DOCTORAL THESIS

In pursuit of transformation: A complex responsive processes perspective on the enactment of improvement strategies in the everyday practice of two primary schools in England

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In pursuit of transformation: A complex responsive processes perspective on the enactment of improvement strategies in the everyday practice of two primary schools in England

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the enactment of the *National Strategies* for school improvement in two English primary schools. Within a qualitative case study design, data were collected on the everyday practice of school professionals employing the instruments of 27 semi-structured interviews, on-site observations and documentary data analysis. The data were interpreted within a social constructionist paradigm and a conceptual framework based on complex responsive processes theory in combination with discourse analysis. The political context for this enquiry is the relentless implementation of neoliberal policies in the English education sector and their reinforcement by the now deeply embedded audit regime. According to complex responsive processes theory, centrally designed and controlled strategy ignores the vital influence of human interdependence and the emergent nature of social change. Critically, target-driven reform focuses practitioners' attention on idealised, 'abstract' children at the risk of severing their connection to children as they really are: embodied, emotional, susceptible, vulnerable. Complex responsive processes theory brings into focus the choices we can make, both individually and collectively, therefore illuminating the responsibility each of us holds for the current condition and the future of education. Within the patterns of conversation in the case study schools, practitioners appeared to be conflicted by the imperatives of target-driven agendas and their personal commitment to the child. However, the patterns of conversation also signalled a strong convergence with the dominant discourse of school improvement which defines educational transformation as the delivery of national targets and standards. This thesis contends that the prevalence of government improvement discourse in primary schools may have narrowed the educational experience of children by reducing teaching to a target-driven assessment cycle. It is argued that as a consequence of government strategy enactment in primary schools, children have become reconstructed as instruments for measuring the effectiveness of the system rather than being the recipients of 'improved education'.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CMS	Critical Management Studies
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
KS1	Key Stage 1
KS2	Key Stage 2
LA	Local Authority
LEA	Local Education Authority
MA	Master of Arts
MBA	Master of Business Administration
NCSL	National College for School Leadership
NHS	National Health Service
NLE	National Leader of Education
NLS	National Literacy Strategy (DfEE 1998)
NNS	National Numeracy Strategy (DfEE 1999)
NPM	New Public Management
NPQH	National Professional Qualification for Headship
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PSR	Public Service Reform
SATs	Standard Assessment Tasks (when first introduced)
	Standard Attainment Test (current name)
SEN	Special Educational Needs
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
TA	Teacher Assistant

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A very special thank you goes to Ralph Stacey, a magnificent teacher, intellectual and person, who has profoundly changed my thinking. I hope that this thesis is a worthy response to his gesture of respect for the ordinary people at the frontline of transformations of modernity.

I am very grateful to my family and in particular my beloved parents. Thank you, Mum, for being my role model. I first knew I would be a teacher many years ago, when watching you mark your pupils' essays in the evenings. Dad, thank you for our English lessons together. Little did I know at the time that our struggle to fathom the intricacies of the English tenses would open a new window on the world for me.

Chapter 1: Locating the research and the researcher

1.1 'In pursuit of transformation'

> Thus when the God, whatever God was he,
> Had form'd the whole, and made the parts agree,
> That no unequal portions might be found,
> He moulded Earth into a spacious round...
> A creature of a more exalted kind
> Was wanting yet, and then was Man design'd:
> Conscious of thought, of more capacious breast,
> For empire form'd, and fit to rule the rest...
>   (Ovid, AD 8/1998)

The idea of transformation appears to have an enduring appeal for education policy-makers in England and, as in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, is premised on two assumptions. Firstly, that it is possible to design and engineer an improved social order, analogous to the 'spacious round' moulded from 'unequal portions' in Ovid's account of creation. Secondly, that such a transformation relies on the leadership of a 'spectacular' individual, granted God-like power over its enactment. The vision of British education as a 'world-class system' (Barber and Mourshed 2007; DfE 2010a) is a reflection of a recent 'metamorphosis' in the goals of policy-makers. In the 1990s, the school 'effectiveness and school improvement movement' (SESI) framed reform in terms of 'raising student attainment' (Ouston 2003). In the discourse of the *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners* (DfES 2004: 14), the purpose of education reform is defined as 'transforming life-chances'.

