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An Analysis of the Socialisation of Primary School Headteachers from a Role Boundary Perspective

Volume 1 of 1

Matthew Robert Cottrell

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath

Department of Education

June 2013

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Abstract

The experience of socialisation for those new to headship can be challenging and often traumatic (Crow, 2007). Research into the socialisation of new headteachers is not extensive and has primarily been concerned with identifying and ordering stages in the socialisation process, for example, phases of headship. Such an approach neither allows for an analysis of the complexity of socialising influences nor does it enable the generation of explanatory theories. The purpose of the current research was to provide an understanding of the socialisation of new headteachers from an analysis of significant socialising experiences. The aims of the research were to:

1. analyse the socialisation of new primary headteachers from a role boundary perspective.
2. test the suitability of the role boundary concept as a rigorous, theoretical and methodological tool that can be applied to researching the field of headteacher socialisation.

The research analysed critical incident vignettes from the experiences of seven newly appointed primary school headteachers up to their first three years in post. Data was collected using two research methods; semi-structured interviews and a written log. Twenty two critical incident vignettes were analysed using an interpretive methodology underpinned by an analytical framework based upon the concept of role boundary. The role boundary is described as being the point of delineation between a set of behaviours that are considered to be legitimate in role and those behaviours that are considered illegitimate in role. The role boundary concept allows for an analysis of the socialising experiences of new headteachers as they and the organisation engage in a recurrent, reciprocal and relational socialising process that seeks to establish those behaviours that are, and those that are not, legitimately enclosed by their role boundaries.

The research found that socialisation is the process by which the new headteacher and the organisation seek to establish and position their respective role boundaries. Headteachers experience socialisation as a series of emotionally challenging interactions where the central purpose is to establish who has the legitimate authority to take decisions and to take actions in the following three main areas; task role allocation, resource allocation and the creation and application of organisational procedure. These interactions are immediate, are intense and have the potential to lead to conflict where individuals contest the limits of their respective role boundaries. The research finds the concept of role boundary as a theoretical and

methodological tool to be of heuristic and analytical value in understanding and explaining headteacher socialisation and presents a role boundary socialisation theory to explain the dynamics of the socialisation process.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Beginning a headship for the first time is an exciting, exhilarating, but complex experience (Weindling and Dimmock, 2006). The extent of the challenge faced by those new to headship is immense and has been described as being "traumatic" (Crow, 2007, p.51). However, whilst there exists a substantial body of research on the characteristics of 'leadership' and 'management' and their impact upon schools, far less is known about the ways in which headteachers are socialised into their role as school leaders (Brandon, 2002). The purpose of the present research is to redress the imbalance and to provide important insights into understanding the complexities and the challenges experienced by those taking up their first primary school headship.

Hobson et al. (2003) have identified early headship as the most crucial phase of a new headteacher's incumbency. Current research proposes three different temporal definitions of early headship. The first is that an individual's success as a headteacher is founded upon their work in their first six months of headship (Reeves et al., 1997); the second is that early headship constitutes the first year in post (Day and Bakioglu, 1996; Ribbins, 1999; Brighouse and Wood, 1999; Gronn, 1999); and third that early headship extends to the first three years of a new headteacher's incumbency (Fidler and Atton, 2004). However, whilst these studies provide subsequent researchers with three temporal demarcations of early headship that might be of interest for future study, they do not provide insights into the specific processes of primary headteacher socialisation. Rather, these research studies are concerned with establishing a model of phased headship with which one is able to categorise and order leadership development.

Arguably, research methodologies of headteacher socialisation have to date paid insufficient attention to the role played by organisational context in the social construction of leaders (Brandon, 2002). For the most part leadership research has been concerned with an analysis of a number of individualistic variables whilst overlooking, or perhaps not taking into consideration, the context which will inevitably influence the formation of an individual's leadership practice (English, 1995; Grint, 2005). Arguably, new leadership research should seek to understand the critical role that context plays in the construction of an individual's leadership practice during their socialisation.

There is a relative paucity of research concerned with the day to day processes involved in the socialisation of new headteachers and the process of learning and change that are central to socialisation itself. Change is concerned with the interplay between the actors in the organisation and the way in which leaders manage these variables (James and Connolly, 2000). Such variables are necessarily influenced by both the individual themselves and their context and as such understanding the impact of socialising influences within an organisational context is central to gaining a detailed understanding of the process of socialisation for new headteachers. Indeed, English (1995) argues that:

> *"If the objective in leadership research is to understand and illuminate behaviour, only the use of data acquired from real settings/contexts will move the study of leadership beyond the presumptuousness of trying to ascertain what leaders do from reputational approaches."*
>
> *(English, 1995, p.204)*

English (1995) suggests that there is a need to research the interplay between leadership development and leadership context. Such research will require the use of a methodological approach that will allow for the collection and analysis of a different type of variable than those currently used to identify such dimensions as, for example, leadership attributes within early headship. Indeed, it is arguable that to limit the research of new headteacher socialisation to a study of leadership styles and traits is essentially reductionist in the sense that it restricts any potential analysis to simply ordering and describing aspects of leadership. Such an approach would seem to overlook the need to address the complexities of studying the processes of socialisation. Further, such an approach, by methodological implication, fails to consider the intrinsic nature of the recurrent, reciprocal and relational behavioural interplay that takes place between the individual and their context during socialisation.

A new theoretical and methodological approach: role boundary perspective

To illuminate the centrality of behaviours during socialisation one must find and utilise an alternative theoretical and methodological perspective to those used in previous research to identify and order leadership attributes, styles and traits. In my thesis, I argue for the heuristic value of the 'role boundary' as a concept with which one can analyse socialisation. Here, it is useful to separately examine the definition that is given to 'role' before proposing the conceptual framework of the role boundary.

The notion of the role boundary takes as axiomatic that the concept of role can at any given time be understood in two distinct ways. The first is role as position (Gabriel, 1999). Role as position can be defined as being the tasks that an individual is required to undertake in order to fulfil their responsibilities and accountabilities as a consequence of them holding a role label (e.g. headteacher). The second distinction of role is that of role as practice (Mullins, 2005). Role as practice is defined as being *the way in which* an individual goes about undertaking their tasks. Thus, whilst role as position is broadly generalisable across schools by nature of the similar requirements of the role of a headteacher, role as practice will be as varied as the skills, temperament and attitudes that the individual brings to their context and vice versa.

The concept of the role boundary conceives of an individual's role as practice as being enclosed by a point of demarcation, rather like a boundary fence, in which lay a set of behaviours through which one interacts with the organisation and vice versa. Arguably, the process of socialisation is that of an individual and their organisational context establishing which behaviours are considered appropriate (i.e. legitimate) to an individual's role and those that are not (i.e. illegitimate) with the process (i.e. socialisation) having the potential to lead to critical incidents and conflict. In my work, I argue that an analysis of these behavioural interactions is central to research that is concerned with understanding socialisation and that all such interactions are the central process of socialisation itself. Further, I argue that a study of the dynamics of role boundary interactions will enable researchers to explore the processes and methods individuals use when attempting to establish a boundary around the behaviours they believe legitimately constitute their role. Such an analysis can be achieved by analysing the behaviours of individuals during the process of socialisation by studying critical incident vignettes from a role boundary perspective.

Research Aims and Research Questions

The aims of the current research are to:

1. analyse the socialisation of new primary headteachers from a role boundary perspective.
2. test the suitability of the role boundary concept as a rigorous, theoretical and methodological tool that can be applied to researching the field of headteacher socialisation.

It is my intention that the thesis presents fresh insights into the socialisation of new primary school headteachers and especially to discover the nature and cause of the events that lead

those new to headship to describe the experience as being traumatic (Crow, 2007). I will do so by analysing the behaviours of individual actors in the organisation within the context of critical incident accounts of significant events that occur during a new headteacher's socialisation. These accounts will be captured and recorded during the research as they are described by the headteachers themselves. In so doing, I intend to test the suitability of the role boundary concept as a rigorous, theoretical and methodological tool that can be applied to researching the field of headteacher socialisation.

The research questions are as follows:

1. How can the experiences of those individuals newly appointed to their first primary school headship be interpreted and explained?
2. What is the nature of the experience of those individuals newly appointed to their first primary school headship?
3. What can be learned from the interpretation and explanation of newly appointed headteachers to enhance understandings of headteacher socialisation?

Key findings

The following is a synopsis of the key findings from the research that are presented in Chapter 6. Firstly, the research finds that the notion of the role boundary as a theoretical and methodological tool is of heuristic value to those wishing to research socialisation from a behavioural perspective. The value in the use of the role boundary lies in its ability to enable researchers to analyse and interpret data drawn from individuals' experiences of socialisation.

Secondly, the research finds that for those new to primary headship the impact of role boundary interactions can be both immediate and intense. It identifies the groups of stakeholders involved in critical incidents as they have been reported by headteachers during their socialisation and also the frequency with which each group appears in the data. Interestingly, the data points to the fact that the overwhelming source of critical incidents experienced by headteachers during their socialisation involves adults; mainly staff and parents. Of further interest is that given the inverse relationship between the number of adults to children in schools (i.e. there are far more children than adults), the research finds that headteachers report experiencing relatively few critical incidents involving children. The research analyses the central leadership and management tasks that lay at the heart of each critical incident vignette against the six strands of the National Standards for Headteachers

(DfES, 2004). The national standards outline the key work of headteachers and an analysis of the vignettes against such criteria enables the identification of the most common tasks of the professional work of new headteachers that were reported as being traumatic in nature. The analysis finds that almost exclusively the trauma of the reported incidents involved management and not leadership tasks. Further, the analysis finds that during socialisation the headteachers involved in the research were largely involved with establishing their legitimate authority in relation to others over the decision making process. In particular, it is possible to identify that the overwhelming majority of incidents reported by headteachers involved their establishing who has the legitimate authority to take decisions of a management nature. Specifically, these decisions can be identified as being those concerned with task role allocation, resource allocation and the creation and application of organisational policy and procedure. Interestingly, the research finds that contrary to the work of Fidler and Atton (2004) there are no discernable differences between the socialising experiences of those headteachers promoted from within an organisation and those appointed to the position from an external post and offers a possible explanation; that the essence of the socialisation process itself is that of an individual seeking to make sense of their understanding of their new role and the way in which they will fulfil that role regardless of whether or not they have been appointed from another school or have been promoted internally within their current school.

Thirdly, the research suggests how socialising experiences can be interpreted and explained. The findings suggest that socialisation is a sense-making process and that the socialisation of new headteachers is fundamentally concerned with learning how best to exercise their authority through complex social interactions. These interactions are recurrent, reciprocal and, being social in nature, are also relational as they take place between different individuals within the organisation. The research studies these interactions through analysing critical incidents and finds that establishing who does and who does not have the legitimate authority to take decisions is central to each critical incident and especially with regard to task role allocation, resource allocation and through the application of organisational policy and procedure.

Fourthly, the research identifies what can be learned from the interpretation and explanation of the experiences of newly appointed headteachers in order to enhance understandings of headteacher socialisation. The research argues that new headteachers have the greatest influence and so sense of control over their socialisation when they have formulated an understanding of the behaviours that are, and those that are not, legitimately enclosed within their role boundary. Where headteachers have such a clear understanding of their role

boundary they are able to influence contextual factors from a secure authority base and through decision making within the context of role boundary interactions.

In the fifth section the findings of the current research are compared with the findings of previous research. Here, similarities are highlighted and points of delineation and difference are explained.

Chapter six concludes by making extant the original claims to knowledge drawn from the thesis. The section is set out under the following headings; the theoretical, the empirical and the methodological.

A Summary of the Thesis

Following this introductory chapter the content of the chapters in the thesis are as follows:

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature and begins by examining what is meant by socialisation. It analyses the processes and outcomes of organisational socialisation before discussing the tactics and typologies of socialising influences. Chapter 2 continues with a review of the existing research with regard to the socialisation of new headteachers and concludes by highlighting both the significant gaps in existing knowledge which form the basis for my own empirical work and the research questions that guide the current research.

Chapter 3

The purpose of chapter 3 is to provide a new conceptual framework for the analysis of the data. The chapter begins by proposing the central concepts of role and organisational boundaries before proposing 'role boundary' as being the central conceptual tool for the analysis and interpretation of the data.

Chapter 4

The methodology chapter begins by specifying the aim of the research and rehearsing the research questions. It considers the ontological and the epistemological issues that underpin the research before arguing for the utility of a case study methodological approach. The chapter then sets out the research design and makes clear how data was analysed through the development of a new conceptual framework for analysis drawn from the literature review;

that of the role boundary. The chapter concludes with a review of the ethical considerations of undertaking such a research project.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of the data, drawing upon the conceptual framework for analysis set out in Chapter 3. The chapter analyses critical incident data drawn from the experiences of seven headteachers during their socialisation. Critical incidents are recorded as vignettes which are then analysed from a role boundary perspective.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 sets out the main findings from the data. The chapter is organised under the three headings of the research questions in order to demonstrate the appropriateness of the research design with regard to meeting the aim of the research. The chapter compares the findings from the current research with those from previous research and concludes by setting out the original claims to knowledge drawn from the thesis.

Chapter 7

In this final chapter, a role boundary model is developed that presents an explanation of the socialisation of new primary headteachers based on the interpretations of the data and the principles of a role boundary approach to analysing and understanding socialisation. The concept of the role boundary is central to the model.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

The aims of this chapter of the thesis are:

- to review the literature which exists in this field of socialisation
- to identify the gaps in understanding of the socialisation of new headteachers.

The literature review is divided into two areas of interest for this study, these being the literature concerned with organisational socialisation and that concerned with the socialisation of new headteachers. The first section of the chapter begins by examining what is meant by organisational socialisation. It then provides an analysis of the processes and outcomes of organisational socialisation and the tactics and typologies of socialising influences before concluding with a discussion of the limitations of the existing theoretical models of socialisation. The second section provides a critique of the literature concerned with the socialisation of new headteachers, considering the extent to which the research is theoretically grounded within the broader body of socialisation literature. The chapter continues with a consideration of the current research in the field of headteacher socialisation identifying the methodological and theoretical implications for the current research project. The fourth section is concerned with beginning headship and what is already known about the experiences of new headteachers. The literature review concludes by highlighting the significant gaps in existing knowledge with regard to the socialisation of new headteachers which will form the basis for my own empirical work.

Section 1: Socialisation

What is meant by 'socialisation'?

The process of socialisation requires an organisational incumbent to interact with the recurring routines and exigencies that exist within the local context of their organisation (Schein, 1988; Gabriel, 1999). Socialisation has been referred to as a form of situational learning by Atkinson and Delamont (1985) that is characterised by the necessity of coping with unfamiliar situations

as a person learns the ropes. Miller (1970) offers a similar definition:

> *"Newcomers in any social situation go through an initial process of learning the ropes: finding out who the other people in that situation are, where they are located, what they do, what they expect the newcomer to do and how they want him to do it. We seldom dignify this process by calling it learning."*
>
> *(Miller, 1970, p.118)*

Thus socialisation is both relational, in that it requires the organisation and the individual to interact in order to communicate expectations, and is recurrent, in that the interactions are part of a learning process that potentially may continue for an indeterminate period of time. What is less clear is the extent to which the process of socialisation is reciprocal, or put another way, is it possible for the individual to influence their own socialisation or is socialisation a process to which an individual is subjected by the organisation? Such a question requires a consideration of the interplay between structure and agency and the notion of voluntarism and free will during the process of socialisation. I will return to this question later in chapter 3.

Socialisation Processes

The two predominant socialisation processes are serial and divestiture (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979). Serial socialisation occurs when existing role holders are used as the primary training agents for new individuals entering the profession rather than the new individual being left to make sense of their new role alone (Hart, 1993). Van Maanen and Schein (1979) argue that the principal feature of serial socialisation is that it is primarily concerned with reproducing the current environment. In the case of new headteachers, serial socialisation is used as a means of preparing an individual to lead a similar phase and size of school to that of the experienced mentor or coach. Serial socialisation is therefore concerned with ensuring that there are enough individuals to fulfil a specific role position within an organisation, or system, as opposed to being concerned with how that individual undertakes the role in practice (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979).

Southworth (1995) considers serial socialisation to be the most common approach used to socialise new headteachers and argues that mentoring, coaching and secondment are the most prevalent examples of serial socialisation used in schools. However, more recent views of

mentoring and coaching models concerned with supporting new headteachers, such as those used by the National College for School Leadership in their Local Leader of Education (NCSL, 2010) and Professional Partner (NCSL, 2010) models place a far greater emphasis on the influence of context in defining leadership solutions recognising that school leaders should adopt working practices that are fit for purpose within their own schools.

A contrary form of socialisation is one that utilises divestiture techniques. Divestiture methods of socialisation are concerned with limiting the potential for an individual to influence the cultural norms of the organisation (Crow, 2007). Military training camps, for example, use divestiture methods to ensure that individuals are rid of their civilian identity and to instil a new military identity. Divestiture models of socialisation are concerned with ensuring that newcomers are taught how to enact their role both as position and as practice, thereby aiming to achieve a strict homogenisation that ensures that all members of the organisation, or system, undertake their work in an expected and recognisable fashion.

Socialisation Outcomes

Socialisation outcomes may be described as being either custodial or innovative (Schein, 1971). Custodial outcomes are characterised by the maintenance of the current environment. Traditional organisational models of socialisation, such as the serial and divestiture models, encourage custodial outcomes that emphasise the key operational management skills required to maintain the 'status quo'. Innovative outcomes are more closely aligned to those models of socialisation where individuals are encouraged to challenge their organisational context and preconceptions to promote collaboration, experimentation and leadership. Here one should point to the complexity of aligning the purposive behaviours expected of organisational innovators with the protective custodial duties expected of those new to headship (Crow, 2006). Arguably, new headteachers are expected to demonstrate their impact upon the organisation through the introduction of innovative practice whilst perhaps ironically the organisation will look to the new headteacher for signs of custodial stability during a time of significant change. Such juxtaposition will lead to inherent tensions during socialisation.

Socialisation Tactics

Van Maanen and Schein (1979) propose that organisations use at least six tactics to structure

the early work experiences of newcomers. Each tactic consists of a bipolar continuum.

1. The tactic of collective (vs. individual) socialisation is the practice of grouping newcomers and putting them through a common set of experiences as opposed to treating each newcomer independently and putting him or her through more or less unique experiences.
2. Formal (vs. informal) socialisation refers to segregating a newcomer from more experienced members for a defined period, rather than *not* clearly separating a newcomer from others.
3. The sequential (vs. random) tactic refers to a set progression of steps leading to the assumption of the role, compared to an ambiguous or changing sequence of steps.
4. Fixed (vs. variable) socialisation provides a set timetable for the assumption of the role, whereas a variable process does not.
5. In a serial (vs. disjunctive) process, the newcomer is socialised by an experienced member, compared to a process where a role model is not used.
6. Finally, investiture (vs. divestiture) affirms the incoming identity and attributes of the newcomer rather than deny and strip them away (discussed above).

Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) conceptual framework of socialisation tactics is considered to be one of the most theoretically developed models of socialisation (Ashforth, Saks and Lee, 1998). However, whilst Van Mannen and Schein's (1979) typology of socialising tactics allows for an understanding of the way in which an individual is socialised into a role, it does not provide an opportunity to explore the individual experiences of those who are socialised. Therefore, such an approach, whilst providing a useful typology for understanding types of socialisation, does not allow for the generation of explanatory theories of socialisation.

Building on Van Maanen and Schein (1979), Jones (1986) argues that the six tactics form a gestalt that he terms 'institutionalised socialisation'. According to Jones, the collective, formal, sequential, fixed, disjunctive and divestiture tactics encourage newcomers to passively accept established roles, thereby reproducing the status quo. Conversely, at the opposite end of the socialisation continuum, the individual, informal, random, variable, serial and investiture tactics encourage newcomers to question the status quo and develop their own approaches to their roles. Jones refers to this end of the continuum as 'individualised socialisation'. The distinction between the passive conforming influence of institutionalised socialisation and the free and proactive nature of individual socialisation suggests the potential for tension within a socialising context where individuals might hold different views as to how they would define

their own role within the organisation. Such a tension would further suggest that it is possible for individuals to be active participants in their own socialisation into role as opposed to being passively subjected to the socialisation process.

Ashforth, Saks and Lee (1997) studied the operational dimensions of the six forms of socialisation tactics and concluded that the institutionalised socialisation tactics reflect a more structured program of socialisation, whereas the individualised tactics reflect a relative absence of structure. Further, with the exception of divestiture (vs. investiture), it would seem that the individualised tactics are defined primarily by what they are *not*: they do not involve grouping newcomers and subjecting them to common experiences, they do not involve segregating a newcomer from others, they do not involve set stages that follow a set timetable and they do not involve the use of a role model. Ashforth, Saks and Lee (1997) argue that although individualised socialisation may be used deliberately to provoke innovation, at times it may be used more by default than by design.

Consistent with the theorising of Van Maanen and Schein (1979) and Jones (1986), empirical research indicates that institutionalised socialisation has generally been used by organisations to encourage conformity rather than innovation (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Ashforth and Saks, 1996). Van Maanen and Schein (1979) consider that such an approach encapsulates a custodial rather than an innovative orientation. However, Ashforth and Saks (1996, pp.170-171) argue that institutionalised socialisation can be used to foster either conformity or innovation. Thus, institutionalised socialisation is simply a process through which individuals learn the behaviours, attitudes, and skills necessary to fulfil their new roles; it need not convey certain conforming content. Conversely, there is no guarantee that an individual who might be exposed to conforming content should choose consciously or otherwise to allow their agency to be informed by that content.

Socialisation and context

Van Maanen and Schein (1979) argue that the socialisation tactics:

> *"are not tied to any particular type of organisation. Theoretically at least, they can be used in virtually any setting in which individual careers are played out."*
>
> *(Van Maanen and Schein, 1979, p.231)*

The argument that socialisation tactics are not necessarily associated with certain organisational contexts would presuppose that socialisation as a process, either individualised or institutional, will be influenced by a range of organisational factors and by the individuals involved in the process of socialisation. Further, these factors can be identified as being an intrinsic and mediating part of the tension between the bipolar purposes of individualised or institutionalised socialisation tactics.

The size and structure of organisations are central influencing factors in defining socialisation tactics (Burns and Stalker, 1994). Large organisations demonstrate a need to moderate and control their structure in order to ensure the continued success of the system as a whole. Their need to reproduce the status quo means that the predominant socialisation tactics experienced by newcomers are custodial in that they are collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial, and investiture tactics; what Jones (1986) refers to as institutionalised socialisation. Conversely, smaller organisations tend to use the individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive and divestiture tactics to encourage newcomers to question the status quo and develop their own approaches to their roles, so empowering the organisation to grow. Jones (1986) refers to this end of the continuum as individualised socialisation. Predominant explanatory factors might be that the size of smaller organisations might prohibit serial or collective socialisation tactics as there simply might not be an individual, or group of individuals, available to socialise and to learn from; such is often the case in the socialisation of new headteachers in schools.

Individuals whose job descriptions are thought to be socially or financially 'high risk' if they fail to perform (e.g. headteachers) will arguably need a mixture of individualised socialisation, (to help them understand and to undertake their role as practice), and also institutionalised socialisation, (to understand their role as position in relation to their context) (Crow, 2006). 'High risk' job descriptions require that individuals are both custodians of the organisation but also require them to demonstrate innovation to ensure the growth of the organisation. Thus, the complexity of socialisation tactics that are deemed institutional in nature and those socialisation tactics that are considered individual are further complicated by 'high risk' job descriptions and a lack of a similarly placed organisational role model would suggest that the socialisation of new headteachers is extremely complex (Weindling and Dimmock, 2006).

Concluding comments

The processes, outcomes, typologies and tactics of socialisation are tools for ordering and

understanding socialisation but are of limited use when applied as tools for analysis of the interactions that exemplify the experience of socialisation as a lived social reality. Describing socialisation in terms of processes, outcomes, typologies and tactics might be considered over simplistic because each fails to provide for an analysis of the complexity of socialising influences. Socialisation is characterised by a series of dynamic interactions between an individual and their context. In order to understand the process of socialisation more fully it will be necessary to analyse these interactions to uncover the complex interplay between how socialisation into role is dictated and negotiated. Such richness of detail cannot be achieved through a process of ordering alone.

Section 2: Existing theoretical perspectives on the socialisation of headteachers

The purpose of this section is to draw from the literature broad theoretical perspectives that have been used to describe the socialisation of new headteachers. The section begins by defining the typologies of socialisation that have been used to describe and order the processes that constitute the socialisation of headteachers finding that existing research into the socialisation of new headteachers has been grounded in the work of Merton (1963) and Greenfield (1985). The chapter concludes that existing research has been influenced by these authors' 20th century views of socialisation and as such these ideas are ready to be challenged and new models explored in the light of new and emerging 21st century research perspectives.

The predominant approach to understanding the socialisation of headteachers derives from Merton's (1963) socialisation theory. The stress here is on the two-way interaction between the new leader and the school situation (with each trying to change and influence the other). In this view of socialisation there are two main overlapping phases:

1. professional socialisation, which involves learning what it is to be a headteacher, prior to taking up the role, drawn from personal experience of schools and of teaching and from formal courses; and

2. organisational socialisation, which involves learning the knowledge, values, and behaviours required to perform a specific role within a particular organisation after appointment (Schein, 1968).

Professional socialisation takes place when the individual, either consciously or unconsciously,

combines prior knowledge and experience with their intention to undertake the role (Greenfield, 1985). In the case of headteachers, professional socialisation begins when an individual enters the teaching profession and observes the agency of the headteacher within their own organisation and is referred to as anticipatory socialisation (Hart, 1993; Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Crow, 2006). Professional socialisation also takes place through the acquisition of formal qualifications, for example the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NCSL, 1997) or participation in a professional development programme, such as the National College for School Leadership's 'Head Start' programme for new headteachers (NCSL, 2010). The essence of professional socialisation is that it is primarily concerned with gathering the skills, values and competencies needed to carry out the work-related tasks required of a headteacher regardless of context. The knowledge requirements and professional qualities required for headship are set out in the National Standards for Headteachers (DfES, 2004). The standards were devised to reflect the role of the headteacher and are set out under the following headings:

- shaping the future
- leading learning and teaching
- developing self and working with others
- managing the organisation
- securing accountability
- strengthening community

The standards were devised to assist in the recruitment of new headteachers, to provide a supporting framework for those undertaking the performance management of headteachers and as a professional development tool (DfES, 2004). They are also used in the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) application process as an assessment framework for those wishing to aspire to headship. Initially, it would seem that such a focus upon the acquisition of a set of generic skills and competencies would appear useful in the sense that it provides a universal set of standards for those seeking to take up headship. However, such an approach would seem to disregard, or at the very least overlook, the inherent importance of context in the process of socialisation and specifically the interplay that exists between individuals and their context; the latter being unique to each case of socialisation. Applied as a tool for the analysis of socialising incidents, the standards are of use to researchers who seek to understand which kinds of tasks headteachers are required to undertake during their socialisation into role. I return to the utility of the standards and specifically in relation to the current research in subsequent chapters.

Organisational socialisation is focused upon the context in which individuals are to perform their role. It is concerned with the complex interplay between the individual, the role and the context and is concerned with conveying to an individual, (i.e. the new Headteacher) 'how things are done around here' (Gabriel, 1999). Whilst professional socialisation is concerned with familiarising an individual with a range of competences and skills to fulfil their role, organisational socialisation is concerned with making the individual an effective member of the collective, or school (Greenfield, 1985). Ogbonna (1993) goes further and suggests that organisational socialisation is, *"the interweaving of the individual into the community and the collective programming of the mind."* (p.42).

Increasingly, those concerned with researching the socialisation of headteachers are adding a third view of socialisation to Merton's (1963) model, that of personal socialisation (Weindling and Dimmock, 2006; Crow, 2006; 2007). Personal socialisation describes a sense-making process that encompasses the professional and the organisational but resides in neither. Personal socialisation involves the change of self-identity that occurs as individuals learn new roles (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). For new headteachers personal socialisation can include identifying with the larger view of schools that goes beyond one classroom and with a different image of the role (Matthews and Crow, 2003) and possibly requires headteachers to realign their preconceptions of their new role with a different reality of their organisational context (Weindling and Dimmock, 2006).

Personal socialisation is concerned with an individual making sense of their identity within the workplace. It defines the processes that govern how individuals manage their own perceptions of themselves and how they align these perceptions to their organisational role and agency (Czander, 1993). An individual's understanding and awareness of the complex processes of induction, growth and stabilisation into role are central to a powerful formative and transforming organisational socialisation that reshapes an individual's understanding of the nature and purpose of headship. Personal socialisation is the process of assimilating these influences within an individual's psyche that ultimately defines how they fulfil their role incumbency as individuals within the organisation (Gabriel, 1999). It represents an understanding of self in relation to the demands of role and other socialising influences. The purpose of personal socialisation is significant in that it is an individual's conscious and unconscious attempt to make sense of professional and organisational influences as they find, make and take up their role as headteacher (James et al., 2006). Arguably, the processes of socialisation that promulgate an individual's understanding of their own position within a given context can be observed during interactions between individuals and tasks.

It might be argued, then, that the traditional view of the socialisation of headteachers as being professional and organisational is over simplistic. Socialisation is a complex and dynamic process that takes place across a range of personal, cultural and physical dimensions within a specific organisational setting. Such complexity can lead to conflict as organisational and professional socialisation processes have diverse objectives. Professional socialisation seeks to develop a conception of the role for newcomers and prepare them with the skills to fulfil the tasks required of a headteacher regardless of context. Organisational socialisation actively seeks to ensure that the newcomer absorbs contextual nuances and aims to ensure that the individual becomes an effective member of the organisation. Neither of these is concerned with the individual at the heart of the process forming an understanding of their own identity within their role. Here, it is possible to recognise that personal socialisation is an important theoretical tool that allows for a more complex and rich view of the socialisation process that itself allows for an understanding of how the identity of an individual evolves in role and over time.

Concluding comments

Existing theoretical perspectives regarding the socialisation of headteachers have been dominated by a perception that the process is both professional and organisational. More recently, the notion of personal socialisation has been introduced into the literature and is described as being a sense making process that confirms an individual's identity in role. Thus, it would seem that research into the socialisation of headteachers to date has predominantly been based upon Merton's (1963) theory of professional and organisational socialisation with a more recent introduction of the notion of personal socialisation into academic literature.

Section 3: Methodological approaches to researching the socialisation of new headteachers

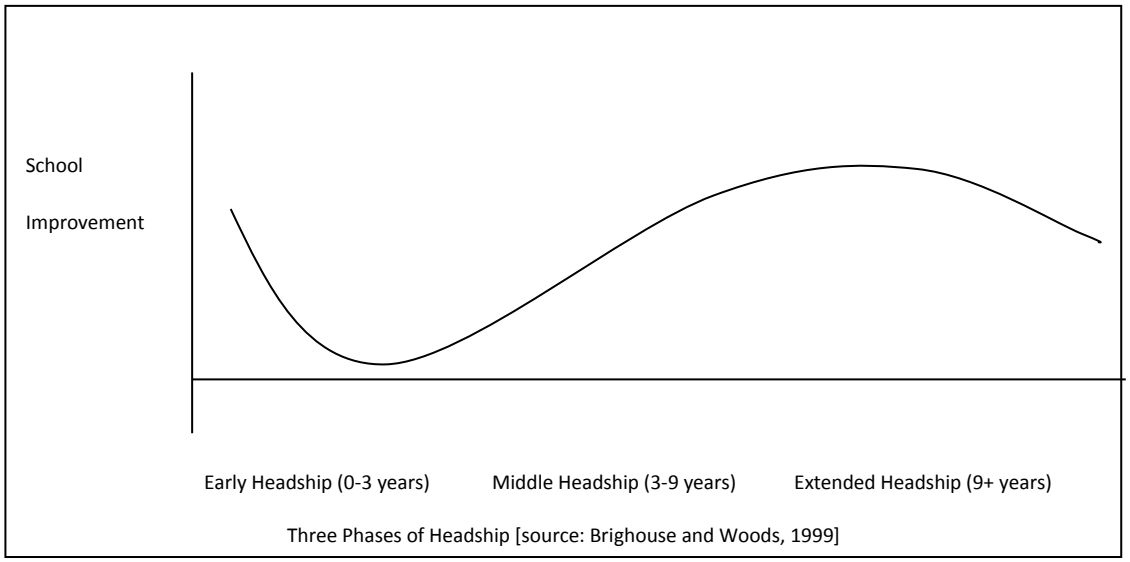
The purpose of this section is to analyse the way in which existing research methodologies have been applied to the socialisation of headteachers, these being a consideration of the route an individual takes to headship, a study of phases of headship and narrative accounts of headteachers' own experiences. The section reviews and critiques existing research before arguing that a more rigorous and sharper methodological approach is needed to unveil important insights into the socialisation of new headteachers.

The work of Handy (1994) would support the argument that headteachers' experiences of socialisation coincides with a period of relative professional inefficiency. Handy's model of

differential effectiveness, (Figure 2.1), first applied in the field of institutional management theory, can be adapted to add coherence to the model of four phases of headship identified by Brighouse and Woods (1999). Arguably, the fourth phase of headship that does not appear in Figure 2.1 is pre-headship.

If we apply Handy's (1994) work to the underrepresented context of headteacher socialisation it is clear that the initial months and years in post, during which time the new headteacher might be experiencing a downturn in efficiency, substantiates a critical period that warrants attention.

Figure 2.1: Personal effectiveness in headship over time [based on: Handy, 1994]



Routes to Headship

Fidler and Atton (2004) distinguish between the socialisation of different groups of new headteachers. They argue that the nature of an individual's socialisation is influenced by their experience and background. Fidler and Atton (2004) build upon the work of Greenfield (1985) by combining the notions of organisational and professional socialisation with an identification of how these concepts might be applied in the case of three distinct groups of headteachers; existing headteachers appointed from another school, promotion to headship of a deputy headteacher from another school and finally a deputy headteacher promoted to the headship of their own school (see Table 2.1 below). Fidler and Atton (2004) argue that headteachers bring varying levels of organisational and professional experience to their post and inevitably that such variations will mean that each headteacher will experience differing levels of professional and organisation socialisation. Specifically, the authors argue that the extent to

which the professional or the organisational is the predominant form of socialisation is dependent upon the route that the individual takes to headship.

Table 2.1: The relative extent of the professional and organisational stress experienced by three groups of new headteachers [source: Fidler and Atton, 2004]

	Existing headteacher from another school	Promotion of existing deputy from within the school	Promotion of deputy from another school
Initial professional socialisation	**Medium**	**High**	**Low**
Organisational socialisation	**Low**	**High**	**Medium**
Continued professional socialisation	**High**	**High**	**Medium**

Fidler and Atton (2004) identify a first group of newly appointed headteachers as being those headteachers appointed from other schools. These headteachers will experience both professional and organisational socialisation into their new role and their new school. Fidler and Atton (2004) argue that the second group of newly appointed headteachers are deputy headteachers promoted to headship from within their own organisation and that those receiving promotion from within their organisation are more concerned with professional socialisation. The third group are those experienced headteachers appointed from another headship. Fidler and Atton (2004) argue that experienced headteachers will be primarily concerned with managing their experience of organisational socialisation as they learn to assimilate the influences of their new context. Fidler and Atton (2004) argue that experienced headteachers will have experienced organisational socialisation before and will be better placed to engage with the process than a new headteacher. Such an assumption would presuppose that new headteachers can actively influence their socialisation and this is an underlying assumption of my thesis.

A critique of Fidler and Atton's (2004) model is that it fails to explain exactly how they have come to decide upon the criteria by which they constitute low, medium or high stress upon the socialisation of any of the three different groups of new headteachers. It might also be argued that the model requires a clearer temporal indication and explanation of the descriptions used in the model. There is, for example, no explanation as to what the authors consider initial

professional socialisation to be, or indeed when it begins and ends. Based upon such a high level of assumption the model is limited in its ability to communicate any coherent analysis of the socialisation of new headteachers.

Fidler and Atton's (2004) model as presented in Table 2.1 is based upon their analysis of eight research studies since 1987 and would seem to argue that the processes of socialisation are experienced most intensely by those headteachers who are new to headship (i.e. those headteachers newly promoted from deputy headship). Such an assertion would suggest that there is a subtle yet distinct implication that research into the socialisation experiences of headteachers entering their first post, such as the approach taken in the current research, will reveal the most intense socialising experiences as opposed to, say, those experiences of headteachers who might be entering their second or third post. However, such an argument would seem to make a number of assumptions about individuals, the nature of the schools and those behaviours that constitute being a headteacher within a range of contexts and age phases (i.e. infant, primary, secondary, special schools). It has already been noted earlier in the thesis that the inherent change caused by socialisation is concerned with the interplay between the actors in the organisation and the way in which leaders manage these variables (James and Connolly, 2000). Such an assertion would imply that headteachers have a degree of control over their socialisation which will be dependent on how well they assess, understand and manage their context. (Grint, 2005). Arguably then, new headteachers will influence their socialisation to a greater or lesser degree dependent upon how well they can manipulate their understanding of their role and how it might be best enacted within their context. Thus, in disregarding the inherent and central influences of personal and contextual factors during socialisation Fidler and Atton (2004) would seem to make assumptions that would render their findings disputable.

Phases of headship

Brighouse and Woods (1999) identify four distinct phases of headship; pre, early, middle and extended headship. Following their model, and drawing upon the work of others, Brighouse and Woods have identified key characteristics of each phase (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Summary of contemporary research into phases of headship (source: Brighouse and Woods, 1999)

Phase	Timescale	Characteristics
• Pre Headship	• 0-9 months before taking up post	• Importance of fit on appointment • Initial visits to the school
• Early Headship	• 0 – 3 years	• Inheriting problems from their predecessor • Feeling overwhelmed • Feeling excited and emotionally drained • Feeling isolated • Feeling to be able to stamp some initial authority by tackling quick-fix strategies • Variable induction programmes
• Middle Headship	• 3 – 9 years	• Tackling longer-term, deeper-rooted issues • More on top of the job – making a real difference • Reaching the summit • Feeling the crunch – a time to review and plan for succession • Consideration of second headship
• Extended Headship	• 9 years and over	• Diversification • Growing system leadership and networking • Decline and withdrawal • Exit strategy

Longitudinal approaches to analysing headteacher socialisation

A further approach to researching new headteachers was undertaken by Weindling and Dimmock (2006). The authors undertook a longitudinal review of researching headteacher socialisation by analysing the existing literature covering a 20 year period (1982/3 – 2003/4). Here, the focus of the research was to provide a synopsis of the research methodologies used

during the period under review and their findings in order to establish the key issues facing new headteachers. The research discusses routes to headship and phases of headship and makes reference to the process of socialisation as being organisational and professional in nature. The authors claim that that the most challenging conditions facing new headteachers have remained the same during the 20 year period under scrutiny and their report specifically identifies the main challenges for new headteachers to be the legacies of their predecessors, past and existent cultures, leadership style and communication, inadequate buildings, weak and incompetent staff, low motivation and poor public image of the school. However, the research methodology used by Weindling and Dimmock (2006) here is once again that of analysing the research findings of others and collating these into a synopsis thus pointing to it being secondary in nature in the same way as the research of both Brighouse and Woods (1999) and Fidler and Atton (2004) described above. Thus, recent research methodologies used to analyse new headteacher socialisation have been predominantly concerned with ordering the process into routes to headship or into phases of headship by reviewing the work of others and viewing socialisation as an organisational and professional process.

Narrative approaches to analysing headteacher socialisation

The more recent empirical work of Crow (2007) begins to recognise the complexity and severity of the experiences of early headteacher socialisation in a way that the previous ordering approaches of Brighouse and Woods (1999), Fidler and Atton (2004) and Weindling and Dimmock (2006) do not. Crow (2007) undertook three semi-structured interviews with four respondents as they entered their second year of headship. In the first interview respondents were required to reflect upon their decisions for aspiring to headship and their training and preparation for the role. In the second interview headteachers were asked to recall their learning during the first year and in the final interview respondents were asked to evaluate the successes and failures of their first year in post. Crow's research found that headteachers described their years in post as traumatic with one respondent stating, "*I would not want to go through those two years ever, ever, again*" (p.57). Whilst Crow's (2007) research points to the complexity and possible trauma of socialisation, and touches upon the professional and the organisational, his research sought to identify the learning, or the socialisation outcomes, from the experiences of those new to headship. Therefore, whilst Crow's work does provide an indication as to the complexity of the socialisation experience it does not provide a detailed and thorough analysis of the process of socialisation from a theoretical perspective. To provide such an analytical understanding of the socialisation

process is the purpose and aim of the current research.

Section 4: Beginning headship

The purpose of the following section is to provide a review of the literature that is concerned with beginning headship in order to:

- make clear what is already known about beginning headship
- to provide a clear basis for comparison with the findings drawn from the current research in chapter 6.

The section begins with a consideration as to how one might conceptualise 'beginning headship' before discussing the nature of the challenges and 'surprises' (Draper and McMichael, 1998; Briggs and Bush et al., 2006) that new headteachers experience.

Conceptualising 'beginning headship'

There are a number of conceptualisations as to exactly what constitutes 'new headship'. These conceptualisations are important in the sense that they provide a framework within which one can examine the experiences of socialisation that new headteachers, as new role holders, undergo. The previous section reviewed the phases of headship that are referred to in the literature and that are used to order the process of socialisation in a temporal manner. Whilst these phases, as they are described by Brighouse and Woods (1999), provide a useful overview of socialisation from a temporal perspective the following section will develop the discussion further with a more detailed focus upon what might be conceptualised as being 'beginning headship' or 'new headship'.

