires me to look into my practices as a professional as an educator and reflect on it so we're going to have a conversation as opposed to simply me come in measure and examine you know with a questionnaire. How have you done what you have done?</p>	Research
Will	<p>Its interesting to unpack it and if I do so its with hindsight and a lot of what I would see now I'm not sure I would have thought through clearly as it would appear looking back at it. I think there were different phases Patrick the first phase is that I came into a school that believed it was successful but where many of the indicators were pointing the wrong way the number of people applying to join the school had fallen dramatically I think back in 1993 there were 40 people who applied to come to the school the exam pass rate had slipped so that the three year 5a to c was 45% and yet people were convincing themselves that this as a good school. I quickly tuned into the fact that this school was complacent and if it didn't transform itself it would have no future and at the time I was appointed governors basically made that very clear that this was make or break time and there was a culture in the school which was worrying the pupils had gone on strike in the summer beforehand they had gone out in the field and refused to work there was no focus on the small things that make a difference so behaviour was very poor uniform was very lax trainers and whatever went and a casualness and dirtiness in the school which reflected in the casual approach now in fairness the school had gone through a difficult amalgamation and the head had done a magnificent job in steering it through to becoming a distinctive new school community and he had paid a heavy price for it and things slipped very dramatically that year it was a very authoritarian approach a no compromise approach and almost confrontational because there was an agenda I wanted to deliver and it was very simple and very focused and it was to do with basic standards of uniform of behaviour expectations in terms of staff being at lessons on time lessons running the full course of the time meaningful homework being set according to a timetable and an expectation that people would do what they were told to do deadlines would be set and almost a rigour being brought back into the way that we would work and also trying to establish this idea of a collective set of values. Now I knew that not everyone would buy into that and therefore I was very consciously going about removing staff from the school and I think in the first three years probably about 70% of the staff left and that was very, very hard because that is not naturally the way in which I work and I think if I got a knife in my back it could be one of about a hundred people who stuck it there</p>	Standards Governors Early experiences of headship Leadership styles

Appendix 7b Extract from Interview Transcripts

6th interview with Headteacher Philip at School D January 2009

Percy	<p>This used to be called Authentic School Improvement, How do Head Teachers Reflect on their Practice Leadership actually it has moved on from that and become more general what its like being a Head really. I have identified a number of themes really and I want to check them out with you so if I just go through the themes and you just tell me if it makes any sense, does it resonate with you, do you think it's true or please say if you think that's rubbish and not true at all. The first theme is and this came from the data from all the conversations with all the Heads I am literally at the point where I am putting the whole thing together and writing it up and please God next year I write the finished final thing and you go through the bits that....it takes a long, long time, I have to say I should have done SIP work and not this it would have been much, much quicker and I would probably be earning more money. Ok the first theme is, a school improvement journey for the Headteacher of a secondary school, it's a bit specific but you know, is always personal, unique and cannot be replicated.</p>	<p>Reflexivity Research Sch Impr</p>
Phil	<p>The word cannot is the bit that ehm, when anybody says you cannot, I think you can learn from, but I would think, yes ehm as a Head if you went to two schools that were very similar and one after the other they still wouldn't be the same there is too many variables and the journey is a unique experience on the other hand you can learn an enormous amount from one journey and then replicate it again, it depends on what you mean by cannot</p>	<p>Sch Impr</p>
Percy	<p>I think that it came from me, and it as quite deliberate it was quite a strong way of saying it because when I spoke to you and William and you Robert and Janet it was so different, we all talk about each other and it is also about my journey I am the other piece of this jig saw and its one of those things where the only thing you know about is where you are and what you are doing in your school and when you change any of those you change, you grow or get older or whatever or the school changes I think it can even change because you change then it all changes, the complicated relationship and yes leadership is leadership and you and I do the same things, I get that is a replicatable phenomena but actually how you do.....</p>	<p>Reflexivity Leadership Headship</p>