According to Gunter (2004), this redefinition of the goals of reform has been accompanied by a 're-labelling' of the roles and identities of educational leaders[1]. The Headteacher, previously seen as an 'educational leader', a leading professional and *primus inter pares*, became a manager responsible for maximising 'educational outcomes'. After the Education Reform Act of 1988 the Headteacher gained the label of a 'transformational leader' and was tasked with implementing the National

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[1] Although many authors draw a distinction between 'leadership' and 'management' (e.g. Bush 2010), the two terms are used interchangeably in this thesis to reflect their usage in the specific literature sources reviewed.

Curriculum 'through a combination of charismatic appeal and contractualism' (ibid: 28). As observed by Gunter and Forrester (2009), the role of the Headteacher has recently been re-labelled as 'leadership of schools' and no longer requires the Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). This opens the opportunities for non-educational professionals to become Chief Executive Officers in schools re-conceptualised as business enterprises.

This study pays close attention to the discourse of education reform, from the premise that discursive patterns may change the meaning of everyday practice and institutionalise new ways of understanding. Complex responsive processes theory posits that such change is enacted through changes in patterns of conversation, which are at the core of organisational activity (Stacey 2010). This aligns the theory with the social constructionist interest in the interactive and discursive processes which produce particular social forms and meanings (Holstein and Gubrium 2008). The meaning of transformation, pursued in my research, is of 'profound change' in the minds of individuals and the quality of social relations (Mead 1956). In line with Mead's (ibid) definition, my enquiry started from an assumption that much of the policy-makers' discourse of reform was rhetorical or superficial. For example, New Labour's claims to 'transforming life-chances' of children were based on small quantitative improvements in Key Stage 2 test scores following the introduction of the *Literacy* and *Numeracy Strategies* (DfES 2004). Defining transformation in narrow terms as 'student attainment' could therefore be interpreted as a continuation of the SESI movement, under a new label.

However, this research has found that the attempt to transform primary education by this narrow approach to strategy may have resulted in a kind of transformation that was not intended or aspired to. As my case study findings suggest, government improvement strategies have affected the ways in which practitioners talk about their everyday practice. The persistent preoccupation with target setting and assessment cycles, articulated by most research participants, is suggestive of changes in their relationships with children. This thesis argues that the ways in which government improvement strategies have been designed, disseminated and enacted may have led to an erosion of educational quality. It draws on complex responsive processes

theory to explain how the policy-makers' reform discourse is taken up and interpreted by practitioners and why this may lead to negative consequences in the long term.

1.2 *National Strategies*, systems thinking and organisational improvement

This thesis provides an account of the enactment of the *National Strategies*[2] in the everyday practice of two primary schools in England. This research interest originates in my experience of implementing the *National Literacy* (DfEE 1998) and *National Numeracy Strategies* (DfEE 1999) as a former primary practitioner. The most vivid memory I have of the *National Strategies* is the pressure to make sense of the sweeping changes to the curriculum, pedagogy and professional values they demanded of teachers. Questions about the purpose of these changes in relation to the purpose of education remained unanswered, lost in the detailed prescription of the *National Strategies* and their implementation. The changes were expected to be put into practice within short timeframes, under the scrutiny of Ofsted and accountability measures set as ambitious Key Stage 2 targets for the year 2002. The *National Strategies* were driven by the New Labour's ambition of bringing about profound educational change, initially labelled as an 'education revolution' (Barber 1997). With the Key Stage 2 targets missed in 2002, two further strategies followed, *Excellence and Enjoyment: a strategy for primary schools* (DfES 2003) and *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners* (DfES 2004). Both documents reiterated the standards and targets agenda, with the latter framing improvement as 'transformation'.

The reliance on strategy as crucial to improvement is exemplified by the model of the 'self-improving system' of public service reform (see Figure 1.1 below). Devised by the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, the model views reform as a result of interactions between four components of the system: Top Down Performance Management; Capability and Capacity; Market Incentives and Users Shaping the

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[2] This thesis will refer to *'National Strategies'* as a generic term for the following New Labour strategies for primary education: *National Literacy Strategy* (DfEE 1998), *National Numeracy Strategy* (DfEE 1999), *Excellence and Enjoyment: a strategy for primary schools* (DfES 2003) and *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners* (DfES 2004). Where pertinent differences in the *National Strategies* occur, these are addressed at the relevant points in the thesis.