Building on the work on Brighouse and Woods (1999), O'Mahony and Matthews (2003) studied 54 newly appointed principals in Victoria, Australia, and identified *phases of learning* that can be identified by analysing the experiences of the new principals throughout their first year in post. They distinguish between the following phases of learning:

- *Phase 1. Idealization phase:* engaging with the concept of the role and considering what it requires. Experiencing feelings of excitement and fear.

- *Phase 2. Immersion phase:* this phase can be referred to as 'learning the ropes'. During this period individuals are required to survive a complex and challenging barrage of demands as they attempt to settle into their role.
- *Phase 3. Establishment phas*e: taking control and defining the role. It is during this phase that new structures and procedures are implemented.
- *Phase 4. Consolidation phas*e: a sense of feeling accepted and a growing feeling of perceived wisdom.

Here, each phase of the socialisation process is considered as a period of learning rather than as a period of time that is characterised by certain experiences (Brighouse and Woods, 1999). Weindling's (1999) study within the English context provides interesting comparisons. He provides insights into the socialisation of new headteachers in a professional and organisational context. Weindling (1999) draws upon the research findings from a ten year study of headship undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) and the work of Day and Bakioglu (1996), Gronn (1999), Hall (1997), and Ribbins (1999) to identify seven phases of socialisation, stage 0 being a phase of preparation for headship through to phase 6 which is a phase of experienced or extended headship. The phases he identifies are:

- *Stage 1. Entry and encounter (first months):* the new headteacher moves into their role and begins to make sense of their new context.
- *Stage 2. Taking hold (3 to twelve months):* a time of deeper understanding of the role and context and a period when the new headteacher begins to implement change.
- *Stage 3.* Reshaping *(second year):* a period of increased confidence. One annual cycle has been completed and expectations of the new headteacher are becoming clearer.
- *Stage 4. Refinement (years three to four):* a period where new headteachers feel that they are 'hitting their stride' (Weindling, 1999: p. 99). New innovations are introduced and others fine tuned.
- *Stage 5. Consolidation (years five to seven):* many of the intended innovations have been introduced as well as those required implementation because of external changes (e.g. a change in educational policy at governmental level).
- *Stage 6. Plateau (years eight and onwards):* a period where a whole cohort has been seen through the school under the headteacher's leadership and where all of the intended changes have been made. This period corresponds with Day and Bakioglu's (1996) 'disenchantment' phase of headship or, paradoxically, Ribbin's (1999)

'enchantment' phase which he uses to describe this phase of headship for some long serving headteachers.

Whilst the work of Weindling (1999) and O'Mahony and Matthews (2003) appear to share commonalities in the sense that they offer similar conclusions as to their being a series of phases of learning within the process of socialisation itself, they differ in that they disagree as to the period of time that headteachers spend navigating through each phase. Dunning and James (2004), however, consider that there are too many complex variables within the nature of the social world to be able to identify any phases of socialisation with any certainty. Instead, they argue that socialisation is in fact achieved over a lifetime.

New headteachers and the importance of context

Existing literature drawn from empirical studies point to the powerful influence of context as a conditioning factor within the experience of socialisation for new headteachers. O'Mahony and Matthews (2003) emphasise the contextualised nature of socialisation within the learning that takes place in terms of the process requiring new headteachers to make sense of their school as a context. The notion that context is such an important and powerful influencing variable is found in the work of Draper and McMichael (1998) who studied ten newly appointed secondary headteachers in Scotland during their first three years in post. In their study, Draper and McMichael (2000) broaden the contextual influences to those that lay both within and beyond the school organisation. The authors identify the following contextual influences as being important.

- Predecessors as contexts for new headship
- Staff as a context for new headship
- The senior management team as a context for new headship
- Other heads providing a supporting context
- The local authority as contexts for new heads

Draper and McMichael (1998) identify the dynamics of the experiences of the new headteachers as they undergo a process of contextual, or arguably both a professional and an organisational, socialisation. They catalogue a series of 'surprises' that await new headteachers that reveal themselves as role overload, role conflict and role ambiguity/confusion (there is a more detailed discussion of these concepts in section 2 of chapter 3). These dynamics were 'felt' in a very real way by the new headteachers. The

respondents in Draper and McMichael's (2000) study reported feeling de-contextualised and as a result, deskilled. Respondents also felt a sense that events were often beyond their control and occurring with an intense ferocity and frequency. As a result, new headteachers struggled to make time to implement their own agenda of new initiatives as they were forced to respond to events around them. Such feelings led respondents to question their competency for the role and the lack of opportunities to adequately prepare them for the demands of headship.

The work of Daresh and Male (2000) would support Draper and McMichael's (1998; 2000) assertion that context has an important role to play in the socialisation of new headteachers. Their study of British headteachers and American principals refers to the shock that individuals experience as they move from deputy headship to their first headship. Here, Daresh and Male (2000) point to the loss of an identity and the difficulty in having to find a new one at a time when the new headteacher is struggling to come to terms with what is expected of them in their new role. The study reveals that the respondents reported being terribly underprepared for the level of stress that they would feel as they moved into headship, with one individual being prescribed anti-depressants to manage their experience. Unlike Draper and McMichael (2000) the authors identify the '*movement'* into headship as the context that causes such a challenge for new headteachers. However, they also point to the influence of the organisation as being a significant variable in conditioning the experience for those new to headship. The authors make reference to the individual who had been prescribed medication following a particularly traumatic encounter with the school's governing body as having contributed toward her feelings of inadequacy and inability to cope.

The influence of external contexts upon new headteachers

Crow (2006; 2007) reports the trauma of new headship. In his work, Crow (2006) analyses the nature of the socialisation experience in his study of newly appointed principals in the US. Specifically, he refers to the pressures of leading schools in a modern information led, high stakes environment. Here, Crow (2006) argues that the experiences of new US principals are highly stressful and are challenging because the level of expectation and responsibility, and so by implication the level of accountability, placed upon senior professionals is higher than ever before. Further, he asserts that the pressure upon school leaders continues to increase as within the context of the political, the educational and

the broader social world more and more is expected of individuals in terms of quantifiable and so measurable outcomes. Crow (2006) identifies the improvement in the speed and the diversity of ways in which modern technology, such as the internet, allows for a far greater intensification of the increasingly 'on demand' and so 'on call' nature of the role of senior professionals:

> *"This dramatic increase in accountability and public scrutiny has added to the complexity of the principal's job, requiring principals to be entrepreneurial, to be more focused on student outcomes and instructional processes, and to be more connected with their communities. While all three requirements are appropriate and critical, they create a more complex job for principals not only in the number of demands but also in the conflicting and dynamic nature of the demands".*
>
> *(Crow, 2006; p. 316)*

In researching the experience of new English headteachers Crow (2007) uses a narrative approach to report the feelings and experiences of four new headteachers during their first year in post. He identifies the difficulty that individuals have when moving into their new position. Particularly, respondents spoke of their lack of confidence in role, intense feelings of loneliness and a feeling of being unable to cope. Here, Crow points to the methods that headteachers used, or that were available to headteachers, to support them in making that transition. Crow (2007) analyses his data following Greenfield's (1985) model of professional and organisation socialisation. However, he also adds the concept of personal socialisation (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). When discussing the nature of new headteachers' experiences that might be termed professional, Crow (2007) focuses upon the preparatory programme, NPQH, and the early induction programme HEADLAMP (later, and following revision, New Visions). Here, new headteachers reported that whilst useful, NPQH had not prepared them for the most challenging aspect of moving into headship which is to take up their new role in context. Similarly, respondents felt that HEADLAMP as an early induction provision for new headteachers recognised the difficulty of moving into role but that the sheer intensity of headship had made it difficult for new headteachers to make time to leave their school in order to attend training and so spend the £2500 of funding offered through HEADLAMP to attend to their professional development. Rather, respondents reported the value of peer networks in their learning during their socialisation and also the ways in which the Local Education Authority contributed toward supporting them in their new role, specifically

identifying mentoring or advisor support.

Crow (2007) points to the importance of peer support and networking in supporting a new headteacher's professional and personal socialisation. Headteachers valued having another headteacher, often more experienced than themselves, from whom they could ask advice or discuss aspects of their role. Similarly, Crow (2007) also points to the importance of the senior leadership team, staff and governors in supporting a new headteacher's organisational socialisation. Such findings would seem to support those of Daresh and Male (2000) who conversely report the impact that not having such support can have upon new headteachers (i.e. for one individual following a serious disagreement with the governing body contributed to her depression).

These findings were echoed in Hobson et al.'s (2003) review of early headship literature. Here, the authors identified the following aspects as key difficulties facing new headteachers:

- Professional isolation and loneliness
- The legacy, practice and style of the previous head
- Multiple tasks, managing time and priorities
- Managing the school budget
- Dealing with ineffective staff
- Implementing new government initiatives
- Problems with site/site management

The work of Briggs and Bush et al., (2006) in their review of the programme successor to the HEADLAMP programme, New Visions, also revealed that these impressions of new headship were reflected in their work. Briggs and Bush et al., (2006) work within the conceptual framework of O'Mahony and Matthews (2003) and refer to the immersion phase as a period when new headteachers are 'subsumed' (p.263) by the demands of the role. The authors describe the experience as being one of surviving a continual onslaught of issues as the new headteacher attempts to settle into their new role and organisational context.

The literature on beginning headship would suggest that it is a complex, demanding and even a traumatic time. It is a period when the new headteacher experiences anxiety and stress as they attempt to find, make and take up their role within what is very often a new context. Research concerned with beginning headship reveals the intensity of the socialising process as the new headteacher is immersed, and is often subsumed, by the requirements of trying to understand the complex interplay that exists between their role as position (i.e. as they learn what is

required of them as a headteacher) and their role as practice (i.e. as they learn how to best go about their work). Whilst research to date has revealed the difficult nature of beginning headship, and the emotions that accompany the process, to date there has not been an attempt to *explain* why moving into headship is such a challenging experience. The purpose of the current research is to provide such an explanation from a role boundary perspective.

Concluding comments

The first section examined what is meant by socialisation finding that much of the existing literature seeks to order and to rationalise the complexities of socialisation, being concerned with identifying socialising typologies, tactics and outcomes as opposed to seeking to understand the nature of the socialising influences themselves.

The chapter's second section provided a review of the methodological perspectives that have underpinned existing research into the socialisation of headteachers. The section found that research has been dominated by the theoretical model proposed by Merton (1963) and the work of Greenfield (1985). Merton's (1963) model proposes that socialisation is concerned with interplay between the professional and the organisational, with each dimension seeking to shape the other. The more recent introduction of personal socialisation into the literature as a tool for sense making has added a third, as yet under developed, theoretical focus for those concerned with studying the socialisation of headteachers.

The third section highlighted that traditional research methodologies have been constrained by the overreliance upon Merton's (1963) model of professional and organisational socialisation and have been concerned with producing research that replicates the ordering paradigm discussed in section one. Such an approach has restricted research to a consideration of the interplay between the professional and the organisational and so producing research that orders the socialisation process rather than seeking to analyse the dynamics of the socialising processes themselves. The section identified that the focus of existing research has been upon three distinct approaches:

- the ordering of headteachers experiences by route to headship or
- by phase of headship, or by
- recording narrative descriptions of new headteachers as they describe their first years in post (Crow, 2007)

The fourth section reviewed the literature concerned with beginning headship. The section highlighted in particular the 'surprises' (Draper and McMichael, 1998; Briggs and Bush et al., 2006) that lead to feelings of isolation and confusion as individuals move into their first headship.

Gaps in the evidence base

The purpose of the literature review chapter has been to discuss and to critique evidence from the literature relevant to the current study. In doing so the chapter has sought to highlight why the focus for the current study is important and the relevant areas of debate.

I conclude this chapter by considering the main gaps which exist in the literature. Firstly, the literature review highlights the relative paucity of research into the socialisation of headteachers. It is necessary and important given the identified trauma experienced by those new to headship (Crow, 2007) that there should be further research into the processes that lead to such powerful and stressful emotions. Such research will require a new methodological approach to the traditional methodology that promotes ordering over an analytical understanding of the socialising process. It will also require a rigorous conceptual and analytical framework. Research concerned with the socialisation of headteachers to date can be summarised as:

- being limited in contextual richness and depth
- being unduly focused upon ordering the socialisation of headteachers into phases of headship, or approaches to headship, rather than seeking to understand and explain the process of socialisation itself
- lacking a rigorous and robust conceptual underpinning

Such criticism can be applied to the work contained in this literature review. For example, whilst Crow (2006; 2007) provides a narrative account of the impact of socialisation experiences upon newly appointed headteachers in both the US and in England, his work is founded upon three retrospective interviews with only four headteachers after their having been in post for 12 months. Such an approach does not allow for the collection of regular, timely and detailed data that can be analysed to provide explanatory theories. Similarly, whilst Weindling and Dimmock, (2006) do explicitly focus upon English headteachers they view socialisation as being solely organisational and professional and place their focus upon the temporal interplay between the two concepts at different points throughout an individual's

incumbency, thus overlooking an analysis of the processes involved. The work of Brighouse and Woods (1999) and Fidler and Atton (2004) seeks to order the socialisation of headteachers and refers to phases of headship, again grouping headteachers narrative accounts from a number of research reports in order to propose characteristics that act as descriptors for each of their proposed phases of headship. Such research is neither underpinned by existing organisational socialisation theory nor does it employ a robust conceptual framework for analysis.

Finally, Crow (2006) argues that there is a lack of clarity regarding the impact of different influences within the socialisation process of new headteachers because there is a lack of understanding of socialisation itself. According to Crow (2006), attempts at:

> *"improving principals' socialisation, with some exceptions, has tended to result in a piecemeal collection of strategies without a conceptual understanding of socialisation."*
>
> *(p.311)*

There is a clear gap then in understanding the ways in which the process of socialisation shapes the leadership development of new headteachers and it is this gap that my work seeks to address. In doing so, it is my intention to investigate two broad premises which have emerged from my literature review. These are that within the context of the socialisation of new headteachers:

1. There is a need to understand how the processes of socialisation are experienced by new headteachers and how these experiences contribute to the social construction of the role of the headteacher.
2. There needs to be a study of the processes of socialisation using a robust conceptual and analytical framework that provides for an analysis of broad variables that extend beyond the professional and the organisational.

The following research questions are informed by the literature review and are designed to meet the aim of the research project. The aims of the current research are to:

1. analyse the socialisation of new primary headteachers from a role boundary perspective.
2. test the suitability of the role boundary concept as a rigorous, theoretical and methodological tool that can be applied to researching the field of headteacher socialisation.

The research questions are:

4. How can the experiences of those individuals newly appointed to their first primary school headship be interpreted and explained?
5. What is the nature of the experience of those individuals newly appointed to their first primary school headship?
6. What can be learned from the interpretation and explanation of newly appointed headteachers to enhance understandings of headteacher socialisation?

Chapter 3

Conceptual framework for the analysis of the socialisation of new headteachers – the role boundary

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to prepare a conceptual framework that will underpin the analysis of the data in chapter 5. The chapter will utilise the concepts of 'role' and the notion of 'organisational boundaries' to provide a conceptual framework that will enable a view of socialisation from a new analytical and theoretical perspective; that of the role boundary.

The conceptual framework is premised upon the perspective that socialisation is the process whereby an individual and an organisation are involved in learning the behaviours that are and that are not considered to be legitimate to their respective roles. These behaviours are enclosed within an individual's organisational 'role boundary'. The notion of 'role' and that of 'organisational boundaries' are therefore significant concepts within the context of socialisation and warrant attention.

The chapter begins with an analysis of the concept of the organisational boundary, exploring its heuristic value as an analytical tool and its potential for theorising, before addressing the concept of role, finding that role can be defined both as position and as practice. The chapter concludes by proposing the notion of the 'role boundary' as the central concept within the framework for analysis to be used in this research.

Section 1: The organisational boundary

> *"One could spend a lifetime on nothing but boundaries. This would be worthwhile work."*
>
> *(Hall, 1996, p.20)*

The concept of the organisational boundary: multiple perspectives

Boundaries have long been of interest to those wishing to study organisations (Douglas, 1966). They are used to form personal, group and national identities, study class, gender and ethnic

issues and are used as an apparatus of social construct within professions, across knowledge and in science itself (Heracleous, 2004). Boundaries have been of interest to researchers in disciplines as varied as anthropology (e.g. Barth, 1969; Hall, 1996), sociology (Giddens, 1984; Abbott, 1995) and organisational psychology (Schein, 1988; Czander, 1993).

Hernes (2003) considers that the study of boundaries is of heuristic value as an interpretive and analytical tool. Boundaries represent points of delineation, division and departure in organisational interactions and allow for the imposition of rational order on to what is a complex scenario of multiple realities. In organisation theory, the definition and analysis of boundaries has been described as contentious (van Maanen, 1982); difficult (Hall, 1991); elusive (Scott, 1998); ambiguous (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978); changing (Weick, 1979) and permeable (March and Simon, 1958; Gabriel, 1999).

The use of the boundary as a tool for understanding organisational behaviour is complex. Mainstream organisation theory has used the concept of the boundary to demarcate analytically where the organisation ends and where the environment begins (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). The idea that there exists a divide between an organisation and its environment is a tenet of systems theory (Miller and Rice, 1967) and has allowed for an analysis of the organisation in relation to its environment and its composite components. The argument that the organisation and its environment are separate entities is based upon the notion that organisations and components of organisations (such as individuals, groups and their roles and tasks) require unambiguous boundaries that can be managed in order to ensure optimal organisational performance. Thus, the management of organisational boundaries is crucial to the sustained success of the organisation itself (Czander, 1993).

The ontology of boundary structures

The complexity of the notion of organisational boundaries, and arguably all boundary structures within social systems, is in articulating a clear ontological foundation for their understanding. It would seem that those concerned with the concept of organisational boundaries have to date two separate ontological assumptions. It is therefore important to make a clear distinction between the ontology of a singular ‘organisational boundary’, a concept with a distinct identity within the literature, and that of ‘organisational boundaries’, which is underpinned by a broader ontological foundation. The concept of ‘role boundary’ used in this research is one such example of ‘organisational boundaries’.

The first and traditional ontological view that exists in the literature is that of the 'organisational boundary'. The 'organisational boundary' exists as a physical point of delineation and demarcation within the social world. That is to say it exists within areas of space and time. Here, the organisational boundary is a place where physical resources enter and leave the organisation through the boundary that links the organisation with the outside world (Parsons, 1951). The second and more recent conception is that of 'organisational boundaries'. These boundaries are multifarious in nature because they are underpinned by an ontology that argues that each is created and modified by the subjective meanings that individuals and groups place upon aspects of organisational life, such as identifying who has responsibility for allocating tasks and resources and the responsibility and the authority to make decisions (Morgan, 1988). Thus, organisational boundaries can be conceived of as being both spatial and aspatial in nature. That is to say that they are a combination of physical, social and mental structures that are understood by each individual in a unique way therefore leading to multiple social constructions of reality (Hernes, 2004). The following section presents a review of the literature concerned with developing a conceptual understanding of organisational boundaries that has informed the authors own ontological assumption as to their construction.

The organisational boundary

Organisational boundaries exist as a delineation between that which lies within the boundary (for example, resources and structures) and that which lies outside of the organisation (for example, the 'task environment') (Diamond, Allcorn and Stein, 2004). Theorists influenced by systems theory (for example, Rice, 1963; Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967a and 1967b; Churchman, 1968; Rice and Miller, 1976) view organisational boundaries as a way of articulating the organisation as an open system. Boundaries demarcate both points of entry into the system and points of exit from the system. These inputs of materials and human resources are converted into internal operational processes that are eventually transformed into products or services. These outputs then exit the system as products and services delivered into the organisation's environment. An explicit aspect of systems theory is the notion that effective 'boundary maintenance' is crucial to organisational success. From a psychodynamic and systems perspective, Czander (1993) writes:

> *"the boundary functions as a point of entry for all of the systems inputs, members, materials, information, and so on. It is also where*

> *the organization meets its environment, including those constituents and significant others who formulate impressions and views of what occurs within the organization's conversion process."*
>
> *(p.204)*

He then goes on to note:

> "*the boundary is often the only point where non-members witness what goes on inside and obtain information about the organization's ideology, culture, and member preference".*
>
> *(p.204)*

Thus, according to Czander boundaries are the location from which analysts can decode the peculiar identity of the organisation, and its individuals, groups and its inherent dynamics and characteristics.

Failure to manage boundaries effectively will lead to a diminishing of the organisation's capacity to maintain its progress toward the primary task and will ultimately lead to inefficiency (James and Connolly et al., 2006). Diamond, Allcorn and Stein (2004) argue that the processes of boundary maintenance are complex, most notably because of the multiple perspectives of boundary constructs. The authors further assert that boundaries can become filled with unconscious and defensive responses to the anxieties stimulated by boundary crossings, especially at crucial times in the life of the organisation. Boundaries, then, are an integral dimension of systems that can be used to analyse complex interactions in organisations and their systems.

Systems theory, however, privileges an understanding of the system and the maintenance of systemic order, rather than the in-depth study of boundaries themselves as defining features of the system (Cooper, 1986). Epstein (1997) is critical of the traditional view of boundaries and argues that the concept of the boundary, and our use and understanding of the term 'boundaries', has evolved as organisations and the individuals and systems within those organisations have developed to meet the needs of a modern 21st century global society and economy. Morgan (1988) agrees that the concept of the boundary as a tool for analysis in modern organisations is multifarious and complex. Certainly, Morgan (1988) is critical of the concept of 'unambiguous' boundaries and states that:

> *"the idea of a discrete organisation with identifiable boundaries*

(whether defined in terms of physical location, the manufacturing process, or staff employed) is breaking down."

(p.129)

Paulsen and Hernes (2003) agree that organisational boundaries are not static, unambiguous entities that can be linked with temporal and spatial order, but rather that boundaries are complex, multiple and transient.

Reviewing boundary structures

Zerubavel (1993) asserts that with the exception of tangible structures, boundaries are invisible or are at best blurred. Hernes (2004) draws upon the work of Lefebvre (1991) and argues that the intangible nature of many boundary structures means that they need to be conceptualised and studied in a differentiated way. He argues that boundaries can be conceptualised as being physical, social or mental structures. This framework is consistent with the work of Scott (1995) who argues that organisations are upheld by 'three pillars' (i.e. boundaries) that are 'regulative' (i.e. physical), 'normative' (i.e. social) and 'cognitive' (i.e. mental) structures. Scott's (1995) conceptual framework provides a useful basis for understanding the nature of boundaries but does not provide the scope for a rigorous analysis of boundary incidents. Such an analysis will require the identification of multiple boundary perspectives that can be used as different lenses through which incidents can be observed and interpreted.

Boundary perspectives

Boundaries can be analysed from a range of different perspectives that can be conceptualised as being physical, social or mental. However, the flexibility of the boundary concept allows for a more diverse application of boundary structures within the social world. Hirschhorn and Gilmore (1992), for example, identify authority, political, task and identity boundaries whilst Miller and Rice (1967) make the distinction between task and sentient boundaries. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) identify hierarchical, functional and inclusionary boundaries and Leach (1976) refers to spatial, temporal and psychological boundaries, an analytical framework supported by Diamond, Allcorn and Stein (2004) in their psychoanalytic study of boundaries within object relations theory (Klein, 1959). Whilst demonstrating the flexibility and complexity

of the boundary metaphor these perspectives are not exhaustive. Inevitably, the complexities of establishing and maintaining boundaries will lead to the creation of multiple perspectives that will be unique to the individuals involved and to the context in which they operate. Such diversity serves to illustrate the potential for using a boundary perspective as a reflexive analytical tool with which to observe and to interpret a broad range of organisational incidents.

Hirschhorn and Gilmore (1992) recognise the inherent potential for boundaries to become disputed leading to social conflict. They advocate the concept of the 'boundaryless organisation' where the removal of traditional boundaries limits the propensity for conflict that comes with boundary management. They argue that the notion of the 'boundaryless organisation' allows for a more progressive organisation. Paulsen and Hernes, (2003) dispute the idea of a 'boundaryless organisation'. They argue that rather than diminishing within the organisation the boundary is mutating to facilitate a certain kind, or approach, to change. Czander (1993), on the other hand, argues that all organisational incidents are boundary issues and that they represent discontinuity, inconsistency and points of disruption.

It is possible to identify a further distinction between the concepts of internal as well as external boundaries (Hirschhorn, 1993). Internal boundaries are those that are deemed to exist within an individual's psyche and may be constructed cognitively both from physical and social practices. Internal boundaries are very personal constructs that have a strong affective significance attached to them. Arguably, the very nature of internal boundary structures leads them to be emotionally charged and therefore they are likely to be rigorously defended if challenged.

External boundaries can be described as those boundaries that are deemed to exist outside of an individual's psyche. They are constructed from composite features of the physical world and include observable tangible objects (e.g. a factory warehouse gate), intangible objects (e.g. a set of rules) or spatial concepts (e.g. time). However, it might be argued that all boundaries are internal, psychological boundaries and that external boundaries are in fact semiotic triggers onto which an internal boundary perspective is projected. Such an assertion is consistent with the author's assumption that organisational boundaries are a combination of physical, social and mental structures that combine to form an understanding of the boundary in question. Thus, each individual has their own understanding of what they consider is, and what is not, and a boundary and further each individual confers their own meaning upon that boundary. Where meanings are at odds we find the potential 'energy' (Douglas, 1966) that lays

within boundary structures invoked as individuals dispute their understandings of any given boundary structure.

Diamond, Allcorn and Stein (2004) describe organisational boundaries in terms of affective and psychological constructs. They argue that boundaries are an inherent part of organisations and that, *"people's experiences in organisations have a rhythm, a shape and a feel"* (p. 31) that is visible when individuals interact at organisational boundaries. Drawing on the work of Ogden's extension (1986, 1994) of Klein's (1959) object relations theory, Diamond, Allcorn and Stein (2004) perceive boundaries to be interfaces between the multiplicity of dimensions of human nature (for example psychological, identity and affect) and that of the organisation; a confrontation at the boundary between self and object. They argue that boundaries are experiential constructs that are 'felt' at points of boundary contact and that studying the affective experience of individuals and groups as they touch the surface of a boundary is more important than seeking to define that boundary as a concrete conceptual concept.

> *"We suggest that the notion of boundary may be extended…Human beings experience the world as surface-to-surface contact where tactile sensation reveals hardness or softness, warmth or cold, pattern and shape, and most of all a sense at the point of surface-to-surface contact of containment. We suggest…that the sensation of organisational boundaries is located and with it the ultimate psychological meaning of organisational structure."*
>
> *(Diamond, Allcorn and Stein, 2004, p.31)*

Lamont and Molnar (2002) argue that boundaries are inherent to the fabric of the social life of organisations and make the distinction between symbolic and social boundaries. Lamont and Molnar (2002) argue that symbolic boundaries (for example, conceptual distinctions, cultural identities and interpretive strategies) are employed by individuals and groups as a means through which they can create, maintain and dissolve institutionalised social differences (for example, gender, race or territorial inequalities). Symbolic boundaries are used to categorise and understand the social environment with regards to its people, objects, practices and even time and space. They are concepts that people struggle to come to terms with and are ways for individuals and groups to impose a rationalised reality upon their environment. Lamont and Molnar (2002) argue that a detailed study of boundary interactions will provide a rich picture of the dynamic dimensions of complex social relations as individuals and groups compete for power and status. Where symbolic boundaries are deeply embedded they become social boundaries (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). Social boundaries are, for example, observable

inequalities in the distribution of resources between individuals and groups, leading to class, gender and ethnic segregation.

Hernes (2003) argues that boundaries have dual properties. They are at the same time both constraining (i.e. used to impose a rational order) and are enabling (i.e. used to provide new opportunities). Bion (1961) describes effective organisations as those that are characterised by groups of people who have a clear sense of their boundaries whilst ineffective organisations operate with blurred boundaries. In developing his argument of the duality of boundary properties Hernes (2003) refers to the 'texture of boundaries' and explains how organisational actors can, through interactions with mental, social and physical boundaries, create a strong organisation. Here, boundaries are used to constrain and so direct work toward the core purpose of the organisation. Further, Hernes (2004) considers that boundaries can facilitate change and innovation as trust between individuals and groups grow allowing for risk taking and the mobilisation of resources across boundaries. This would seem to imply that boundaries can also be conceptualised as being permeable (enabling) or impermeable (constraining) in nature and that the extent of the permeability of boundaries will depend on creating a balance between enabling and constraining factors that govern organisational boundaries (March and Simon, 1958; Gabriel, 1999).

Boundary Phenomena

Boundary phenomena can be considered to be the possibilities and outcomes of human interactions with boundaries. Here, Douglas (1966) identifies the notion of boundary work. Douglas' social anthropological study identified individuals and groups actively involved in defining and redefining their relationships through interactions at boundaries. Hannan and Freeman (1989) employed the notion of boundary maintenance to their study of populations in organisations focusing on the nature of the boundary work undertaken between individuals and groups. Douglas (1966) argues that boundaries are areas of tension that are tested by members and are therefore dangerous places. Douglas also asserts that boundaries are transient places and notes that there is, *"energy in margins and unstructured areas"* (Douglas, 1966, p.114).

Hernes (2003) argues that whilst boundaries provide order they can also provide the motivation and capacity for individuals and groups to act outside of their boundaries. Individual awareness of boundary structures, where they interconnect and where they

overlap, provides opportunities for that individual to consciously manufacture situations where they might cross boundaries in order to secure a change in their social or organisational position. However, it would seem that such an argument is predicated upon the assumption that individuals have the physical and mental resources necessary to cross significant social or organisational boundary structures. Further, Hernes' (2003) argument appears reliant upon the individual's perception that boundary structures are permeable. However, Ellemers (1993) argues that to view boundary structures as impermeable makes social change more likely for low-status groups leading to increased social competition for those individuals who co-exist within any given boundary. Such an assertion would suggest that Ellemers (1993) would also posit that impermeable boundaries therefore result in a reduced potential for individual mobility.

Finally, Hernes (2003) draws upon the work of Adams (1980), Tushman and Scanlan (1981) and Ancona and Caldwell (1992) to describe the idea of 'boundary spanners'. Organisational boundary spanning assumes that an individual is employed in boundary work that requires them to control interactions between physical, social and psychological borders in a rational attempt to create order. Boundary spanners are actively engaged, consciously or unconsciously, in determining the degree of permeability of their organisational boundaries given that they have located themselves across an identified point of delineation.

Boundaries as tools for theorising

Paulsen and Hernes (2003) have identified that much of the existing theorising regarding boundary structures has been founded upon an implicit recognition of boundaries as tools for delineation and analysis. However, they are critical of the argument that an analysis of boundaries, when conceptualised in such a manner, can be used to understand a stable order. They argue that whilst individuals and groups construct boundaries as structures to understand and to manage their organisational environment, researchers draw boundaries as a means of what Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) term, "*analytic convenience*" (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978, p.30). Hernes and Paulsen (2003) draw upon a quote by Laumann et al. (1983) who described such an approach as being nominalist because the analyst, *"self-consciously imposes a conceptual framework constructed to serve his own analytical purposes*." (p.21)

In advocating systems theory, Parsons (1951) considers that boundaries are an incidental by-product of the process of organising in order to achieve an optimum and stable organisational

structure that itself has unambiguous boundaries that can themselves be managed. Paulsen and Hernes (2003) question the notion of a static, stable organisation and consider such a conceptualisation of boundaries to be inadequate when considering the constant process of change that they see is inherent in modern organisations. They argue that modern organisations are composed of individuals and groups that are constantly involved in the repeated process of drawing and then redrawing boundaries through daily interactions. Drawing on the work of Giddens (1984), Paulsen and Hernes (2003) are critical of the view that boundary theorising should be constrained to the process of ordering as a means to understand organisations and argue that it is the very nature of the recurrent process of drawing and redrawing boundaries that provides the potential for evolution and change.

The view that organisations evolve through the process of boundary setting suggests that boundaries are an intrinsic and inherent, as opposed to an incidental, part of organisations (Giddens, 1984; Luhmann, 1995). To take the view that organisational change is based upon the constant process of setting and resetting boundaries (Giddens, 1984) reflects the complexity and dynamic processes of organisational change and places the study of boundaries as a fundamental part of understanding organisations (Hernes, 2003). Schneider (1987) argues that the study of boundaries is fundamental for the understanding of individual and group interactions where boundaries are closely associated with roles and identities and how these have been managed. Berg and Smith (1990) make the point that it is impossible to analyse group interactions without implicitly introducing the concept of boundaries. Situating and defining the boundary has been important given the need to spatially locate a shifting social order in which individuals and groups interact. Lamont and Molnar (2002) have identified a scholarly potential in the use of boundaries to explore a multiplicity of factors that might occur during social interactions:

> *"Whereas empirical research almost always concerns a particular dependent variable or a subarea of sociology, focusing on boundaries themselves may generate new theoretical insights about a whole range of general social processes present across a wide variety of apparently unrelated phenomena—processes such as boundary-work, boundary crossing, boundaries shifting, and the territorialization, politicization, relocation, and institutionalization of boundaries."*
>
> *(p.168)*

Anderson and White, (2003) point to the importance of boundary management for those involved with public administration (e.g. a headteacher). In particular, they make clear the inherent dangers of working within boundary structures:

> *"Boundary management is an important task of the public administrator, for when they are located at the organisations boundary, they are able to monitor what is inside and outside of the system. If they are too much inside, they may become caught up in the projective identification process. If they are too far outside, they may lose the emotional experience that contributes to the knowledge of group defenses and dysfunctions."*
>
> *(p.198)*

The concept of the boundary, then, is multifarious and complex and yet is central to the work of organisations.

Boundary challenge and change

The nature of the socialisation of a new headteacher into role is that it is synonymous with change; the appointment of the new headteacher is in itself representative of change. Change is well known to bring about resistance not least because it challenges the status quo (Hannan and Freeman, 1989) and increases fear and anxieties of real or imagined actions (Morris and Raben, 1995) including threats to personal security and self-confidence (O'Toole, 1995). It is therefore important to explore the relationship between change and its association with boundary challenge in order to understand why boundaries are such key structures during socialisation.

Burdett (1999) argues that change is a necessary aspect of the ways in which we live our lives. He argues that a lack of change leads to stagnation, loss of self-esteem and even undue stress. DiPaola and Hoy (2001) consider that the solution to coercive formalisation as a way to inhibit change is to proactively seek constructive conflict. They argue that people are unaccustomed to dealing with conflict and wish to avoid uncomfortable situations where possible. Change is therefore a shared responsibility and whilst resistance is almost inevitable, Burdett (1999), DiPaola and Hoy (2001) and others argue that change should be viewed as a positive and necessary part of organisational life and something that can be a powerful and critical source of energy, motivation and development. However, it is hard to concur with such a view when

one considers that some forms of organisational change, such as the untimely loss of a close colleague, are unlikely to foster positive feelings. Douglas (1966) promotes the idea that boundaries are places of tension that are tested by members. Douglas (1966) therefore suggests that boundaries are dangerous places to be and asserts that there is energy in society's unstructured places that is used to fuel a perpetual state of change.

Section 2: Socialisation and the concept of 'role' in organisations

The purpose of the following section is to provide a critical review of the literature relating to the notion of 'organisational role' finding that it is largely descriptive and that there is a lack of an analytical framework with which one can analyse the dynamics of role incumbency.

Organisation and role

Organisations are varied, complex, multi-faceted and can be understood in a range of ways (Gabriel, 1999). Making sense of them is therefore somewhat problematic (Morgan 1988). Schein (1979) offers the following useful description of organisation:

> *"An organisation is the planned coordination of the activities of a number of people for the achievement of some common, explicit purpose or goal, through division of labour and function, and through a hierarchy of authority and responsibility."*
>
> *(Schein, 1979, p.15)*

Schein's description points to the complexity of studying organisations given that he would conceive organisations as being multi-faceted and essentially organic entities in that labour, authority, hierarchy and even purpose are not determined but are subject to change. Likert (1961, 1967) argues that the complexities of organisations require that they are conceptualised if they are to be analysed and understood. Mullins (2005) offers such a conceptualisation and argues that organisations are characterised by complex group processes and behaviour. Further, Mullins (2005) maintains that in order for an organisation to achieve its goals and objectives the work of its individuals must be coordinated through a series of coherent processes and behaviours that can be defined as 'roles'.

> *"A 'role' is the expected pattern of behaviours associated with members occupying a particular position within the structure of the organisation."*
>
> *(Mullins, 2005, p.186)*

If role implies an expected set of behaviours then it follows that some behaviour will be expected (i.e. considered legitimate) in role and others unexpected (i.e. considered illegitimate). The distinction between what is perceived as being legitimate or illegitimate behaviour is important. Arguably, those behaviours that are 'expected' of an individual in role will be viewed positively, affirming them a sense of legitimacy in role, whilst those behaviours that are unexpected will be perceived to be inappropriate, or illegitimate in role, causing frustration and anger and possibly leading to conflict. Thus, the notion of individuals establishing what is considered legitimate and illegitimate behaviour in role will be of central importance during socialisation.

Organisational roles and role holders operate within a 'role structure' (Mullins, 2005). Arguably, role structures are understood through interactions within and across the organisation. Such an assertion would imply that those holding a role as position are required to engage in a series of complex relationships and interactions in order that roles might be self-perpetuating in nature. These relationships are themselves defined by authority, contextual and personal factors (Mullins, 2005) and will necessarily lead to each individual, though holding the same role as position, undertaking their role as practice in different ways.

The concept of role then is that of a formally prescribed set of behavioural expectations that are carried out through individual and group relationships and that are themselves influenced by a range of conditioning factors important in which are authority, context and personality (Gabriel, 1999; James and Connolly et al., 2006). Conceiving of role in such a way would suggest that the agency of any two individuals occupying the same role will almost certainly be different because each individual is influenced by a unique set of conditioning factors. To recognise the existence of contextual factors is therefore important for it suggests that whilst two individuals occupy the same role as position (e.g. headteacher) their experiences, as their agency, will be inextricably specific to each individual. Arguably, the process of socialisation is the principle vehicle by which role holders learn what is required of them; their 'role expectation' in terms of tasks and outcomes; what is required of their role as position, and also what is informally expected of them, (i.e. their 'informal role expectations' in terms of their conduct, what is required of their role as practice) (Mullins, 2005).

Here it is useful to make the distinction between 'task role' and 'process role' as distinct sub sets of the role as practice (Gabriel, 1999). Task role is conceptualised as being the nature of the activity that the individual undertakes and process role is *how* the individual undertakes the task. Task role is determined by a range of organisational influences, especially the professional expectation of those within the role structure that an individual or group undertakes an action, or series of actions, that directly or indirectly facilitates the work of others toward the primary task of the organisation (James and Connolly et al., 2006) The task role is learned by the individual through the reciprocal, recurrent and relational processes of socialisation. It is also during socialisation that an individual learns their process role. Socialising influences seek to condition the individual to 'how *we* do things around here' and consequently, yet implicitly, 'how we want *you* to do things around here' and is characterised by the personal requirements of the role not just the professional tasks that an individual is required to undertake. Such influencing and conditioning factors have the potential to create disagreement and conflict.

Role Conflict

Role conflict occurs where an individual's role as practice is not aligned with their own or others understanding of what constitutes their role as position. Role conflict is characterised by powerful emotions that may lead to challenge (Hirschhorn, 1993). Earlier in the section I argue that an individual's agency in role is influenced by relationships that are themselves defined by authority, contextual and personal factors. Further, I would argue that these conditioning factors are experienced most intensely during socialisation. It is therefore important to understand how these conditioning factors might be recognised in organisational contexts and further how they might lead to problematic role conflict during socialisation. The following section provides a critical review of the factors that contribute toward role conflict, a generic term that includes (Mullins, 2005):

- Role identity
- Role overload
- Role ambiguity

It is important to explain and critique how these multiple dimensions of role ownership might lead to conflict in order to understand how conflict arises in organisations. Moreover, a multiple conception of role is useful because it demonstrates the way in which we can also

conceive of roles as being experienced in many different ways. Role identity, role overload and role ambiguity are all examples of the different ways in which individuals can experience challenge and can be compromised or indeed legitimised in role. Role overload, role conflict and role ambiguity lead to weak role boundaries and inevitably to boundary conflict (Schein, 1988).

Role Identities

Role identity refers to the extent to which a role cues or denotes a certain persona that is consistent with specific goals, values, beliefs, norms, interaction styles, and time horizons (Ashforth, et al., 2000). Role identities are socially constructed definitions of self-in-role, consisting of core or central features and peripheral features. Core features tend to be characterised as being more defining of identity (Perry, 1997). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) draw upon the work of Schein (1973) when they suggest that the stereotypical managerial role identity emphasises the core features of, "*self-reliance, emotional stability, aggressiveness, and objectivity*" (1985, p.81- 82), whereas more peripheral features may include intelligence and charisma. Core and peripheral features also may include aspects of the context(s) that help situate the role identities, such as geographical location, role set members, and role status. Defining one's role identity is an incisive aspect of socialisation, or entry into role, and is an intrinsic part of the social construction of an individual's role.

Role identity is related to two sociological concepts that overlap in their meaning; social status and role labelling (Czander, 1993). Bensman and Lilienfeld (1979) argue that the status attributable to a role, and how that status differentiates between the occupants of other roles within an organisation, will determine the extent to which a role is sought after. The conceptualisation of role as being an application of meaning reduces role to a definition, or label, which is socially meaningful. This perspective would appear to assume that the role occupant will adopt specific behaviours that are consistent with the role label, although this might not be the case. Indeed, it would seem that role labels indicate an individual's position in the social and role structures of the organisation and would therefore presume organisational stability and reliability.

At its most simple, the concept of role identity can be conceived of as encapsulating the behaviours that individuals expect and are expected to enact. Turner (1969) makes the distinction between 'role-taking' (i.e. accepting a role) and 'role-making' (i.e. actively reconstructing that role). Hall (1997) develops these ideas and uses a theatrical analogy to

describe the process that individuals undergo when they move into a new role. Here, the individual is likened to an actor playing a role. The analogy refers to 'role-taking' as a phase when an individual's understanding of their new role is limited to how it is defined in job descriptions and other written agreements. These documents are viewed as the 'scripts' that specify the expected behaviours in role. However, Hall (1997) points to the tension that can be created if during the process of 'role-making' the actor deviates from their script, perhaps being creative in their interpretation of their part and so creating a unique role identity. Should this happen, the expectations of the audience (i.e. other actors within and beyond the organisation) are not met and here lay the potential for significant dispute.

> *"Teachers, lecturers and principals, within their framework of their understanding of others' expectations of their roles, attempt to interpret them in ways which are comfortable, rewarding and manageable. The problem is in the failure of these myriad interpretations to match eachother,...conflict may occur while staff interpret their own and others' roles in ways which may or may not resemble others' interpretations."*
>
> *(Hall, 1997, p.64)*

Here, Hall (1997) appears to take the view that there is no singular conception of the social world but rather that the social world, and so our interpretation of that world, is unique to each individual. Indeed, such a view of the social world underpins the present research and points to a potential source of organisational conflict.

The notions of 'role-taking' and 'role-making' are useful concepts in the sense that they provide a clear framework that describes the way in which an individual creates a role identity. However, neither is mutually exclusive. From the moment an individual 'takes' a role, they inherently begin to 'make' it their own through their actions. Arguably, during the process of socialisation an individual is involved in concurrently reconciling these two aspects of their role incumbency in order to find their own interpretation of their role. Therefore, it might be appropriate to view socialisation as a process whereby an individual is required to 'find, make and take up' thatinterpretation whilst in role.

If one is to accept the notion that role identity is essentially a social construct that is embedded within an organisational role structure then it follows that there is considerable opportunity for conflict. Social constructs are necessarily reliant upon individual perceptions

and individual perceptions are in turn reliant upon contextual and personal influences. It is therefore unlikely that an organisation will be entirely stable, or perhaps without conflict, as individuals exercise their prerogative to challenge each other's role identity and so their social status, perhaps in an attempt to increase their own standing within the organisation. It is conceivable that such conflict might become evident in the form of a challenge, possibly as the result of a perception that another individual is incapable of fulfilling their role.

Role Overload

Role overload is characterised by an individual's inability to manage the requirements of the role as position they hold within the organisation (Schein, 1988). Arguably, an individual's inability to fulfil their role as position will be evident through their actions, or role as practice. Role overload is caused by the focal person's professional or personal deficit in relation to the requirements of the post. However, it might also be argued that role overload could be the result of an individual having been presented with a genuinely unreasonable level of task responsibility. Such a conception would itself suggest possible role conflict caused either by malicious challenge to an individual's status by another individual or by a colleague themselves experiencing role overload and an inability to fulfil their own role as position.

Individuals may experience 'multiple role occupancy' (Gabriel, 1999) where they are required to occupy an unmanageable number of roles, for example in the case of a headteacher who, in addition to being headteacher and a school governor, is also required to maintain a significant teaching role in addition to their school leadership responsibilities. The concept of multiple role occupancy is consistent with the notion of role conflict (Czander, 1993). Role conflict exists where different members of the organisation expect different things of the focal person whilst role ambiguity is where the organisation fails to communicate, or the individual fails to understand, the requirements of the position leading to uncertainty and inefficiency. Such factors exemplify the processes that take place during the socialisation of new organisational incumbents and ultimately lead to the individual's success or failure in their work. Schein (1988), drawing upon the work of Kahn et al., (1964), argues that role conflict will be more intense if the focal person, perhaps a new headteacher, is required to interact with a large number of different associate parties, some of whom rest within the organisational boundary (for example, teaching staff, children, school governors), or within the associated system (for example, parents, the church, the local authority, other schools), and some that lie outside of that immediate system (for example, Ofsted, contractors, researchers).

Those individuals who occupy positions that require managing complex interactions between various organisational influences are 'boundary spanners' (Czander, 1993). Boundary spanners have a significant role to play in the life of such organisations given that their ability to manage the interactions that take place between and across complex layers of organisational boundaries will impact upon the work of the individual's host organisation. Successful boundary spanners do not experience role conflict because they have a clarity of their role expectations that is unambiguous (Czander, 1993).

Role Ambiguity

Individuals experience role ambiguity when they are uncertain as to which aspects of their work are the primary purposes of their role within the organisation (Czander, 1993). Such a lack of clarity can lead to confusion and cause individuals to underperform as they focus their energy on tasks that lay at the periphery and not at the heart of their role. Schein (1988) argues that the inability of the focal person to cope with the pressures of role ambiguity can cause them to seek to reduce tension at the cost of organisational efficiency, perhaps by choosing to avoid a potential role conflict by failing to address a challenging organisational issue in their work or in that of others. Conversely, role labels can cause role ambiguity should the expected behaviours be inconsistent with an individual's personality. Such inconsistency has the potential to lead to increased feelings of emotional anxiety and can themselves lead to a perceived or real feeling of underperformance and inefficiency in role. Schein (1988) also points to the intensity of the role conflict experienced by the individual being significantly increased if the individual also experiences role ambiguity in relation to their understanding of what each associate party expects of them in role. There is a case for arguing that role ambiguity is most acute when an individual enters a new position (i.e. headteacher) and during socialisation.

Concluding comments

Such a critique of the existing literature concerned with role demonstrates the need for an analytical, as opposed to a descriptive or ordering, framework that allows the researcher to analyse the recurrent, reciprocal and relational dynamics of role incumbency taking into account the influence of conditioning factors that make the experiences of each individual unique. Applying such a descriptive approach to researching the dynamic interactions of

socialisation limits the potential to analyse and understand the process of socialisation in the sense that it focuses upon describing the outcomes of socialisation and not the dynamics of the process. However, the literature does point to the complexity of role incumbency and its considerable potential for conflict due to the multiplicity of influencing and conditioning variables. The following section sets out the conceptual and analytical framework to be used in the analysis of the data in Chapter 5 and in particular the central concept of the role boundary.

Section 3: Introducing the concept of 'Role Boundary'

The following section begins by identifying the relative lack of literature concerned with the role boundary before developing the concept of the 'role boundary' suggesting that it might be of heuristic value when applied to the study of the socialisation of new headteachers.

The literature on the concept of the role boundary is somewhat limited. That which is to be found in organisational literature tends to view the role boundary as being a point of task delineation where an individual's role, in task terms, starts and ends. Such a view might be useful in terms of understanding the role boundary of, say, a production worker whose role boundary is defined by where they work on the production line and by the component parts that they are responsible for adding at any given stage of manufacture. However, such a conceptualisation is too limiting in its application to a study of the complexities of the social world during socialisation and as such an alternative view of what constitutes the notion of role boundary is required.

It is tempting to suppose that the concept of the role boundary might be located within the notions of organisational role. The previous section identified that the existing literature relating to the concept of organisational role is largely descriptive being concerned with identifying observable trends in role incumbency such as role identity, role overload and role ambiguity leading to the potential for role conflict. However, these concepts are nevertheless relevant to the current research as they provide a basis for a more thorough understanding of role and more importantly the *nature* of role incumbency and its associated potential causes of role conflict (i.e. role identity, role overload, role ambiguity). To conceptualise role the boundary as being aligned to these aspects of role incumbency may seem attractive given the apparent analytic convenience of arguing that the role boundary is in fact the very place where role conflict is located (and therefore by implication where role identity, role overload and role ambiguity are played out during interactions at the role boundary). However, such an attempt to align a conception of role boundary with that of the existing notion of role conflict would

seem to ignore, or at least overlook, the importance of the behaviours that an individual brings to their role. That is to say, it would suggest *where* the role conflict takes place (i.e. at the role boundary) but would fail to unveil the *way* in which an individual demonstrates the effects of role identity, role overload and role ambiguity through their behaviours.

Here, it is important to make the point that the terms 'role label' and 'role identity' are not universally understood in a distinct, consistent and linear fashion. It is certainly the case that role labels and role identities are attributed historical, cultural and task expectations that are projected upon the role occupant (Schein, 1979; Gabriel, 1999). However, to suggest that the concept of the role boundary can be constructed upon the notions of role label and role identity is impossible. Both concepts are limiting in the sense that they neither provide clarity as to which behaviours might be considered as being commensurate with the role label nor do they allow for one to consider how an individual's role boundary might be influenced by their understanding and experience of context.

Role Boundary

The previous sections demonstrate that the notion of role has tended to be associated with specific individuals who hold a 'role label' and therefore a 'position' (e.g. headteacher) (Ashforth et al., 2000). However, such a view of role is limiting in that it restricts our understanding of role to that of a label; itself merely suggestive of a 'position'. Indeed, the view that individuals are attributed a role label is essentially a reductionist construct in that it does not allow the possibility to analyse the behaviours of individuals in role. Thus, it can be argued that whilst one may have a role label, or put another way hold a role as position, one may not act in a manner that others might consider commensurate to that position. It follows that one is required to consider role in terms of practice, for even to do nothing is to be seen to be doing something in role.

The view of the role boundary is one that encloses the behaviours, and so practices, that are associated with a particular role as position. Such an assertion would suggest that the role occupant is able to manipulate and either strengthen or weaken their position through their behaviours in role.

Role boundary and behaviours

Here, it would seem appropriate to introduce the notion of behavioural legitimacy within the

emerging concept of the role boundary. An analysis of behaviours as being either perceived as legitimate or illegitimate allows for an analytical approach to studying the dynamics of socialisation in a way that provides a richer account of the process beyond that which would seek to order socialising experiences. A behavioural approach to analysing socialisation allows for an interpretation of socialising incidents as individuals find, make and take up their role boundary.

The traditional view of the concept of role implies that one holds a position. In holding a position, one might reasonably be expected to demonstrate behaviours in order to fulfil the responsibilities of the position for which one is accountable. One's behaviour in role may be discerned as being appropriate to one's role (i.e. legitimate) or inappropriate (i.e. illegitimate). The concept of 'role boundary' is defined in the current research as being the point of delineation between legitimate and illegitimate behaviours.

Behaviours exemplify both what an individual is charged to do and how they do it; their role as position and their role as practice. Upon appointment, one is conferred a role label and a position (e.g. headteacher). A position affords an individual a degree of responsibility for which he or she is accountable. The process of socialisation is therefore that of an individual seeking to understand the requirements of their position, the behaviours that are legitimate or illegitimate in relation to that role as position and how their behaviours, legitimate or illegitimate, might shape and be shaped by their authority in role.

Arguably, role boundaries are configured and constructed during everyday behavioural episodes that take place at organisational boundaries. Role boundaries are most acutely shaped during 'critical incidents' that are both representative and reflective of the process of organisational socialisation. Arguably, one might argue for the hypothesis that the whole process of socialisation is in fact a process of an individual establishing their role boundary; what is considered legitimate behaviour and what is not. Such an analysis can be achieved by analysing the behaviours of individuals during the process of socialisation and from a role boundary perspective.

The following ideas underpin the analytical framework that will be applied to the analysis of the data in chapter 5:

- Socialisation is experienced as a series of social incidents
- An analysis of these incidents will require the identification of specific behaviours

- These behaviours can be interpreted from a role boundary perspective. That is to say that each behaviour is either legitimate or illegitimate in nature when analysed against the individual's position in the organisation

Incidents can be interpreted in order to understand how role boundaries are positioned and utilised during the process of socialisation. For the purposes of this research the role boundary is therefore defined as being that which encloses the set of behaviours that are commensurate with the responsibilities of an individual's role as position and that are legitimate and appropriate to that role as position.

Concluding comments

The present chapter explored the main foci of the research, identifying them as being the multi-faceted nature of role and the notion of the role boundary. The latter is to be used to underpin the conceptual framework for the analysis of the data in chapter 5.

The chapter began by stating that boundaries are an intrinsic part of organisations before going on to explore the extent to which boundary configuration and boundary management are a recurrent and reciprocal process that takes place between an individual and the organisation during socialisation. The opening section concluded with a consideration of the complex nature of boundaries and their heuristic value as tools for analysing as well as for theorising.

Section 2 discussed the interrelated concept of role, finding that the configuration of an individual's role is dependent upon them undertaking boundary work and further that the social construction of an individual's role is dependent upon the individual's ability to selectively combine and integrate elements of contextual nuances.

The third section then presented the conceptual framework that is to be used to analyse the data, conveying as its central tenet the notion of the role boundary before positing that the process of socialisation is therefore that of an individual seeking to understand the requirements of their position; the behaviours that are legitimate or illegitimate in relation to that role and how their behaviours, legitimate or illegitimate, will influence their perceived and actual authority in role.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Introduction

The following chapter will:

- restate the research questions against the aim of the research and will provide a synopsis of the research
- establish the ontological, epistemological and methodological underpinnings of the research
- demonstrate how the research design will address the research questions
- discuss and critique the research design and methods

The methodology chapter is divided into four broad areas of interest to the research project. The first section will rehearse the research questions and will provide the reader with a synopsis of the design of the research. The chapter then continues with a discussion of the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the research before setting out the methods of data collection and analysis. The third section of the chapter provides a critique of the research design addressing the issues of accuracy and authenticity before going on to identify three distinct phases of research incorporating the use of two methods of data collection, namely a written log (referred to as a 'boundary log') and semi-structured interview. The fourth and final section identifies and discusses the ethical issues relative to the research and concludes with a critique of the research design and methods, including the use of the critical incident vignette.

Section 1: Research Aim, Research Questions and Synopsis of the Research

Aim of the Research

The aims of the current research are to:

1. analyse the socialisation of new primary headteachers from a role boundary perspective.

2. test the suitability of the role boundary concept as a rigorous, theoretical and methodological tool that can be applied to researching the field of headteacher socialisation.

Research questions

The key research questions are:

1. How can the experiences of those individuals newly appointed to their first primary school headship be interpreted and explained?
2. What is the nature of the experience of those individuals newly appointed to their first primary school headship
3. What can be learned from the interpretation and explanation of newly appointed headteachers to enhance understandings of headteacher socialisation?

Research Synopsis

The research design was determined from existing research into the experiences of new headteachers. In chapter 2, the literature review identified three distinct points of interest in the socialisation of new headteachers. These are:

- after the first 6 months in post (Reeves et al., 1997)
- after the first year in post (Day and Bakioglu, 1996; Wenger 1998; Brighouse & Wood 1999; Gronn 1999)
- after the first 3 years of being in post (Brighouse and Woods, 1999; Weindling and Dimmock, 2006)

These points of interest were used as indicators to shape three phases of research that used a case study approach. Seven headteachers were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format whilst the researcher kept a written 'boundary log'. Headteachers were asked to report upon significant events that occurred during their socialisation. These events were recorded as 'critical incident vignettes' and formed the data for analysis. In phase 1 of the research, the seven participants were interviewed once after they had been post for six months. Phase 2 of the research focused upon collecting critical incident data from a single individual who had been appointed to their first headship. Interviews were conducted each month during the headteacher's first academic year in post. In phase 3 the researcher analysed his boundary log

to identify critical incidents throughout his three years in post as substantive headteacher. The critical incidents analysed in chapter 5 were not selected from a larger body of data. Thus, chapter 5 provides a synchronic analysis of all the critical incidents that were drawn from the three phases of research. The data from each headteacher was analysed from a role boundary perspective to provide an interpretation of events that might provide an understanding of the dynamics of headteacher socialisation. The critical incidents were ordered under the following headings to reflect the distinct points of interest in the study of the socialisation of new headteachers that had been indicated in prior research:

1. Incidents that took place after appointment and pre-incumbency
2. Incidents that took place between 1-6 months in post
3. Incidents that took place between 7-12 months in post
4. Incidents that took place between 13-36 months in post

The following section will provide a substantive underpinning of the present research by presenting the authors ontological and epistemological assumptions before providing a methodological approach to inform the research design.

Section 2: Establishing the ontological, epistemological, and methodological underpinning for the research

The purpose of section 2 is to provide an academically rigorous foundation for the research. The section will begin by considering the ontological view that human behaviour in the social world is governed by free will, or voluntarism, and that therefore social reality can only be interpreted in a uniquely subjective manner. The section continues with an explanation of the author's epistemological view that knowledge and understanding are created by the meanings that individuals place upon their experiences of the social world and that such a view is itself inherently allied to nominalist ontology.

Section two continues by finding that an idiographic and specifically interpretivist case study methodology is both consistent with a nominalist ontology and is desirable as a means by which positivist critiques of social science research might be addressed before ending with a discussion of the conceptual framework that is to be used to analyse the data.

Ontological considerations

Arguably, an important purpose of social science research is concerned with the subjective meaning that individuals place upon their direct experiences within specific contexts (Beck, 1979). Beck (1979) neatly summarises the philosophic view that underpins the current research project. He writes that:

> *"[T]he purpose of social science is to understand social reality as different people see it and to demonstrate how their views shape the action which they take within that reality. Since the social sciences cannot penetrate to what lies behind social reality, they must work directly with man's definitions of reality and with the rules he devises for coping with it. While the social sciences do not reveal ultimate truth, they do help us to make sense of our world. What the social sciences offer is explanation, clarification and demystification of the social forms which man has created around himself."*
>
> *(Beck, 1979; cited in Cohen* et al., *2000, p.20)*

If social science is unable to penetrate that which lay behind social reality then it would seem that it must at least attempt to understand it. According to Beck, (1979) such an understanding can only be achieved by seeking to understand the meanings that individuals place upon their social reality and the systems that individuals use to rationalise their social lives. Arguably, individuals and organisations use boundaries as conscious and unconscious attempts at organising and so managing their experience of the social world. If we are to view boundaries as tools for making sense of one's organisational environment then the process of drawing contextual boundaries around roles, tasks, resources and spaces becomes an important part of an individual rationalising their existence within the organisation. Conversely, organisations may actively seek to define working practices and so dictate their own boundaries, such as who has responsibility for defining working practices. Such a view of the social world would suggest that from an ontological perspective boundaries exist both within organisational structures and within the minds of individuals. Arguably, the diversity of human experience would suggest that each individual will hold a different view of each boundary, possibly leading to confusion and even conflict. It is through these boundaries that individuals navigate the social world making boundaries a suitable conceptual and analytical framework with which one can study and understand the actions of individuals in the social world.

Blumer (1969) argues that people are deliberate and are creative in their actions; that is to say, they act intentionally and make meanings in and through their activities. Such an assertion would suggest the notion of voluntarism, or free-will, in human interactions which itself would presuppose that humans are not passive actors in a social reality that is pre-determined in nature (Garfinkel 1967; Becker, 1970). The notion of voluntarism is consistent with the view of causality that is adopted in the present research project where causality is considered to be a conditioning and not a determining factor in social interactions (Crossley, 2005). Furthermore, voluntarism would suggest that individuals can, through conscious and unconscious actions, both shape their social world whilst they themselves are also shaped by that social world. Such a proposition forms a further foundational underpinning of the current research project and resonates with the theoretical principles that underpin structuration theory (Giddens, 1979). In section 3 I expound the idea that the extent to which an individual actor can knowingly influence their social world is reliant upon their formulating a 'correct' understanding of their context (Grint, 2005).

Epistemological considerations

Nominalist ontology is principally concerned with understanding the ways in which individuals create, modify and interpret the social world of which they are a constituent part (Cohen et al., 2000). The nominalist view that the behaviour of individuals is not governed by a pre-determined, general and universal law presupposes that social reality, and so social life, cannot be determined by such underlying regularities (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Such a view would imply that individuals are the author of their own actions and this in turn would suggest the existence of free will. Indeed, I am of the opinion that the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the phenomena being investigated; in this case from the standpoint of the headteacher. The multifarious perspective of nominalist ontology supposes that the analysis of data from individuals who are themselves the subject, or unit, of investigation, and any subsequent claim to the generation of knowledge, can only be specific to the individual and to the context and is therefore subjective in nature. The generation of knowledge in such a context specific way might be referred to as being 'soft knowledge' and that as such might further be contested by the claims of positivist researchers on the grounds that 'real' knowledge is only that which can be described as being transferable and generalisable. Such claims to knowledge, termed 'absolute' or 'hard knowledge', are considered by positivists to be the only true form of knowledge (Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

Methodological considerations

The counter to the positivist argument rests with the considered use of an idiographic methodology (Cohen et al.,2000). Idiographic methodology has the potential to compare and contrast the experiences of a number of individuals within different contexts in order to identify key consistent or recurrent themes that illuminate the matter under investigation. Specifically, the current research will utilise an interpretivist approach to idiographic research.

Interpretivist methodology has the potential to analyse and so understand the social world in terms of its actors (Habermas, 1972). Interpretivist methodology is consistent with the view adopted by the current research that reality is socially constructed and is therefore reliant upon both the actions and the perceptions of the actors themselves. However, it is necessary to point out that interpretivist approaches, most notably those concerned with the use of verbal accounts to draw analytical conclusions, are criticised as being overly reliant upon and heavily influenced by the assumptions, context, knowledge and prior experience of the researcher (Bernstein, 1974). Giddens (1976) recognises the relativism of interpretivist methodology stating that:

> *"No specific person can possess detailed knowledge of anything more than the particular sector of society in which he participates, so that there still remains the task of making into an explicit and comprehensive body of knowledge that which is only known in a partial way by lay actors themselves."*
>
> *(p.131)*

Certainly, the notion that there is a universalistic theory that can be drawn from an interpretivist paradigm is unrealistic. Interpretivist approaches to research will necessarily be as multi-faceted as the nature of human behaviour and as varied as the contexts and situations that would condition that behaviour. The usefulness of an interpretivist approach to research is that it seeks to understand how reality presents itself to individuals in different contexts and at different times. Comparison of such behaviours, using a consistent interpretive perspective, such as that offered by adopting a role boundary perspective, will identify recurrent themes that can be drawn from similar contexts. From this methodological standpoint, theory drawn from interpretivist research is consistent with a set of meanings that can be applied to the social world in order to yield insight and understanding of human behaviours. Such theory can be drawn from interpretivist case study research.

Case study methodology

The purpose of the following section is to provide a rationale for the use of case study as a methodological approach to research. The section begins with a brief overview of case study methodology, exploring its strengths and critiques, before discussing the suitability of instrumental case study (Stake, 1994) to the aims of the current research project.

Case study has been broadly defined as being empirical research that takes place with a bounded and natural context (Yin, 1984). Case study is the study of a single bounded system that provides detailed insights to inform the thinking of decision makers or theoreticians. Case study methodology enables the researcher to interpret context and infer meaning in terms of those agents involved and therefore supports an interpretive epistemology (Cohen et al., 2000). It has the strength of being able to analyse human interactions and events within a bounded system, such as those that occur during the socialisation of a new headteacher within a school. Most significantly, multiple or collective case studies will allow for the analysis of empirical data against the theoretical templates of organisational socialisation and organisational boundaries with a specific focus upon role boundary.

The underlying assumption of the current research is that the process of socialisation takes place within and across behavioural interactions between the individual and their context, and further, that these interactions take place at organisational boundaries (Czander, 1993; James et al., 2006). The rationale for the use of case study in the current research project is that it allows for a detailed and rigorous focus upon a unit of research interest (i.e. the headteacher) within a bounded context (i.e. the school) and during a given period of time (i.e. during a period of socialisation lasting up to three years). Therefore, unlike positivist experimenters who manipulate variables to determine their causal significance within a context or the surveyor who asks standardised questions to vast numbers of respondents, the particular relevance and applicability of case study to the current research enables a focus upon the experiences of a specific unit of research interest – in this case the headteacher.

Instrumental case study

The matter of research interest and the importance of context are inextricably linked in the sense that the unit of research interest will necessarily be bounded within the given context in which they are to be studied. Where the purpose of research is to examine a case, or a series of cases, in order to provide insight into a given issue or theory the methodological approach

to be used is instrumental case study (Stake, 1994). Here, the case is of secondary interest, its purpose being to elicit an understanding of some matter that is external to the case itself. Such a methodological approach is in keeping with the current research project where the purpose is to study of the socialisation of new headteachers from a role boundary perspective.

Where researchers use case study to test or refine a theoretical perspective it will arguably be necessary to study more than one case study. Such an approach is termed collective case study and is not the study of a collective, but rather instrumental case study extended to several cases. In such research, cases are selected on the basis that they might reveal understandings that will allow for the generation or refinement of an issue or theory. It would seem that the issue here is to ensure that the cases are carefully selected in order to ensure that they provide the required insights to make such an undertaking possible in a way that is credible, transferable and dependable therefore making its findings generalisable (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

Designing case study research

The use of a range of methods of data collection supports the important process of addressing researcher bias and subjectivity through the analysis of comparative data for the purposes of ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability and generalisability.

> *"Where research is exploratory, as opposed to focused upon solving a specific issue, and where it is concerned with generating ideas, concepts and theories to elucidate an area of research interest as opposed to diagnosing a problem in order to prescribe a solution, the framing of the aim and purpose of the research study is of paramount importance in order to ensure a clear focus."*
>
> *(Gabriel, 1999, p.261)*

Nisbet and Watts (1984) argue that if case study data is to be academically rigorous and more than merely 'illustrative' of a given situation researchers should avoid:

- Journalism (that is, emphasising the most 'interesting' elements of the case, thus distorting the overall picture)
- Selective reporting (that is, selecting only the data that will support a predetermined hypothesis or argument therefore misrepresenting the case)

- An anecdotal style (that is, allowing the case to degenerate into intricate details to the detriment of rigorous analysis)
- Pomposity (that is, the generation of complex and profound theories from low level data)
- Blandness (that is, unquestioningly accepting only the respondents view or perhaps choosing only to include data upon which individuals might agree as opposed to data that might be contested).

The key issue in case study research surrounds the selection of information to be collected and subsequently the way in which the researcher interprets and then reports their analysis and conclusions from their data set. Those who support a positivist epistemology, where reliability and validity are tested through replication, are critical of the unique and contextual nature of idiographic case study methodology (Smith, 1991). However, it would seem that the inductive nature of case study would inherently imply that by definition case studies involving different individuals within different contexts, and studied at different times, will likely be to some degree inconsistent with similarly focused case studies. It is, then, impossible for case study methodology to demonstrate the positivist view of reliability and validity as being evidenced by exact replication. It is, however, necessary that case study research should demonstrate that it is academically rigorous and is therefore credible (Yin, 1984). The following section will establish the unit of analysis for the current study and will clarify from whom research data is to be collected in order to demonstrate the rigour and credibility of the current research project.

Researching organisations requires that the voice of the individual can be elicited and analysed (Czander, 1993; Gabriel, 1999). Here, it is necessary to make an important distinction with respect to the way in which respondent voice is collected, from whom it is collected and for what purpose. Specifically, a distinction should be made with regard to the unit of analysis to be used in the research.

Case study research should be clear as to whom or what is to be the unit of analysis given that the unit for analysis will define the research design, the choice of research instruments and subsequently the data collected (Yin 1984; Gabriel, 1999). If the unit of analysis is the organisation then the voice of some individuals (who may know more, care more or even matter more in the context of the research) will carry more weight than others, but if the unit of analysis is the individual then the data from each individual carries the same weight and should be treated accordingly (Simons, 1996; Gabriel, 1999). In order to clarify the appropriate

unit of analysis for the current research we must return to the aims of the research itself which are to:

1. analyse the socialisation of new primary headteachers from a role boundary perspective.
2. test the suitability of the role boundary concept as a rigorous, theoretical and methodological tool that can be applied to researching the field of headteacher socialisation.

It is clear that the aim implies that the unit of analysis that is most appropriate for the current research is that of the new headteacher. The primary concern for the researcher then, and working within the context of the aim of the current research project, is to ensure that the research design should provide a credible and dependable account of the individual experiences of those individuals who are new to headship. The notions of credibility and dependability will be returned to later in the chapter on research design.

The unique nature of case study research has been critiqued for its inability to produce generalisable representations of social life, except where others might consider the research to be applicable to their own situation (Cohen et al., 2000). Such an argument necessarily questions the validity of case study research. However, it might be argued that it is the very ability of case study to provide analysis and interpretations that resonate with others that contributes toward the credibility, and so generalisability, of case study research. That is to say that case study research, where credible and dependable is by implication necessarily 'valid' because it has the potential to illuminate the experiences of individuals and groups and for those findings to resonate with others.

Further, generalisability, and by implication 'validity', is strengthened by the considered use of a synchronic analysis of data that would seek to identify consistent and recurrent themes. Such consistent and recurrent themes can be elicited from case study research by way of a thorough analysis of sets of individual situational case study data drawn from multiple contexts (Cohen et al., 2000). It is therefore possible that generalisation can take the form of moving from the single instance, or group of instances, to making generalisable statements about how these significant instances might at the same time be consistent with significant others that might occur in similar contexts (for example, how the experiences of new primary headteachers in the research schools might illustrate significant experiences of similarly new primary headteachers in other schools). This implies a collective instrumental case study approach to

the research design that will yield robust and rigorous data that is so crucial to theory building (Yin, 1984).

Section 2: Approach to data collection – 'Critical Incident Technique'

Critical Incident Technique (CIT) and the 'critical incident vignette' (Flanagan, 1954; Tripp, 1993; 1994) is consistent with case study methodology and is used in the current research as the tool with which to collect critical incident data from new headteachers. The idea that the critical incident vignette is an appropriate tool for use in case study research is based upon the assumption that case studies, in not having to limit research to frequencies of occurrences, replace a purely quantitative methodological approach with a vivid and rich account of human behaviour that can be analysed to seek explanatory theories of the social world. Case study allows for the analysis of both the usual and the unusual, or critical, events and therefore case study allows for the collection of data that is highly significant in that it illuminates both the 'significant few' and the 'significant many' occurrences over a period of time. Thus, case study methodology is 'highly significant' in terms of understanding the complexities of the interplay that exists between both the unit of study (i.e. the headteacher) and the context (i.e. the school) (Adelman et al., 1980). Further, the use of critical incident reporting in case study research should not be prohibited on methodological grounds given that, *"As a form of research, case study is defined by interest in individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used."* (Stake, 1994, p.236).

The use of 'Critical Incident Technique'

Critical incident technique (CIT), originally proposed by Flanagan (1954), involves eliciting and analysing the experiences of individuals in order to facilitate learning. CIT has been adopted by the emergency services (Sarna, 1984) and by leaders and managers with responsibilities to respond to critical incidents (Flin, 1996). CIT has been used extensively in medical education to help students make sense of clinical situations since, according to Parker et al*.,* (1995), reflecting on incidents allows for the development of new skills, attitudes and knowledge. Whilst CIT has been evidenced in education it has focused predominantly upon the study of experiential learning of student teachers (Brennon and Green, 1993; Farrell, 2004) and the action research learning of serving practitioners (Tripp, 1993; 1994).

Tripp (1993) offers the following definition of critical incidents:

> *"Incidents happen, but critical incidents are produced by the way we look at a situation: a critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of an event. To take something as a critical incident is a value judgement we make, and the basis of the judgement is the significance we attach to the meaning of the incident."*
>
> *(Tripp, 1993, p.8)*

Tripp argues that as individuals we define what is, and what is not, a critical incident (CI). Such a view is consistent with the social constructivist standpoint adopted in the current research project. What may be a critical incident for one person may not be a critical incident for another, or indeed for the same person on a different day. A further definition is offered by Durgahee (1996) and Francis (2004) who consider that a critical incident is defined as being an experience identified by the learner as significant and from which learning is achieved.

Critical incident reporting

An analysis of CI data will provide a rich and vivid account of the socialisation of new headteachers from a role boundary perspective because using CI analysis allows the researcher to collect data that is at the same time:

- contextual (situated within the organisation)
- time dependent (experiences that are considered to be 'critical' by headteachers during the early stages of socialisation are experiences that may not be considered 'critical' by the same individual at another time)
- highly individualised (accounts that articulate the experiences of socialising influences at organisational boundaries from the unit of research; the new headteacher).

(Francis, 2004)

Critical incident analysis enables the researcher to record and to understand incidents within school that are of significance to those involved, (i.e. the new headteacher). However, coping with the anxiety and stress that an incident might cause, making well-informed and effective decisions and managing others when coping with these incidents arguably places considerable pressure on those involved (Sarna, 1984). It might be argued, therefore, that the stress of

recalling and reporting critical incidents makes capturing factually accurate data a challenging undertaking and a matter of methodological importance.

Finally, the utility of CIT lies in its flexibility as an approach with which to collect data. That is to say, it is not reliant upon a predefined or prescribed method of data collection but rather it can utilise a range of instruments, each selected appropriately to meet any given research aim (Tripp, 1993). In the current research, CI data was collected from documentary analysis of a written boundary log and from semi-structured interviews. The following sections provide a rationale for the use of these approaches to CIT data collection.

Concluding comments

Where researchers hold the ontological assumption that social reality is constructed as the result of individual cognition and the epistemological assumption that knowledge is based upon experience and so is essentially subjective in nature, their research methodology will be characterised by an inductive and interpretive approach as they seek to understand the way in which an individual interacts with their context. Such an assumption lends itself to idiographic research that focuses upon the relationship between the individual and their context and furthermore suggests the use of a case study approach to data collection. Interpretive approaches to theory generation might be criticised by those who would argue that the theoretical claims to knowledge that are derived from an interpretive approach are not grounded in existing theory and are therefore dismissed as being nothing more than anecdotal commentary (Nisbet and Watt, 1984). However, Yin (1984) argues that analytical generalisation is an appropriate method of generating theories where previously developed theories are used as a template against which one can compare the empirical results of the case studies. Where multiple-case studies are employed, this approach lends itself to establishing a resonance across studies where shared meaning and collective understanding will contribute toward the construction and illumination of new theoretical perspectives upon the socialisation of newly appointed primary headteachers.

Section 3: Research design

Research design and methods of data collection

The purpose of the following section is to establish the research design and the methods of

data collection, demonstrating how these will address the research questions. Principal amongst academic criticism is that at worst, case studies are unsystematic and lack rigour rendering data from such research to be the logically weakest method of knowing (Smith, 1991). The following section will demonstrate that such critiques, whilst well-rehearsed, can be countered through robust research design.

Research design

The research design for the current project allows for data to be drawn from seven new primary headteachers and

their organisational contexts at key points during the first year of socialisation and further into the first three years of headship, the point at which it is generally agreed that 'early headship' socialisation comes to an end (Brighouse and Woods, 1999; Fidler and Atton, 2004). In total, 22 critical incident vignettes were collected from the headteachers. The research was designed in three phases using semi-structured interview and document analysis of a written account of socialising incidents recorded in a 'boundary log'. There were three phases as follows: In phase one, five headteachers were interviewed after they had been in post for six months and the researcher analysed data recorded in his boundary log during the same six month period. In phase two a new headteacher was interviewed monthly during his first year in post. In phase three, the researcher's boundary log in which he recorded significant incidents during the first three years of his incumbency was analysed. The data was collected as critical incident vignettes and was interpreted from a role boundary perspective in order to identify key socialising influences and their impact upon the configuration of the headteacher's role boundary. Finally, the interpretations of the data were analysed from a role boundary perspective in order to identify robust themes to inform theory building. The research activity in the three phases in detail is as follows:

Phase 1 research *(September 2006 – July 2007)* involved conducting interviews with five headteachers. Interviews took place after the individuals had been in post for six months. Critical incident vignettes were also drawn from the author's own documented experiences during the same period during which time the author maintained a written boundary log that recorded his experiences of significant events during the socialisation process.

Phase 1 data analysis *(July 2007 – September 2008)* involved the detailed analysis of interview data and scrutiny of the researcher's own boundary log to identify socialising influences and key emergent themes.

Phase 2 research *(September 2008 – July 2009)* involved a further detailed case study of a new headteacher from shortly after the time he took up post until the end of his first academic year. The headteacher was interviewed approximately monthly. The data was analysed to provide a detailed account of the nature of critical incidents in the first year of a new headteacher's incumbency whilst the researcher continued to maintain his own boundary log of critical incidents. The purpose of phase two was to allow for the collection of further critical incident vignettes and from a single individual in order to obtain rich contextual data.

Phase 2 data analysis *(August 2009 – December 2009)* data from interviews and the researcher's own boundary log were analysed.

Phase 3 research *(February 2006 – July 2009)* involved the researcher continuing to maintain a boundary log of critical incidents that recorded critical incidents from the first three years of early headship socialisation.

Phase 3 data analysis *(January 2010 – January 2011)* the data from all three phases of research were collated and received a further analysis from a role boundary perspective.

Writing up *(February 2011 – February 2012)* key emergent themes and main findings were identified and the thesis written.

The case study participants

The five respondents who were interviewed during phase one were drawn from a new headteacher's focus group that formed within a local authority in the academic year 2006-2007. The focus group was organised and facilitated by local authority officers from the education department. All the participants in the focus group had been appointed to their first headship and had taken up their post in September 2006. There were ten individuals in the focus group, including the researcher, which was composed by the local authority as a means of networking and providing peer to peer support. The focus group was the first of its kind in the authority and was born out the authority's wish to ensure that all ten new headteachers would receive the necessary mutual peer and authority support mechanisms. Of the ten

individuals, nine were newly appointed within the primary sector and one headteacher had been appointed to a special school for children between the ages of eight and 16 years.

Following an overview of the research the local authority facilitators agreed to allow the researcher to make a verbal presentation to the focus group in October 2006. The presentation provided a synopsis of his research aim, its methods and an invitation for all members of the focus group to become participants in the study. Six headteachers agreed to participate in the study and agreed to be interviewed after they had been in post for six months. However, one individual later withdrew from the research before the interviews took place. Therefore, five new headteachers were interviewed.

In all five interviews took place with the new headteachers in the months of February and March 2007 in order to collect critical incident data pertaining to the first six months of early headship. An analysis of the incidents recorded in the researcher's boundary log also took place in February 2007 making an initial data set drawn from six new headteachers. An initial analysis of the data drawn from the first round of interviews suggested the suitability of the research design, and specifically the use of role boundary perspective as a theoretical framework for analysis.

The following table provides a synopsis of all of the participant's contextual information. For the purpose of clarity, the Ofsted column states the school's overall judgement of its effectiveness at its last full section 5 inspection. It is included as a method of externally auditing the provision of the school to which the new headteacher had been appointed as a means of demonstrating that the school context did not present an unusually high degree of challenge for the new headteacher, such as if it were to be placed in 'Special Measures', for example. In 2006 Ofsted awarded four categories of judgement when inspecting schools. They were:

- Outstanding
- Good
- Satisfactory
- Unsatisfactory (leading to a 'Notice to Improve' or 'Special Measures')

Schools that are judged to be 'Unsatisfactory' are issued with either a 'Notice to Improve' or will be placed in Ofsted's 'Special Measures' category. These are schools that are considered to be failing in the sense that they have been judged to provide an inadequate quality of educational provision. Consequently, they are schools that are subject to intense monitoring by the local education authority, Ofsted and Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI). Arguably, a

headteacher appointed to a school that has been issued with a 'Notice to Improve' or one that has been placed in 'Special Measures' would be subject to an unusually high degree of scrutiny and more so than a newly appointed headteacher appointed to a school that was not in such a situation. Indeed, the intensity of regular monitoring visits and the need to construct and implement challenging targets for improvement working within what would arguably be a very difficult organisational context following an 'Unsatisfactory' judgement would suggest that the experience of socialisation for a new headteacher in such a situation would be considerably different to those that are not. Therefore, to ensure a degree of consistency in the current research all the participants that took part were taking up their first headship in a school that had been judged 'Satisfactory' or 'Good' in its last Ofsted inspection. Of course, to research the experiences of new headtechers appointed to schools that have been judged 'Unsatisfactory', or indeed the experiences of those headteachers appointed to schools that are judged to be 'Outstanding' would be of particular interest and would provide an interesting comparison with the data contained in the current research project. Such a comparison would constitute an interesting area for future research.

Table 4.1: The research participant's contextual information

Code	Gender	Age in years	Years of teaching Experience	Number of pupils in current school	Location	Current school's most recent Ofsted inspection judgement
Matt	Male	31	10	220	Urban; town	Good
Karl	Male	36	12	220	Urban; town	Satisfactory
Ben	Male	38	15	350	Urban; town	Good
Eric	Male	39	18	180	Urban; city	Good
Cathy	Female	36	14	210	Urban; city	Satisfactory
Paul	Male	45	20	371	Urban; city	Satisfactory
Graham	Male	46	22	121	Rural; village	Good

Whilst Matt (the researcher) maintained his boundary log of socialising incidents during his first three years as a headteacher, Karl was interviewed using a semi structured format approximately each month during his first year in post. The remaining headteachers were also

interviewed following a semi-structured approach on one occasion and after they had been in post for six months.

Having provided an initial outline of the research design and the research participants it is now necessary to provide a more detailed discussion and critique of the methods of data collection and its analysis.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

The purpose of the data collection was to record evidence of each respondent's experience as a new headteacher through their recollection of critical incidents during their incumbency. Two main methods of data collection were used in the research. These were document analysis and semi-structured interview (Cohen et al., 2000). Each is discussed below in order to provide a more detailed account and critique.

Document Analysis

The researcher maintained a 'boundary log' of critical incident experiences during his first three years in post. The purpose of the boundary log was to capture a detailed account of socialising incidents that included the actions and feelings of the headteacher in relation other individuals in each case. The log was not kept as a diary and therefore does not contain daily records of interactions and experiences of a lesser degree but rather was used as a tool to record those events that were critical in the sense that they were experienced as emotionally powerful incidents and were therefore considered to have been significant points during socialisation. Therefore, by their very nature these critical incidents contain details of the researcher's actions, feelings and perceptions at a specific point in time which could then be recorded as critical incident vignettes and then analysed from a role boundary perspective in order to gain insights into the socialisation process of new headteachers.