Service from Below. The 'self-improving' nature of the system results from 'incentives for continued improvement' embedded in each of the system's components (PSR 2006: 5). The incentives consist of top down pressure from the Government; greater competition and market incentives; pressure from the 'users' of the system through choice and voice; school leadership and workforce remodelling. Paradoxically, power appears to be assigned by the self-improving system to everyone apart from teachers and yet it is the teachers who are made accountable for the outcomes of reform by the policy-makers (e.g. Morris 2001; DfE 2010).
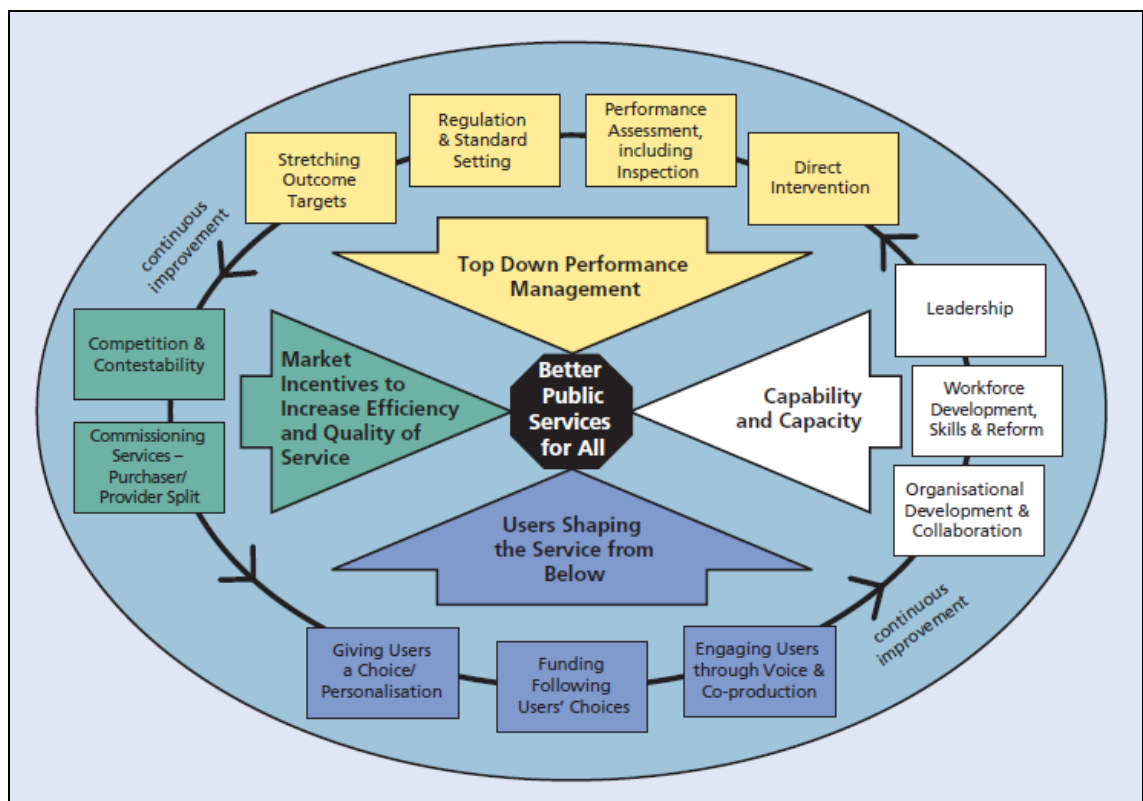
Figure 1.1   The UK Government's Model of Public Service Reform – A Self-Improving System (PSR 2006: 5)

The model is underpinned by systems thinking (Senge 1990; Seddon 2008; Alhadeff-Jones 2008), whereby a system (a whole) is seen as made up of components which can be best understood when analysed in the context of relationships with each other, the whole and other systems, rather than in isolation.

The focus of the self-improving system on competition, market incentives and the devolution of some power from the state to local authorities and 'Users' of public services (parents and presumably children), aligns the model with the New Public Management (NPM) approach to governance in education (Mahony and Hextall 2000). Embraced by New Labour and their Conservative predecessors, NPM is rooted in neoliberalism (Harris 2007; Ball 2007, 2012), in which the state perceives its main role as protecting and promoting market values and extending them to public institutions. This thesis explores the connections between the public service reform model, educational 'transformation' and the role of school leaders and teachers in enacting government improvement strategies.