Critique of document analysis

Document analysis is often critiqued on the basis that the documents available may be limited or partial and that the researcher may be selective in their use thereby obscuring the analysis. Further, it is possible that the documents for analysis have been written for a purpose other

than for the purpose of the research which create bias and distortions in the analysis. A further disadvantage of document analysis is that it is difficult to assess causal relationships in documents, that is to say that it is not always possible to ascertain if the document is the cause or the result of the phenomena that is being analysed. Such a distinction is of course critical in assuring the credibility of subsequent theory building (Cohen et al., 2000).

Documents are also subject to both external and internal criticism (Cohen, et al., 2000). External criticism is concerned with establishing the authenticity of the data. That is to say that it is important to be able to confirm the identity of the author. Moreover, having established the authenticity of a document it should then be subject to an internal critique (Maxwell, 1992). Here, a document is analysed to establish if the data contained therein is accurate, trustworthy and therefore credible. Having established the credibility of the document it is then important to consider how the data is synthesised by the researcher in terms of ensuring that the interpretation of the account is neither too neutral, nor too embellished or makes claims to knowledge that cannot be substantiated by weight of further evidence. Thus, in addition to establishing the authenticity of a document the availability of documentary evidence, problems in sampling and of inference and interpretation are further critiques (Platt, 1981).

Response to the critique of document analysis

Whilst there are a number of critiques that can be justly applied as objections to document analysis the approach nevertheless remains an appropriate method of data collection within the context of the current research. Firstly, document analysis is reliant upon the collection and scrutiny of recorded accounts. As such, it is possible to identify two sources of documentary evidence; primary and secondary material. Primary sources of data are considered to be the preferred approach to the collection of data given its direct link to the events or the objects that it describes (Hill and Kerber, 1967; cited from Cohen et al., 2000). Such an example of a primary source within the context of the current research would be the researcher's personal boundary log underlining its value as a primary method of data collection. Secondly, it is possible to identify the author of the document and further that the author had written the document for the purpose of the research itself. Therefore, the accounts recorded in the researcher's boundary log are narrative texts that include an account of events and the researcher's personal response to them at that time. Such an approach

provides rich, authenticated, primary sourced contextual data for an analysis from a role boundary perspective.

Semi-structured interviews with headteachers

The research interview itself has been defined as:

> *"A two person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information and focussed by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction or explanation."*
>
> (*Cannell and Kahn, 1968, p.527*)

In total five headteachers were interviewed in the first round of interviews (i.e. after their having been in substantive post for 6 months). The main purpose of the semi-structured interviews with headteachers was to elicit answers to the research questions. In particular, headteacher respondents were asked to 'tell, explain and describe' their experiences of socialisation in relation to their interactions with key stakeholders and these were recorded by the researcher as critical incident vignettes. Headteachers were asked to reflect upon each incident in terms of the events preceding, during and immediately after the incident and to explain and describe their perceptions of the impact the incident had upon their own socialisation and the broader organisation. Headteachers were asked to consider the animating influences that lay behind the incident and the limit or otherwise of their own involvement in and control over the incident at each stage. The purpose here was to ascertain headteacher's perceptions, feelings and understanding of the socialisation process as well as their perceived and actual involvement and control over those processes.

Design of the interview schedule

A number of considerations underpinned the rationale for the design of the interview schedule. The first consideration was to ensure that the data collected from interviews were not coloured by respondent's attempts to provide a 'certain kind' of response to questions, perhaps, for example, the response that they felt was most appropriate given the researcher's aims (Cohen et al., 2000). Therefore, respondents were not informed of the research aims but were provided with the broader purpose of the research. Participants were advised that the

purpose of the research was to learn more of the processes involved in the socialisation of new headteachers and further that the reason for the interviews was to gather data about the experiences of beginning headship from headteachers themselves. At no point were respondents asked to "think about and relate critical incidents" and the researcher was careful to avoid using the term 'critical incident' before or during interviews. Similarly, respondents were not informed of the critical incidents that the researcher was hoping to collect and so were not in a position to intentionally report highly coloured or sensationalised accounts of their experiences to meet the expectations of the researcher.

The interview schedule was designed to enable respondents to offer their own perceptions as to the events that were for each of them 'critical incidents' (A copy of the interview schedule can be found in Appendix 1). Such an approach minimised the impact of researcher bias (Oppenheim, 1992) by removing an element of suggestion from the interview questions. Here, the intention was to construct an interview schedule that allowed the flexibility to explore the whole nature of the experience of socialisation by enabling the researcher and the respondent to explore the dynamics of moving into headship. The rationale behind the design of the interview schedule was thus to:

- Put respondents at ease
- Provide general opportunities to explore their experience of the socialising process
- To drill down into specific incidents when they are identified
- To ensure respondent validation when a 'critical incident' was reported

The questions used in the interview schedule used a 'tell, explain, describe' format (Moston and Engelberg, 1993). Respondents were asked to 'tell me about,...', 'can you explain how/why that happened,...?' and 'can you describe how that made you feel,...?'. Additionally, and importantly, researcher bias was reduced and the validity of the research data increased through the use of respondent validation. The interview schedule therefore used four stages to structure the interview schedule. These were to:

1. Elicit a series of incidents as responses to direct questions (i.e. 'tell me about,...')
2. Respondent validation (i.e. 'Am I correct in thinking that this was a significant incident,...?')
   If 'yes', then proceed to stages three and four.
3. Encourage respondents to explain, from their perspective, the nature and cause of the incidents they are reporting (i.e. 'can you explain how/why that happened,...?')

4. Ensure that respondents emotional reactions to the incident was captured ('can you describe how that made you feel,...?)

Respondent validation was used at stage two to check that the researcher had correctly identified a significant incident. Where respondents identified an incident, either by direct declaration or indirectly through the use of emotive language, during stage 1 (i.e. the 'tell me about' stage) the researcher checked that the incident was indeed a significant moment in the early experience of the new headteacher (i.e. by asking 'Am I correct in thinking that this was a significant incident,...?'). If the headteacher reported that the incident was indeed of importance to them, and so to their socialisation, the researcher then proceeded on to stages three and four of questioning. The purpose of stage three (i.e. the 'can you explain how/why that happened,...?') was to gain further contextual data to inform the subsequent analysis of the incident and to ascertain the respondent's view as to how the incident came about (i.e. the 'animating influences'). The purpose of stage four of questioning (i.e. the 'can you describe how that made you feel,...?) was to gain an understanding as to the way in which the incident affected the respondent.

Critique of semi-structured interviews

The reliability of interviews can be undermined by bias, subjectivity, hidden agenda, inaccurate recall of events; giving responses that respondents think the researcher might want to hear or; the interpretation that the researcher places upon the information given (Cohen et al., 2000). In essence, the reliability of data collected through semi-structured interview is reliant upon the extent to which there is a convergence between the researcher's record of events that take place and what actually occurs in practice.

The sources of bias are the characteristics of the interviewer, the characteristics of the respondent and the substantive content of the questions. The nature of bias will be influenced by the attitudes, expectations and limitations of the interviewer and the interviewer's tendency to ask questions to support their own preconceived notions. The question of misunderstandings between interviewer and respondent may lead to inaccuracies in the data set as questions and responses are misunderstood. *"Interviewers and interviewees alike bring their own, often unconscious experiential and biographical baggage with them into the interview situation".* (Cohen et al., 2000; p.121). It is inevitable that interviews are interpersonal interactions during which both the researcher and the respondent will influence the process and so the data collected. Silverman (1993) argues that each respondent should

understand the question in the same way if reliability is to be achieved, although acknowledges that this limits the more open ended interviews where the respondent is encouraged to articulate their own unique account and interpretation of events.

Reliability can also be compromised through the inappropriate use of leading questions. Leading questions are those that make assumptions about the respondent's views and opinions and so effectively put words into the respondent's mouths. Interviewers who approach interviews with the conscious or unconscious intention to uncover responses that will support a preconceived theory or hypothesis thereby bring into question the credibility of those responses.

Credibility does not reside solely in the preparation for and conduct during interview; it extends to the ways in which the data is analysed (Cohen et al., p.125). The credibility of accounts drawn from interviews can be brought into question by selective transcription of the interview material and the interpretation placed upon what has been reported during interview.

Finally, secondary sources of documentary data, such as in the recording of events during semi-structured interview are often deemed inferior due to the errors that occur when an individual passes information to another individual thereby distorting the data and its subsequent analysis (Best, 1970).

Response to the critique of semi-structured interview

To improve control over credibility, whilst encouraging a personal interpretation, the same format of structured questions were used for each respondent. The purpose of such an approach was to elicit data concerning the perceptions of key stakeholders and key events in the socialisation of the headteacher and how they impact upon specific groups within the organisation or the organisation itself. Interviews also used open ended questions to enable the respondent to report personal views and interpretations of key events during the socialisation process.

In order to minimise the impact of researcher bias or incorrect interpretations, throughout the interview the interviewer made use of opportunities for the respondent to comment upon the accuracy of the data recorded by the interviewer and to confirm that accurate information had been captured. The data was then recorded as critical incident vignettes and the researcher

conducted an analysis upon the complete data set from a role boundary perspective. Finally, the researcher ensured that all critical incidents identified were written up and were analysed.

Member checking

It is important that methods of data collection are robust and that researchers can demonstrate that the data collected is valid. One such method of ensuring methodological rigour is member checking (Creswell and Miller, 2000). The value of using such an approach lies in its facility to ensure the systematic verification of data through the triangulation of accounts drawn from the unit of research (i.e. in the research reported here, the headteacher) and other members of the organisation (i.e. other stakeholders within the school community). However, despite its methodological rigour member checking was not used to corroborate the accuracy of the headteachers' accounts for the reasons explained immediately below.

Firstly, the rationale that underpins the decision not to use member checking is drawn from the aims and purpose of the research. Specifically, the purpose of the research reported here is to analyse the process of socialisation as headteachers themselves experience it. Therefore, any attempt to triangulate the details of any reported incident with the account of another individual will not yield further data as to the way in which the headteacher experienced the event given that other individuals cannot possibly know how the headteacher experienced any given incident.

Secondly, I was very concerned to ensure the accuracy of my record and understanding of headteachers' accounts during data collection. I achieved this by using respondent validation (Bloor, 1978) during the interviews. Through the questioning process I validated the accuracy of respondents' factual recount of events to ensure that the data set captured the detail of the incident for analysis. However, it was decided not to use respondent validation to check the interpretation of the incidents themselves. The decision was made based upon the premise that the researcher intended analysing each incident using a conceptual framework that he fully understood. If respondents were asked to comment on the accuracy of the interpretation they may not share the same understanding of the role boundary concept and so their responses may well have coloured the individual interpretation. Similarly, any attempt to engage respondents in the interpretation of the incidents will have introduced the possibility of them analysing their own experiences before reporting them during interviews a process that would arguably distort future data collection. The following section describes in more detail the process of data collection and specifically its recording and its subsequent analysis.

Recording critical incident vignette narratives

During interviews the discussion was recorded using a digital voice recorder. Additionally, and in order to obtain contemporaneous data, the researcher took notes during interviews recording key pieces of information such as the times of key points in discussions to refer to when analysing the narrative captured with the digital voice recorder, respondents' key words and phrases, their body language and emerging themes and ideas. The notes were then reviewed alongside the digital recording of the interview and key events, and subsequently key quotes, were drawn from each incident as it was reported during the interview. The researcher then used the information to write a narrative of events that formed the critical incident vignette. The construction of critical incident narratives drawn from the researcher's boundary log was revised in order to present the critical incident narrative in the third as opposed to the first person. Where quotes are used in the text they have been drawn from the boundary log. Where the researcher has had to add information for the purpose of clarity inserts have been identified by squared brackets (i.e. [ ]).

The maximum period of time that elapsed between a critical incident taking place and it being reported by the headteacher was six months. This was in the case of the respondents in phase one who were interviewed after having been in post for six months as they reported incidents from their early weeks and months in post. In phase two, the researcher interviewed a new headteacher approximately monthly and so the period of time that had elapsed between the incident and it's reporting at interview was at most a month (i.e. approximately four weeks). The researcher himself kept a written log of incidents from his own experience of headship that he termed his boundary log. Here, critical incidents were recorded as quickly as possible after the event. Where possible, records were made on the day of the incident. In total, there were three phases of research. After each, the data was formed into a critical incident vignette and subsequently was analysed from a role boundary perspective. Therefore, the production of the critical incident vignettes and their subsequent analysis took place at the three distinct points set out in the current section and after each of the three phases of research. However, as the researcher developed his understanding of, and as he became more familiar with, analysing the critical incident vignettes from a role boundary perspective, he recognised that in the third and final phase of analysis he would need to revisit his work in analysing the previous data in phases 1 and 2 in order to provide a more robust analysis.

There was no selective use of specific critical incident vignettes. The researcher recorded and analysed all the incidents reported by respondents from a role boundary perspective and therefore chapter 5 contains all of the research data set. The purpose of presenting all of the

critical incident narratives for analysis was to ensure that the research was not unduly biased by researcher selectivity therefore reducing the possibility of the researcher influencing the research findings (Gabriel, 1999). Given the importance of collecting factually accurate accounts of contemporaneous events it was important to ensure that the research design ensured that methods of data collection recorded factually accurate accounts by using respondent validation of the records made by the researcher during interviews. These accounts, recorded as critical incident vignettes, were then analysed using a new conceptual framework based upon the specific and unique perspective of the role boundary providing robust interpretive criteria that can be applied to the data in order to elicit new insights into headteacher socialisation.

Analysing critical incidents using the role boundary perspective framework

Each critical incident was analysed using a role boundary perspective. The narrative accounts were interpreted in order to identify how the specific behaviours of the individuals involved were influencing events and the ultimate outcome of each incident. The interpretations were then analysed in chapter 6 in order to gain a better understanding of the socialisation of new headteachers by identifying common themes from a role boundary perspective thereby suggesting the heuristic value of applying a role boundary perspective to the socialisation of new headteachers.

Concluding comments

The research used semi-structured interviews and documentary evidence in the form of a boundary log as the methods of data collection. The purpose of using two distinct methods of data collection was to provide an authentic and trustworthy account of headteacher socialisation that would allow for a robust analysis of critical incident vignettes from a role boundary perspective. Information was referred back to respondents during interview to ensure factual accuracy of the incident and to ensure the credibility and dependability of the data. All critical incidents were analysed from a role boundary perspective and as a result chapter 5 contains the full data set drawn from the research. The analysis focused upon the ways in which the behaviours of individuals influenced events during each critical incident.

Section 5: Ethical Integrity

Ethical considerations

Conducting case study research carries with it a number of ethical concerns. In this section, I outline the key considerations and the steps taken to provide rigorous ethical standards when carrying out case study research.

The research adhered to BERA ethical standards at each process of the research process. Permission was sought and granted by the respondents to participate in the research prior to embarking upon data collection. In order that participants could make an informed consent they were provided with an overview of the purpose, research procedures and ethical guidelines that will be used. Informed consent was given and subject confidentiality was respected.

Informed consent

In order to conduct the multiple case study research it was necessary to obtain the consent and co-operation of the participants. The principle of informed consent arises from the subject's right to freedom and self-determination. Informed consent is defined by Diener and Crandall (1978) as:

> *"the procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions."*
>
> (*in Cohen* et al., *2000, p.51*).

However, Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992) consider that informed consent should not be an absolute prerequisite of all social science research. Although desirable, it is not absolutely necessary where no danger or risk to participants is involved. The greater the risk to participants, the greater becomes the obligation to obtain informed consent. Diener and Crandall (1978) define the four elements of informed consent as being competence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension. Competence implies the participant's ability to make correct decisions based on the facts provided; voluntarism ensures that participants have the option to participate in the research or not; full information implies that the

participants consent is fully informed; and comprehension ensures that participants fully understand the nature and purpose of the research project.

In the context of a multiple case study research design the four elements of informed consent identified by Diener and Crandall (1978) were met during a preliminary meeting with a new headteacher induction group where the purpose of the research was outlined. The research aim and the research design, methods and procedures were explained and there was an opportunity for potential participants to seek clarification. It was explained that the findings of the research would form the basis for doctoral study and that some detail would be published nationally in a separate report by the National College for School Leadership. Participants were informed that a copy of the report and thesis would be made available to all respondents upon request. Following the preliminary meeting six of the ten members of the new headteacher induction group agreed to participate in the research although a further headteacher withdrew from the research before having been interviewed. The final number of participants was therefore reduced to six including the researcher himself. It was also made clear that participants had the right to withdraw their consent and to discontinue their participation in the research at any stage without prejudice or explanation.

Anonymity and confidentiality

The principle of anonymity is to ensure that it is not possible to identify participants or individual contexts through the information provided by them and therefore the obligation to protect the anonymity of research participants and to keep research data confidential is all-inclusive (Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1992). The nature of conducting face-to-face semi-structured interviews makes anonymity impossible, although confidentiality was assured. Where quotes have been used in the main body of text participants are referred to using pseudonyms with the exception of the researcher, Matt. Where it was possible to identify transferable themes, evidence was collated and presented together so removing the dissemination of personalised information (Cohen et al., 2000).

Insider research

The subject of insider academic research has received relatively little attention in analyses of the nature of and approaches to organisational research (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). The

following section provides an explanation and critique of insider research and also explains the ways in which the current research has addressed those critiques, most notably those concerned with objectivity and validity.

Insider research has been defined as:

> *"research by complete members of organizational systems and communities in and on their own organizations, in contrast to organizational research that is conducted by researchers who temporarily join the organization for the purposes and duration of the research".*
>
> *(Adler and Adler, 1987, in Brannick and Coghlan, 2007, p.59)*

Insider research is often criticised as being problematic as the researcher is too close to that which is to be researched and so has an emotional stake in the outcomes of the study (Anderson and Herr, 1999; Alvesson, 2003). Here, the critique is fundamentally concerned with the researchers proximity to the setting in which the research is to be conducted and their ability to attain a suitable distance from events to enable them to be objective and so produce valid data. In the context of discussing funded qualitative research, Morse (1998) makes the following point:

> *"It is not wise for an investigator to conduct a qualitative study in a setting where he or she is already employed and has a work role. The dual roles of investigator and employee are incompatible, and they may place the researcher in an untenable position."*
>
> *(Morse, 1998, p.61)*

Whilst the current research is not a funded project, and so is different from Morse's criticism in that sense, it is nevertheless the case that the researcher's own involvement in the research study as both a headteacher and as a headteacher researching within his own school context might be considered problematic.

In the context of the current research, the following issues have been identified. Firstly, the researcher was interviewing peers, new headteachers who were in the same position as he was, and as such it would be reasonable to suppose that certain difficulties may arise. For

example, there is the ethical consideration of gathering sensitive information at what is a challenging and difficult time in a new headteacher's career. Secondly, it was important to recognise that participant responses might be influenced by their need to project a positive view of their school and their experiences of that context to a colleague headteacher in a similar situation. However, and conversely, the advantage of conducting this research as an insider researcher was that of collegiality within the context of a professional support group where discussions were open and unguarded as a prerequisite of joining at the outset. Thirdly, the researcher was especially aware that in researching his own context his data might be critiqued for not being suitably objective in the sense that it might be unduly coloured by his knowledge of the school leading to suggestions that the data set might not be valid.

The literature, however, is not so clear in its rejection of insider research. Specifically, it would seem that it is important to make distinctions between the ontological and the epistemological foundations of the research project, suggesting that insider research might be more or less appropriate depending upon the research paradigm that is being adopted (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). The current research adopts an interpretivist epistemology and therefore is considered to be a part of the hermeneutic tradition. Such an approach argues that there is no single knowable external social reality and that therefore the researcher is an integral part of the research as he will interpret the interpretations of others. It follows that by definition the researcher cannot sit outside of the research and is in fact necessarily an unavoidably a participant themsleves.

The hermeneutic tradition understands social reality by interpreting the meanings held by the social actors or members of the social group. This involves entering into the culture, understanding shared values, speaking the culture's language, and so on. The researcher is an engaged participant whose critical and analytic observation of the culture is integral to the research activity. Successful practice is the result of personal knowledge, judgment, and experimental action. In the words of Susman and Evered (1978):

> *"Appropriate action is not based on knowledge of the replication of previously observed relationships between actions and outcomes. It is based on knowing how particular actors define their present situations or on achieving consensus on defining situations so that planned actions will produce their intended consequences".*
>
> *(Susman and Evered, 1978, p. 590)*

The importance of individual experience within the current research would suggest that the central focus for data collection should upon capturing data that records critical incidents as they are defined and as they are experienced by headteachers themselves. In that sense, the research is concerned with the experiences of individuals and how they impact upon their emerging role boundary. The focus is upon the headteacher and not the organisation. In terms of insider research it is therefore important to ensure reflexivity. Reflexivity is the concept used to explore and deal with the relationship between the researcher and the object of research. It is the very closeness of the insider researcher to their research context that leads to critiques of objectivity and validity. Indeed, when insider researchers combine their normal organisational membership role with an additional role of researcher it can be difficult and can become confusing (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). They may, for example, experience the challenge of a contrasting role duality (i.e. their organisational role as headteacher influences their role as a researcher and vice versa). However, it would seem that when the unit of research is the organisational role of the researcher themselves and how their individual experiences are felt by that individual, there can be little confusion. Here, the researcher is concerned with capturing their own experiences as they undertake their work in role therefore reducing the potential impact of holding a dual role. Furthermore, in the current research reflexivity is achieved by utilising an interpretive framework, that of role boundary, to provide distance between the researcher as headteacher and the object of the research, to understand and explain the socialisation of new headteachers.

Section 6: Limitations of the research design

The research design included two instruments for collecting data: semi-structured interview and document analysis, specifically a boundary log kept by the researcher, Matt. The purpose was to provide trustworthy data which could be analysed for key emergent themes to illuminate the aims of the research. The aims of the current research are to:

1. analyse the socialisation of new primary headteachers from a role boundary perspective.
2. test the suitability of the role boundary concept as a rigorous, theoretical and methodological tool that can be applied to researching the field of headteacher socialisation.

In common with all research, there were a number of research design limitations. These are described below.

Addressing balance in the use of data collection instruments

Specifically, it might be argued that the research design may have required the headteachers from phase one to have kept a boundary log for twelve months in addition to them being interviewed. This may have improved the research by having further longitudinal data drawn from a small number of case studies. However, the research design consciously chose not to request that headteachers keep a boundary log on ethical grounds. It was felt that maintaining a detailed written record of socialising incidents was an unrealistic and unreasonable request to make of headteachers as they take up a new and challenging post. Participants were, however, encouraged to make notes of critical events to act as an aide memoire during interview.

Concluding comments

The purpose of chapter 4 has been to explain in full detail the research that was undertaken and to provide a rationale and critique of the research design and research method. Whilst I recognise the limitations of the research design I would argue that these have not compromised the overall integrity of the research and its findings because the data drawn from each phase of research is analysed in a consistent manner, using a conceptual analytical framework based upon the notion of role boundary in order to identify recurrent themes in the socialisation process. Semi-structured interview and document analysis ensured credible and dependable accounts through respondent validation. The significance of using a critical incident approach to data collection, as it is understood and is used in the current research project, is that critical incidents are themselves deemed to be self-significant moments in an individual's socialisation and so are by definition considered to be credible and dependable for that very reason alone.

The use of a multiple case study analysis of these critical incidents will enable the researcher to understand the types of socialising influences that impact upon the socialisation of new headteachers. Trustworthy interpretations with regards to the impact of the incidents upon the new headteacher's experience of their socialisation will be achieved through an interpretation of the data from a role boundary perspective. Finally, the identification of recurrent themes through a synchronic analysis of contemporaneous data will strengthen any claims to the generation of new explanatory theories and original knowledge. Whilst I am confident that my research will present a reliable account of the socialisation process from a role boundary perspective, and further that my research will enable future theorising, I

acknowledge and accept that a greater richness could be obtained by broadening the research design so that it might address the research limitations outlined above.

Chapter 5

Data Analysis: Interpretation of Socialising Incidents

Introduction

The purpose of chapter 5 is to describe and interpret the data drawn from critical incidents from a role boundary perspective. The chapter is structured in such a way that the critical incidents reported by each headteacher are grouped and analysed together. Each headteacher is introduced by way of a contextual narrative that provides information about their route to headship and their school context. Each critical incident account begins with a narrative of events and is followed by an interpretation of those events from a role boundary perspective. Due to the complexity of some of the events contained in the data I have, for some of the vignettes, provided a context section preceding the vignette narrative itself. It is hoped that the context will enable the reader to gain a richer insight into the animating influences that have led to each critical incident as it is reported in the vignette.

The critical incidents reported by each headteacher are analysed in such a way as to allow for an understanding of the socialisation of new headteachers over time. The time categories were chosen to represent the existing theoretical understanding of the timeframes that are described as early headship. These were discussed in the introduction and in the literature review. I have included a further category for analysis, that of a period of 'pre-incumbency'; a period following an individual's appointment but before they have taken up their substantive post. The purpose of introducing a further category for analysis is to allow for a broader analytical scope to the research that would aim to understand the immediacy of the socialising process. Thus, the categories for analysis used in the data analysis are:

- pre incumbency
- during the first 6 months in post
- during the period up to and including the first 12 months in post
- the first 3 years in post

The following 22 vignettes and interpretations represent the full data set drawn from the research. There has not been any selective reporting of critical incident vignettes.

Case Study 1

Matt – the researcher

Matt is a male in his early thirties. He has ten years of experience in primary education, four being in a junior school. The headship he has just taken up is that of an average sized primary school, having approximately 220 pupils, and is situated in the south west of England. The school serves a predominantly white British community and social housing indicators suggest that the area is in line with the national economic average. In 2004, the previous Ofsted inspection had judged the school to be 'Good' with some very good features, a view shared by the local education authority who had graded the school as 'Category 1', the highest category indicating that the school required little or no support from the school's advisory team. The previous headteacher had been in post for 23 years during which time the school had gained a strong reputation for a 'traditional' approach to schooling based upon achieving high standards of academic attainment, smart presentation and strict discipline. As the only denominational choice in the town the school had developed strong links with the local parish church. The school was heavily oversubscribed with 73 applications for 30 places in its Reception Class in the previous academic year. Staffing levels were very stable with 8 of 11 teachers having taught at the school for over 10 years. Matt recognised the strengths of the school; *"The school is good and should be even better. There are some fundamental systems missing that need to be introduced to make that difference and take the school forward."* However, the new headteacher was clear that the school had an established working culture that might make directly imposed change difficult to implement. Matt had recognised that the school favoured a democratic approach to decision making in which teachers were the decision makers and with decisions being made in staff meetings. Matt noted that:

> *"Georgina* [the previous headteacher] *was considered by parents and the local* [education] *authority to be very much an autocrat – you didn't mess with her – if she said jump, you'd say 'how high?' But the reality was that the deputy* [headteacher] *and the teaching staff took most of the decisions as a group and not the head*[teacher]*. Her role was more to rubber stamp the majority decision."*

Matt recognised that authority to make decisions about the working practices of the school was restricted to the teaching staff and that there was a sense of hierarchy in which teachers were considered to be 'above' other colleagues in decision making terms, such as teaching assistants or office staff. Matt's opinion was that such a working culture would view any

attempt by the new headteacher to directly implement change without the general agreement of the teaching staff to be hostile in nature.

<u>Pre Incumbency Vignettes</u>

Vignette 1: Impromptu staff meeting before taking up post

The incident took place during an informal visit to the school during which the new headteacher was to meet the staff and children and to take a tour of the school. During the visit Matt held an impromptu conversation with the deputy headteacher who told him that, "*the staff* [teachers] *wanted to meet with me after school to discuss a few issues and concerns they have about September"*. The new headteacher reported that he had been made to feel very anxious by the unexpected request and recorded the conversation in his boundary log. He noted that:

> *"I explained that I would be prepared to do this, but also that as I was not expecting it* [the meeting*], coupled with my lack of knowledge of the school, I didn't really expect it to be particularly productive."*

Matt reported that the cause of his considerable anxiety lay in his opinion that the conflation of his, "*lack of knowledge of the school"* and his lack of experience in role would compromise his decision making ability.

Matt wrote that he had decided that it would be necessary for him to demonstrate that it was he who would decide upon the content of the meeting and the subsequent decisions that might be taken and was most concerned that he should portray himself as being confident and decisive. In his boundary log Matt noted his actions:

> *"Before the meeting began I sat down and introduced myself once again, restating how much I was looking forward to working with everyone. I also took the opportunity to make it very clear that I would not be able to make any substantial decisions that day and so people should not expect me to. Rather, I saw the meeting as nothing more than an informal chat, and said so.*"

However, Matt reported quickly realising that individual members of staff clearly had an agenda for the meeting and made reference to the intensity of the exchanges between teaching staff in his boundary log: *"during the meeting several issues came to light which had*

clearly been bubbling away under the surface". The first was the question of what to do with an undesignated classroom space that staff clearly felt had been under-utilised for some time. Matt noted that, *"everyone had a different view as to how it might be used and the discussion quickly became very intense, if good natured*". At this point, Matt reported feeling that the meeting was, *"getting away from him"* and further realised that it was inevitable that a member of staff would ask for his opinion on the matter. Matt recalled that:

> "*I was asked my opinion* [as to the designation of the spare classroom]*, at which point I said that this was clearly an important issue, and so one that needed due thought and consideration. I told them that I was not prepared to commit to an opinion at that stage."*

The discussion then moved on. Staff requested that the new headteacher might designate the first day of the new school year as an INSET day. Matt recorded his response:

> *"The other request that emerged was the question of an INSET day on the first day of the Autumn term. This was something that I had considered and was going to propose. It seemed to me to be a sensible idea, given that for the first time in a number of years, school was due to start on a Monday, making the first week a full one. I agreed to the INSET day request and said that I would email an agenda the following week."*

Matt reported leaving school feeling uneasy. Whilst he felt that in being clear and decisive during the meeting he had acted as 'headteacher' he did not enjoy the feeling of being, *"put on the spot"* and felt that his inability to articulate a clear opinion with regard to the designation of space might be perceived as indecision caused by a lack of clarity of thought.

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

The incident is an attempt by the teaching staff to shift the headteacher's role boundary so that aspects of the decision making part of his role falls within their role boundary as it always had done. In requesting an impromptu staff meeting the staff seek to create a setting whereby they would ordinarily discuss school issues and take democratic and corporate decisions about the work of the school (i.e. at a staff meeting with the headteacher as chair). Such a view would suggest that the incident is a significant attempt by the organisation to influence the

headteacher's socialisation and one that seeks to demonstrate to the new headteacher that, "this is how we do things around here."

The request to arrange a meeting with the headteacher is an initial attempt by staff to influence the headteacher's socialisation by demanding when and where they wish decisions to be made (i.e. at staff meetings). The staff request that the headteacher should take an unexpected meeting with them in order to, *"discuss issues and concerns"* requires a response from the headteacher. He may choose to agree to take the meeting or he may not. Taking the decision lies firmly within his role boundary. The headteacher's decision to take the meeting leads to a situation where the staff is afforded an opportunity to attempt to re-position the power to make decisions so that it falls within their role boundary. Matt is clearly anxious about the meeting because he recognises that the decisions taken at the meeting may well prove to be significant in that they have the potential to have a direct impact upon the operation of the school; the re-designation of working space and the allocation of an INSET day.

The headteacher also recognises the importance of the meeting in terms of its impact upon his socialisation. His primary concern appears to be to ensure that he should portray himself as the individual within whose role boundary lay the authority to take the ultimate decisions in school. Firstly, he decides to reject the staff request to re-designate working space stating that he will take a decision on the matter when he has more information and has had more time to consider the options before him. The headteacher's action strengthens his legitimate authority because he chooses to take a decision that lay within his role boundary; he makes it clear to staff that it is he who will decide where and when decisions are to be made (i.e. on his terms). He is then able to demonstrate the ability to make clear decisions when he decides that he will allocate the first day of the new school year as an INSET day. Here, the headteacher's role boundary is clarified and strengthened by his demonstration of legitimate authority in taking the decision.

The First 6 Months in Post

Vignette 2: Informal exclusion of a statemented child

Context

A child in receipt of a 'statement of educational need' is one that experiences significant barriers to their learning and who is therefore working at a level that is well below that

expected of a child of a similar chronological age in literacy and mathematic skills. A 'statemented child' (i.e. a child who is in receipt of a statement of educational need) may also have complex social, emotional and physical needs. Children are awarded their statement by a 'statementing panel'. The statementing panel is made up of a number of multi-agency professionals each of whom has been involved with the child's education and well-being and each of whom present their assessment of the child's needs in their specialist areas. Obtaining a statement of educational need is especially difficult as local education authorities who issue the statements require rigorous and detailed assessment evidence from a number of professionals, and over time, before they decide to award a statement. The funding that is associated with the award of a statement is specifically meant to be used to support the child's needs in order that they might stay within a mainstream school.

Critical Incident Vignette

The headteacher's decision to impose an informal exclusion from school upon a child took place on day one of his incumbency. Matt had inherited a difficult situation upon his appointment regarding a pupil with reportedly serious behaviour and learning difficulties. Matt wrote that:

> *"Georgina* [the previous headteacher] *had put in place an informal afternoon exclusion agreement with the child's parents for the last three weeks of the summer term which is illegal. She told me that her aim was to try to alert the local authority to the child's vulnerability to permanent exclusion because the child had already received two fixed term exclusions in as many years. I think that she* [the previous headteacher] *was trying to help me out in her own way by flagging this issue up with me and the local authority."*

The school had previously undertaken a review of the child's behavioural and educational needs which itself had involved officers from the local authority's specialist behaviour service. The specialist behaviour service was responsible for assessing the child's needs and for advising a statementing panel as to whether or not the child should receive a statement. If the child was to be awarded a statement of over 100 'units' the school would receive additional revenue from the local authority to make suitable provision for the child in school. Acting upon advice from the specialist behaviour service the local authority decided to issue a statement of special educational needs. However, the statementing panel had set the child's allocation at 94

‘units’, falling short of the 100 or more ‘units’ required to trigger any additional funding support from the authority. The school, therefore, had received neither extra funding nor external support from the specialist behaviour service rendering the award of the statement nothing more than a notional title. Georgina (the previous headteacher) had informed Matt that it was her opinion that without the one to one support such external funding could provide the child’s behaviour would eventually become so poor that he would be permanently excluded from school. Georgina had explained that the school could afford to provide one to one support for each morning of the school week but not the afternoons (i.e. one adult would work exclusively with the child each morning but not each afternoon). There had been an unresolved dispute between Georgina and the local authority with regard to funding and Georgina had implemented the informal exclusion arrangement with the agreement of the child’s father, with whom the child lived, on the basis that she could not adequately provide for the child, or the other children, during the afternoon sessions without support funded by the local authority. Georgina had introduced the afternoon exclusions in the summer term of the previous academic year.

Matt was anxious that if he was to readmit the pupil to school on the second day of term (i.e. the following day and day two of his incumbency) he might undo any potential leverage that Georgina may have gained with the local authority from the previous summer term’s (illegal) exclusion. He was also aware that his actions in regard to the matter were being scrutinised by the staff who had made it clear to Matt that without the necessary support the child’s behaviour would put the adults and children of the school at risk. The new headteacher had yet to meet the child and to make his own assessment of need and considered it prudent to maintain the informal exclusion agreement with the child’s parents until such a time as he could review the situation in an informed manner.

Matt decided to contact the parents, who were separated, and requested that the informal agreement to exclude the child from school for afternoon sessions should continue for the short term in order to allow the new headteacher time to appraise the situation. Matt explained that the appraisal would include a discussion with the local authority and that he would make further enquiries in respect of obtaining the 100 units required to release one to one funding for their son on their behalf. Whilst the father agreed to maintain the agreement, the mother did not:

> *“The mother insisted that she was unable to collect him* [her son] *from school after morning sessions because she suffered from agoraphobia and couldn’t get out the house. I asked if there was anyone else who*

> *could collect him. She said no. I was really rattled because I knew that for the staff and for me this was a big deal. However, I was hugely aware that I was treading a very fine line here. Essentially, I was bluffing, didn't really know how far I could go and was hoping for the best really."*

Matt decided to hold his line and insisted that he would not have the child on site without one to one supervision in the afternoons. He insisted that the child's mother would have to organise for someone to collect her son on days when collection was her responsibility. He also insisted that the child would not be allowed on site in the afternoons whilst it remained the case that there was no one to one supervision for him and suggested to the child's mother that social services collect the child and take care of him if she could not do so. He offered to contact social services on her behalf:

> *"I told her that as social services were not currently involved I could call them and they could visit to offer her help with her agoraphobia as well as providing support for the child."*

The child's mother told Matt that this would not be necessary and agreed to find someone to collect her child each day. Matt was pleased that in addition she agreed to attend any subsequent statementing panel meetings that might be required in order to discuss her child's needs.

Matt convened an emergency meeting of the local authority statementing review panel and argued for two technicalities on the award of the child's statement that had been overlooked. The review panel agreed that the child's statement should be permanently increased to over 100 'units' in order to provide full funding for the child's needs. When recording how he felt the staff had perceived his actions Matt noted, *"I think they feel that I did a good job. It was a good outcome all round."*

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

In this critical incident Matt is operating beyond his role boundary. He has no legal right to enforce an informal exclusion and it is clear from his comments that he is seemingly aware of this fact when he writes that he was, *"bluffing"* and that he was, *"hoping for the best".* He recognises that this is a risk and that he may fail in the endeavour. This failure could rebound on him and perhaps undermine his authority in his role as headteacher. The significance of the

incident is further compounded by the range of stakeholders involved. Matt is new to post and from the perspective of the local authority there is no precedent as to how he might act when faced with such a challenge. Secondly, the child's mother is exercising her right to her child receiving an education; a request that legitimately lay within her role boundary as a parent. Thirdly, for the outcome to be successful Matt feels that he is required to attempt to operate beyond his legitimate role boundary by challenging the role boundary of the local authority and the parent.

Matt is satisfied that the critical incident was resolved successfully. He was operating beyond the remit of his own role boundary and so beyond the extent of his authority and was fortunate that the local authority and the parent were not more robust in defending his attempt to re-position his own and their own respective role boundaries. Matt feels that the outcome had strengthened the perception of his own role boundary held by the local authority, his staff and with the parents of the child. The incident appears to be an example of how new headteachers may enhance their perceived authority by operating beyond their normal role boundary but that such a strategy involves significant risk taking. Matt had no legal power to act as he did but through his actions he successfully forces the local authority to make decisions that lay within its role boundary that it very likely would not have made had Matt not taken action of his own. Further, the vignette is an example of the way in which individuals new to the position can experience the immediacy of the pressures of headship in this case given that the experience took place on Matt's first day in post. The outcome might as easily have been as negative as it was by good fortune positive in the sense that the local authority could well have chosen to refuse to allocate more than the 94 units of statement support from their initial review of the pupil's case. Equally, the parent of the child may well have decided to operate within her role boundary and made a formal complaint against the conduct of the headteacher to either the chair of the governing body of the school or to the local authority.

Vignette 3: Parent using car park

Critical Incident Vignette

The incident took place after school when the school secretary and school caretaker had seen a parent driving into the staff car park and parking in one of the designated visitor bays whilst she waited to collect her child from an after school club. Matt was alerted to the parent's action and it was made known to him that:

> *"Both the secretary and the school caretaker made it clear that they felt this was overstepping the mark and that school rules clearly stated that parents were not to use the car park."*

Since taking up post Matt had been required to police the car park on several occasions when parents had been seen to drive onto school grounds to drop off their children before school and after school. He considered his action to be important on two counts:

> *"Firstly, I wanted to demonstrate that I was no pushover and would be as quick to defend the school rules as my predecessor and secondly, I wanted to make sure that there wasn't going to be an accident by ensuring that vehicles were not driving through the very busy main school gates as children and parents were arriving or leaving the school grounds."*

Matt reported having had a great deal of success in changing parents' behaviours in such matters. He felt that parents were, "*trying it on"* with him to see how he would react; would he be as fastidious as his predecessor in insisting that the school rules were observed?

Matt decided to confront the parent in the car park to explain that he wished to maintain a consistency of expectation between his actions and that of his predecessor despite it being 4.30p.m. and so well after school hours. He approached the parent and asked if she could remove her car from the school car park:

> *"Her* [the parent] *response was extremely hostile because she said that she felt unfairly treated. I just told her that I was enforcing a school rule. She said that she had always honoured the school rules when dropping off and collecting her children and if it was my policy that parents could no longer use the car park to collect children from after school clubs, as had always been the case under the previous headteacher, then perhaps I should write to parents notifying them of the change in school policy rather than confronting individuals."*

The parent informed Matt that she would, however, if he wished, remove the vehicle. Matt apologised for his approach. He explained:

> "*that I didn't realise that it had always be an informal agreement that parents use the school car park to collect their children from after school clubs and I asked her to fill me in on the details."*

After the incident, Matt returned to the school where he asked the school secretary and caretaker if there had been a separate agreement about the use of the school car park in respect of collecting children attending after school provision. The secretary and caretaker advised him that the previous headteacher had allowed parents to use the car park and that this was a well observed convenience. Matt asked if this was recorded in school documentation that would be available to parents and was informed that it was not, but the informal arrangement was widely understood by parents. Matt enquired as to why, then, his two colleagues had appeared so concerned about the parent parking in the school car park if this informal agreement had always been the accepted norm and further that if the agreement was widely understood and observed why they felt the need to alert the new headteacher to the matter with such concern. Both staff responded that they felt the arrangement showed inconsistency and that they believed that the previous headteacher should have maintained an absolute policy that restricted parental use of school grounds for parking their vehicles, regardless of the time of day. Matt noted that:

> *"I felt really stupid. I'd basically allowed myself to be used to do something that was on someone else's agenda – not mine. I was also really angry with them* [the school secretary and caretaker]."

He also reported feelings of anxiety over how the incident might be related in the broader school community given that the confrontation was one of his first communications with parents and also one in which Matt himself appeared to be at fault.