1.3   Constructs of 'strategy' and 'strategic leadership'

In my current role as a lecturer in MA Education Leadership and Management, I witness the consequences of introducing 'strategy' into educational discourse. My students, many of whom are teachers and leaders in primary schools, talk about 'teaching and learning strategies', 'listening strategies', 'pupil questioning strategies', 'strategies to develop leadership', often using (and misusing) 'strategy' where terms such as 'approaches', 'methods' or 'techniques' would be more precise and appropriate. And yet, when asked to define 'strategy' in their introductory MA sessions, most students explain that strategy is 'a plan', rarely mentioning other key elements of 'textbook definitions' of strategy: rational choice, long-term goal orientation and optimisation of organisational performance (Chia and Holt 2009; Stacey 2007; Armstrong 2009). Similarly, the *National Literacy* and *Numeracy Strategies* (DfEE 1998, 1999) set out the curriculum for literacy and numeracy and could therefore be referred to as 'curriculum frameworks' rather than 'strategies'. 'Strategy' is thus embedded in the discourse of school improvement and used both by policy-makers and practitioners. To call a plan or action 'strategic' or to refer to curriculum frameworks as 'strategies' highlights the importance of these documents, as well as the status of their authors. As suggested by Harris (2007) however, terms such as 'policy' and 'strategy' also replace the concept of planning. Through its origins in military conflict, the discourse of strategy and accompanying vocabulary of 'targets', 'intervention', 'impact' 'at once impose[s] and maintain[s]' (Foucault 1980: 200) a version of education as a site of struggle.

Strategy originates in what Gray (1999: 354) refers to as the universal strategic experience of man arising from the basic social condition of 'threat or use of politically motivated force'. In the context of military conflict, strategy is defined as 'the use that is made of force and the threat of force for the ends of policy' (ibid: 17). Broader definitions of strategy refer to exercising power or authority with regard to a vision of what is considered to be desirable. Strategy has traditionally been associated with the instrumental use of means to achieve ends. Strategic leaders exercise power to affect the behaviour of the followers through an apparatus of vision, policy, strategy, operations and tactics. These dimensions comprise the 'whole house' of strategy (ibid: 24), with the political dimension underpinning all of them. Fundamental, though often overlooked in strategising, is the human dimension, the ordinary people at the frontline who contribute to victory or defeat. What sustains both political conflicts and wars in modern times, argues Gray, is a combination of the human factor, chance and subordination to authority...

> the 'remarkable trinity – composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity... the play of chance and probability... and [the] element of subordination, as an instrument of policy'. (ibid: 28)

Although Gray's interpretation of the origins of strategy in a primordial condition of violence and hatred can be contested[3], organisational strategising appears to ignore this. Instead, it utilises strategy as instrumental in improving organisational output and gaining competitive advantage in the marketplace, as well as providing a sense of purpose and meaning to the employees. What mainstream literature appears to gloss over with notions of management presented as 'scientific' and 'objective', is the link between strategy and policy and the political dimension underlying both. The element of power and subordination for the ends of policy appears in this context as a combination of a strategic manager's vision of a better future and the more mundane regime of targets which operationalise the vision as specific everyday activities for the followers to undertake. Underpinning strategy are imbalances of power and hierarchies which elevate the visionary manager/leader whilst

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[3] For example, according to the philosophical tradition developed by Heidegger (1962) and continued by phenomenological 'human science' (e.g. Van Manen 1990), the primordial condition of (human) being is that of care, concern (*Sorge*).

diminishing the role of people at the frontline of organisational improvement. Mainstream thinking (e.g. Davies 2006) appears to ignore the element of chance and the emergence of the unpredicted that may lead to unintended consequences or require a change of plan. In contrast, strategy is conceptualised as emergent, complex and political in the theory of complex responsive processes (Stacey 2007, 2010; Griffin 2002; Mowles 2011), discussed in section 1.5 below.

The focus on command and control, rational planning and efficiency originates in Taylorism, management thinking developed by Frederick Taylor (1911) in *The Principles of Scientific Management*. As highlighted by Stacey (2010), Taylorism provides methodological underpinnings for the discipline of management. Despite claims to rationality, simple logic and 'objectivity', the 'science' of strategic management is riddled with tensions and contradictions. For example, Senge (1999: 488) argues that keeping strategy development within 'the inner sanctum of top management' privileges top-down, hierarchical leadership over more distributed forms of leadership (Harris, Leithwood, Day and Sammons 2007). There also appears to be a contradiction between the concept of strategic leadership, defined by Preedy, Glatter and Wise (2003) as developing a vision for a future direction of a school, and government strategies prescribing what the vision and direction will be. Strategic leadership models are often presented as simplistic prescriptions for 'what works', which ignore everyday organisational reality and may therefore disregard important barriers to improvement or resistance to change (Stacey 2007; Chia and Holt 2009).