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

The school secretary and the caretaker attempt to 'persuade' the headteacher to reprimand the parent by giving him the apparently sound reason that the parent is breaking a well-established rule. Their action is one that would attempt to re-position the headteacher's role boundary and is one that the headteacher accepts when he agrees to take action on their behalf. Arguably, had Matt had full knowledge of the context in which he found himself he would have repelled the attempt to re-position his role boundary. However, his lack of contextual knowledge causes him to allow his colleagues to define his role boundary and in so doing he accepts the suggestion that reprimanding parents in such a context is a legitimate behaviour for him to take as headteacher. When he attempts to reprimand the parent he finds that his action was not applied correctly given the context. That is to say that whilst the headteacher's role boundary does include the legitimate authority to reprimand parents in

certain contexts he should not have attempted reprimanding this parent for having parked where she did and crucially, when she did (i.e. at 4.30p.m. and therefore well after the end of the school day at 3.15p.m.). Thus, the new headteacher has allowed the school secretary and caretaker to decide upon his course of action. The headteacher's attempt to reprimand a parent in such an inappropriate context, such as it was, causes the headteacher to experience the consequences of the parent's anger and the associated feelings of embarrassment.

The confrontation with the parent demonstrates the high stakes nature of successfully re-positioning role boundaries. The parent's anger at being confronted exemplifies the strong sense of injustice that is evoked when an individual who is perceived as having more power exercises their authority inappropriately. However, in offering to remove her vehicle from the premises the parent also accepts, albeit angrily, that the authority to make decisions as to how the school site is managed rests within the headteacher's role boundary. The strong sense of embarrassment experienced by Matt having recognised his mistake, and moreover the frustration and anger that he re-directs at the people he considers responsible for the causes of his mistaken action, are evidence of the intensely emotional nature of role boundary construction and management during socialisation.

Second 6 months

Vignette 4: Headteacher and deputy headteacher conflict

Context

The following critical incident involving the headteacher and deputy headteacher occurred after Matt had completed a particularly difficult performance management review with a member of his teaching staff. Matt had introduced a new system of performance management to the school where none had previously existed. The system required the detailing of specific and measurable targets against which staff would be held accountable for their performance in role. The introduction of a rigorous system of performance management had been viewed negatively by staff who saw its implementation as a lack of trust on the part of the new headteacher that they were in fact doing a good job. During the first weeks of his incumbency Matt had noted in his boundary log that:

> *"Performance management, per se, doesn't really happen. People have been given a couple of 'targets' but these were never reviewed.*

> *People are not being held to account. Pay progressions go forward without evidence to support them and are nevertheless still awarded."*

Matt recognised that the new procedures that he had introduced for setting and reviewing performance targets was challenging for staff and that not all staff had accepted the change to a structured system and an increased level of accountability. Matt recorded an initial discussion that he had with a member of teaching staff in the early weeks of his incumbency having just introduced the new system:

> *"Performance Management: had a difficult conversation with 'X'* [a class teacher] *today. She told me that in more than 20 years at* [our school] *she had never known or needed such a detailed and tough system of performance management driven from the top. I explained that things had moved on a lot during that time and that it was now expected that schools would have a rigorous system in place. She said that no other school required so much of their teachers and that she had shown the sample performance management grid to a friend who was a deputy head in another school. Apparently, the deputy head told her that the grid was 'laughable' and 'unnecessary'."*

Matt reported feeling very frustrated by teacher 'X's actions, and somewhat hurt by the comments, but nevertheless decided to go ahead and implement the proposed changes to the performance management system.

Critical Incident Vignette

It was February and the time to undertake an in year review of each individual's progress toward their targets. Following the review of teacher 'X's targets the teacher had apparently left Matt's office feeling very upset. Matt was unaware that teacher 'X' felt this way. The teacher complained about her treatment to the deputy headteacher, a colleague who had also worked with teacher 'X' at the school for over 20 years, who in turn decided to speak with Matt.

The deputy headteacher chose to discuss the matter with Matt immediately after lunch break had ended that day. The matter was addressed in the staff room where a School Meals Supervisory Assistant (SMSA), who was also a parent of a child on roll, was collecting her belongings before leaving for the day. Matt was not expecting the deputy headteacher's

subsequent outburst which ended abruptly when the deputy headteacher left the room.

> *"Really angry with 'P' today* [the deputy headteacher]. *She vented a tirade at me in front of Mrs 'H'* [the SMSA] *accusing me of 'marmalising'(!!) 'X' during her performance management review. She said that I had really upset her because I had insinuated that she had not made any progress toward achieving her targets since September. Then she stormed out!"*

Matt immediately confronted the deputy headteacher who apologised for the incident. Matt made the point that the SMSA was an audience to her outburst and expressed concern as to how the professional relationship between Matt and the deputy headteacher might have been portrayed. The deputy offered to go back to the staff room and speak with the SMSA in order to provide an explanation for her behaviour. Matt followed up the matter and was told that the SMSA said that, *"it's just like families; they all have arguments and disagreements from time to time – don't worry about it."* Matt then arranged to meet with teacher 'X' in order to discuss the matter. The meeting took place the following day and uncovered that 'X' had felt that her professionalism and ability had been challenged by the nature of the discussion that took place during her performance management review the very existence of which she viewed as an injustice after having accrued more than 20 years of experience in the teaching profession. Matt told 'X' that whilst he recognised her experience and skills a rigorous and robust system of performance management was a necessary, and an expected, part of modern day school self evaluation and accountability. The new system of performance management remained in place.

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

The introduction of a new system for performance management is entirely consistent with

Matt's role boundary in that as headteacher it is his responsibility to recognise areas where improvement is required. Such a responsibility would suggest that he is also required to ensure that there is a suitable system in order to secure improvement through which he and others are accountable (i.e. performance management). Teacher 'X' feels aggrieved that the new system was imposed and views its conception as being unnecessarily complex, unfair and even *"laughable"*. Her behaviour is a direct challenge to Matt's authority. Teacher 'X' views the new system as a direct attempt by the headteacher to extend his role boundary by re-positioning

her own professional role boundary so that he can define the way in which she works through target setting. She appears to feel that it is within her role boundary to stop the performance management process and its systems. She believes that the decision as to whether or not she has targets, what they are to be and who has the legitimate authority to monitor her progress against those targets lay within her own role boundary and resents the implication that it should lay within that of the headteacher. Teacher 'X' appears to feel that it is within her role boundary to persuade the deputy headteacher to shift the headteacher's role boundary so that implementing performance management comes not within his role boundary but within that of teacher 'X'. The deputy headteacher accepts teacher 'X's attempt to re-position her role boundary and in turn seeks to move the headteacher's role boundary so that it doesn't include the implementation of performance management. She rather unwisely decides to do this in full view of the SMSA. The headteacher rejects the attempt to move his role boundary and also informs her that he decides matters of this kind and where and when they are to be raised and discussed. The headteacher makes it clear that she has acted in appropriately.

Vignette 5: Intervention in an argument between the deputy headteacher and a parent in the main office

Critical Incident Vignette

The deputy headteacher and her class had been working with a composer to produce an original piece of music to perform at an annual music festival due to take place on a Saturday morning. With the festival performance drawing closer the deputy headteacher informed Matt of her concern that an increasing number of children were dropping out and that it was becoming apparent that the school would be under represented and may even need to pull out of its commitment to the festival organisers. The deputy headteacher did not want for this to happen and had told the children that if they were to make the effort to attend she would buy them all an ice-cream as a means of thanking them for their commitment to the school. Matt was unaware of this promise.

The incident took place the Thursday preceding the music festival and at 3.30p.m. after the school day had ended. Matt became aware of raised voices in the office block lobby and decided to investigate. Upon arriving at the main school entrance Matt witnessed an angry exchange taking place between the deputy headteacher and a parent of a child involved in the music festival. It was apparent that the parent was angry over the deputy headteacher's offer to buy the children an ice cream should they attend the festival. The headteacher noted that:

> *"She* [the parent] *was making it abundantly clear that P's* [the deputy headteacher] *offer to buy the children an ice cream was tantamount to "bribery". She went on to imply that the deputy headteacher telling the children that they had a moral duty to attend the festival in order to uphold the good name of the school was "blackmail". P strongly disagreed and was denying having done anything improper. She was saying that it was just a means of encouraging the children to attend. The whole episode was being played out in front of children, parents and the office staff. I felt I had no other option but to intervene."*

Matt decided to attempt to diffuse the situation by separating the two adults. He asked the deputy headteacher to go and wait in the staff room and asked the parent if she would like to discuss the matter with him in the headteacher's office. Matt noted that:

> *"I explained that I didn't know what the issue was but that it would be good to discuss the matter further in my office. There was no way that she was going to do that and instead she just continued the argument with me where we were standing!"*

Having attempted diplomacy Matt reported realising that he had no further option available to him. In his boundary log he wrote that:

> *"I couldn't think of anything else to do so I told her that I wouldn't continue the discussion in the foyer of the school office and that if she wouldn't speak calmly with me in my office then she should leave the premises. Once again she declined to come with me to discuss the matter elsewhere and left."*

The following day Matt received a request from the parent to meet to discuss the matter. Matt agreed. During the meeting the parent offered an apology for her behaviour.

> *"She said that she was sorry. Her father had died earlier in the week and she said that this had really messed her up. I said that it was no problem - even though it was – because I didn't feel that I could take it any further with her at that time. I did say that should she wish to, she could come and speak to me anytime she liked if she was unhappy about something."*

Matt considered that the matter had been handled badly by the deputy headteacher. He

considered that she should not have allowed her frustration of possibly having to withdraw from the festival to develop into an angry confrontation with a parent. Matt decided to discuss the matter with the deputy headteacher and made it clear that the deputy's actions were inappropriate and should not be repeated. The deputy headteacher agreed. Subsequently the deputy and the parent met to discuss the matter where the matter was resolved.

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

The parent views the deputy headteacher's offer to buy the children attending the music festival an ice cream to be an illegitimate behaviour in the sense that as the festival was to be held on a Saturday morning it lay beyond the school week and therefore beyond the deputy headteacher's role boundary. The parent therefore chooses to exercise her parental prerogative to raise the matter with the deputy headteacher a behaviour which lay within her own role boundary. The parent's argument is evidenced by two objections. Firstly, she feels that the offer itself is an attempt at, *"bribery"* and secondly she suggests that the deputy headteacher's motive for suggesting to the children that should they fail to attend the festival they may damage the school's reputation is in effect, *"blackmailing"* them into attendance by making them feel guilty. The deputy headteacher does not view her own actions as being in the same way coercive or manipulative and rather views her role as being one that should encourage the children to attend such events. She defends her role boundary by refusing to acknowledge that she had acted inappropriately in any way.

Matt decides that the situation is one that will not be resolved without intervention. His decision to take action is an appropriate behaviour that lay within his role boundary. He therefore chooses to intervene and asks the deputy to go to the staff room whilst he speaks with the parent. The parent is aggrieved that Matt had used his authority to intervene and further that in asking the deputy to move away he had in effect taken charge of the situation. Clearly the parent does not consider that such a behaviour falls within his role boundary. The parent's resentment manifests itself in her refusal to comply with any further requests from Matt and can be interpreted as her attempt to send the message to the headteacher that he may well have authority to direct the deputy headteacher's actions but that his role boundary does not encompass directing the actions of parents; a perception that she concedes when she later leaves the school site upon the request of the headteacher. Matt disagrees and reasserts on two occasions where and when he feels that the discussion might appropriately continue (i.e. in his office). When the parent rejects Matt's offers to discuss the matter further Matt

decides to make recourse to a different behaviour that falls within his role boundary when he asks her to leave the school premises, which she does, demonstrating that she acknowledges that the authority to request that a person leave the school premises does in fact lay within Matt's role boundary. Should the parent have refused to leave then Matt would have been required to either accept the parent's illegitimate behaviour, in the sense that her refusal to leave lay beyond her role boundary, or choose to exert his authority. He might have done so by requesting that a third party, such as the police, attend to enforce his authority to decide who is allowed on the premises, and who is not, on his behalf. Such behaviour is within his role boundary. Interestingly, such an action would see Matt's role boundary using that of another's (i.e. the police) in order to achieve his end.

An additional interpretation of the critical incident is that Matt realised that his role boundary was 'at risk' and that he sought to protect it by giving the parent two options – come and talk with me or go, leaving the parent to decide which course of action is most appropriate. Having taken the decision to leave her subsequent request to meet with Matt the following day, during which meeting she apologises, is evidence that she recognises and respects Matt's authority in the sense that the apology signifies her recognition that her own behaviour was inappropriate whilst that of Matt was legitimate. Thus, Matt's behaviour (i.e. his decision to intercede), which falls within his role boundary, strengthens his legitimate and perceived authority.

<u>Years 1 - 3</u>

Vignette 6: Feud over the ownership of the school

Context

The school's governing body was embroiled in a complex land exchange involving the church and the local authority. The historical context that led to the situation is as follows. In 1960 the local authority approached the diocese with a request that Matt's school might expand to take the growing number of children in its catchment area. If the church trustees and school's governing body were to agree to the local authority's request then the church school would move from its small Victorian school house to a new much larger building funded and built by the local authority. Under the terms and conditions of the agreement the ownership of the Victorian school buildings and grounds would remain with the church and ownership of the new school with the local authority. The newly built church school quickly reached its capacity

and yet another new school was required in the town to accommodate the growing number of children in the area. The authority made a further request of the church that it might be allowed to re-open a new community primary school in the church-owned Victorian school house that had been vacated some years earlier. The church agreed and the new community school opened. Thus, an interesting situation had occurred whereby the new church school was operating on a local authority owned site and the new community school was operating in the church owned Victorian school house.

However, in 2005 the number of primary age children in the schools' catchment areas had fallen and the local authority advised the church that it was to shut two local schools, one being the community school operating in the church-owned Victorian school house which would, once again, at the end of the academic year leave the school house vacant. Further, the two closing schools would be amalgamated and their children were to attend a new school planned to open in the following September and one owned and built by the local authority. However, the local authority could not open its new school until a legal agreement had been reached between themselves and the church on the ownership of the existing sites. Thus, the local authority had once again approached the church and with a new proposal.

The new proposal was a land swap whereby ownership of the local authority-owned school building built in 1960 would be transferred to the church and the Victorian school house owned by the church would transfer to local authority ownership. Should the local authority gain ownership of the Victorian school house, it would be sold for redevelopment to raise funds for the building of the proposed new school to educate the children of the two schools it planned to close that year. However, whilst the local authority considered the new proposal straightforward the exchange of sites had become extremely complex as it was becoming apparent that the governing body from Matt's church school had determined to scrutinise each step in the transfer process and to attempt to secure as much from the exchange itself as was possible. Matt noted in his boundary log that:

> *"It appears that the local authority is bound under the previous agreement of 1960 to use the land and buildings owned by the church as a school and for no other purpose. The authority has built a replacement school for the children that used to go to the school in the church owned building but is bound to finalise the land swap before it can open. The authority is getting very pushy and we're pushing back. Meetings are getting tense."*

The following critical incident took place in the Spring terms of the new headteacher's second year in post. The authority intended resolving the land swap in time for the opening of the new school in September. Relations between the two parties had become increasingly acrimonious and a third party negotiator was asked to mitigate.

Critical Incident Vignette

Matt and a school governor had attended several meetings with the local authority that took place throughout the period February to May where the local authority and church's respective legal teams had discussed the proposed exchange. At the meeting the local authority advised that legal precedent dictated that the new school could not open should Matt's school's governors fail to accept their revised condition of exchange. Should this be the case, the result would be that the displaced children from the two schools about to close at the end of the academic year would be left without a school to attend the following September. Further, should such a scenario occur, the local authority made it clear that they would consider the governing body of Matt's school to be to blame for the lack of school places for the displaced children because of their perceived obstinacy in not agreeing to their terms of exchange. In April, Matt and the school governor once again met with the local authority, this time with a third party negotiator. The negotiator presented the local authority's final offer which Matt and the school governor rejected on the basis that they considered it to be inadequate; the final offer was a proposal to transfer the ownership of the school buildings from the local authority to the church whilst the authority would maintain ownership of all access rights and the school grounds. The response from the local authority came from a divisional director in May who in approaching Matt in his capacity as both headteacher and a school governor made it clear that in failing to accept terms for agreement the school's governing body were putting the local authority's education review in jeopardy and also the education of the children who were hoping to be educated from September in the new school. The headteacher noted that:

> *"the divisional director made it clear that it was the local authority's view that the school was being unreasonable,…getting it right and standing our ground is not making me any friends at the authority. Feeling very stressed."*

Matt also noted that he felt, "*uncertain as to how hard I can push – I keep arguing for more and more out of the deal. Never done anything like this before. Feeling out of my depth."* However,

following discussion at a meeting of the full governing body Matt and the governing body were of the opinion that the situation and its associated pressures in terms of securing an agreement in time for the new school to open just a few months later in September had been entirely of the authority's own making. The governing body of Matt's school felt that it should have been approached with an exchange proposal far sooner. Thus, they resolved to work to their own schedule and to negotiate for the best possible deal at each and every step.

Having received the backing of the governing body Matt called a further meeting with the local authority to discuss revised terms for the exchange. The meeting was planned by the school to negotiate two specific details of the exchange that had not been part of the local authority's final offer in April. The matter for discussion was to establish who would gain ownership of the school field and access rights to the school grounds. The meeting was once again chaired by a third party negotiator. During the meeting the local authority legal representative made it clear that in order for the new school to open in the following September they would need agreement from the school on the exchange within days allowing them enough time to process the legal necessities. Matt noted that it was:

> *"A hugely uncomfortable meeting. 'P'* [the school governor] *and I could have cut the air with a knife. Not agreeing to their* [local authority] *demands was clearly annoying the authority and even the negotiator seemed to be getting frustrated. I sensed that we were coming to an impasse but wanted to push it one step further to see what more we could get from the deal."*

Matt viewed the meeting as a success in the sense that the local authority representative agreed to take the school's request for partial ownership of the school field and complete ownership over access to the school grounds away for consideration. The local authority's response to the school's request was to accept the proposal and the details were subsequently written in to the exchange agreement. A final meeting was held between both parties to sign the legal documents in May and the new school opened the following September. In conclusion the final agreement was that the church (and by implication governing body through its ex-officio and foundation governors) had secured ownership of the 1960 site, its buildings, a large proportion of field and all access rights. Additionally, the church and governing body had negotiated an agreement that would see the local authority take ownership of the Victorian school house but the attached school master's cottage and gardens would remain the property of the church in order that it might be sold or redeveloped to raise future funds for Matt's school.

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

The local authority is operating within its role boundary when it requests that the school's governing body should agree to a land exchange. However, the school's governing body is also operating within its own role boundary when it decides not to agree to the local authority proposal. The governing body's refusal to accept the initial and subsequent terms for the change of land ownership leads to conflict between the two parties.

It would seem that with the 1960 legal agreement of exchange currently being in place the governing body has no obligation to agree to a new or revised contract. Therefore, when the local authority, through the divisional director, decides to approach the headteacher and not the chair of the governing body it is arguably acting beyond its appropriate role boundary. The headteacher experiences an attempted re-positioning of his role boundary by the divisional director who argues that Matt, as a headteacher, has a moral imperative as part of his role as position and role as practice to encourage the school's governing body to bring negotiations to a swift conclusion in order to ensure that local children have a place in the new school for the following September. Such a manipulative approach is not within the local authority's role boundary and is therefore arguably inappropriate. The director attempts to re-position Matt's role boundary in order to use Matt's position as headteacher as a means to influence the decision of the school's governing body. However, Matt is backed by his governing body and repels the attempt to re-position his role boundary on the basis that his responsibility is firstly and foremost to protect the interests of his own school by obtaining the best possible deal from the exchange as he can. In that sense he is working within his expected role boundary.

Interestingly, in role boundary terms the incident illuminates the inherent power of utilising the legitimate authority of a corporate role boundary, such as that of the full governing body, through one individual in this case the headteacher. It is interesting that despite the feelings of concern that the headteacher experiences he is nevertheless convinced of the legitimacy of his actions in dealing with the divisional director on the basis that he is operating on behalf of, and with the full support of, the school's governing body. He therefore feels that he is operating within not only his own role boundary as headteacher but also within that of the governing body. Thus, it might be argued that the critical incident reveals that an individual's role boundary during their socialisation might well be tested by others, as was the headteacher's in his dealings with the divisional director, but also that a headteacher's role boundary can be conditioned and strengthened by the authority in which they ground their decision making (i.e. on behalf of the governing body). The headteacher's strength in resisting the attempt at re-positioning his role boundary lay in his understanding that his authority was not based upon

his own role boundary alone but on that of a corporate group (i.e. the full governing body).

It is possible to make a subtle distinction with regard to the divisional director's actions. Whilst his manipulative approach toward the headteacher is arguably inappropriate behaviour for a divisional director, and therefore is arguably beyond his role boundary, conversely it might nevertheless be argued that he is indeed acting within his role boundary as divisional director in seeking to secure the broader education provision for other children in the town. Thus, the distinction is made between his undertaking the requirements of his role as position (i.e. to secure the required educational provision for the town in his capacity as divisional director, which is legitimate and therefore a behaviour that lay within his role boundary), and his role as practice (i.e. his manipulative approach toward the headteacher which is an inappropriate way to attempt to meet the requirements of his position to secure that provision).

To conclude, the action of the headteacher to request of the local authority further negotiations and their subsequent acceptance of the request appears to recognise the legitimate authority that is inherent with the role boundary of the school's governing body which ultimately leads to their securing significant improvements to the final exchange deal.

Vignette 7: Visiting artist – safeguarding issue

Critical Incident Vignette

A visiting artist had been invited to visit the school in order to work with the children for a day to complete a specific project. The artist was previously a secondary school art teacher who had resigned from teaching in the 1970's in order to pursue a career as an independent professional artist. Her visit to Matt's primary school was the first time that the artist had led a workshop in a school since leaving her secondary teaching post.

During the afternoon the deputy headteacher had informed Matt that a number of children had made an allegation that the artist had lost her temper and had hit a child. Matt recognised that he would have to investigate the matter and very carefully indeed given the nature of the allegation. Indeed, Matt was very mindful of the potential implications for the artist's professional career if an investigation found against her. He was also mindful of the potentially negative implications for the school and for himself as headteacher if the investigation was not conducted impeccably. Such a recognition of the potential consequences of an incorrectly conducted investigation worried him deeply. He noted:

> *"'A'* [deputy headteacher] *told me that the children had accused her* [the artist] *of hitting a child. Apparently, she slapped him around the back of the head because she thought he wasn't getting on with his work. This was really bad. A lot could go wrong for a lot of people here and that includes me!"*

Matt decided to seek advice as to how best to proceed from the local authority designated officer for child protection and was advised that he was indeed required to undertake an internal investigation and report back to the authority with his findings and recommendations. In the meantime Matt decided that the artist should be removed from another classroom in which she was now leading a different workshop with immediate effect and informed her of the allegation and of the investigation. Matt described having to inform the artist of the allegation as being, *"one of the singular most difficult things I've had to do in my life*." He went on to note that:

> *"Informing her of the accusation didn't go well. She swore, cried and held her head in her hands. She was clearly devastated by it all. She said that she couldn't believe I was going to go as far as to undertake a formal investigation into things. All I could say was that I was truly sorry but that I had to investigate the accusation."*

Matt reported a strong feeling of being alone in the matter for in order to ensure that the investigation was not to be in any way prejudiced he was unable to discuss the matter with anyone other than as a part of his investigation. He began the investigation:

> *"I asked her if she had hit the child. She got angry and denied it. She said that I had no right to make such accusations. Then she said no, not on purpose, but that she had spun around quickly when standing behind the child in question and had felt her hand hit something, but not very hard and she thought nothing of it. I spoke with the children individually – they all said that she was looking at the child when she did it – she did not spin around at all. The children's view was that it was a deliberate and intentional slap around the back of his head".*

Matt asked the visiting artist if she was to visit any other schools whilst working in the area. He then telephoned the headteacher of the school in which the artist was due to work the following day to inform him of the situation. Matt then asked the artist to leave the school in order that he could conduct an internal investigation into the matter.

> *"I asked her to leave whilst I carried on with my investigations. She got angry saying that I couldn't possibly rely on a child's interpretation of the incident and that it was beyond my remit to call other schools which had lost her work and cost her money. She said that I was ruining her career. She argued that I couldn't make her leave if I was going to be asking questions about her conduct. She said that she had a right to be here to defend herself. I said this was a horrible situation but that she would have to go – that was it and all about it, really."*

The artist having left Matt spoke with the class teacher and a teaching assistant who were present in the classroom when the alleged incident took place. When asked if they had witnessed the incident both the teacher and teaching assistant said that they had not as they were working to support other groups of children and so had seen nothing. They informed the headteacher that they had first learned of the allegation from the children sitting on the same table as the child whom had allegedly been hit. Having no way to conclusively triangulate the allegations with the testimony of an adult witness, and there not having been any physical evidence that the child had been hit, it was therefore the children's word against the artist's. Matt sought further advice from the local authority's senior child protection officer and was advised that it would be impossible to find for or against the artist. The local authority advised Matt to record his investigation as inconclusive. The parents of the child in question were then informed and visited the school to speak with Matt. He reported feeling extremely relieved by, and appreciative of, the parents' understanding and support when they expressed their confidence that Matt had acted appropriately and that he had dealt efficiently with the incident. Matt then advised the local authority that the parents had decided not to lodge a formal complaint against the findings of his investigation. He then contacted the chair of governors to inform her of the situation who congratulated him on successfully dealing with the incident. The following day Matt was contacted by a divisional director from the local authority who praised his swift and efficient handling of the matter.

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

The animating influence was the deputy headteacher's report of an alleged child protection incident. The report forced Matt to take action in the sense that as the teacher responsible for child protection his role as position makes it his duty to investigate the incident as a required aspect of his role as practice. The thought of confronting the artist with the accusation causes

Matt to feel anxious because he is conscious that the outcome of his role as practice, that is to say the investigation, may well have serious consequences for a number of people. He is, however, determined to take action and considers that the legitimate power to do so rests within his role boundary.

The artist's anger is partly derived from the shock of her hearing the accusation which in turn can then be seen in her refusal to accept that the authority to raise the issue of the alleged incident lay within the headteacher's role boundary. The headteacher rejects the artist's view that he does not have legitimate authority to take action and continues to act within his role boundary when he continues to question her about the incident. Once again, the artist attempts to deflect the headteacher when in becoming angry she argues that he does not have the legitimate authority to ask her to leave the school grounds and moreover, that his behaviour is illegitimate in the sense that it lies outside of his role boundary. The headteacher is adamant that he is to continue with his investigation, which, although it proves inconclusive, significantly strengthened his perceived authority and ability to act within his role boundary as headteacher when he receives positive comments as to how he managed the situation from both the chair of governors and the divisional director. Such validation of his agency from senior figures demonstrates how individuals can use behaviours that lay within their role boundary to strengthen their legitimisation in role.

Vignette 8: Child's accident at an extra-curricular sports club

Critical incident vignette

The incident took place during an after-school rugby club training session. The club was run by two experienced rugby coaches who although were not direct employees of the school had been quality assured by an observation of a training session by the teacher responsible for leading Physical Education (PE) at the school. The club had been running for several weeks without any cause for concern.

During the training session Matt was informed by one of the coaches that a child had fallen and was refusing to move. The coach wanted to know what action Matt wished to take. Matt noted that:

> *"It was the first scary sort of accident that I've had to deal with as head. I was aware that the child in question had something of a reputation for overacting and attention seeking but he was saying*

> *that his back was hurting. It was a potential nightmare scenario and one that I couldn't afford to get wrong."*

Matt decided to speak with the child who complained that his lower back was in pain and that he could not move. Matt reported feeling uncertain as to how to proceed:

> *"I had all kinds of thoughts going through my mind, mainly is he play acting to get attention, should I just call his parents and get him taken home or was it bad enough to need an ambulance – more to the point who was I to decide which option was the best?!!"*

Matt noted that his doubt was caused by his not knowing what course of action to take medically and the fact that this was his first major accident in school since having been appointed as headteacher. His confusion was compounded by, *"information received from one of my teachers informing me that at a weekend rugby match and after a collision with another player the child had acted in a similar fashion causing those present to call for an air ambulance."* Having been collected by helicopter, and subsequently having been treated at hospital, the child's parents had been informed that he had in fact sustained no injury, minor or otherwise, following which the child admitted to 'play acting'. Despite the possibility that a similar situation might be taking place Matt took the decision to act:

> *"I decided to call for an ambulance and gave a verbal description of the child's situation. The emergency services view was that an ambulance was needed. I then asked the school office to telephone his* [the child's] *parents and they travelled with him to the hospital for examination."*

Matt received a telephone call from the child's parents later that day informing him that the child had received no injury and thanking him for having taken precautionary action given the nature of the suspected injury to the child's spine. The child's parents also informed Matt that they would speak with their son about his conduct as this was indeed not the first time that he had given the indication that an injury was far worse than he knew it was. Matt considered requesting a representative of the emergency services to meet with himself, the child and his parents to make clear to the child the implications of hoax emergency calls but decided that such a course of action would simply waste more of the emergency services time. Instead, he thanked the parent's for their support and requested that the meeting be held jointly with themselves and the child being present in order to impress upon the child the implications of his behaviour. At the meeting child was reprimanded by the headteacher and by his parents.

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

In requesting that the headteacher take charge of the situation the sports coaches appear to consider that the authority to take a decision as to what to do next lay within the headteacher's, and not their own, role boundary. The request invokes feelings of stress and uncertainty in Matt as he recognises that the responsibility, and therefore the accountability, to ensure that the decision taken is the correct decision is solely his own; he describes it as, "*a potential nightmare scenario and one that I couldn't afford to get wrong"*. Matt appears to accept that it is within his role boundary to assume the lead and decides to speak with the child to gain a further understanding of the situation. His actions appear contrary to the emotions that he is experiencing, emotions that might have found him incapable, or at least unwilling, to act within his role boundary in order to take important decisions as to how to proceed. However, in accepting his responsibility to take a decision he also realises the ironic ambiguity that in not being medically trained he has in fact no more ability than anyone else to make a sound judgement based upon a medical assessment of the child's situation other than that afforded him by default of his position as headteacher.

The headteacher's actions strengthen his legitimation in role as 'headteacher'. He achieves this by successfully taking actions that others perceive lay within his role boundary. He accepts that the responsibility is his from the outset and does not hesitate to act on that basis. Such an assertion is evidenced by the parent's telephone call to thank him for his actions. However, the headteacher does not appear to have applied a school-based sanction for the child's behaviour, other than a verbal reprimand, and he appears satisfied that the child's parents will take the necessary action in terms of applying an appropriate sanction. Arguably, the child's action was an attempt to influence the headteacher's role boundary behaviour (i.e. to call his parents or an ambulance). It is possible that Matt might have strengthened his authority further if he had himself chosen to discipline the child for his behaviour in order to demonstrate the consequences that would follow if someone should attempt to re-position his role boundary.

Vignette 9: Headteacher's clash with the director of children's services

Critical incident vignette

Matt was informed in May, and therefore six weeks before the end of the academic year, that a child with significant and complex medical needs was to be admitted into the reception class

of his school in the following September. Matt was informed that the child was incontinent and that he would therefore require a changing facility and the necessary associated furniture and equipment. Furthermore, the school would need to provide a trained member of staff to administer to his medical needs and to provide intimate cleaning for the child. The local authority informed Matt that these requirements were necessary and that he was to ensure that they were to be fully in place in time to allow the child to begin school in the September of the following academic year. The reaction of the reception class teacher and of the early years team was described by Matt as, *"horrific":*

> *"I spoke to the early years team as a group and passed on the little I knew about the child. Their corporate response was pretty horrific really. One of the teaching assistants (TA) said that I couldn't ask her to provide intimate cleaning for the child and that if I did she would consult her union - pretty much the same reaction all round. What's more, I could tell that the staff were looking to me as head to sort this thing out – somehow."*

Matt recognised the critical nature of the matter at hand given the short timescale in which he had to make the necessary arrangements for the child and in terms of managing the staff's reactions and attitudes to the situation. He decided to invite local authority health and safety officers to survey the school site and ask them to identify a suitable area of the school that could be used as a changing facility. The officers found that there was nowhere on site that could, having being subject to 'reasonable adjustments', be used for such a purpose. Therefore, the officers are of the opinion that it would be necessary to build a new purpose-built facility. Matt noted:

> *"So, nowhere is suitable. This means that I now have to build a new changing facility, appoint a new and suitably experienced member of staff to meet the child's complex medical needs and someone who is prepared to undertake intimate cleaning, train up my existing staff so that they understand the child's medical needs and do all this in only six weeks before the summer closure - and do it with no funding!"*

Matt informed the chair of governors of the matter who agreed to offer the headteacher all the necessary support should he decide to challenge the authority and push for funding and help from other agencies to whom the child was already known. Matt reported feeling frustrated that whilst the allocation of places in reception classes had been known months

earlier in early spring it was now May and to date he had neither been approached by the local authority, one of their associated agencies who were currently working with the child nor the child's parents to discuss the provision. Matt was further angered that it was he that was, *"doing all the chasing"* in the sense that it was he that had liaised with the child's parents and current pre-school setting to begin a phased induction programme for the child's transition to school in the following September. He was further frustrated that it was also he that had contacted the local authority capital team and inclusion support team to seek financial support for the capital works to build a changing facility and to fund the appointment of a full time carer. Matt reported feeling very angry that none of the teams that he contacted were prepared to offer the school any support in terms of providing for the child's needs. When reflecting on the incident Matt recalled:

> *"I remembered two pieces of advice from colleague heads. The first was don't let the authority push you around – make a fuss. The second was that when you feel you need to push back, don't be afraid to push the person at the very top. The first sounded a must, the second more scary – but I had to get moving and do something so I decided to contact the director of children's services."*

Following two telephone calls the director informed Matt that having researched the situation he felt that the school had been placed in an impossible situation and one that was in no way of its own making. Given that the pressures of time had been compounded by an absence of funding to deal with the matter the director informed Matt that he had authorised full funding to the required level to ensure that the necessary alterations and improvements were put in place and the appropriate personnel appointed. Further, the director had instructed the local authority capital team to oversee the building of a new changing facility during the summer school closure.

The child began school as expected in September with all the necessary provision and training in place, including a personal carer. Matt reported that he felt that in resolving the incident he had shown staff, governors, parents and the local authority that he was prepared to fight hard for his school and that he felt that the incident had had a positive outcome in the sense that he had held his ground in his discussions with the director.

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

The incident is triggered by the local authority when it informs the headteacher that it had allocated a place at his school to a child with complex medical needs. The allocation of places for children being admitted to reception classes is the responsibility of the local authority and is therefore an action that is legitimately within the local authority's role boundary. The issue for the headteacher resides in the fact that it is indeed commensurate with his role boundary to take actions to make specific provision for the child but that it is arguably unfair for the local authority to require him to do so in such a very short period of time and with no additional funding. In short, Matt considers that the local authority had failed to act effectively and appropriately in the sense that they had failed to inform him of the child's needs in good time. Thus, he takes the view that the local authority's request lay beyond its role boundary. Conversely, Matt believes that it is therefore within his own role boundary to request resources and support from the local authority in order to make the necessary and timely provision for the child. The headteacher considers that it is the responsibility of the local authority to provide the necessary resources whilst the local authority appear to take the view that it is the headteacher's responsibility as part of his role as position. The point of delineation in the argument appears to be the lack of time available to the headteacher in order for him to undertake his role as position. He views the lack of time as a failure on the part of the local authority and therefore is of the opinion that it is the authority that has the responsibility to resolve the issue. The lack of response that the headteacher receives from the agencies that he contacts for help is indicative of the agencies apparent view that it is not within the headteacher's role boundary to make such requests because he does not have the legitimate authority to do so. Having received no support the headteacher decides that his only recourse is to attempt to operate at the very limit of his role boundary when he contacts the director of children's services. The decision is high risk. The director may recognise that Matt is operating close to the limit of his role boundary in attempting to ask him directly to intervene. Matt appears to be attempting to re-position the director's role boundary and the director may well repel such an attempt. Should that been the outcome then the headteacher would have exhausted his options. Fortunately, the director recognises the headteacher's predicament and takes action to ensure that matters are taken in hand. He accepts that Matt's request lay within his role boundary as headteacher and intervenes to ensure a positive outcome. Arguably, the outcome has served to confirm the position of Matt's role boundary as headteacher and that he is willing and able to enact a series of personally difficult behaviours and actions in an attempt to secure the very best for his school.

Vignette 10: Excluding a child from school

Critical incident vignette

Whilst working in his office at playtime Matt was informed that his assistance was required immediately in the playground as a child was physically and verbally attacking a member of the teaching staff and that the child could not be persuaded to stop. Matt reported feelings of intense and immediate stress as he made his way to the playground. This was the first time that he had been required to deal with such a situation and as headteacher.

> *"I immediately felt my stomach turn over. I realised that as head everyone was looking to me to take charge of the situation. The question going round in my mind was how?"*

Upon arriving in the playground Matt observed the teacher trying to move away from the child who, in turn, was persisting in following her. Matt assessed the situation and noted:

> *"The child was lashing out at 'X'* [the teacher on duty]*, kicking and punching – he was clearly hurting her* [the teacher]*. I demanded that he stop. He didn't. So I decided that the only course of action was restraint. Felt terrible about doing it but he was causing some real harm. I decided I'd have to deal with any comeback later."*

Matt was deeply uncomfortable with his actions not least because it, *"felt wrong"* but also because he was very conscious that if asked he could not claim to have had any safer handling training should he, in the course of restraining the child, cause him any harm. Matt removed the child from the playground and escorted him inside and into the school library where two members of staff were assigned to ensure his safety until he had calmed down. Matt then went to his office to consider how best to proceed. He reported feeling disturbed and rattled by the incident but at the same time he recognised that he now had to think quickly and clearly with regard to deciding upon the best course of action:

> *"Having diffused the situation the next thing on my mind was does this warrant exclusion? Hadn't done an exclusion before and felt that if I was going to do it then I had to get it right procedurally to avoid any potential for an appeal. Frankly, I was scared that I might get something wrong along the way and so I decided to investigate the facts and then get advice."*

Matt decided to investigate the situation and discussed the matter with the teacher, other children who witnessed the attack and the child himself. It appeared that the incident had been triggered when the teacher had attempted to intervene in a dispute between two children. One child felt that he had been treated unjustly by the teacher in being asked to take 'time out' in the school hall and had become violent towards her. Matt had not excluded a child from school before. Given that he was now considering the possibility of putting in place his first exclusion he sought advice from a colleague headteacher and from the local authority before deciding that an exclusion was indeed a correct and a reasonable course of action to take. Having been reassured that applying a fixed term (i.e. temporary) exclusion was an appropriate course of action given the circumstances Matt informed the chair of governors and then the child's parents who he asked to come to collect the child. A fixed term exclusion of two days was imposed. Matt noted that:

> *"I was concerned that Mr and Mrs Y* [the child's parents] *would refuse to accept the exclusion so I had taken notes from other witnesses and had the teacher on hand to show her scratches and bruises. Didn't turn out to be the case though. They accepted what their son had done and rather than being angry, both were rather tearful."*

Following the exclusion the child returned to school and a pastoral care plan was put in place with support from external agencies. As a result of the incident Matt organised safer handling (i.e. restraint) training for all staff as part of the school's programme of INSET training.

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

In attacking the teacher the child's extreme actions clearly lay beyond his role boundary as a pupil. The teacher has taken the decision that in order to stop the child's physical assault she would need to take actions that she considers to lay beyond her own role boundary (i.e. physical restraint). The teacher therefore decides that the most appropriate course of action is to request the intervention of the headteacher an action that in itself is an entirely reasonable behaviour and one that lay within the confines of her own role boundary as a teacher. However, the child does not respond to the headteacher's demands that he stop assaulting the teacher and the headteacher considers that the only remaining course of action is for him to act potentially beyond his role boundary and to restrain the child. His action causes him strong feelings of anxiety which are compounded by his subsequent concerns as to whether or not the incident warranted exclusion. Having investigated the incident and having sought

advice from more experienced colleagues the headteacher feels more confident that his behaviour and his decision to exclude the child are appropriate behaviours and ones that lay within his role boundary and he enforces a fixed term exclusion.

Matt's subsequent decision to ensure that all staff received safer handling (i.e. restraint) training would seem an appropriate course of action in order to ensure that should a similar incident occur each and every member of staff would be suitably prepared to take action. However, in role boundary terms one might argue that ensuring that everyone was equally well prepared and also responsible for taking action when required would imply that Matt was seeking to ensure that he would not receive such an irresistible call for him to have to take sole action in restraining a child in future. Arguably, such a view would be supported by the intense unease that he experiences in enacting such behaviour and his reluctance to do so again in future. Finally, Matt's report of feeling his, *"stomach turn over"* upon hearing the request for help demonstrates the traumatic nature of headship in the sense that there is always the possibility of intense scenarios presenting themselves without warning. It is also evidence of the emotional trauma that is attached to managing such events.

Vignette 11: Parental challenge over the use of physical restraint

Critical incident vignette

The school had installed new bicycle and scooter racks. Successive school newsletters had reminded parents that in order to ensure a safe school environment, especially before and after school, children were not to ride their bicycles or scooters whilst on the school grounds. Matt had decided to monitor the playground before school to ensure that children and parents were acting safely and that the school rules were being observed. As Matt left the school building he saw a reception class child riding a scooter down a busy pathway at speed. The child was seemingly unaccompanied by a supervising parent. Matt requested that the child stop on two occasions and on the second request the child did so. Having spoken to the child reminding him not to ride his scooter in school the child then made ready to scoot off once again and Matt took the decision to stop the child from doing so by placing a hand on the child's shoulder. The child then stepped away from his scooter and began pushing it. The child's father had allowed his son to get some way ahead of him as he was not on the school site at the time when the incident took place. He was therefore unaware that the incident had occurred. Having seen his child into school the child's father began speaking with another parent who offered him a description of the incident as they perceived them. Matt later

learned that after he had spoken with the child that the child's father had caught up with his son in the playground at which time the child had got upset saying that he had been told off by the headteacher and that he did not want to go to school that day. Having heard the description of events from the other parent the child's father was of the impression that Matt had acted improperly and unfairly.

Having waited until all other parents had left the school grounds the parent approached Matt as he made his way back to the school office. Matt noted that:

> *"He* [the child's father] *was incensed that his son had been "man handled" and explained that whilst he understood the need for the school to have rules and that I had a responsibility to enforce those rules he felt that I'd acted wrongly in this case. I explained that M* [the child] *was unsupervised, was riding quickly on a busy pathway and that he had been requested to stop twice before attempting to scoot off again. He was having none of it."*

The child's father remained angry and Matt reported that the parent drew very close to him in a very aggressive manner causing Matt to feel that there was the distinct possibility he might become physically aggressive. The parent then told Matt:

> *"I know that rules are rules, but you don't put your hands on my child; I mean, if it were your child you wouldn't like it would you – no-one puts their hands on my child."*

He went on to state that whilst he accepted that Matt had requested that the child stop riding his scooter on two occasions, and further that Matt had then spoken with him once again after he had stopped, he maintained that the child was only 4 years old and that he could not be blamed for attempting to continue riding his scooter even after Matt's intervention. Matt told the parent that he understood his concerns and informed him that any form of physical intervention is only used where all other interventions have failed and where there is immediate potential risk of injury to an individual or group individuals as was the case in this instance. Matt explained that should he deem it necessary to protect the interests of an individual or a group of individuals he would take the same course of action again in future. The child's father remained indignant and left the school grounds shouting to Matt over his shoulder as he left.

Some weeks later Matt received a letter from the child's parents informing him that the child was to attend a different school with immediate effect and he was subsequently removed from the school roll.

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

Having previously requested that parents supervise their children in order to ensure that they do not ride their scooters or bicycles on the school grounds and by going outside to monitor the playground the headteacher places himself in a position where his role boundary is visibly exposed to confrontation and attack. Should he witness any child acting in a fashion contrary to his requests he will be compelled to act within his role boundary in order to ensure that he maintains his perceived legitimate authority to create and enforce school rules. Failure to act within his role boundary would suggest to parents and children that he is not prepared to, or is unable to, do so. Therefore, Matt has in fact placed himself in a very difficult situation where the maintenance of his role boundary in terms of him being seen to have the legitimate authority to impose order through the implementation of school rules will necessarily be dependent on one of two scenarios. Firstly, that by virtue of his presence, or by no more design than by sheer chance, not a single child is seen riding in the playground or, on the other hand, that should a child be observed breaking the school rule Matt acts within his role boundary and he or she is successfully stopped and rebuked for having done so, therefore demonstrating Matt's legitimate authority to create and enforce school rules.

The child's father, not having seen the incident, acts upon information provided by another parent that would seem to him to explain the reason for his son being distressed and consequently his not wanting to go to school that day. The child's father is arguably both annoyed and embarrassed that in failing to provide suitable supervision for his child he did not witness events that caused his son distress and therefore could not have stopped these events from developing, thus failing to fulfil his duty of care for his own child. He may be aware that he should have supervised his child more closely and he is clearly aware of the school rules, which he alludes to in his discussion with Matt. Arguably, the child's father is embarrassed and is angered from his recognition that he had failed to act within his own role boundary as a parent in order to protect his child. It is possible to surmise that the trigger for the ensuing critical incident is that in the account relayed to the child's father Matt was supposed to have, *"manhandled"* his son. He clearly feels that neither Matt, nor indeed any other person, has any

legitimate authority to make physical contact with his son (*"no one puts their hands on my child")*.

Such a statement challenges Matt's professional integrity in terms of the way in which he treats children in his care and in that sense alone requires a stout defence of his actions, which he provides. However, in role boundary terms the parent's accusation is also seen as an attempt to attack Matt's role boundary by seeking to define what actions are, and are not, appropriate for a headteacher. As such, he is seeking to define the boundary of both Matt's role as position and his role as practice.

Matt's response to the father's attempt to redefine his role boundary is somewhat helped by the parent's admission early in the exchange that he realised that the school needed rules and that Matt had a responsibility to enforce those rules. Matt proceeds to restate those rules, the reasons for them and despite the parent's argument insists that if he were to face a similar situation in future, he would act in the same manner given that the authority to take such action lay within his role boundary. The father appears to refuse to accept the legitimacy of Matt's role boundary and arguably withdraws his child from Matt's school in protest.

Case Study 2

Karl

The headteacher is a male in his late thirties. He has 16 years of experience in primary education. The headship he has just taken up is at an average sized primary school, having approximately 220 pupils, and is situated in the south west of England. The school serves a predominantly white British community and social housing indicators suggest that the area is broadly in line with the national economic average. The previous Ofsted inspection, prior to his having taken up post, had judged the school to be 'satisfactory', an improvement upon the previous inspection when the school was issued with a 'notice to improve'.

Karl had taken up post following several years of instability at the school. He succeeded an acting headteacher who had led the school for one academic year. The acting headteacher had originally been appointed to the school as its deputy headteacher in the previous September. Subsequently, in the following January she was to find herself further promoted to acting headteacher when the substantive headteacher of the school was herself promoted to the position of school advisor with the local authority.

Karl reported that having met with the acting headteacher on several occasions he had formed the opinion that she considered her role to be one of, "*holding the fort*" and that whilst she recognised that the school had issues that should be addressed, most notably standards in English and mathematics, he perceived that as an acting headteacher, as opposed to a substantive headteacher, she had consciously decided to avoid dealing with the important matters at hand and rather had chosen instead to set out on a diversionary task of embarking upon a programme of broader curriculum review thus side stepping the more thorny issues. Karl suspected that the acting headteacher had adopted such an evasive approach toward dealing with all potentially difficult and challenging matters and that he would therefore very likely expect to have to address some of the legacies that such an approach might have left behind as he took up his new headship at the school.

Pre-Incumbency

Vignette 12: A teacher's non-attendance at parents evening

Critical incident vignette

The new headteacher had organised a series of induction visits to his new school in the term preceding his taking up post. The purpose of his visits was to hold meetings with each individual member of staff in order to provide them with an opportunity to meet with him to discuss their personal roles and in so doing to gain a more detailed picture of the school. During one such visit Karl had held a discussion with a member of the teaching staff where Karl was asked to clarify his policy regarding staff attendance at parent's evenings. Karl had begun the meeting by enquiring how the job share was arranged. He was told that the two teachers shared responsibility for teaching the same class, each working two and a half days each week. The teachers had decided that in order to facilitate the smooth management of their job share they would divide the curriculum between them, with each teacher having responsibility for teaching specific subjects. This arrangement, Karl was told, worked well. In terms of reporting children's progress each teacher wrote sections of the children's annual reports relating to their areas of curriculum responsibility and had always reported together at parent's evenings. However, the teacher had complained that her job-share partner had, for the first time since joining the school, failed to attend the previous parent's open evening and had given no reason for her absence. The teacher then informed Karl that the previous substantive headteacher (who had left the school to become a school's advisor with the local authority)

had made it clear that it was her expectation that part-time teachers attend parent's evenings together.

Karl decided to investigate the situation and called a meeting with the teacher who had not attended the parent's evening. Karl reported that he had:

> *"asked the teacher why she hadn't attended parent's evening because this had left her job share to carry full responsibility for discussing areas of the curriculum that she didn't even teach."*

When asked how the teacher responded to the question, Karl replied:

> *"she* [the teacher] *told me that she didn't think I'd mind! She felt that it would be much fairer for part time teachers to attend every other parent's evening."*

The teacher explained to Karl that it was her perception that such a policy of attending a contractually proportionate number of parent's evenings would be more in line with the part time nature of her work.

Karl noted that:

> *"I felt the teacher was using the transition period between the acting head and me as an opportunity to try to change the way things worked to her advantage. The thing is I was saying to myself if she can get away with it then what message does that send and so I decided to do something about it."*

Karl arranged for a further meeting between himself and the teacher during which he made it clear that his expectation was the same as that of the previous substantive headteacher; that every member of the teaching staff should attend parent's evenings in order for parents to meet their child's teachers and for parents to receive a full and balanced picture of their child's development. Karl described the meeting:

> *"It's fair to say that I was nervous about going head to head with someone so early on but also felt pretty mad that someone was trying it on and thinking that I wouldn't mind! Anyway, it had to be done. When I thought about it, I realised that if I gave in on this one then where would it stop? I'd have people not turning up for staff meetings, INSET days and all sorts!"*

Karl decided that he was going to take a firm, almost aggressive, line during the meeting and that he would make his thoughts entirely clear. Karl admitted that fortunately the teacher arrived at the meeting in a conciliatory mood and she agreed that her action was inappropriate and unprofessional. She would, she told Karl, ensure that in future she would attend all parent's evening meetings but she was still adamant in her insistence that it was an unfair policy to expect part-time teachers to attend every meeting.

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

The teacher feels that the authority to take decisions regarding school policy lay within her role boundary. It would appear that the headteacher disagrees and thinks that he holds the authority to make decisions regarding school policy and the direction of his staff. The headteacher shows a strong desire to maintain his authority and to protect his role boundary. He was concerned that should he allow the teacher to direct her own professional duties (i.e. dictate when and where she would undertake her professional duties) his authority would be severely undermined, potentially leading to similar role boundary challenges from other members of part-time staff in respect of similar and related matters of attending school meetings. Such a perception led Karl to decide to view his decision making power as an unmoveable part of his role boundary and he was therefore prepared to defend his authority to take decisions regarding staff direction regardless of outcome. One interpretation is that it would have been more emotionally difficult for Karl *not* to have confronted the challenge because of the internal emotional turmoil that he would experience in fearing that he may, in receiving more requests for non-attendance from other part time members of staff, be perceived by the school as being 'weak'. By deciding to directly address the matter himself Karl takes the decision that he must enforce his role boundary in order to ensure that he does not in future risk carrying the constant emotional turmoil that he feels at the thought of teachers defining and directing their own professional duties and in so doing lose an aspect of his legitimate authority as headteacher, thus re-positioning an aspect of his role boundary. It might be argued that his decision to defend his role boundary by asserting a legitimate role boundary behaviour (i.e. to call a meeting with the teacher to make clear his expectations) and so risk a potentially difficult confrontation with the teacher is a less emotionally painful thought for Karl than the thought of the implications of the potential actions that other individuals might take in future if he chooses not to take action to defend his role boundary.

The incident was founded upon a single report from one member of the teaching staff and it

would seem that Karl's account does not make mention of his investigating her claim further. Whilst the outcome of the role boundary conflict appeared to strengthen Karl's perceived legitimate authority to take decisions in respect of the direction of staff duties it could just as easily have undermined his authority should he have decided to have taken action by way of a one-to-one meeting and it had subsequently proved to be that the claim was inaccurate or incorrect.

Vignette 13: Deputation of teaching assistants seeks to define their role

Critical incident vignette

The incident involved two teaching assistants who approached Karl with a request to define their own professional duties. This is interesting in the sense that the following vignette has a similar theme to the previous vignette suggesting something about his suspicion surrounding the lack of strong leadership of the acting headteacher that Karl speaks of in his context section.

The incident took place during one of Karl's summer term visits to school prior to his taking up substantive post in September. Karl had arranged with the acting headteacher and staff to make an informal tour of the school to observe its work. During the visit Karl was approached by two teaching assistants who asked him if he was going to allow them to continue teaching French across the school when he took up post in September. Karl reported the discussion in the following way:

> "*I was pretty surprised that they had asked me about this. They knew that I had already highlighted literacy as an area for development across the school. Modern Foreign Languages is not a statutory part of the national curriculum is it, so I told the teaching assistants that I wanted their focus to be on working with targeted groups of children to improve their reading and writing skills. That was the priority."*

Karl reported that the teaching assistants responded negatively to his direction of their duties and was later informed by the acting headteacher that she had been told that they had transmitted their feelings of discontent during playtime discussions with colleagues in the staff room later that morning making it, *"a very negative place to be"*. Karl felt that he had made his point and chose not to pursue the matter any further. The teaching assistants made several further attempts to petition him to change his mind during his subsequent visits, but when

their lobbying proved ineffective, one teaching assistant decided to leave to follow her interest in languages and the other seemed to accept the new headteacher's newly defined role for her in terms of curriculum delivery.

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

It is possible to take the view that the recent organisational instability in the school was an important animating influence leading to the critical incident. Arguably, the relaxed period of transition where the school had been led by an acting headteacher had led to a lack of clarity about individual role boundaries and it would seem that the teaching assistants considered that they had the authority to take the decision to direct their own duties and that they could, therefore, enact that behaviour. The headteacher perceives their request to teach French and not English, his priority for school improvement, as a challenge to his legitimate authority and as being a significant issue that will form a critical element of his socialisation. He therefore decides to defend his role boundary and he takes action.

The headteacher experiences the approach of the teaching assistants as an attempt to re-position his role boundary in such a way that he feels it will lead ultimately to his losing the perceived legitimate authority to direct the professional duties of individual members of staff. He decides to assert himself by exercising his authority to reject their requests to direct their own work. In exercising his authority Karl reinforces his role boundary as headteacher. He actions make it clear to the teaching assistants that their request to continue to teach French is a behaviour that lay beyond their own role boundaries because it lay beyond their authority to take the decision to do so. That authority rests with the headteacher. His frank and strong refusal to accept the teaching assistant's attempt to coerce his authority is received in a manner that the teaching assistants find unacceptable and they felt that they needed to share their feelings of anger and frustration in the staff room. Such action would suggest the emotionally charged nature of role boundary conflict and the way in which it can affect an organisation beyond those individuals involved in the conflict itself. The result is that the teaching assistants have to accept that the authority to take decisions about the professional work does not lay within their role boundary and that therefore they do not have the authority to continue act in the same way (i.e. to continue to teach French) in future. It would appear that one individual accepts the changes but the other does not and the result is that she chooses to leave the organisation. Thus, Karl's decision to demonstrate his legitimate authority strengthens his role boundary. He uses that authority to redirect the tasks of the teaching

assistants and so asserts his role boundary through a combination of his role as position and his role as practice.

First 6 months

Vignette 14: Child safety issue

Context

The incident recorded in this vignette took place on the first day of Karl's headship and involved the headteacher making critical decisions about the safety of a child under intense time pressure. The incident demonstrates the way in which headteachers can be called upon at any time to involve themselves in matters where the role boundary of the headteacher and that of a parent/carer, or any other individual, might become an emotionally charged point of blurred delineation. In the following vignette, Karl has to make a decision at the end of his first day in post as to whether or not he allows a child to leave the premises with her parent.

Critical incident vignette

At the close of the school day Karl received an urgent message from the school secretary. She had recognised a parent, a mother, who had been served a court order standing by the school gate, possibly waiting to collect her child. The court order had forbidden the parent to have contact with her child and it was therefore imperative that the child was not allowed to leave the premises with this adult.

Karl recognised the critical nature of the following minutes, noting that:

> *"I decided to remove the child from her class prior to the ringing of the end of day bell to avoid any possibility that the child might leave the building. I took her* [the child] *to the school office to wait with 'A'* [the school secretary]*."*

The secretary informed Karl that the child had a social worker whose contact information was available on the child's personal file. Karl asked the school office to contact the child's social worker and to ask him to collect the child from the school office. Karl's decision to contact the social worker was:

> *"very difficult - this was a big decision to make on my first day and I didn't really know if I was doing the right thing or not. No-one knew who* ***was*** [Karl's emphasis] *supposed to collect the child all I knew was that it wasn't supposed to be her mother. It was a bit stressful to be honest, explaining to the child, you know, that you can't go just yet – yes, it was a* **very** [Karl's emphasis] *stressful situation!'"*

Karl decided that he would keep the child under supervision in school until he could gain clarification as to who exactly should be responsible for collecting her at the end of the school day. He then decided that he should confront the parent. Karl decided that he could not bring the individual into the privacy of the school to discuss the matter as this would require them both entering through the main school entrance which would be in close proximity to where the child was waiting. Instead, he decided to ask the parent to come to one side, away from the other waiting adults, to discuss the matter. Having discussed the issue with the adult in question at the school gates, Karl felt confident that the adult was very clear of the rules regarding her child's collection from school:

> *"I was apprehensive about speaking with her* [the parent]*. What if I got this wrong and she didn't have any kind of restriction placed upon her? Not a good start on your first day, upsetting a parent in public! Anyway, it turned out that she was entirely clear about the restrictions placed upon her by the court order, but she wasn't able to provide any good reason for being at the gate. I told her that the social worker was on their way and she said she understood why I had done what I had and left."*

The child's social worker would later take responsibility for arranging for the child to be taken home and for ensuring that future arrangements for her collection from school were made clear.

Karl was of the opinion that the child's mother was attempting to use his suspected lack of knowledge of the family situation to her advantage:

> *"I think she was trying it on. She knew that it was my first day. I reckon that she thought no one would notice and would let me know. Good job that 'A'* [the school secretary] *had spotted her or God knows what might have happened."*

Karl noted that he felt that the parent's action was purposeful and premeditated and that he perceived the situation as a direct challenge to his authority as headteacher. He noted that:

> *"She must have known that if I'd been told she was there that I'd have to confront her but she obviously took the risk that I wouldn't do it."*

Karl concluded that he felt the incident had strengthened his position as headteacher in the eyes of the parents because he showed that even on his first day he was prepared to take whatever difficult action was required wherever and whenever it was necessary. He felt that his action had shown him to be, *"a strong headteacher"* and was of the opinion that as such the incident had enhanced his credibility.

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

The court order has altered the parent's role boundary in such a way that it has removed her legitimate authority to collect her child from school something that the parent is well aware of. In waiting to collect her child at the school gates, therefore, the parent is acting beyond her role boundary perhaps in the hope that the new headteacher will be unaware of the restrictions placed upon her by the court order.

When the headteacher is made aware that the parent should not be waiting to collect her child he experiences a challenge to his role boundary. The headteacher takes swift action to ensure the child's safety (i.e. removing her from class and ensuring that she is supervised) before deciding to confront the parent at the school gate. However, Karl recognises that in approaching the parent at the end of the school day, and at the school gates, he will be operating at the very limits of his role boundary as headteacher. Further, the confrontation takes place on his first day and in full view of other parents making his action open to public scrutiny. The headteacher experiences feelings of stress in deciding to take action, demonstrating the emotionally challenging nature of role boundary conflicts. In noting his feelings of concern the headteacher recognises the potentially damaging consequences to his credibility should he choose to confront the parent in public on the first day of his headship and it go badly. He appears to be aware that such a confrontation would have the effect of either strengthening or weakening his perceived legitimate authority in a public forum. In discussion with the parent the headteacher subtlety alludes to his authority to trigger action from the combined role boundaries of the court and social services as a means to enhance

how his own role boundary is perceived by the parent (i.e. that the authority to take such actions lay within his role boundary as headteacher). She quickly recognises that she has no recourse to any action other than to concede that the decision to contact the court, social services or indeed any other enforcement agency lay within the headteacher's role boundary over which she has no control. Her decision is therefore to withdraw and she agrees to leave.

Vignette 15: A parental accusation

Context

The incident recorded in this vignette took place two months into Karl's headship. It involved the headteacher dealing with a verbal complaint from an incredibly angry parent of a child at the school. The parent accuses another child of damaging his property and demands that the headteacher take action.

Critical incident vignette

On Monday morning Karl received a telephone call from a parent of a child in the school. The parent was accusing another child in the school of damaging his car and stealing the vehicle's hub caps on the Saturday of the previous weekend. Karl noted:

> *"He was livid! It was quite funny really. He said that a boy from* [the school] *had nicked his car hub caps and had damaged some of the paintwork. He wanted to know what I was going to do about it! He seemed to think that the boy was a member of the school council and that at the very least I should remove him from the council because he wasn't a good advert for the school and tell all the children why I had done it."*

Karl informed the parent that anything that happened outside of school premises or school hours, such as his accusation, was beyond the remit of his authority.

> *"I told him that there was nothing I could do. The damage to his car was done at the weekend and off of school grounds. What could I do? I don't know what he was thinking really."*

Karl reported that the parent at this point became very irate and informed him that he was, *"going to take matters into his own hands and come down to the school to sort it out."* At this point, and not knowing the parent in question, Karl became concerned that should the parent decide to come along to the school he might cause a scene and that people and property might be at risk.

> *"I thought oh, no,...what's he going to do now. The only thing I could do was to restate my argument, which I did; that the incident was a police matter as it was concerned with damage to a car done at a weekend. I told him that it was nothing to do with the school and there was nothing I could do about it."*

Karl reported that the parent told him once again that he was going to, *"deal with it himself",* and then ended the telephone call by hanging up. Karl reported that for the rest of the day he, *"was worried that the parent might arrive at school to take matters further"*, but that this did not happen; neither had he heard that the parent had taken any further action in respect of the matter with the police.

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

In requesting that the headteacher take action against the child the parent was attempting to re-position his own role boundary. He is seeking to use the headteacher's role boundary as a medium through which he can obtain a swift retribution for the alleged crimes against him. Karl, whilst initially taken aback by the immediacy and intensity of the unexpected and angry telephone call from the parent, very quickly regains his composure and decides that he will repel the parent's attempt to use his role boundary to take action to punish the child. The parent appears to be seeking to inform Karl that as headteacher his role boundary should require that he removes the child from the school council as a punishment for having allegedly damaged the vehicle. Whilst the authority to take such actions does indeed lay within Karl's role boundary to take the decision to do so in this instance would be an illegitimate use of his authority in the sense that Karl would have had his role boundary manipulated by the parent's actions and it becomes, therefore, a medium for the parent's vengeance. Karl informs the parent that his request is inappropriate and he refuses to take action on the parent's behalf. Such decisive action is an effective assertion of role boundary behaviour and one to which the parent has no recourse. Perhaps ironically, Karl informs the parent that his decision not to take any action is based upon the fact that the incident took place at a time (i.e. at a weekend) and

at a place (i.e. outside of the school grounds) where he could not be called upon in role as headteacher. In making such an assertion, Karl points to the matter being beyond his legitimate authority and therefore by implication beyond his role boundary.

Karl successfully defends his role boundary position when he refused to accept the parent's desire for him to act as a medium for retribution. Karl's decision not to engage with the matter, perhaps by agreeing to make enquiries on behalf of the parent, demonstrates a clear knowledge and understanding of his role boundary. The outcome of the boundary incident strengthened Karl's perceived authority in role by clearly demarcating what is, and what is not, appropriate professional work for a headteacher (i.e. what does, and what does not, lay within his role boundary).

Second 6 months

Vignette 16: A parental issue with the chair of governors

Context

The incident involved Karl and the chair of governors. Karl had been working through the detail of a complex change to employment law that would lead to imposed changes to the contractual obligations of support staff in all schools. Karl learns that the chair of governors had visited school to speak with support staff and that during the discussion he had offered his personal assurances as chair of the governing body that he would ensure that support staff would not be adversely affected by the impending changes.

The local authority had written to schools in the early weeks of the school year and had informed headteachers that it was to be their intention to implement a pay and contract review for part time teachers and support staff. The intention of the review was to ensure that contractual arrangements for part time teachers could be brought into line with national expectations, making it clear what was to be expected of teachers working less than five days each week during term time. This was not currently the case and in some cases part time teachers were receiving more or less favourable pay and working conditions than similarly contracted colleagues working in schools in other authorities. It was not possible to know how, or even if, the review of part time teacher's pay and conditions would affect all schools in the local authority or even all members of part time staff. Schools were advised to inform staff of the impending contractual review and advised them to be prepared to meet the possible financial costs for potential claims made by any staff found to be eligible for back-pay having

found that historically they had not received an equal level of remuneration as colleagues in other schools. Further, schools were advised to consider how, in making these payments, it might need to make changes to its staffing complement through reducing staff hours or redundancy in order to absorb the costs. Further details would follow from the then Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and local authority.

Critical incident vignette

Karl noted that:

> *"I informed my staff and governors as soon I could and made them all aware of what might happen if the school had to make big back-pay payments, like cutting hours and redundancy. As you can imagine, it didn't exactly go down well!"*

The school had a high number of part-time teachers and Karl made it clear that the announcement was met with quite fierce opposition:

> *"and a degree of fear as well, I think. I found myself having to make it clear time and again that it was not me that was doing this it was a statutory national review that all schools had to implement."*

Karl informed the chair of governors of the teacher's angry reaction. Without the knowledge of the headeacher the chair subsequently visited school to tell each member of the school's part time teaching staff that regardless of the outcome of the review, he would ensure that the teachers would not receive a reduction in their remuneration and that their current conditions of contract, and the expectations placed upon them, would not change.

Karl learned of this and decided to confront the chair of governors over the issue.

> *"I was really mad when I first heard about it. He* [the chair] *didn't have enough information about what was to come to go around telling people that their contracts wouldn't change. The thing is we normally get on pretty well, and I know that he's been really supportive of the school during recent years, but I felt that I had to speak with him about this because he just can't go around saying things like that."*

Karl called a meeting with the chair where he:

> *"made it clear to him* [the chair] *that of course the school needed to communicate changes to staff and try to reassure them if possible but that this was the job of the headteacher – you know, that's what he appointed* **me** [Karl's emphasis] *to do!"*

The chair recognised that he had overstepped the mark and had become involved in what Karl described as, "*the operational management of the school"* and informed the headteacher that he would take a step back from the matter whilst ensuring him of his ongoing support.

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

In entering the school without the headteacher's knowledge the chair of governor's is arguably taking an initial action that lay outside of his role boundary. The headteacher is responsible for the day-to-day operational management of the school and therefore who visits the school and when. The chair's action is therefore outside of his role boundary in the sense that in making an unannounced visit to school he is taking a decision that lay within the headteacher's role boundary. In opening communication with staff on the matter of the staffing review the chair demonstrates his belief that the protection of staff interests lay within his role boundary. The headteacher disagrees and decides to confront the chair. Arguably, in doing so he addresses two discrete role boundary issues. Firstly, in stating that it was he and not the chair that had operational responsibility for dealing with staffing matters the headteacher asserts his own role boundary. Secondly, the headteacher was arguably making a more subtle point to the chair; that he was not afraid to take action when faced with difficult situations. Perhaps more specifically, he was demonstrating that he would be prepared to address school matters that he himself might find personally difficult in nature such as challenging the chair of governors. Such an assertion can be borne out by the headteacher's statement, "*that's what he employed* **me** [Karl's emphasis] *to do!"*

This supposition is further supported by the headteacher's perception that the chair had been very supportive of the school during the recent years of management instability. It is possible, for example, that given the period of management instability the chair of governors had been used to providing the acting headteacher with support by regularly taking decisions regarding the day-to-day management of the school. Thus, it is possible that the chair of governors might consider such action as being legitimately within his role boundary. Such a supposition would suggest that the chair of governors would have considered taking such action as addressing staff to be entirely within his role boundary and it is almost certain given the weight of

evidence that his action was benevolent in its intention. The incident is not, then, malevolent in nature because there was no conscious attempt to challenge the new headteacher's role boundary. Rather, the incident can be seen to be a simple proactive repositioning of the headteacher's and the chair's respective role boundaries initiated by the headteacher. The incident had the further effect of serving to strengthen the headteacher's perceived legitimate authority to challenge others thereby clarifying and strengthening his role boundary and so his legitimation in role.

Case Study 3

Ben

The headteacher is a male in his late thirties. He has extensive experience of primary education and was a leading deputy within the authority in which he works. His primary school is a one and a half form entry primary school in an affluent urban area and has 350 children on roll. The previous headteacher had been in post for over 20 years and the school's previous Ofsted inspection under his leadership had found the school to be 'Good'. Ben reported feeling that the school was mourning the previous incumbent's loss. He felt strongly challenged by the sense of, "past ghosts" as he put it. His perception was that having followed a strong and experienced headteacher he was seen by staff as being unable to fulfil his role as competently as his predecessor on the basis that he simply, "*didn't know enough*." Indeed, Ben reported that on the occasions where he had been forced to admit that he didn't know the answer to a question, or how best to deal with a matter, he could sense from the staff their feeling of his inadequacy as headteacher, something that he felt profoundly.

Vignette 17: A newly qualified teacher's inability to follow school procedure

Context

Ben was telephoned by a parent who claimed that her child, who should have been at an after-school club run by a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT), had arrived home early having been allowed to walk home alone. The parent was angry that whilst she expected that the child was being safely supervised her daughter was in fact making her way home and unsupervised. The parent was incredibly annoyed that the school had allowed the situation to occur and was equally concerned that in all probability the teacher in question might also be unaware that

the child was absent. Such a supposition, should it prove to be the case, would make the matter even more serious because no one would know to go looking for her daughter if there was no recognition that she was in fact missing from the after school club.

First 6 months

Critical incident vignette

Having received the complaint Ben made some enquiries and it appeared that the NQT had not followed school procedures that had been put in place to ensure child safety. These procedures had been clearly explained as part of the NQT's induction and Ben felt that there were no extenuating circumstances to suggest why, on this occasion, the correct procedures had not been followed.

> *"There was nothing I could do. She* [the NQT] *had not taken a register and she did not even realise that the child had left. I felt that it constituted professional negligence."*

Ben was of the opinion that in failing to take an attendance register at the after school club the teacher had not followed school procedure. Further, his view was that in not having been aware that the child had left the club she had shown professional negligence that had endangered a child's safety and well-being. Ben decided to begin competency procedures against the NQT.

Ben reported that his decision to begin competency proceedings against the NQT was met with hostility by other staff members who felt that he was taking an overly hard line. The staff argued that the child had not come to any harm and also pointed out the inexperience of the teacher concerned.

> *"The staff felt that I was acting too rashly; being overly hard on her* [the NQT]. *Their view was that a quiet talking too would have been sufficient."*

However, Ben decided to continue on his chosen course of action and consequently convened a panel of school governors to oversee the competency procedures. He then informed the local authority of the situation. The governors were fully supportive of Ben's course of action. Ben described the experience as being, "*extremely stressful"* and despite having the full backing of the governors, recognised the difficulties that his decision had created with his

emergent relationship with other staff members, some of whom had made it quite clear that they felt that competency procedures were an inappropriately severe reaction to a mistake made by an inexperienced teacher; and, furthermore, an action instigated by an equally inexperienced headteacher.

Having reflected upon his decision Ben decided to take an alternative and less severe course of action. The outcome was that the NQT received a written warning but no further action was taken. When speaking of his first six months as a newly appointed headteacher, Ben said, *"Don't talk to me about it – it was a nightmare and I just want to forget it."*

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

The responsibility to ensure the child's safety lay within the NQT's role boundary. As the member of staff responsible for the after school club it was her duty as an employee of the school to follow the school's designated procedures and policies, including those relating to child protection and safeguarding. In failing to take an attendance register the NQT had allowed a child to leave the school site without permission and without staff knowledge. Interestingly, the child's decision to leave the school building and grounds would suggest that the child believed that the authority to take such a decision lay within her role boundary. When the parent informs the headteacher of the incident and makes a complaint against the NQT she is acting within her role boundary. However, it is perhaps remarkable that the headteacher decides to focus his actions upon the NQT and there does not appear to have been any attempt by the headteacher to discuss disciplining the child for having chosen to act outside her role boundary. One interpretation might be that the headteacher's inexperience had led him to be reluctant to tackle the issue with the parent perhaps in the belief that taking action against the NQT might be a less troublesome course of action to further provoking the child's parent by suggesting disciplining the child.

The headteacher recognises that the NQT had failed to operate within her role boundary and decides to take action against her. The headteacher's decision to begin competency procedures against the NQT lay within his role boundary and is met with full support by his governing body. However, staff feel that his action is unjustly hard on the NQT and they question the headteacher's decision. It is beyond the role boundary of the staff to alter the headteacher's decision to start competency proceedings. However, it appears that the headteacher's inexperience and uncertainty as to the correct way to proceed allowed the staff complaints to successfully re-position Ben's role boundary causing him to choose to reduce the

severity of his actions by issuing a written warning as opposed to initiating competency procedures. The vignette is an example of how a headteacher's role boundary can be influenced by other stake holders within the school community. It also demonstrates how the intense and stressful nature of role boundary conflict can lead to a successful re-positioning of a individual's role boundary ultimately causing that individual (e.g. the headteacher) to act in a way that is commensurate with the opinions of others.

Case Study 4

Eric

Eric is a male in his late thirties. He has 15 years of teaching experience in Early Years settings and some limited experience of teaching in Key Stage 1. He is the headteacher of an inner city infant school and is nursery trained. The school is two form entry and has 180 children on roll. The school faces distinct challenges in terms of behaviour and social deprivation is high. Despite the challenging circumstances the school's last inspection by Ofsted judged the school to be 'Satisfactory' and performance indicators show that the school is continuing to improve.

Eric has worked in his school as a teacher, then as acting deputy headteacher, and had then been promoted to acting headteacher and then substantive headteacher upon the unexpected departure of his predecessor due to ill health. He regarded his relationship with staff, governors and parents as, "*excellent*" despite having, *"come up through the ranks"*. He attributes this to the fact that his promotions coincided with a period of retirements, of others gaining promotions to other schools and of unforeseen illness. His perception is that staff had regarded him as being the individual who supported the school during challenging times and periods of transition by taking on more responsibility to fill the voids left by the departure of others.

Due to the effect of colleagues securing promotions and a number of retirements Eric had recently found it necessary to appoint almost all of his substantive teaching staff, including his deputy and senior leadership team. He also considered himself fortunate to have a significant number of extremely enthusiastic and capable NQTs [Newly Qualified Teachers], again who were appointed by him. The decision to appoint so many NQTs was taken partly as a strategic plan to inject, *"new blood"* into the school and was also due the schools precarious budget situation, brought on by long term instability of the number of children on the school roll.

First 6 months

Vignette 18: Staff discontent

Context

The incident occurs as the result of a national programme of workforce review for support staff in schools (i.e. administrative, kitchen and lunchtime supervisors, caretakers and cleaning staff and teaching assistants). The local authority had written to individual members of staff informing them that it was to review the contracts of its employees and that as a result some individuals would stand to lose money whilst other groups might gain. Support staff were informed that class teachers would be exempt from the review because changes to teacher's pay and conditions had been agreed some years before.

Critical Incident Vignette

Eric made it clear that the review of his staff's pay and conditions was, *"very difficult to manage*". The difficulty lay in the local authority's lack of clarity as to what the review would entail and who it would affect. Further, Eric advised that the advice given to headteachers as to how to manage the review was changing on a day to day basis as legal issues were encountered and resolved at both national and local levels. The result was that staff, *"felt angered by what they considered was the local authority's apparent victimisation of the lowest paid section of the school workforce."* Eric noted that:

> *"My support staff were really angry about the possibility of having to take a pay cut. One or two of them came to see me and asked that I supported them in taking action. They said that they wanted to write to the director of children's services and complain. I said that was OK - it was fine by me".*

Eric did not ask to see the contents of the letter before it was sent and was of the opinion that the director, likely to have been subject to many similar complaints in respect of the matter, would not feel any need to make a personal response. Having submitted the letter Eric reported that he was surprised when several days later he was contacted by the director of children's services who wanted to discuss the matter with him. The headteacher remarked that, *"At first I thought oh shit, I'm in for a right bollocking now, but I was wrong."* Rather, the director offered Eric some practical advice, "*to help bring the whole thing to a swift and*

concise finish. I was really surprised - and I guess grateful, for his advice and decided to get on and put it into practice." Eric called a meeting of the support staff where he explained that the director, having received their letter, had telephoned him to discuss the matter. During the discussion Eric explained to staff that he had made it clear to the director that they were angered by the whole review process and how it had adversely affected morale. He then explained that he had agreed to convey the director's response to staff. The director's response made it clear that the matter of workforce reform was a national issue to be addressed by all local authorities in order to ensure that staff were afforded equal and commensurate terms of contract and remuneration throughout the country and that it was therefore the morally, as well as the legally necessary, right thing to do. Staff accepted that that the decisions being made in respect of their terms and conditions of employment lay outside of the locus of control of the headteacher and thanked him for his support in allowing them to submit a letter of complaint to the local authority.

In reporting on the incident Eric referred to his feeling, *"caught between two stools."*He explained that his overriding concern throughout was that he should be seen to support his staff but at the same time that he, *"should at all times try to keep my hands clean"* so as not to damage his relationship with the local authority.

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

The headteacher experiences an emotional appeal from the support staff who request that he shows solidarity and allows them to take action. They appear to recognise that their request to submit a letter of complaint to the local authority lay at the very extreme of their role boundary both as individual members of staff and as a group. Interestingly, the staff do not need to consult the headteacher before sending a letter. If they were concerned about repercussions they might, for example, have chosen to send the letter anonymously or via their union. However, in requesting that the headteacher allows them to compose such a letter they appear to be seeking his support. The headteacher appears to recognise that the authority to stop staff from sending a letter to the director lay outside of his role boundary; they could send it with or without his consent. He therefore decides to agree to their request in the knowledge that in doing so he will appear to be supportive of his staff and will avoid the inherent risk involved in attempting to operate outside of his role boundary in attempting to stop them composing and sending the letter.

The headteacher does not appear to recognise the potential implications of his action. Specifically, in not requesting to read the letter before it is sent the headteacher fails to take the opportunity to consider the content and whether or not he is recorded in the letter as having directly supported or even recommended the course of action to his staff. To have requested a copy as a courtesy would have been an entirely appropriate way of ensuring that he was familiar with the content of the letter and to have done so would have been to have acted entirely within his role boundary. Had he of done so, he might have considered the ways in which the situation might have developed and the potential, or at least perceived, impact it might have upon his legitimate authority. Thus, Eric risks placing himself in a position where he might be admonished by the director of children's services for not having taken firmer and more decisive action in dealing with his staff – a behaviour that, arguably, would legitimately lay within the director's role boundary in this case.

However, whilst the director does choose to take action he chooses to do so in a very different way. It would seem that the director perceives that the new headteacher has been compromised by staff pressure and decides to intercede on Eric's behalf. Arguably, such a course of action is more appropriate to his role boundary than simply disciplining the headteacher. Thus, the headteacher's mistake in failing to read the letter is redressed by the way in which the director exercised his own role boundary; the outcome being that staff perceive that upon receipt of their letter of complaint the director, in respecting the headteacher's position of authority in school, had requested that he should firmly quell the rebellion. The result is that staff feel that their voice has been heard by the director and further they feel supported by their headteacher for him having allowed them to make the complaint. The director's legitimate authority is strengthened significantly. He does not communicate directly with the staff in response to their letter but arguably acts wisely and within his role boundary when he requests that the headteacher conveys his firm response on his behalf. Such action taken from a distance is a clear demonstration of his authority and of the power that resides within his role boundary should he decide to take any further action. Finally, the manner in which the director chose to utilise his own role boundary meant that Eric's perceived legitimate authority is not damaged and is possibly strengthened given that his staff appear to perceive that he has interceded between themselves and the director. Arguably, the staff considers that Eric's actions demonstrate the strength of his role boundary and his perceived legitimate authority to take action and to influence others at what they consider to be the highest level.

Vignette 19: Dealing with a managed move of a pupil

Context

The incident reports the details of Eric's involvement in a managed move of a child at risk of permanent exclusion. A managed move is an agreed transfer of a child from one school, at which he or she is at risk from exclusion, to another school to afford the child a 'fresh start'. At the time of the interview, managed moves were a new innovation designed to reduce the number of recorded exclusions in the local authority. However, the protocol of a managed move was not explained to headteachers and as a result there was confusion as to how they worked.

Critical Incident Vignette

Eric was contacted by the local authority regarding a child that was at risk from being permanently excluded from another school in the authority. The local authority proposed a 'consultation' with Eric regarding a possible joint approach to supporting the child that would involve the child's current school and Eric's own school. The aim was to avoid the situation where the child might be permanently excluded from his current school. Eric noted that:

> *"The idea was that I'd host him* [the child] *for a short term behaviour intervention. He'd come here for a day or two to see how he got on with us. The hope is that placing the child in another school for a while might break his cycle of negative behaviours*."

If successful, then the authority would approach Eric with a proposal for a longer term block placement of six weeks that would, according to the local authority, provide the child with a fresh start at Eric's school.

Eric agreed to allow the child to spend a few days at the school which his staff later reported as having being a success. He conveyed the child's positive start to the local authority whose response was to inform Eric that in the light of the recent successful trial visits made by the child to his school they had decided to move the child to Eric's school full time under a 'managed move'. Initially, this involved a six week block placement where the child would not attend school full time. Eric was furious:

> *"The term 'managed move' had not been discussed at the 'consultation' meeting. I felt that they* [the local authority] *were taking the piss."*

Eric was very angry that the decision to introduce a managed move had been taken by the local authority on very little evidence that it might actually be successful in the longer term and without consultation with the school. Eric felt betrayed by the local authority who, he felt, had, *"taken advantage of his lack of experience"*.

Some weeks after the six week intervention had been completed and the child had been transferred to Eric's school roll Eric was discussing the situation with another headteacher. Eric's colleague was familiar with managed move protocol and informed him that during the six week placement a child remains on his previous school's roll and therefore the host headteacher can at any point inform the local authority that the placement is to end at which time the child would return to his former school. Eric was also told that if the host school did not take any action to question the matter then at the end of the six week placement the child would automatically be transferred to the host school's roll, which is what had happened.