1.4 The 'technical-rational' orientation of neoliberal education reform

As signalled in section 1.1, successive governments' vision of a transformed, world-class education system has narrowly focused on standardised test scores. The vision is embedded in 'technical-rationality', which reduces the purpose of education to meeting standards and teaching to a set of skills in delivering instruction (Parker 1997). In broader terms, 'technical-rationality' is defined as 'a way of thinking and living that elevates the scientific-analytical mindset and the belief in technological progress over all other forms of rationality' (Adams and Balfour 2004: 30). Rooted in the 'sciences of certainty' (Stacey 2010; Mowles 2011), which assume a

mechanistic reality where change can be predicted and controlled through simple, linear cause and effect manipulations, technical-rationality supports the policy-makers' authority to design and control reform. Through its reliance on 'objective' measures, technical-rationality has changed the nature of educational governance into what Lawn (2011) terms 'governing through data'. Supported by powerful new technologies and software, 'governing through data' creates a version of education in which improvement is equated with more efficient data production (ibid).

The negative consequences of technical-rationality in education are highlighted by a number of researchers. A relentless focus on performance indicators creates new 'economies of student worth' (Ball 2004: 10), whereby students become viewed as instrumental to producing 'spectacular outputs' (Stronach 2010). Woods and Jeffrey (2002) demonstrate how technical-rational performativity unsettles holistic and humanistic approaches to teacher professionalism. Troman's (2008) research reveals the diminution of the 'caring aspect' in new professional identities. To survive the system, and to avoid 'naming and shaming' (Vulliamy and Webb 2006), the 'good teacher' complies with, and contributes to, the disciplinary mechanisms that produce a particular version of a 'good school' (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012). The 'good school' offers normative 'pleasures of performance' to those students who can achieve success, simultaneously excluding those who cannot (ibid: 136). Ironically, despite years of the 'policy epidemic', the proliferation of often disjointed government policy initiatives (Levin 1998), 'world class excellence' standards have not been achieved (Smithers 2007). For example, in 2009 the UK scores in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) ranked as 'average' in reading and mathematics (OECD 2009).

Technicist approaches to education reform have been in the ascendancy as neoliberalism has spread throughout the public sector. The gradual privatisation of public services began in the Thatcherite years (1979-1997) and was continued by New Labour (1997-2010). This trend is now being accelerated by the Coalition government to a point which threatens the survival of education as a public good (Ball 2004, 2007, 2012; Gunter 2008; Pring 2013). Whilst New Labour's promise to transform life-chances for all children was not entirely successful (Taysum and

Gunter 2008; Hatcher 2012; Whitty and Whisby 2009; Barker 2012), the Coalition is redefining the education system as the 'school market' and opening it to new providers (Hill and Matthews 2010: 104). As argued by Ball (2012), a systematic colonisation of UK 'edu-business' by networks of policy entrepreneurs and private companies, symptomatic of neoliberal globalisation, has been eroding teachers' sense of moral purpose and distorting their responsibility for students. Neoliberal education produces a workforce for the marketplace, 'held captive' by the language of consumerism and competition (Harris 2007). In accordance with Arendt's (1953: 314) analysis, as the totalising logic of the marketplace replaces thinking and diminishes conviction as a motive for action, the purpose of education becomes no longer 'to instill convictions but to destroy the capacity to form any'. This constructs the neoliberal subject who is 'malleable rather than committed, flexible rather than principled − essentially depthless' (Ball 2012: 31). In this context, a pursuit of alternative perspectives on educational transformation could be viewed as a moral project. The ethical responsibility which each of us holds for what we do, individually and collectively, is also an important dimension to complex responsive processes theory (e.g. Griffin 2002), which is discussed next.

1.5 Complex responsive processes theory

Complex responsive processes theory explains social change in terms of its emergence from many ordinary 'local interactions' among people involved in their everyday activities and conversations (Stacey 2007, 2010, 2012). The theory posits that, as social beings, people are essentially interdependent and, consequently, cannot act or make choices as if they were autonomous individuals. Instead, they need to constantly engage in negotiations with the intentions and actions of others. Local interactions in organisations include 'daily conversation, gossip, political negotiations, power plays, acts of resistance and pursuit of personal agendas' (Stacey 2010: 124). There are two key implications of the view of change as emergent in local interactions between interdependent individuals. Firstly, since change is mutually created and sustained, each one of us holds responsibility for our participation in local interactions (Griffin 2002). Secondly, because organisational change emerges in a complex interplay of intentions, negotiations and actions, its precise nature cannot be predicted in advance.

This perspective on change challenges the common understanding of improvement arising from a deliberate plan or strategy developed by a dominant elite and implemented by the followers (Stacey 2012). Complex responsive processes theory is helpful in understanding how centrally designed improvement strategies are enacted in schools and why they may lead to unpredicted or undesirable consequences. In this context, local interactions consist of countless iterative processes of communication which involve teachers and school leaders in making sense of, complying with, as well as resisting the strategies. This makes it impossible for the policy-makers to control the outcomes of the strategies. It also explains why the discourse of standards and targets repeated throughout the 'policy epidemic' (Levin 1998) may be unable to bring about the expected effects. Targets and standards may make sense at the abstract level of models of self-improving systems. However, unpredicted consequences arise when abstraction is mistaken for reality or when resistance is driven out in order to mould reality in the exact image of the abstraction.

From the complex responsive processes perspective, change is underpinned by complex causality and equivalent to changes in the patterns of everyday conversations. The theory, therefore, argues for an alternative understanding of management as a 'political practice', not a science (Stacey in Mowles 2011: vii). Educational leadership and policy-making do not follow universal rules which can be captured by the 'sciences of certainty' and presented as techniques for delivering transformation. A detailed explanation of complex responsive processes theory is offered in Chapter 3 and section 4.6 (p.76).

1.6 Research orientation and original contribution to knowledge

Underlying this research is my concern about an 'erosion of pedagogic meaning' (Van Manen 1990), whereby engaging in practice dominated by technical-rationality, efficiency or profit orientation makes us forget the 'whole child' (Maguire, Wooldridge and Pratt-Adams 2006: 35). Whilst working as a primary practitioner, I had doubts about target setting and 'teaching to the test'. In my current role of a Leadership and Management educator, I witness my students' desire to understand educational improvement, as well as a search for management 'recipes'

and fear of ambiguity. This research is thus embedded in my professional experience and aims at deepening my understanding and improving my practice as an educator.

There is also a further impetus guiding this research, arising from my ideological convictions. It is a desire to contribute to the voices critical of the neoliberal approaches to education reform and mainstream conceptualisations of leadership. As neoliberalism advances and spreads, it seems to replace democratic values with the values of the marketplace. It also appears to privilege an elite of visionary leaders, variously titled as Chief Executive Officers, managers, experts, consultants and entrepreneurs. Within this ideology, human beings are constructed as self-interested and self-aggrandising and individual liberty is equated with economic gain (Harvey 2007). The knowledge on which the managerial-entrepreneurial cadre stake their claims to power is located in the paradigm of certainty, in what Mowles (2011: 24) terms 'a realist position' and Gunter and Forrester (2009: 507) view as based on 'positivist evidence'. According to complex responsive processes theorists, this knowledge originates in the 'sciences of certainty', as signalled in section 1.4 (pp.15-16). The implications of such knowledge are presented in Chapter 2 and section 4.6 (p.76).

This research aims to make an original contribution to the intellectual resources of professionals and researchers who undertake a critical analysis of educational policy and leadership. Complex responsive processes theory, which provides my conceptual framework, is as yet relatively unexplored in educational contexts. In the context of business organisations, the theory also presents a 'minority tradition' (Mowles 2011: 24). For example, an advanced search in ERIC reveals that there are no publications which draw on complex responsive processes theory in the context of primary and secondary education. As Bottery (2012: 449) confirms, referring in broader terms to 'complexity theory' (rather than specifically to complex responsive processes theory), complexity concepts are just 'beginning to be noticed' in the primary and secondary education context. Similarly, an advanced search for 'complex responsive processes theory / perspective' in Scopus referred to just six peer reviewed articles published in management journals.

For research underpinned by complex responsive processes theory, Stacey (2010, 2012) recommends a methodological framework of reflexive narrative inquiry. This methodology positions the researcher as a participant and a narrator. The task of the researcher-as-participant is to make explicit his/her assumptions, ideology and power relations implicit in everyday organisational interactions. Research data, continues Stacey, consist of accounts of practice which are critically and reflexively analysed by the researcher-as-narrator. The theory enables powerful insights into what is actually experienced in everyday practice, 'with all its uncertainty, emotion and messiness' (ibid: 244).

However, this methodology appears to limit the researcher's choices by disengaging from the 'traditional' empirical material, such as textual documentary and interview data. A close textual analysis of discursive patterns of conversation may provide more subtle insights into how individual and collective identities and power relations are articulated and institutionalised, or contested and changed. As argued by Fairclough (2003: 11), even though it is meanings rather than texts that have social effects, 'one resource that is necessary for any account of meaning-making is the capacity to analyse texts in order to clarify their contribution to processes of meaning-making'. An application of Fairclough's (2003) discourse analysis tools to the analysis of the empirical material enables links to be developed between key complex responsive theory concepts and textual data which convey some of the actual conversational patterns in the two case study schools. I would contend that, without recourse to empirical textual data, complex responsive theorising is anchored in the meta-level of conceptual explorations of local interactions. An engagement with textual empirical material invites explorations at the 'micro' level of the actual conversations which are at the core of everyday practice.