> *"Only after the child had come onto my school roll was I told that I had the authority to refuse both the placement and the transfer of roll under a 'managed move'. It turns out that a managed move and everything that goes with it has to be agreed between schools, the child's family and the local authority. That didn't happen."*

In fact, Eric was told that the only situation where he could not refuse placement would be in the case of 'a hard to place child' (i.e. a child for whom there is no other school placement available) which was not the case in this particular situation. Eric reported feeling, *"morally obliged* " to support a child who was at risk from permanent exclusion and recognised that his schools involvement was, *"the right thing to do".* He was, however, still furious at how the matter had been handled by the local authority and felt that they had used his inexperience to secure their own desired outcomes.

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

The local authority's initial request that the headteacher's school support a child experiencing behavioural difficulties is made in such a way that the headteacher would seem to feel that his role boundary has been respected. He appears to feel that the local authority have made it

clear that the final decision to admit the child to his school lay with him. The headteacher therefore feels that no indiscretion has occurred. As a result, he agrees to host the child's placement considering it the correct decision to make for all involved.

When the local authority informs the headteacher that the child is to attend his school full time under a managed move they are operating outside of their role boundary. They do not have the authority to make this decision and have not followed the correct protocol in terms of failing to have secured the necessary school agreement for the managed move process to begin. Arguably, despite the headteacher's initial perception of the local authority's intentions their action was in fact a direct attack upon the headteacher's role boundary. The headteacher is unable to repel the local authority's attempt to re-position his role boundary because of his lack of experience of policy and procedure and his inability to ask the right questions about managed moves. He therefore feels very angry about the incident as he feels that the local authority has taken advantage of his inexperience making him unable to fulfil his responsibility as headteacher because of his own lack of knowledge of the extent of the legitimate authority that lay within his own role boundary at that time.

Case Study 5

Cathy

Cathy is a headteacher in her mid-thirties. She has almost 15 years of experience as a primary school teacher, five as deputy headteacher at her current junior school. She was appointed as substantive headteacher of the school following her predecessor's promotion to another headship. The school is a two form entry junior school serving an affluent community. Children enter school with standards that are above the national and local averages. There are low levels of unemployment in the school catchment area and the area is deemed to be an area of high socio-economic status. The school was deemed to be 'Satisfactory' following its latest Ofsted inspection.

In summarising the school as she saw it when she was appointed, the headteacher stated that she felt strongly that, *"The school falls into the category of a 'coasting school' and I am actively working to address this situation"*. One of her key concerns was that there was a need to improve the quality of teaching and learning and that this would have the necessary positive impact upon the school's performance allowing it to move from 'Satisfactory' to 'Good' at its

next Ofsted inspection. The headteacher perceived the current situation to be the result of a school culture that could be characterised by the phrase, *"good enough is good enough".*

Context

Cathy reported feeling an, *"air of resentment"* from a core of staff early on in her headship. She was unclear as to whether the uncomfortable atmosphere was caused by issues that occurred prior to her taking up post relating to the creation of a temporary senior leadership team or whether the resentment was because of her own internal promotion from deputy to headteacher. Cathy was clear that the school had historically been led by, *"very nice, but not necessarily very rigorous heads"* and that staff had not been expected to, *"do or be accountable for very much"*. Cathy explained that staff considered her expectations of them to be unreasonable and her aspirations too high. When reflecting upon this situation she noted that:

> "*There is a culture that has developed where people are not child focused and standards driven, but rather the notion exists that our school is lovely and that we do lovely things here – everything is pink and fuzzy"*.

Cathy explained that staff were unhappy about her more rigorous expectations and that they had decided to, *"work to rule"* in protest.

<u>First 6 months</u>

Vignette 20: Dealing with the poor performance of a teacher

Critical incident vignette

The incident occurred during the performance management review process. Cathy had observed a lesson and she had judged it to be unsatisfactory. Cathy was specifically concerned with the poor quality of teaching and learning that she had seen in the lesson and more generally with the lack of progress made by the children in the class on a longer term basis. Subsequently, the teacher who had taught the lesson had submitted an application to progress from Upper Pay Scale 2 (UPS2) to Upper Pay Scale 3 (UPS3), the highest level of payment available to a classroom teacher. The incident took place following Cathy's first round of lesson observations and after she had been in post for two months.

Progression on the Upper Pay Scale is not mandatory but is made at the discretion of the headteacher. Discretionary awards are made to applicants who demonstrate a significant and sustained professional contribution to the development of the school. When reporting the incident, Cathy explained that the teacher making the application was highly respected for her work in the local community and was also widely recognised for her work as a leading skills teacher for which she received a management point (i.e. an additional payment for her work as a leading skills teacher). However, Cathy considered the quality of the written statement provided by the teacher in support of her application to move from UPS2 to UPS3 to be unsatisfactory, and described it as, *"consisting of two paragraphs describing her work as a leading teacher, work that she was already being paid for".*

Cathy explained that following her own promotion from the deputy to the headteacher of the school the applicant had, with a colleague, made an unsuccessful application for the post of job share acting deputy headteacher in the previous academic year. Cathy considered the unsuccessful application to be a powerful contributing factor to the individual's negative 'work to rule' attitude and was concerned that this attitude was now beginning to affect children's learning. Cathy also perceived that the teacher had decided to utilise the, *"air of resentment"* as a vehicle through which she could demonstrate her own frustration and felt that the teacher had made the conscious decision to become an emissary for the staff on all matters of their discontent. Cathy felt that there was a perception amongst some members of staff that the teacher's adopted role as emissary was her attempt to assert her position within the organisation and was a negative reaction to her failed joint application for the post of deputy headteacher.

Given the poor quality of the UPS3 application and the negative 'work to rule' attitude of the member of staff Cathy decided not to award the pay progression. Cathy explained that she felt that she had to, *"front up"* this member of staff. She described the process as leaving her feeling, "*very stressed and concerned"*. She recognised that these feelings were caused by her insecurity over her decision not to make the pay award. In particular, she described a national lack of guidance or clear criteria to support headteachers in making pay progression judgements and reported feeling concerned that she might not have the backing to say 'no'. When describing the process of denying the teacher a pay progression Cathy noted that the incident:

> *"was excruciatingly painful, because she* [the member of staff] *is also very union minded and so I had all the union stuff to deal with as well.*

I found managing the situation hugely intimidating, but at the same time necessary to break that culture".

Cathy reported having to meet on several occasions with the teacher and union representatives which she described as having been, *"emotionally painful*" and, *"hugely intimidating*". At these meetings Cathy was asked to present evidence as to why she might have declined the teacher's pay progression. She reported having spent a lot of time preparing for each meeting to ensure that her evidence was thorough and compelling. As a result of the meetings the union withdrew their involvement. The researcher later learned through discussions with Cathy that the teacher had decided to leave the school at the end of the academic year. Cathy felt certain that the current incident was a major catalyst for the teacher's decision. Cathy reported that she had learned a great deal from the situation, describing it as, "*an important and steep learning curve*" for her as a new headteacher.

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

Cathy experiences a direct challenge to her role boundary in that whilst the teacher accepts that Cathy has the legitimate authority to award pay progressions she feels that the headteacher is being unjust on this occasion and so approaches her union for support. However, Cathy's actions demonstrate that she has a clear understanding of the behaviours that lay within her own role boundary as headteacher and she consciously decides to use the UPS3 application process as an appropriate mechanism with which to assert her legitimate authority as headteacher. The teacher's decision to contact her union and ask for support in challenging the headteacher's decision lay within her own role boundary as a member of a teaching union. However, the teacher's action does not alter the fact that the legitimate authority to take the final decision in matters of pay progression lay ultimately with the headteacher and despite their efforts Cathy does not allow the union, on behalf of the teacher, to mount a successful attempt to re-position her role boundary (i.e. the headteacher is not persuaded to change her mind). The result is that firstly the union withdraws its involvement on behalf of the teacher and that he teacher herself leaves the school at the end of the academic year. Such an action on behalf of the teacher is illustrative of how role boundary interactions can produce very emotionally intense incidents that can lead to extreme outcomes.

Case Study 6

Graham

Graham is a male in his mid-forties. He has 22 years of experience of teaching children from across the primary age phase and has served as a deputy headteacher for ten years before taking up his first headship. Graham describes the school to which he has been appointed as:

> *"a rural, village school; not too big, not too small but will take some managing. The level of expectation from the monied professionals who live in the area is huge."*

The school is located in a rural setting and has low mobility with 121 children on roll. The school was judged to be 'Good' in its last Ofsted inspection and before that the school was judged to be 'Satisfactory'. Graham felt that the school was slowly improving.

Vignette 21: Chair of governor's argues with parents and resigns

Context

The incident reports the conflict that arises as a result of parental concerns with regard to the proposed groupings for a school residential trip. The chair of governors becomes involved and an open meeting is called at school where the matter is discussed.

Critical incident vignette

The class teacher had asked the children to indicate the friends with whom they would like to share a room. The school policy when conducting such matters was to use a 'sealed ballot' approach in order to avoid the potentially difficult matter of discussing the issue in class whilst allowing the teacher an insight into how to group the children successfully. Having shared the groupings with the children, the following morning Graham was informed by the class teacher that a, *"very angry parent"* had confronted him [the class teacher] before school demanding that the groupings be changed. Graham noted that:

> *"She* [the parent] *was adamant that her child was not going to share a room with this other child in the class. She had heard that this other child had been subject to physical and sexual abuse in the past.*

Basically, I think she felt that the child might do something inappropriate during the residential."

The teacher informed Graham that she would return at the end of the day to speak with him. Graham had not agreed to taking a meeting but reported his recognition that due to the sensitive nature of the issue he should contact the parent as a matter of urgency and agree to meet with her after school that day.

The meeting was held and whilst an alternative solution to the accommodation issue was offered by Graham it was rejected by the parent who argued that she saw no reason why her child should miss out on being with other friends because of another child's problems. A solution could not be found. The parent then informed Graham that if a suitable alternative arrangement could not be presented then she and her husband would withdraw their child from the residential which would mean the child missing out on her end of primary school trip, all because Graham refused to acquiesce to her simple request. On that basis the parent felt that this was discriminatory and she informed the headeacher that she intended to make a formal complaint to the governors with respect to his conduct in the matter. Graham informed the chair of governors of the situation and he subsequently received a series of telephone calls from other parents complaining that they had heard that there was an issue and seeking clarification that their child would be safe. Graham made a further unsuccessful attempt at formulating a suitable solution for all involved and subsequently took receipt of the parent's formal complaint which he forwarded to the chair of governors.

The chair of governors considered that Graham's actions were entirely appropriate and suggested that he convene a meeting with all the parents of the children in the class at which both he and Graham would be present and at which he would express his unequivocal backing for the headteacher. The meeting was arranged.

At the meeting the chair of governors and the parents held a heated argument surrounding the issue leading to the chair stating that if parents were unhappy with the reasonable adjustments that had been made with regards to the matter of accommodation then they should withdraw their children from the residential, possibly calling the whole residential into question; or if they preferred perhaps the parents would like to, *"sort it out between themselves"*. The parents were incensed and as a result of the resulting argument the chair took the decision that his position had become untenable in that by hosting the meeting he had compromised his capacity as chair to remain impartial and had therefore lost the ability to chair Graham's formal complaint panel in relation the matter. He decided to resign. The

residential went ahead without alteration to the accommodation arrangements and with all pupils in attendance.

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

In demanding that her child move rooms for the residential the parent is attempting to operate beyond her role boundary. She makes her initial complaint to the class teacher who feels that he is unable to act within his own role boundary to divert the parent's attempt to re-position her role boundary. Instead, the teacher refers the parent to the headteacher whom he feels has more authority within his role boundary to resolve the issue on his behalf. In stating to the class teacher that she will return to speak with the headteacher after school that day the parent is making a further attempt to re-position her own role boundary, this time attempting to re-position her own role boundary in relation to that of the headteacher who, although he does not have to, agrees to take the meeting. At this stage the headteacher has compromised his role boundary as he has allowed the parent to force him to agree to her demand to meet with him that day. Arguably, the headteacher might have re-asserted the position of his role boundary, and may have regained some initiative in the meeting itself, if he would have exercised his legitimate authority to insist upon meeting with the parent at a time of his own choosing.

In asking that the headteacher agrees to her request the parent is acting beyond her role boundary. She attempts to coerce the headteacher into agreeing to her request that she decides upon the grouping of her child's room by threatening to make a formal written complaint to the governing body. Further, she arguably feels that her attempt to operate beyond her role boundary and to replace the headteacher's authority to take decisions with her own is likely to be successful when she states that the complaint about the headteacher's conduct would be submitted on the basis that the headteacher was discriminating against her child.

Having received the formal complaint against the headteacher the chair of governors acts within his role boundary in the sense that it is entirely appropriate for him to call a meeting at any time. However, it might be argued that he utilises his role boundary in this instance unwisely; to call a public meeting to address a complaint is a high risk strategy. It would appear that in deciding to engage in an argument with parents the chair has allowed the parent's aggression to influence his role boundary and he therefore acts inappropriately. The result is that the chair of governors finds himself in an untenable position and he chooses to resign.

That the residential went ahead without any changes to the original accommodation plan demonstrates that the headteacher does not allow the parent to make a successful attempt to re-position her own role boundary in relation to that of the headteacher. In standing fast he repels the parent's attempt to take the legitimate authority to make decisions as to the organisation of the school into her own hands. The parent, therefore, had failed to achieve her aim. However, the chair of governors, through his own decision to call a meeting with parents, had unwittingly provided a public forum that the parents used to sustain an attack upon his role boundary that could not be repelled causing him to withdraw from the incident through his resignation.

It might be argued that in situations when an individual attempts to operate beyond their role boundary, as the parent did in this incident, the appropriate response from the individual who holds the legitimate authority to make decisions (i.e. the headteacher in this case) does so clearly, quickly and succinctly at the earliest possible opportunity (i.e. at the first meeting with the parent). The headteacher, in using the meeting as he did to put forward an alternative accommodation plan might have made it clear that the parent's choice was simply to choose between plan A or plan B: there would be no Plan C. Arguably, in such cases further discussion, public or otherwise, should be avoided as this happens to increase, rather than decrease, the potential level of challenge to the role boundary of the individual that holds the legitimate authority to take decisions.

Case Study 7

Paul

Paul is a male in his mid forties. He has 20 years of experience of teaching children across the primary age phase and served as a deputy headteacher for seven years before taking up his first headship. Paul describes the school to which he has been appointed as being:

> *"recognised by the local authority as being* ***the*** *area of social deprivation in the authority and so we get a lot of resources, for example we have 13 statements* [of behaviour] *to support and over 20 languages are spoken in the school".*

The school is growing in size with 371 children on roll, including a nursery unit. The school is located on the urban fringe of a densely populated major city. The previous Ofsted inspection of the school took place under the previous headteacher where the school was found to be

‘Satisfactory’ and during the inspection prior to that ‘Unsatisfactory’. Paul recognised that he had inherited an improving school from the previous incumbent.

Vignette 22: Teacher has her school laptop stolen during a burglary and requests that the headteacher replace it for her as she has no home contents insurance

Critical incident vignette

Paul was informed by a member of teaching staff that having taken home a school laptop on which to work the teacher’s house had been burgled and the laptop stolen. The practice of staff taking home their laptop computers, and indeed other school resources, was a precedent set under the previous headteacher and with no safeguard procedures in place. Paul noted:

> *“I asked her if the laptop was covered by her house insurance. She told me that she didn’t have any! I felt like saying well that’s tough then. I’ve never heard of anyone not having contents insurance. That’s mad.”*

The teacher asked Paul for a new laptop stating that without a computer she would not be able to teach effectively. When asked how he responded to the request, Paul replied:

> *“Well, there wasn’t a lot I could do really. There was no way to claim for the thing and I knew that I couldn’t really withhold a replacement. That would be too risky for obvious reasons* [i.e. it would seen that Paul was with holding the resources needed for her to do her job effectively] *so I said I’d order her a new one although I wasn’t happy about it.”*

Paul then went on to explain that he didn’t ever want to be placed in that position again and explained how he intended to introduce a new system of a *‘Removal of Assets’* agreement:

> *“I decided to introduce a ‘removal of assets agreement’ that would stop this happening again. Staff will have to sign for their expensive equipment in future admitting liability for it. Perhaps that might make them more responsible for things.”*

Paul completed the interview by stating that he felt annoyed by the teacher's demand that provide her with a new laptop but that he also felt pleased with the new system he had introduced to ensure that it was not to happen again.

Interpretation from a role boundary perspective

When informing the headteacher of the stolen laptop the teacher is asserting that replacing the laptop is within the headteacher's role boundary and equally that it is within her role boundary to make such a request. The headteacher appears to accept that given the custom and practice of his predecessor the teacher might reasonably make the request and especially so as the teacher seems to suggest that it was not her personal carelessness that led to the laptop being damaged but rather it has been lost as a result of an event that was beyond her control; a burglary. However, the headteacher considers the request to be an attempt to influence him to take action within his role boundary and in considering it to be a demand as opposed to a request resents the approach. The headteacher responds to the teacher's attempt to force him to take action within his role boundary by asking about the teacher's home insurance policy. The teacher seems to recognise that as the school has no set procedures to deal clearly and concisely with her situation she is not concerned to admit that she carries no home contents insurance. Further, she appears to attempt to convince the headteacher to take action commensurate with his role boundary (i.e. to replace the laptop) by asserting that she will be less effective as a teacher without a computer. The combination of a lack of clear procedural guidelines to deal with the matter and the teacher's statement that she will be a less effective professional without a replacement laptop makes it impossible for the headteacher to repel the attempt to coerce him into taking action. Thus, she successfully manages to influence the headteacher into acting within his role boundary when he agrees to her request. The headteacher recognises that the teacher has made a successful attempt to re-position his role boundary that in effect forced him to provide her with a replacement laptop.

Arguably, the headteacher's decision to provide the teacher with a new laptop confirmed the position of his role boundary. He demonstrates decisive and authoritative thinking when he quickly, and without argument, agrees to replace the computer. However, in introducing a new system of a 'Removal of Assets' agreement into the school, he has demonstrated that he has the power and authority to implement change where he identifies an issue that needs to be addressed and that such actions are within his role boundary.

Chapter 6

Discussion of the main findings

Introduction

The purpose of the following chapter is to discuss the main findings identified from the data analysed in the chapter 5 and to identify the significant themes that relate to the socialisation of new headteachers from a role boundary perspective. The chapter consists of six sections. Sections 1 to 3 address each of the research questions. To recap, the research questions are as follows:

1. How can the experiences of those individuals newly appointed to their first primary school headship be interpreted and explained?
2. What is the nature of the experience of those individuals newly appointed to their first primary school headship
3. What can be learned from the interpretation and explanation of newly appointed headteachers to enhance understandings of headteacher socialisation?

Section 4 discusses the potential of role boundary perspective as a methodological and analytical tool that can be applied to the study of socialisation.

The chapter begins by explaining how socialising experiences can be interpreted and explained. It analyses the animating influences that lead to critical incidents during socialisation and argues that role boundary interactions during socialisation are fuelled by feelings of stress that are experienced by both the headteacher and by those affiliated to the organisation. The section discusses the sense-making process that takes place during socialisation before proposing that the socialisation of new headteachers is fundamentally concerned with the exercising of their authority through recurrent, reciprocal and relational social interactions. It goes on to argue that it is the inherent energy that exists within role boundaries that provides an individual new to role with the potential to establish their legitimacy in that role. The section concludes by proposing that socialisation is itself a process of establishing an individual's legitimacy in role and that it is characterised by an individual finding, making and taking up their 'role boundary'.

The second section establishes the nature of socialising experiences for those new to

headship finding that the impact of role boundary interactions is both immediate and intense. The section presents a synchronic analysis of the data from chapter 5 and establishes both the groups of stakeholders involved in critical incidents reported by headteachers during their socialisation and the frequency in which each group appears in the data. Critical incident data is analysed against the six strands of the National Standards for Headteachers (DfES, 2004) that were discussed in chapter 3. The purpose of the analysis is to ascertain which aspects of the professional work of new headteachers are most commonly reported as being traumatic in nature during their socialisation.

The third section is concerned with what can be learned from the interpretation and explanation of the experiences of newly appointed headteachers in order to enhance understandings of headteacher socialisation. The section argues that headteachers have greater influence and therefore control over their socialisation when they combine their understanding of their context with their knowledge of their role as position and their role as practice. Further, the section argues that headteachers can only hope to condition, and not control, their socialisation. The conditioning of socialising experiences is achieved by ensuring that others understand the areas of organisational life in which the headteacher has the legitimate authority to make decisions. Specifically, the research identifies that these decisions are most commonly located in the following areas; task role allocation, resource allocation and the creation and application of organisational procedure.

The chapter continues in section four with a discussion of the centrality of role boundaries during the socialisation of new headteachers finding that role boundaries are an integral, as opposed to an incidental, element within the process of socialisation before proposing role boundary perspective as a rigorous methodological and analytical tool with which one can analyse and understand the complex processes that take place during socialisation.

Section five compares the findings from the current research study with those from previous studies. The section is organised under the same headings used in Chapter 2, the literature review, in order to clearly and specifically demonstrate where the findings drawn from the current research study are aligned with those from other research concerned with the socialisation of new headteachers and the points of delineation and the significance of these differences.

The chapter concludes by setting out the original contributions to knowledge drawn from the current research. These are organised under following headings; the theoretical, the empirical and the methodological.

Section 1: How can the experiences of those individuals newly appointed to their first primary school headship be interpreted and explained?

The following section points to how socialising experiences might be interpreted and explained. It analyses the animating influences that lead to critical incidents during socialisation finding that role boundary interactions during socialisation are fuelled by feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. The section discusses the sense-making process that takes place during socialisation before proposing that the socialisation of new headteachers is fundamentally concerned with the exercising of their authority through recurrent, reciprocal and relational role boundary interactions the outcomes of which are visible through the enactment of decision making behaviours. It goes on to argue that it is the inherent energy that exists within the role boundary interface that provides an individual new to role with the potential to establish their legitimacy in that role. The process of establishing an individual's legitimacy is presented as being a process of finding, making and taking up one's 'role boundary', itself arguably the central process of socialisation.

Socialisation as a sense-making process

It might be suggested that the process of socialisation is itself the very mechanism through which an individual places meaning upon, and draws knowledge from, their organisational context and their understanding of their role. The process of socialisation is therefore consistent with idea that reality is socially constructed and that therefore each individual will have a different conception of reality (Giddens, 1979). Upon entering a new role an individual is charged with the task of finding, making and taking up an understanding of the relationship that exists between their role as position and their role as practice within their organisational context; that is to say, an individual is required to ask themselves the question, "What do I do here and now?" in respect of the actions that they undertake in role. Equally, other individuals ask themselves the same question but in relation to their own actions in role and in relation to those of the new headteacher. Arguably, the trauma experienced by those new to headship (Crow, 2007) is at least in part due to the individual's uncertainty of what are, and what are not, legitimate and appropriate behaviours to enclose within their role boundary. Furthermore, the experience of exploring the nature and impact of these behaviours through recurrent social interactions is very likely to prove difficult given that boundaries are places of inherent energy (Douglas, 1966) and conflict (Hirschhorn, 1993). Thus, the way in which an individual learns to find, make and take up their role boundary is via a series of social interactions that are attributable to the process of sense making.

Identifying the animating influences in socialising incidents

The purposes of the complex social interactions that take place during socialisation are the very way that individuals learn to understand the behaviours that are appropriate to their role boundary. I have already explained that such a process, and therefore socialisation itself, is therefore a sense making activity. The process can be observed through the incidents that occur during socialisation as individuals enact behaviours that can be analysed in the context of the social world. These behaviours are the result of animating influences, or put another way a series of events, that cause an individual to decide whether or not to act. It is therefore important to analyse and understand the events that lead to, or are at the heart of, critical incidents during socialisation. These events, or animating influences, form the context in which an individual decides to enact a specific behaviour, such as an attempt to demonstrate authority through decision making, for example. In turn, having identified the animating influences that lay behind an individual's behaviours it might be possible to further identify recurring themes in the data that might allow us to identify animating categories.

In Table 5.1 I have analysed each of the twenty two critical incident vignettes from chapter 5 in order to identify each of the animating influences and from these I have devised a series of animating categories. Each animating influence identifies the decision that was to be made in each case. For example, the animating influence for vignette number 1 was the need to take a decision over the allocation of the use of a space (a spare classroom). I then ascribe an animating category to explain the nature of the animating influence. For example, the animating category in vignette 1 sees the decision as to how to allocate a space as a decision over how a resource is utilised in school.

Table 5.1: Animating influences leading to critical incidents

Vignette	CI description	Animating Influence	Animating Category
1	Impromptu staff meeting	Designation of space	resource
2	Informal exclusion	Exclusion of a pupil	procedure
3	Parent using car park	Maintenance of school rules	procedure
4	HT and DHT conflict	Performance management	procedure
5	HT intervening in DHT's argument with a parent	Parental accusation of staff having 'bribed' her child	procedure
6	Land exchange: local authority to the church	Negotiating ownership of school buildings and grounds	resource

7	Visiting artist	An alleged physical assault by an adult upon a child	procedure
8	Child's accident	Deciding who was responsible for taking action	task
9	Headteacher's clash with director of children's services	Lack of resources to manage a child's needs	resource
10	Formal exclusion of a child	A child assaulting a member of staff	procedure
11	Parental challenge over restraint	Restraint of a pupil	procedure
12	Teacher failing to attend parent's evening	Failure to comply with school policy	procedure
13	Teaching Assistants' wish to teach French	Staff request to direct their own tasks	task
14	Child Protection	Parent attempting to break the conditions of a court order	procedure
15	Parental accusation	Attempt to have the headteacher act on behalf of a parent	task
16	Argument with the chair of governors	Disagreement as to who should assume responsibility for the operational management of the school	task
17	Child Safety	Investigating the conduct of a NQT	procedure
18	Staff discontent over changes to their pay and conditions	Mediating between staff and the local authority	task
19	Managed move of a child from another school	Dealing with the impact of the local authority's failure to communicate important information	procedure
20	Performance management	The headteacher's decision not to award a pay rise to a teacher	resource
21	School residential	Parents' wishing to direct the headteacher's decision making	task
22	Stolen laptop	Teacher loses a school laptop following a home burglary and insists that having no home insurance that the school buy her a replacement	resource

The data would seem to suggest that socialising incidents that involve new headteachers are concerned with establishing or contesting who has the legitimate authority to make decisions in the following three areas:

- task role allocation
- resource allocation
- procedure

The nature of the three sources of animating categories show that they appear to be concerned with who has the authority to make decisions relating to resources, who has the authority to direct role holders to undertake tasks and who has the authority to introduce and to enforce procedures. In section 2 of the current chapter, I analyse the reasons for these being the predominant animating categories for role boundary conflict by referencing the vignettes against the National Standards for Headteachers (2004). Such an analysis provides a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between the way in which aspects of the professional work of headteachers can, through the animating categories identified above, lead to role boundary incidents during socialisation for those new to headship.

Socialisation: an unending recurrent and reciprocal social interaction; a process of social sense making through role boundary positioning

The analysis of the animating influences in the previous section identifies three distinct animating categories that feature as a central aspect of the social sense making process during socialisation. The purpose of this section is to discuss how individuals make sense of these categories, the critical incidents and the animating influences that create them.

Firstly, it finds that critical incidents are indicative of what is a recurrent, generative pattern during socialisation where a new headteacher's role boundary is shaped through experiencing a series of social interactions. Secondly, critical incidents are socially reciprocal, in that they necessarily require an interplay between the role boundaries of both the headteacher and those of others in the organisation. Thirdly, by implication of their being recurrent and socially reciprocal such incidents are therefore also socially relational in that they require individuals to engage in resolving social matters that affect the interrelated worlds of their working context and their social relationships with one another.

The critical incidents reported by those headteachers whose socialisation was studied for the longest period (headteacher Matt, three years; and headteacher Karl, one year) demonstrates

that they reported a number of recurrent socialising experiences (11 and five respectively) whilst of those headteachers interviewed in phase 1 (i.e. after having been in post for six months) one headteacher reported as many as three separate incidents. Such an observation would suggest that the intensity of the socialisation process will differ for each individual perhaps being reliant on important contextual matters within each school as has been pointed out earlier. Whilst an analysis of the critical incidents does not support the argument that socialising incidents are recurrent, in the sense that they necessarily involve the same individuals attempting to position their role boundary through the same medium time and again, although that might well be the case, it does suggest that socialisation is experienced as a number of recurrent interactions that take place at the role boundary interface. It is therefore possible to assert that socialisation is characterised by a number of recurrent incidents that occur time and again although perhaps not involving the same individuals or delivered through the same social medium.

Secondly, social interactions during socialisation are reciprocal in nature. An analysis of the critical incident vignettes reveals that in each case there was an outcome. That is to say, that having experienced an animating influence either the new headteacher or other individuals involved felt compelled to make an attempt to take decision making action in order to generate an outcome regardless as to whether they have the legitimate authority to enact that behaviour (i.e. the behaviour does not lay within their role boundary). Arguably, even when there was no discernable effect to the context where, for example, the outcome of the incident was simply to maintain the status quo, the socialising incident nevertheless still serves to confirm the existing position of the role boundaries involved. Such an observation is borne out in vignettes one, 14 and 15 where the headteachers acted within their role boundary in order to limit the attempt by others to implement change. In doing so each headteacher utilises their legitimate authority in role as leader and manager of the school.

The outcome for the individual that makes the initial attempt to enact a behaviour that lay within their role boundary will either be viewed as having been successful or unsuccessful and on two levels. Firstly, their actions will have succeeded or will have failed to alter their context through the direction of work related tasks, resources or in regard to working procedure. Secondly, their success or failure to have asserted their authority will, in role boundary terms, have led to the strengthening or the weakening of their role as position in relation to another individual or group of individuals thereby having a similarly perceived, yet not actual, effect upon their role boundary. Thus, socialising incidents are reciprocal in their outcomes on two levels; on the one hand we might consider the outcome of the incident as to how it has altered

or maintained the organisational context through the deployment of personnel, resources or procedure whilst on the other hand we might consider the outcome in terms of the respective impacts upon the role boundaries of the individuals involved.

A third dimension: The relational and transformative energy in boundaries

Douglas (1966) argues that boundaries are areas of tension that are tested and that as suchboundaries are therefore inherently dangerous places. Douglas also argues that boundaries are transient places and notes that there is, *"energy in margins and unstructured areas"* (Douglas, 1966, p. 114). For Douglas, it is the energy that lay within role boundaries that enables change.

As we have seen, if we are to argue for the recurrent and reciprocal nature of social interactions we should also consider that by implication this would suggest that such interactions are also necessarily relational. Such an assertion is founded upon the earlier finding that socialising incidents have the potential to lead to changes in the organisation and at the very least can lead to temporary changes in the respective role boundaries of those involved as, for example, when an individual allows another individual to re-position their own role boundary. Moreover, to accept that socialising incidents are recurrent, reciprocal and are therefore necessarily relational in nature is to suggest that the outcomes of role boundary interactions are transformational in nature. Thus, the critical nature of socialising incidents demonstrates that boundaries are places where the combination of the inherent energy therein when coupled with a lack of structure causes them to be contested through repeated conflict. Arguably, such a view would suggest that socialisation can be seen as being the very process of individuals establishing and maintaining their respective role boundary positions. Thus, the nature of the socialising incidents alters the social dynamics that exist between individuals within the organisation, itself by nature being an essentially relational process.

Finally, it would seem that the notion of socialisation as an inherently recurrent process would appear consistent with the assumption that socialisation is an on-going process of learning and adaptation that never ends. Such an assertion would appear consistent with the analysis of the critical incident data that demonstrates that role boundaries will constantly be repositioned as new individuals or resources leave or enter the organisation and new ways of working are developed and are introduced. Socialisation, therefore, can be characterised as being an unending and perpetual relational process that is characterised by a wide and diverse range of social incidents caused by interactions between groups of individuals each of whom are

seeking to assert their actual or perceived authority to enact a series of behaviours that they consider lay within their respective role boundaries.

Section 2: What is the nature of the experience of those individuals newly appointed to their first primary school headship?

The purpose of the following section is to understand the nature of socialising experiences for those new to primary headship. The section provides a synchronic analysis of the data and identifies both the individual stakeholder groups that are reported as being involved in each critical incident and the number of times they are reported, thereby identifying the stakeholder group most frequently involved in the critical interactions during a new headteacher's socialisation. The section then analyses the critical incident vignettes against the six strands of the National Standards for Headteachers (DfES, 2004) that were discussed in chapter 3, these being:

- shaping the future
- leading learning and teaching
- developing self and working with others
- managing the organisation
- securing accountability
- strengthening community

The purpose of the analysis against the National Standards for Headteachers (DfES, 2004) is to understand which aspects of the professional work of headteachers are most frequently called upon during their socialisation. The analysis, by implication of the data being reported in the vignettes as being critical in nature, and therefore in that sense significant, reveals which aspects of the professional work of headteachers causes them most concern during their socialisation. The section concludes with an analysis of these themes and the identification of the most common issues that underpin role boundary challenges for new headteachers.

Establishing a boundary typology: A synchronic analysis of the data

The nature of the socialisation process for those new to headship, as revealed through the critical incident vignettes, is that it is immediate and intense. New headteachers can expect to encounter socialising experiences from the moment of their appointment and it is certainly

possible that socialising incidents can take place before a new headteacher has taken up his or her substantive post. Such an argument is borne out in the data where headteacher Matt and headteacher Karl reported a total of three critical incidents during the pre-incumbency phase of their socialisation whilst a further two incidents were reported by the same headteachers on their first day in post. Arguably then, the initial experiences for those new to headship would suggest the immediacy of the socialising experience might possibly be an important contributing factor accounting for the trauma of early headship (Crow, 2007).

Whilst the data points to the immediacy and intensity of socialising experiences, it also provides an indication as to which stakeholder groups are involved in socialising incidents and the frequency in which they are involved. Table 6.1 presents an analysis of the critical incident (CI) vignettes and reveals that headteachers reported six stakeholder groups as being participants in their socialisation, these being; children, governors, the local authority, parents, staff and visitors to school.

Table 6.1: Sources of critical incident vignettes by stakeholder group

	Children	Governors	Local Authority	Parents	Staff	Visitors
CI Vignette Number	1, 10	16	6, 9, 19	2, 3, 11, 14, 15, 21	1, 4, 5, 12, 13, 17, 18, 20, 22	7
Total	2	1	3	6	9	1

Of the six groups the largest number of critical incidents involved the headteacher interacting with members of their staff (9 CI's) and the second largest group involved headteachers and parents (6 CI's). It is interesting that five of the six participant groups were adults. Such an observation might be considered surprising given the ratio of children to adults in schools. Indeed, headteachers reported only two critical incidents involving children meaning that the remaining 20 vignettes, the overwhelming majority, involved encounters with adults. Such a finding would suggest that the socialisation of new headteachers is predominantly influenced by socialising encounters with adults and not with children.

The nature of the critical incidents and the National Standards for Headteachers (DfES, 2004)

The table below sets out the National Standards for Headteachers (DfES, 2004) that were discussed in chapter 3 of the thesis. To recap, the six strands of the framework were devised as a conceptual tool with which to understand the fundamental work of school leaders. The six strands are; shaping the future, leading learning and teaching, developing self and working with others, managing the organisation, securing accountability and strengthening community.

Each critical incident vignette was analysed against the national standards and placed against the strand that represents the nature of the headteacher's professional work in each situation. Each number in the table below refers to the corresponding vignette in chapter 5. The purpose of the analysis is to establish those aspects of a new headteacher's professional work that are more or less prominent during their socialisation.

Table 6.2: An analysis of vignettes against the National Standards for Headteachers (DfES, 2004)

Key Area of National Standards for Headteachers	Description of Headteachers Actions in the Key Area	CI Vignette Number
Shaping the Future	Think strategically, build and communicate a coherent vision in a range of compelling ways Inspire, challenge, motivate and empower others to carry the vision forward Model the values and vision of the school	
Leading Learning and Teaching	Demonstrate personal enthusiasm for and commitment to the learning process Demonstrate the principles and practice of effective teaching and learning Access, analyse and interpret information Initiate and support research and debate about effective learning and teaching and develop relevant strategies for performance improvement Acknowledge excellence and challenge poor performance across the school	20
Developing Self and Working With Others	Foster an open, fair, equitable culture and manage conflict Develop, empower and sustain individuals and teams Collaborate and network with others within and beyond the school Challenge, influence and motivate others to attain high goals Give and receive effective feedback and act to improve personal performance	4, 5, 15, 18 16

	Accept support from others including colleagues, governors and the LEA	
Managing the Organisation	Establish and sustain appropriate structures and systems Manage the school efficiently and effectively on a day-to-day basis Delegate management tasks and monitor their implementation Prioritise, plan and organise themselves and others Make professional, managerial and organisational decisions based on informed judgements Think creatively to anticipate and solve problems	2, 10, 11, 12, 19, 22 3, 7, 8, 14, 17, 21 13 1, 6, 9
Securing Accountability	Demonstrate political insight and anticipate trends Engage the school community in the systematic and rigorous self-evaluation of the work of the school Collect and use a rich set of data to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school Combine the outcomes of regular school self-review with external evaluations in order to develop the school	
Strengthening Community	Recognise and take account of the richness and diversity of the school's communities Engage in a dialogue which builds partnerships and community consensus on values, beliefs and shared responsibilities Listen to, reflect and act on community feedback Build and maintain effective relationships with parents, carers, partners and the community, that enhance the education of all pupils	

An analysis against the criteria of the National Standards for Headteachers (DfES, 2004) demonstrates the type of professional work that the headteachers were required to undertake in dealing with each critical incident. Of the twenty two reported incidents twenty one cases were concerned with "developing self and working with others" (five vignettes) and "managing the organisation" (sixteen vignettes) whilst only one incident required the headteacher to "acknowledge excellence and challenge poor performance across the school" (vignette 20). Arguably then, the data would suggest that the overwhelming majority of incidents reported by new headteachers as being critical in nature during their socialisation are, perhaps unsurprisingly, fundamentally social in nature, and are concerned with managing people. Further, the analysis would suggest that the socialisation of new headteachers is focused upon just 25% of the competencies of headship that are set out in the national standards. Such an observation is interesting in the sense that it would imply that much of what the national standards, and so Department for Education and Skills (as was in 2004), deems fundamental to successful school leadership is of secondary importance to new headteachers during

socialisation (some 75% of the role of headship). Thus, it might be argued that the most successful way to support those new to headship would be to provide early and specific input to develop each individual's knowledge and understanding of a narrow field of competencies, these being "managing the organisation" and "developing self and working with others". I return to this point in section 3.

It is interesting that new headteachers did not report any of the multifarious administrative tasks required to successfully manage a school as being critical in nature. To find that those new to headship do not appear to consider the administration of their school as being critical in nature during socialisation is perhaps surprising. Certainly, when one considers that many of the administrative tasks associated with headship are 'high stakes', in the sense that they have profound implications for both the headteacher and for their school if they are not conducted in a timely and accurate manner, it does seem remarkable that administration is not reported more often in the data. Further, many of the administrative tasks associated with headship, such as reporting to national government, setting a school budget or arranging the staffing complement and associated contracting matters, can only be completed by a headteacher. Thus, it follows that it would be highly unlikely that many new headteachers will be experienced in undertaking such tasks before taking up their first headship, unless, of course, they had experienced a period as an acting headteacher, for example. That none of the headteachers involved in the research had been an acting headteacher, and therefore were unlikely to have had experience of undertaking the administrative aspects of headship before taking up their substantive post, would seem to support the argument that it is surprising that administrative tasks were not considered critical in nature. Perhaps one might conjecture that the headteachers interviewed must have been successful in quickly learning the administrative aspects of their new role for to have made an oversight or error when attending to such important matters would very likely have led to the situation being conceived by the headteacher as being critical in nature and thus reported as such during the research.

Section 3: What can be learned from such an interpretation to enhance understandings of headteacher socialisation?

The following section is concerned with what can be learned from the interpretation and explanation of the experiences of newly appointed headteachers to enhance understandings of headteacher socialisation. It analyses the data in order to explore the relational interaction between the new headteacher and their context. The section explores the idea that an individual's ability to influence, or condition, their socialisation is dependent upon how

accurately he or she can formulate a correct understanding of their context. Such a view is based upon the notion that an individual who has a clear understanding of their organisational context will be the more successful in effectively apply their limited knowledge of their role as position and their role as practice. The section further argues that headteachers can manipulate and condition their socialisation if they ensure that they retain, and do not relinquish through attempts to re-position their role boundary, the authority to enact behaviours relating to the key strands of the National Standards for Headteachers (2004) that are most called upon during their socialisation; "developing self and working with others" and "managing the organisation". Further, section 1 of the current chapter identified the animating categories within these two strands that are most often contested during socialisation, these being; task role allocation, resource allocation and the creation and application of organisational procedure. Thus, if new headteachers are to successfully condition their socialisation they should be mindful to ensure that they assert their authority over these matters during socialising incidents.

Socialisation as decision-making

Socialisation might be compared with the notion of situational learning (Miller, 1970; Atkinson and Delamont, 1985) where an individual establishes their role boundary through their decision making behaviours. Decision-making is an implicit aspect of organisational life (Mullins, 2005) as it is through the process of making decisions that an organisation learns how its work and resources are to be directed and allocated. Decisions, and importantly who takes them and when, are therefore the most significant form of organisational behaviour given that decision making will both be influenced by, and will influence, the behaviours of the organisation through recurrent, reciprocal and relational social interactions. Understanding the process of socialisation can therefore be achieved through an analysis of organisational behaviours and most notably, decision making behaviours. Of course, the key issue is to establish who has the authority to enact decision making behaviours; within whose role boundary do these behaviours lay. Therefore, the very process of socialisation itself is that of individuals learning which decision making behaviours lay within their own role boundary (i.e. which decisions are they authorised to make) and those that do not.