1.7 Aims of research and research questions

The overarching aim of this research is to provide a deeper understanding and reveal the complexity of the enactment of the *National Strategies* and other improvement initiatives in the everyday practice of primary school leaders and teachers. The following research questions have been formulated:

1. What are the epistemological origins of government strategies and conceptualisations of strategic leadership/management as applied to educational contexts?

2. How were the New Labour's *National Strategies* (DfEE 1998, 1999; DfES 2003, 2004) disseminated, enacted and evaluated in schools?

3. How does government school improvement and 'transformation' agenda affect the everyday practice of school leaders and teachers?

1.8   Limitations of the study

The key limitation of this study is linked to the contradictions inherent in seeking to understand and write about complex phenomena without reducing their complexity. The power of models and 'universal laws', taken for granted in the technical-rational paradigm, is challenged by the sciences of complexity. For example, Cilliers (1998) argues that a model of a complex system would need to be as complex as the system itself and could therefore offer low level descriptions, as opposed to highly generalisable meta-analyses. Stacey (2010: 133) points out that modelling systems fails to account for the temporal processes which, in 'the living present' contain both the past and the future/s as non-linear, emergent, 'always evolving' and therefore 'never complete'. It also positions the researcher as a detached observer, which Stacey argues to be a key flaw in systems thinking. These two contrasting arguments reflect a tension inherent in this study. Whereas Cilliers's approach is closely aligned to the qualitative case study (Stake 1995) developed for this research, Stacey might question the positioning of a case study researcher as a detached 'outsider' observer. My positioning as an educator and social constructionist researcher and therefore a participant involved in the world I am seeking to better understand is discussed further in Chapters 3 and 4.

A further limitation of this research is found in the notion of paradox and the resulting claims to knowledge. As Stacey (2007) explains, the way in which we approach paradox aligns our thinking either towards the 'sciences of certainty' or towards complexity. When a paradox is understood as an apparent contradiction, a simultaneous existence of two conflicting elements, the dualism can be removed by privileging one element over the other or by reframing the problem to remove the

contradiction. This approach to paradox is rooted in Aristotelian logic which 'requires the elimination of contradictions because they are a sign of faulty thinking' (ibid: 14). Conversely, recognising that opposing elements, forces or ideas cannot be resolved or eliminated, is rooted in Hegelian dialectic logic, which underpins complex responsive processes theory. As a result, however, the theory shares the vulnerability of the constructionist and poststructuralist perspectives, discussed in sections 4.5 (p.74) and 4.6 (p.76). These perspectives acknowledge that, paradoxically, understanding co-exists with doubt, with an awareness that 'we know there is always more to know' and that the world created in our writing is a construction rather than an accurate representation of social reality (Richardson & St. Pierre 2005: 963).

1.9 Structure of the thesis

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 reviews the core literatures on strategy and strategic leadership and draws together existing knowledge of these substantive concepts from the fields of business and education. It traces the epistemological origins of government approaches to strategy in education. The discipline of leadership and management stakes its claims to knowledge on the authority of the 'sciences of certainty', premised on a systems view of organisations (Stacey 2010). This results in mainstream literature which reduces complex phenomena to universal laws, reductive management techniques and recipes for success, which are 'analytical, concrete, logical, convincing and wrong' (Mowles 2011: 16). The chapter presents alternative discourses (Alvesson, Bridgman and Willmott 2009; Chia and Holt 2009; Gunter 2012) and explores the political dimensions to education policy and strategy. It also reviews investigations into how the 'policy epidemic' has affected teachers, school leaders and pupils in 'ordinary schools' (Ball et al 2012).

Chapter 3 offers a detailed discussion of complex responsive processes theory (Stacey 2007, 2010, 2012; Griffin 2002; Shaw 2002; Mowles 2011). The writings of Mead (1932, 1956), Elias (1970, 1991) and Scott (1990, 1998), whose thinking informed the refinement of the theory, highlight the reasons why scientific management, underpinned by the 'sciences of certainty', has an enduring appeal to

policy-makers. The concepts of change (transformation); values; power; compliance and resistance are particularly helpful in making sense of the complex processes which come into play in the enactment of improvement strategies. The ongoing, iterative engagement in local interactions involves people communicating, articulating values, using power, complying and resisting as part of their everyday work. Over time, global patterns emerge out of the many everyday local interactions, patterns which cannot be controlled or predicted in advance (Stacey 2010).