The concept of the role boundary, as it has been developed and employed in the present research, is one that views socialisation as being concerned with an individual's need to identify and make sense of a set of behaviours that are appropriate to their role as position

and role as practice. Such an assumption necessarily predicates that the legitimate authority to take the decision to set into motion a set of behaviours must rest with an individual or group of individuals. Where there is a dispute between individuals with regard to who has the legitimate authority to make a decision there will be an incongruity between role boundaries that leads to conflict.

Role boundary conflict is influenced by a sense of role ambiguity or a pre-existing context that promotes overlapping role sets. Role ambiguity is described as being an uncertainty with regard to who has the authority to take decisions. It is characterised by individuals essentially asking "Do I do this, or do you?" Equally, where role boundaries overlap, that is to say where it has been the case that two or more individuals have by virtue of consent, or by default, have alternately taken decision-making responsibility in a given matter, it will inevitably lead to conflict when a new individual claims sole authority over decision making. Such a scenario is clear in the socialisation of headteacher Matt, Karl and Cathy where each headteacher experienced significant socialising incidents as they sought to establish that is was they and not their staff that had the authority to take decisions.

An attempt to assert authority over a decision making process through taking decisive action may be legitimate (that is to say, the individual holds the authority to enact that behaviour as it lay within their role boundary) or illegitimate (that is to say, the individual does not have the authority to enact that behaviour; the behaviour therefore lay outside of their role boundary). The current research provides examples where headteachers have employed illegitimate decision making behaviours that by implication lay outside of their role boundary enclosure and therefore also outside of their legitimate authority (e.g. when Matt enforces an illegal exclusion and when Eric challenges the director of children's services). However, in some cases the headteacher still achieved their desired outcome despite enacting a behaviour that lay beyond their role boundary and so attempted to force action that lay beyond their authority. It therefore follows that one might argue that in terms of understanding the process of socialisation, it is the outcome of socialising incidents that is important as opposed to whether or not the decision making behaviour being enacted can be considered legitimate or illegitimate in nature.

Socialisation and routes to headship

The literature review discussed the notion that an individual's socialisation might be more or less difficult depending upon their route to headship (Fidler and Atton, 2004). Here, the

fundamental assertion is that headteachers promoted to the post from within their organisation receive a less traumatic socialisation experience. Fidler and Atton (2004) point to the socialising benefits that can be realised when an individual has a sound contextual knowledge such as might be the case for an individual promoted to their first headship from within their current school. However, such an assertion is not supported by the data collected in the current research project. Headteachers Cathy and Eric were both internally promoted from the position of deputy headteacher to substantive headteacher within their school and yet both reported critical incident vignettes. It would therefore seem that the current research does not concur with the conclusion of Fidler and Atton (2004). Thus, it would appear that whilst an understanding of context is useful in terms of helping to condition the socialisation process it would seem that socialisation is more heavily influenced by the need for new headteachers to find, make and take up their role boundary. Such a process in learned as an individual develops a growing understanding of their role as position and their role as practice through complex social interactions with others.

Section 4: The use of role boundary perspective as a methodological and analytical tool with which to study socialisation

The findings of the current research project have identified that the integral and inherent nature of role boundaries require that individuals are continuously involved in a recurrent, reciprocal and relational process that creates, maintains and alters role boundaries during their socialisation. The purpose of this section is to draw upon the findings from the current chapter to point to the centrality of the role boundary within the process of socialisation and to present an argument for the appropriateness of using a role boundary perspective as a methodological and analytical tool with which to understand socialisation itself.

The findings of the current research would suggest that role boundary perspective is a useful methodological and analytical tool with which to study socialisation. The findings of the current chapter argue that it is possible to take the view that the role boundary is the very interface through which the process of socialisation takes place as individuals enact behaviours that seek to establish who has the authority to take decisions about task role allocation, resource allocation and organisational procedure. The analysis of the critical incident vignettes would indicate that the process of socialisation is itself inherently relational in nature and that the processes of socialisation, as distinct from the process of socialisation, are recurrent and reciprocal social interactions that take place at points of organisational delineation and

departure; at organisational boundaries (Czander, 1993) such as at the role boundary. The current research would further argue that the tasks and processes involved in establishing and managing role boundaries are an integral and dynamic aspect of organisational life and as such the research project has shown that a study of role boundary management during socialisation both recognises the social construction of reality and the centrality and dynamic nature of human social interactions.

The scholarly value in the use of a role boundary perspective as a methodological and analytical tool with which to study socialisation is that it can be easily applied to a number of contexts. The current research project was located within the context of schools, and more specifically English primary schools. Through a multiple case study approach the research project identified consistencies between and across contexts with regard to the socialisation of new headteachers within each school. Such consistencies allowed for the formation of a boundary typology that could be used to further analyse the socialisation of headteachers and could be used methodologically to support the credibility, dependability and so the potential transferability of the research findings to the future study of new headteachers in other English primary school settings. It is unlikely, however, that the boundary typology derived from an analysis of the data drawn from the current research project would itself be transferable to a research project that seeks to understand the process of socialisation in a different context, such as, for example, the socialisation of a factory production worker where context and working practices might be entirely different. However, the methodological strength of analysing socialisation from a role boundary perspective lies in its flexibility, allowing researchers to extrapolate suitable boundary typologies from the data specific and therefore applicable to the context. Role boundary perspective is therefore both a flexible and an academically rigorous tool for use in the study of socialisation and perhaps arguably so within the context of any study of organisational or social life from a behavioural perspective.

Section 5: Comparison of current research findings with previous research

The purpose of the following section is to compare the findings from the current research with those from other research studies. Chapter 2 provided a review of the literature concerned with researching the socialisation of new headteachers. In order to ensure that the findings from the current research are rigorously compared with what is already known in the field the following section will analyse previous and current findings under the same headings as those used in the literature review. The rationale for organising the following section in such a way is

to demonstrate the ways in which the findings of the current research are similar to that which has come before and to identify the specific points of delineation and differentiation.

Existing theoretical perspectives on the socialisation of headteachers

The findings of the current research would seem to support the notion that the socialisation of new headteachers is indeed professional and organisational in nature (Merton, 1963; Greenfield, 1985). Further, the data drawn from respondents in chapter 5 demonstrates that socialisation also involves a personal, or sense making, aspect to the socialisation process (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Weindling and Dimmock, 2006). During personal socialisation an individual is required to rationalise their professional and organisational experiences in order to make sense of the process of finding, making and taking up a role (Hall, 1997). Indeed, respondents in the current research reported time and again that they struggled with knowing what course of action to take during the critical incidents and reported the anxiety they felt as they attempted to formulate a sense of how they should act as 'headteacher' within the context of the organisation (i.e. the school) and the situation in which they found themselves immersed (Czander, 1993). Vignette seven is typical of the confusion and pressure that new headteachers experience. Here, the new headteacher describes his actions in dealing with an allegation that a visitor to school had hit a child. Being unsure as to the course of action that he should take as headteacher, the respondent decides to contact the local authority for advice, noting that, *"A lot could go wrong for a lot of people here and that includes me."* Such a statement points to the complexity of the incident as a socialising event and the way in which the respondent seems to recognise that there will be an outcome that is both organisational (i.e. *"a lot could go wrong for a lot of people here"*) and the professional (i.e. *"and that includes me"*). It is the headteacher's realisation of the possible outcomes that makes the incident one of personal socialisation into role and context (i.e. the respondents attempt to make sense of the situation and act appropriately as 'headteacher').

Methodological approaches to researching the socialisation of new headteachers

Routes to Headship

In their work Fidler and Atton (2004) apply the notion of professional and organisational socialisation within the context of the route that different groups of headteachers take on their journey to headship. They identify two groups that are relevant within the context of the

current research study, these being headteachers promoted to their first headship from another school and those who are promoted from within their organisation. The experience of moving into headship for each group is measured in terms of the 'stress' that individuals from each group will experience. Here, Fidler and Atton (2004) argue that the level of stress experienced by those who are promoted to the headship of a new school will be high in terms of their professional and their organisational socialisation. Conversely, they posit that where an individual has been promoted from within their organisation, with which they are already familiar, the individual will experience low stress in terms of their professional socialisation and medium stress in terms of their organisational socialisation. However, the findings of the current research would suggest otherwise. In the first instance, two of the headteacher respondents in the research reported here were promoted from deputy headship to headship in their own respective schools. Both headteachers reported feelings of intense stress with the first, Eric, reporting two critical incidents in his first six months in post, more than any of the respondents interviewed in phase one of the research (i.e. where headteachers were interviewed after their first six months in post). The second respondent, Cathy, described her experience of managing the underperformance of a senior teacher as being, *"emotionally painful"* and *"hugely intimidating"*. Therefore, the findings drawn from the current research do not support the work of Fidler and Atton (2004) who argue that headteachers promoted to headship from within a known school and therefore a known organisational context will necessarily receive a less stressful socialisation experience than those who are promoted to headship from a different school. Further, such evidence would suggest that an individual's socialisation is arguably conditioned more by their ability to manage the complex interplay between individuals (James and Connolly, 2000) combined with their understanding of the social and organisational context (Grint, 2005) that exists on any one day in history and perhaps less upon whether the individual is more or less familiar with the context (i.e. the organisation) itself.

Phases of Headship

The work of Brighouse and Woods (1999) points to the significance of phases of headship. They identify pre headship, early headship, middle headship and extended headship as being temporal points of delineation. They argue that each phase can be identified by specific characteristics that focus upon the kinds of work headteachers are required to do and the feelings associated with undertaking that work. The current research collected critical incidents drawn from the first three years of incumbency and therefore when mapped against

the phases of headship identified by Brighouse and Woods (1999) cover what they term as being pre headship and early headship (i.e. up to the third year in post). The purpose of the current research was not to attempt to replicate the longitudinal work of Brighouse and Woods (1999) or the similar work of Weindling and Dimmock (2006) in the sense that it did not aim to identify temporal phases of headship by identifying a series of characteristics from the critical incident vignettes that might be attendant to each phase. Rather, the purpose was to identify both the animating influences that lead to critical incidents and the stakeholders involved. Such a difference in approach makes a direct comparison between the findings from the research reported here and that of Brighouse and Woods (1999) or similar studies problematic. However, the current research does provide an interesting insight into the stakeholders involved in critical socialising incidents and over time. Here, it is interesting that the overwhelming majority of incidents during the first three years of headship involve adults (20 of the 22 critical incidents reported) and a significant proportion involving staff and parents (15 of 22 critical incidents) and over time. Matt's data exemplifies such a pattern. Of the 11 critical incidents collected from his experiences of the first three years in post, ten incidents involved adults and only one a child. Such a finding is perhaps surprising considering the inverse ratio of adults to pupils in a school. Equally, Karl's data set, (five critical incidents collected from his first year in post), reveals a similar pattern with all five related incidents involving adults. Further, in analysing the critical incident data against the six strands of the National Standards for Headteachers (DfES, 2004) it was found that all but one of the critical incidents were located within the management dimension and not the leadership dimension of headship and once again over time. Such an observation within the context of the current research findings would suggest that the critical incidents that headteachers report as being traumatic are therefore predominantly complex and challenging social interactions with adults that are located within tasks that are essentially of a management nature.

Narrative approaches to headteacher socialisation

More recent approaches to researching headship have used narrative accounts to provide insights in to the nature of the socialising experience (Crow, 2006; 2007). Here, the value of the narrative approach lay in its ability to encourage respondents to reflect upon their time in post and asks them to provide a description of their experience. Specifically, Crow (2006; 2007) asked respondents to focus upon their successes and failures in their first two years in post and encouraged headteachers to evaluate their own performance. In summing up their experiences, headteachers described their incumbency as being traumatic with one

respondent stating, "*I would not want to go through those two years ever, ever, again"* (p.57). The headteachers who participated in the current research reported similar experiences. When asked to reflect upon his first six months in post Ben said, *"Don't talk to me about it – it was a nightmare and I just want to forget it."* Whilst the new headteachers in the current study reported very similar experiences to those headteachers involved in Crow's (2006; 2007) narrative the methodology of the current research was different. Crow's (2006; 2007) work focused upon asking the respondents to identify successes and failures during their incumbency and then to ask each individual to draw a conclusion on their time in post. The research reported here, whilst using a narrative approach, was distinctly different in its methodological approach in that it used, for the first time within the context of researching the socialisation of new headteachers, critical incident reporting. Such an approach required respondents to provide detailed examples of very specific significant incidents in their socialisation that might not be considered to be simply generalised as being 'successes' or 'failures'. These individual events were captured as critical incident vignettes and could be analysed using a specific conceptual framework, that of the role boundary, allowing for a far more detailed analysis of the animating influences that cause new headship to be such a challenging experience. Having analysed detailed incidents recorded in the vignettes using a new conceptual framework, the current research is able to move beyond the summary of new headship provided by Crow (2006; 2007) toward a detailed understanding of events that, when considered from a role boundary perspective, for the first time provides an *explanation* as to why new headship is traumatic – because it is the period when the new headteacher is finding, making and taking up their role boundary.

Conceptualising 'beginning headship'

The literature review points to the fact that there are a number of conceptualisations of what exactly constitutes 'beginning' or 'new' headship. In the current section I refer to the work of Brighouse and Woods (1999) who's work on phases of headship provides a temporal template which can be used to understand the socialisation of new headteachers. Building on the work of Brighouse and Woods (1999), O'Mahony and Matthews (2003) indentify *phases of* learning (as opposed to phases of time) drawn from their study of newly appointed principals in Victoria, Australia. Their work, drawn from an analysis of the experiences of new principals during their first year in post, identifies four phases of learning. These are:

1. Idealization

2. Immersion
3. Establishment
4. Consolidation

Weindling's (1999) study within the English context provides similar findings. In his work, Weindling (1999) identifies seven 'stages' of headship with stage 0 being a preparatory stage prior to taking up role. These stages are:

1. Entry and encounter (first months)
2. Taking hold (three to 12 months)
3. Reshaping (second year)
4. Refinement (years three to four)
5. Consolidation (years five to seven)
6. Plateau (years eight and onwards)

Whilst there are discernible similarities between the work of Weindling (1999) and O'Mahony and Matthews (2003) they differ in the sense that they disagree as to the period of time it takes for headteachers to navigate through each phase or stage. What is significant within the context of the current research findings is that both approaches appear to use a synchronic analysis of the data to provide summaries of different stages in the careers of headteachers. The emergent frameworks that evolve are therefore summaries of how headteachers might be *feeling* about their work at specific periods of time. They are not, therefore, detailed accounts of the events that *occur within* each phase or stage in the way that the current research study provides using critical incident reporting. The purpose of the current research project was not to identify key stages or indeed phases of headship but rather to capture accounts of significant or critical incidents, drawn from new headteachers up to and including their third year in post, in order to analyse them from a role boundary perspective. Such an approach moves beyond the work of Weindling (1999) and O'Mahony and Matthews (2003) in the sense that it analyses detailed accounts of individual incidents allowing the researcher to identify the animating influences and actors who are involved. Further, such an analysis allows for an understanding of what kinds of work headteachers are undertaking during the incidents that they describe as being significant, or critical, in nature. An analysis of the critical incident data reveals that during these incidents new headteachers are working to establish who has the legitimate authority to take decisions in regard to task, role and resource allocation and over who decides upon and implements organisational policy and procedure. Further, the analysis, when mapped against the National Standards for Headteachers (DfES, 2004) demonstrates that this work is almost exclusively of a management nature in the sense that taking decisions

as to resource allocation and deciding upon matters of procedure are negotiated through human interaction and are therefore concerned with managing people.

New headteachers and the importance of context

The work of Draper and McMichael (1998) points to the importance of context during the socialisation of new headteachers. In their study of ten newly appointed headteachers in Scotland, Draper and McMichael (2000) identified the following as being key contextual features that influence the socialisation process. In order to analyse the influence of the contextual factors within the current context the vignettes have been mapped alongside the relevant area.

1. Predecessors as contexts for new headteachers *(vignettes 1, 20)*
2. Staff as a context for new headship *(vignettes 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 22)*
3. The senior management team as a context for new headship *(vignettes 4, 5)*
4. Other heads providing a supporting context
5. The local authority as contexts for new heads *(vignettes 6, 9, 19)*

Arguably then, the current research broadly supports the work of Draper and McMichael (2000). However, is interesting that the data presented here contains vignettes that report critical incidents located within all of the above contextual features with the exception of point 4 (i.e. other headteachers). However, it is interesting to point out that the headteachers who participated in the current research were drawn from a local authority peer support network for new headteachers and so arguably 'other heads' were indirectly involved in the research context. It is interesting that nine (almost half) of the vignettes from the current research do not fit the contextual features identified by Draper and McMichael (2000). An analysis of these nine vignettes shows that they involve parents, other adults such as visitors. Arguably then, these are important contextual features that influence the socialisation of new headteachers and therefore should be added to Draper and McMichael's (2000) list.

The work of Daresh and Male (2000) supports that of Draper and McMichael (2000) in the sense that it asserts the importance of context within the socialisation of new headteachers. Working within the context of British headteachers and principals from the US they refer to the shock that individuals experience as they move into headship. The sense of shock is symptomatic of the 'surprise' that Briggs and Bush et al., (2006) identifies as being a common aspect of the socialisation process. The current research supports the argument that moving

into headship is a traumatic experience. Headteachers reported feeling bemused by the unexpected situations in which they found themselves and were often in these situations simply because they were more often than not working within a unknown context, dealing with people with which they were unfamiliar and in an organisational role with which they had no prior experience to draw upon in order to inform their actions and decision making. Indeed, within the data set of the current research there are numerous situations where headteachers were clearly surprised and are made to feel very anxious by the intensity of unexpected events, when for example, on day one of his incumbency Karl faces a potentially critical child protection issue when a parent with a court order against her having contact with her child is seen waiting at the school gates or when Matt has to intervene in an argument that is taking place between his deputy headteacher and a parent. In the latter incident Matt demonstrates the surprise and immediacy of the incident when he states that he simply, *"didn't know what to do"*. Indeed, it is arguably the case that the 'surprises' (Briggs and Bush et al., 2006) experienced by new headteachers are intensified just because those new to headship have yet to establish and understand their role boundary. It is such a lack of an effective role boundary that leaves individuals in a position that when they experience surprise they, *"don't know what to do"*.

The influence of external contexts upon new headteachers

The work of Hobson et al., (2003) in their review of early headship literature identifies the key difficulties facing new headteachers. These are:

1. Professional isolation
2. The legacy, practice and style of the previous head
3. Multiple tasks, managing time and priorities
4. Managing the school budget
5. Dealing with ineffective staff
6. Implementing new government initiatives
7. Problems with site/site management

What is interesting here is that with the exception of point 6, all of the difficulties identified by Hobson et al., (2003) are either personal to the individual in terms of their feelings (point 1) and their developing professional ability to manage their workload (point 3) or are issues that are located within the context of the organisation itself (points 2, 4, 5 and 7). However, implementing new government initiatives is different in the sense that it is an external

difficulty that is experienced by the organisation and that must be managed by the headteacher in conjunction with senior staff and school governors. The current research found that managing external contexts is indeed a challenge for new headteachers. In vignette six, Matt faces a particularly difficult situation when conflict arises during the negotiation of the ownership of the school site with the local authority, an external issue projected upon Matt and initiated by the local authority. Similarly, Eric is placed in a very difficult situation when he attempts to implement complex changes to staff contracts, itself a national government policy and so an external issue. Reflecting upon these challenges it would seem that headteachers are required to implement challenging initiatives some of which some are internal and so over which the headteacher has a degree of control and some of which are external and so being underpinned by external policy and procedure over which the headteacher has less control over how and when the matter is implemented.

To conclude, the findings of the current research study support those of previous studies and so provide further evidence of the challenge faced by those new to headship. However, the current research builds upon previous research in that for the first time it uses a robust conceptual framework, that of role boundary, to analyse detailed critical incident accounts of incidents that headteachers themselves report as being significant points in their socialisation. Further, the current research identifies the animating influences that lead to the critical incidents and the stakeholders involved. Finally, the research explains that the socialisation of new headteachers is traumatic because heads are involved in negotiating who has the legitimate authority to take decisions over the allocation of tasks and roles, resources and who has the authority to define and to implement organisational policy and procedure, all of which are located in the management dimension, and not the leadership dimension, of the work of headteachers. These processes are integral and inherent dimensions of the socialisation process as the new headteacher finds, makes and takes up their role.

Section 6: Original contributions to knowledge

The following section will summarise the original contribution to knowledge that has resulted from the current research. The section demonstrates the ways in which the thesis presents an original contribution to the theoretical, empirical and methodological knowledge that exists within the field of research that is concerned with the socialisation of new headteachers.

Original contributions to theoretical knowledge

In the thesis I have used a new concept, that of the role boundary. The concept of the role boundary is of heuristic scholarly value in the sense that it at once allows one to conceive of three of the core aspects of organisational life, these being role, boundaries and behaviours. Furthermore, the role boundary concept enables one to consider at the same time the subtle and complex interplay that exists between an individual's role as position and their role as practice. The concept provides, for the first time within a behavioural study of the socialisation of new headteachers, an explanation as to why the experience of taking a first headship is described in previous research as being traumatic (Crow, 2007). It is because the new headteacher is required to find, make and take up their new role, both as position and as practice within the context of the organisation whilst at the same time trying to make sense of that process.

The theoretical construct of the role boundary concept supports the theoretical assertion made by James and Connolly (2000) that socialisation never ends. For the first time the concept of the role boundary provides an explanation for such an assertion. It is just because social interactions, the very place where the role boundary is constructed, are unending in organisational life that socialisation is also unending. Individuals come and go, as do resources and ways of working. In each case, each and every individual within the organisation and perhaps beyond will be required to reconfigure and reposition their role boundary.

The thesis also points to the theoretical strength of the role boundary concept as being found in its flexibility and simplicity making it of scholarly value for those seeking to further understand the complex dynamics of the social world from a behavioural perspective regardless of context. Such a claim is founded upon the belief that we all hold roles in life, and arguably many different roles at once, and the role boundary heuristic allows us to analyse our actions as we act within these roles and as we learn and grow within them and move between them.

Original contributions to empirical knowledge

The research identifies the sources, or animating categories, that are the cause of the experiences that headteachers describe as being traumatic. These are recurrent, reciprocal and relational social interactions that are experienced as critical incidents as the headteacher negotiates who has the legitimate authority to make decisions, and also both where and when

those decisions are made, regarding the allocation of tasks and roles, the allocation of resources and the application of organisational policy and procedure. Further, the research makes an important distinction when it analyses the critical incidents against the National Standards for Headteachers (DfES, 2004) where it finds that the overwhelming majority of incidents are of a management and not a leadership nature and are specifically concerned with 'developing self and working with others' and 'managing the organisation'. The research also notes that once again the overwhelming majority of these incidents are concerned with managing complex and difficult social interactions with adults and not children. Such findings are significant in that they would suggest that programmes that seek to prepare individuals for headship should invariably be concerned with the notions of managing complex social interactions and with ensuring that individuals are aware of the kinds of experiences, and where they might come from, that they will be required to manage.

Original contributions to methodological knowledge

The thesis demonstrates that there are two clear methodological contributions to new knowledge. Firstly, the research demonstrates for the first time that the use of critical incident theory, and more specifically that of critical incident reporting as it is conceived by Tripp (1993), is of methodological use as a research tool with which one can collect data for analysis within the context of the socialisation of new headteachers. Secondly, the research demonstrates the analytical heuristic of the newly conceived theoretical concept of the role boundary and applies it as an interpretive tool with which one can analyse the critical incident data.

Concluding comments

The current chapter has been concerned with analysing and understanding the key influences involved in the socialisation of new headteachers from a role boundary perspective. Section 1 analysed the data in order to establish the animating influences that underlay the critical incidents. It was possible to identify three animating categories from the data that can be used to understand the nature of socialisation for new headteachers. The research found that headteachers are involved in recurrent, reciprocal and relational critical incidents that are concerned with establishing who has the legitimate authority to enact behaviours and to take

decisions that concern task role allocation, resource allocation and the creation and application of organisational procedure.

An analysis of the data in section 2 found that socialisation is both immediate and is intense. Six stakeholder groups were identified from the data as being those groups of individuals that headteachers reported as being most actively engaged in their socialisation; these were children, governors, parents, the local authority, staff and visitors. A further analysis of the data found that an overwhelming majority of the critical incidents involved adults (twenty of twenty two) and not children suggesting that the socialisation of new headteachers is essentially concerned with developing adult relationships. Section 2 analysed the critical incident data against the six strands of the National Standards for Headteachers (DfES, 2004). The purpose of the analysis was to compare the conceptualisation of the work of headteachers found in the standards with the work that was reported by headteachers themselves during their socialisation and found that the majority of incidents reported in the data were concerned with only two of the six strands; “managing the organisation” and “developing self and working with others”.

In section 3 I argued that socialisation can be considered to be the very process by which the new headteacher and the organisation seek to establish and position their respective role boundaries. Headteachers experience socialisation as a series of emotionally challenging interactions where the central purpose is to establish who has the legitimate authority to take decisions and take action in the following three areas; task role allocation, resource allocation and the creation and application of organisational procedure. These interactions have the potential to lead to conflict as individuals attempt to mobilise an authority, legitimate or not, to enact decision making behaviours that they believe to be, or that they wish to be, legitimately enclosed within their own role boundary. The trauma experienced by those new to headship is as a direct result of managing such critical incidents that are an inherent and not an incidental part of the process of the situational learning that takes place during socialisation.

Section four argued for the heuristic value in the use of role boundary perspective as a flexible methodological and analytical tool that can be used to study socialisation.

Section five compared the findings from the current research study with those from previous studies. The section was organised under the same headings used in Chapter 2, the literature review, in order to clearly and specifically demonstrate where the findings drawn from the current research study are aligned with those from other research concerned with the

socialisation of new headteachers, the points of delineation and the significance of these differences.

The chapter concluded by setting out the original contributions to knowledge drawn from the current research. These were organised under following headings; the theoretical, the empirical and the methodological.

Chapter 7

Role Boundary Socialisation Theory

Introduction

The findings set out in the previous chapter would make the case for the concept of the role boundary being a theoretical and methodological tool of heuristic and analytical value in understanding and explaining headteacher socialisation. The purpose of the present chapter is to draw upon the findings from the current research and together with concepts from existing literature develop a conceptual framework that can be used to analyse, understand and to explain the process of socialisation from a role boundary perspective; role boundary socialisation theory.

In the following section I present role boundary socialisation theory as a new way of understanding and explaining the process of socialisation. I introduce the theory as a methodological tool with which one can understand the dynamics of socialisation, drawing upon the findings from the current research to present a conceptual framework which can be used to analyse socialising experiences and so generate explanatory theories.

Section 1: Role Boundary Socialisation Theory – a conceptual framework for analysis

The literature points to the central importance of the concepts of 'organisational role' and the 'organisational boundary' within the study of organisations. The findings of the current research point to how the interplay and dynamics of each are exemplified during the recurrent, reciprocal and relational processes of organisational socialisation. The purpose of the following section is to restate the conceptual framework used in the current research to analyse the data and specifically how the concepts of organisational role and organisational boundary are conceived and are understood within role boundary socialisation theory. However, the reader will notice that the initial framework has been developed from that presented in chapter 4 in light of the findings of the current research. Legitimate behaviour is now regarded as being that which lay within the individual's role boundary because the individual's position in the organisation (e.g. headteacher) gives them the authority to enact

those behaviours, should they wish or be able to, in order to take decisions and to determine outcomes.

The concept of 'role' implies that an individual holds a position that is communicated to the world through a role label (i.e. headteacher). In holding a position, an individual is required to demonstrate behaviours in order to fulfil the responsibilities of the position for which he or she is accountable. In fulfilling those responsibilities an individual's behaviour in role may be discerned as being appropriate to their role (i.e. legitimate) or inappropriate (i.e. illegitimate). The concept of 'role boundary' is defined as being the point of delineation between legitimate and illegitimate behaviours.

Behaviours exemplify both what an individual is charged to do (their role as position) and their how they do it (their role as practice). Upon appointment, an individual is conferred a position (e.g. headteacher). The process of socialisation is that of an individual seeking to understand the requirements of their position and therefore the behaviours that are legitimate or illegitimate in relation to that role. Behaviours that sit legitimately within an individual's role boundary are those that the individual has the authority to enact, should they wish to, in order take control over a decision making process.

When an individual enacts a behaviour, or series of behaviours, in role they are demonstrating nothing more than the fact that they have the power to do so. However, the behaviour, or behaviours, that they enact might not be legitimate. That is to say that the behaviour may not fall within that individual's role boundary. What determines whether the behaviour is legitimate or not, and therefore whether or not it lay within the individual's role boundary, is to consider if the individual has the legitimate authority to enact the behaviour. To establish the legitimacy, or otherwise, of any given behaviour one should refer the consideration to the fact that the authority to enact a behaviour is conferred by dint of the individual's role as position (i.e. that is to say that the authority is derived from the position and so role label they hold, such as 'headteacher'). However, it should be noted that even when an individual has the authority to enact a behaviour they may not choose to, or may not be able to, take action in their role as practice and for many different reasons. Arguably, when an individual is not seen to enact their legitimate authority to make decisions others are encouraged to attempt to act outside of their own role boundary in the hope that the other person may allow them to take decisions that are not theirs to make. These situations can lead to critical socialising incidents. The following is an example of such a situation by way of exemplification. The account also makes an important distinction between the notions of legitimate and illegitimate behaviours, the role boundary and the notion of authority. If individual 'a' enacts a decision making

behaviour that lay outside of his role boundary, and therefore beyond his authority, and when the behaviour actually resides in the role boundary of individual 'b', then the following two possibilities arise. Firstly, individual 'b' contests individual 'a's authority to enact that behaviour and a confrontation ensues or secondly, 'b' accepts 'a's illegitimate behaviour. In the latter case, the role boundary of individual 'a' increases and the role boundary of individual 'b' decreases, although perhaps only temporarily, in that 'b' *allows* 'a' to take a decision that is rightfully his to take. In other words, they each allow the other to behave in ways in which are not appropriate to their respective roles because neither is operating in a way that is conducive to their role boundary. However, whilst 'a's role boundary increases it is important to point out that his *authority* does not increase. Equally, whilst 'b's role boundary decreases his authority does not. Such a distinction refers us back to the fact that like all role holders 'b's authority is allocated to him by virtue of his role as a position in the organisation and therefore he can, at any time, choose to return to individual 'a' and demand a change to the initial outcome. Such a scenario is important in that it clearly identifies that the role boundary (i.e. the enclosure of behaviours that are either legitimate or illegitimate in relation to an individual's position) is the phenomena that allows us to view, to analyse, to interpret and understand the ways in which individuals attempt to utilise organisational authority through the decision making process. Therefore, whilst a person can modulate the behaviours enclosed by their role boundary, either by operating within or beyond their role boundary, the underlying authority conferred upon that person by virtue of their organisational role as position does not change assuming, of course, that their position within the organisation does not change. It is, then, simply a matter of whether or not an individual utilises his authority through taking decisive actions that lay within his or her role boundary.

Role boundaries are negotiated during everyday behavioural episodes and through critical incidents. These incidents are both representative and are reflective of the recurrent, reciprocal and relational processes of organisational socialisation. Role boundary socialisation theory considers that the process of socialisation is that of an individual establishing their role boundary; their learning to understand and act upon what is considered legitimate behaviour and what is not in relation to their own role boundary and that of others. Such an understanding can be achieved by analysing the behaviours of individuals during the process of socialisation by studying critical incident vignettes and from a role boundary perspective. Whilst role boundary interactions take place frequently critical incidents are those socialising experiences that are felt most sharply. Critical incidents are therefore those episodes where socialisation can be most clearly illuminated because it is here that an individual experiences their own role boundary and that of others most acutely usually causing strong emotions such

as anxiety, stress, frustration and even anger; hence the trauma experienced by those who are new to headship (Crow, 2007).

Due to the social construction and interpretation of behaviours, socialisation is also the process by which an individual comes to understand how others experience and view their role and consequently how their own individual behaviours are interpreted by others. It follows that the process of socialisation is also one of positioning as the individual and the organisation learn how their own respective role boundaries, and the behaviours that they enclose, impact upon the role boundaries of others.

Section 2: The key concepts of role boundary socialisation theory

The following section develops the key aspects of role boundary socialisation theory. It considers the ways in which role boundaries are experienced, how they are configured and how they can be manipulated. The section explains that role boundaries, by their very nature, are not static entities and that therefore by implication socialisation, which is concerned with individuals learning to understand and to position role boundaries, is an unending process that cannot be adequately understood by simply ordering experiences into temporal phases, such as phases of headship. Finally, the section ends by arguing that as role boundary is neither situated solely in the professional, the organisational nor the personal dimension it therefore forms a conceptual framework that might be used to analyse, explain and understand the process of socialisation for any given individual new to role.

The role boundary

The concept of role boundary does not assume that an individual will seek to create a role boundary that is itself aligned to the needs of the organisation or the requirements of the post. Neither does it assume that every individual will be able to configure a successful, or at least an appropriate, role boundary. In certain cases an individual may consciously or unconsciously position their role boundary in such a way that it will challenge the organisational context and so will lead to a very distinct, and possibly an uncomfortable, series of socialising experiences. However, the significance here is to be found in the very fact that role boundaries, whether consciously or unconsciously created, whether benevolent or malevolent by default or design, and whether they lead to comfortable or uncomfortable experiences, nevertheless are the mediating agent through which socialisation occurs and can

be studied. The ability to observe and interpret interactions by studying incidents that occur at role boundaries at once allows for an analysis and understanding of the professional, personal and organisational factors that contribute toward a positive or a negative experience of socialisation. These factors can then be addressed through further boundary configuration work.

Boundary socialisation theory takes it as axiomatic that role boundaries are created through what Giddens (1984) refers to as recurrent and reciprocal processes. That is to say that context will influence the configuration and management of role boundaries and also that those role boundaries will in turn influence the context. Role boundaries are configured and are reconfigured following the selective filtering of influences from the environment and through human interaction. Here, I would argue that the most intense influences are from human interactions and as such are, by their very nature, relational. It is, then, that role boundary socialisation theory views the process of socialisation as being recurrent, reciprocal and relational in nature.

To accept the assertion that socialisation is a recurrent, reciprocal and relational process is to suppose that role boundary socialisation theory proposes that the process of socialisation is unending and that socialisation itself is the process of learning to navigate through the complexities of the social world. Such an assertion is premised upon the findings of the data in the previous chapter where socialising interactions were recognised as being an ongoing series of recurring, reciprocal and relational incidents that take place at the role boundary interface. It follows that boundary socialisation theory is consistent with social learning theory (Bandurra, 1977) in that both theories argue that social learning is the result of social interaction wherever and whenever that takes place. Further, given that social interaction is an integral and ongoing part of organisational life it therefore follows that socialisation must be an integral and ongoing process.

A further argument in support of the assertion that socialisation is a perpetual process is that role boundaries are not static entities. Rather they are socially constructed and as such the way in which any given individual experiences their own role boundary, or that of another person, is necessarily dependent upon the way in which that individual views their own position in relation to the role boundary of another. Put another way, people change their minds, their perceptions, their goals and their aims as they react to changes in their lives and in their environment. People also leave and join organisations and so socialisation ends and begins afresh with each departure and with each new addition. Role boundary socialisation theory argues that the socialising process for those new to headship is described as being

traumatic because individuals bring different perspectives upon what they consider legitimate behaviour to their own role and to that of others. Such differing views are the cause for tension and conflict causing feelings of anxiety and even stress.

Finally, role boundary socialisation theory is not limited to the study of new headteacher socialisation but can arguably be applied to any study of human relations and within any given context. Such a claim is based upon the flexibility of the theoretical framework itself. Role boundary socialisation theory is not bound by, nor is it intended to be used as, a theoretical tool for ordering the socialisation process (e.g. either by dimension, such as the organisational, the professional or the personal or by the temporal, such as phases of socialisation). Rather, role boundary socialisation theory is a tool for an academic analysis of the processes of socialisation and as such can lead to the creation of explanatory theories. Such an assertion can be made because the theory is not bound by an undue focus upon a limiting constraint, as is, for example the focus upon the emotional in emotional structuration theory (Callahan, 2004). Rather, boundary socialisation theory takes as its central tenet the notion of the role boundary, its nature and how it is experienced by individuals and groups through a series of wide and diverse behaviours. Thus the scholarly value of role boundary socialisation theory rests with its ability to understand the complexities and dynamics of organisations through an analysis of how individuals act to position their role boundary and the effect that taking such decisive action has upon others.

That the theory can be applied to other socialisation contexts lies with the centrality of the main concept, that of the role boundary. The concept is itself significant because it transcends the need to draw a distinction between what might be considered a personal, a professional or an organisational boundary. Role boundaries are at the same time all of these things given that role boundaries are constructed by the need to fulfil professional, organisational and personal needs. Role boundary socialisation theory accepts as axiomatic that the role boundary is itself the interface through which socialisation takes place and this inherently means that the role boundary, and interactions at the role boundaries of individuals or groups of individuals, embody the generative processes of socialisation itself. Put another way, to study role boundary interactions is to study the process of socialisation. The very process of socialisation can therefore be understood in role boundary terms through an analysis of how they are created and how they are managed by actors in the organisation. If we are to apply our understanding of socialisation processes from literature with an applied focus upon how these processes take place at role boundary interfaces we create a powerful contextual tool with which one can understand and explain socialisation in any given context.

Further areas for future research

The current research has identified the conceptual framework that underpins role boundary socialisation theory and demonstrates how it can be used as a tool with which one can analyse, explain and understand the complex processes of socialisation for those new to headship in English primary schools. Some of the questions that perhaps warrant further research are:

1. How might a role boundary analytical framework provide insights into the socialisation of other role holders in schools, such as deputy headteachers, teachers and teaching assistants?
2. What is particular about the role boundary experiences of those headteachers that report their socialisation as having been easy as opposed to those who report their experience as having been traumatic?
3. How can role boundary socialisation theory be used to provide insights into the complexities and dynamics of the socialisation of individuals in a range of working contexts other than schools?

Here, research would move beyond a study of newly appointed headteachers and would apply a role boundary perspective to the study of the socialisation of a range of different role holders in schools, would analyse and contrast individual's reported experiences of socialisation and would study the process of socialisation across a range of organisational contexts other than schools. Such research would prove useful in terms of providing further evidence beyond that drawn from the current research of the suitability of utilising a role boundary approach to the study of socialisation, and potentially even beyond that its possible application as a particular approach toward behavioural understanding of social interactions and the social world. Further, such research will enable researchers to learn more of the nature of the experiences of different individuals within a range of different contexts.

Concluding comment

The aims of the research reported here have been to:

1. analyse the socialisation of new primary headteachers from a role boundary perspective.

2. test the suitability of the role boundary concept as a rigorous, theoretical and methodological tool that can be applied to researching the field of headteacher socialisation.

The research began by setting out the complexities of analysing the process of socialisation and specifically pointed to the under representation of research into the socialisation of those new to headship noting that it is largely concerned with identifying and ordering phases of socialisation. The thesis argued that in order to better understand the socialisation of new headteachers it would be necessary to utilise a new conceptual analytical framework, one that would allow for an analysis of socialising experiences, and one that would have the potential to generate a new explanatory theory with which one can better understand the dynamics of socialisation.

The research found heuristic scholarly value in the application of a new conceptual framework, that of the role boundary, to the analysis, understanding and explanation of the complex nature of the socialisation process. From such knowledge the research presented an explanatory theory that finds that socialisation is an unending process and one that is characterised by recurrent, reciprocal and relational human interactions that are the outcomes of a series of legitimate or illegitimate behaviours that relate to an individual's role as position and to their role as practice as defined by the authority conferred by position.

The following is a synopsis of the theory. They are that role boundary socialisation theory:

1. Has as its central concept that of the 'role boundary'
2. Considers critical incident theory to be a useful methodological tool with which to collect data.
3. Views the process of headteacher socialisation as being one that is concerned with configuring, managing and positioning the headteacher's role boundary with that of others in the organisation (i.e. views socialisation as a recurrent, reciprocal and relational process).
4. Views the process of socialisation as an unending process of learning.

Appendix 1

Interview schedule

1. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. The purpose of this conversation is for us to talk about your experience of becoming a headteacher. I'll be taking notes and our full conversation will be captured on the digital voice recorder so that I can analyse it later. Is that O.K? Just before we start do you have further questions or anything you'd like to tell me?

   [Questions 2 and 3 were asked only at the first interviewing of each respondent and were not used thereafter].

2. So, can you tell me a little bit about your professional journey to headship?
   Age when appointed to first headship?
   Number of years teaching experience?
3. Can you tell me a little bit about your school?
   Number of pupils on roll?
   Location?
   The schools most recent Ofsted inspection judgement?
4. So, now you've got your first headship how's it all going?
5. Can you tell me what are the best things about becoming a headteacher?
6. Can you tell me what are the most difficult things about becoming a headteacher?
7. What have been you triumphs as a new headteacher?
8. What have been your lowest times as a new headteacher?
9. Has anything surprised you about the experience of becoming a headteacher?
10. How has it been working with parents/governors/pupils/Ofsted/local authority?
11. Is there any specific event or incident that sticks out to you as being an important moment within your work as a new headteacher?

Questioning structure

1. Elicit a series of incidents as responses to direct questions (i.e. 'tell me about,...')
2. Respondent validation (i.e. 'Am I correct in thinking that this was a significant incident,...?')
   If 'yes', then proceed to stages three and four.

3. Encourage respondents to explain, from their perspective, the nature and cause of the incidents they are reporting (i.e. ‘can you explain how/why that happened,...?’)
4. Ensure that respondents emotional reactions to the incident was captured (‘can you describe how that made you feel,...?)

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