Chapter 4 starts with a discussion of the instrumental, qualitative case study design (Stake 1995, 2005). An account of data collection and analysis is followed by an explication of research paradigms and their origins, either in the 'sciences of certainty' or the complexity sciences. I also discuss social constructionism, in order to elucidate my research paradigm and draw links between complex responsive processes theory (Stacey 2010) and Berger and Luckmann's (1966) treatise in the social construction of reality. In explaining how subjective meanings become objectified, institutionalised and eventually taken for granted as 'real', Berger and Luckmann emphasise the paradox of humans producing a social world which they experience as 'something other than a human product' (ibid: 78). This thesis, therefore, brings together three bodies of related theory: complex responsive processes theory (Stacey 2007, 2010, 2012 et al), social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann 1966 et al) and discourse analysis (Fairclough 2003). These theories have informed the data analysis and interpretation discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

The findings presented in Chapter 5 reveal 'local diversity' in the patterns of conversation and distinctive values espoused by leaders and teachers in the two case study schools. Chapter 6 focuses on the command and control interaction between the policy-makers and practitioners established by the *National Strategies*. The main theme in participants' 'story' of the *National Strategies* was a re-positioning of teachers as policy implementers. Regardless of their own values or professional expertise, practitioners are obliged to deliver improvement narrowly defined as standards in national examinations. The legacy of the 'policy epidemic' (Levin 1998) discussed in Chapter 7 includes some profound changes to everyday practice in the two schools. The sheer proliferation of government improvement initiatives prevents

practitioners from considering alternatives or reflecting on the consequences of teaching to target. Whilst alternative values and understandings of education have been articulated in both schools, the immediate response to the command and control improvement regime has been that of compliance, despite the erosion of educational quality (Bates 2013) that such response may engender in the long term.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by considering the implications of these findings within different timeframes (Elias 1991). In the short term, strategy enactment in 'Abbey Primary' and 'Green Lanes Primary' appears to be partly 'successful'. Most of my research participants talked about their schools' 'success', in terms of improvement in SATs and better Ofsted grades. However, in the longer term, as practitioners internalise the dominant discourse of improvement with its imperative of delivering targets, they simultaneously contribute to maintaining a one-dimensional world for children to inhabit. Through transformations of 'new capitalism' (Fairclough 2003), this world is being taken over by neoliberal agendas and the view of individuals as self-sufficient, self-interested and disconnected from others.

Complex responsive processes theory has two key implications for understanding transformation defined as profound change. Firstly, that transformation cannot be pre-designed by 'spectacular' individuals 'for empire form'd and fit to rule the rest' (Ovid 8/1998). This is because profound change emerges from many ordinary everyday local interactions amongst interdependent individuals. Over time, global patterns emerge from these interactions. Secondly, by denying interdependence, neoliberal agendas and technical-rational improvement strategies impoverish human relationships. This leads to a kind of education which, despite the rhetoric of transforming life-chances for all children, may confine them to a target-driven future in the global marketplace. Complex responsive processes theory highlights the responsibility held by the policy-makers and practitioners for the everyday choices they make and therefore for the future/s they construct for the children as legitimate.

Chapter 2: *National Strategies*, **dominant strategic management discourse and its critics**

2.1 Introduction

Strategic management emerged in the private sector as a particular form of management in the 1970s, in the wake of the oil crisis of 1973 and the ensuing political and economic instability in capitalism (Stacey 2010). The crisis shattered the post-war certainty of continuous economic growth, prompting business educators to reconceptualise management in terms of financial agency (ibid). Whilst post-war professionalism in management had embraced codes of ethics and ideals of service, new forms of investment capitalism gave rise to the notion of the manager as an agent to shareholders, free to take any risks in order to maximise shareholder value. Gradually, business schools started turning towards 'management as leadership'. Whilst managers work 'within' the system, leaders work 'on' the system (Covey, Merrill and Merrill 1994), aided by their charisma, vision and other 'spectacular' qualities. As Stacey (2010: 45) points out, the conception of a 'heroic' leader or 'chief strategist' has also found the way into the public sector services:

> the hero myth was widely taken up by motivational speakers, consultants and corporate trainers as well as aspiring CEOs, who sought to emulate charismatic leaders... A leadership ideology had thus been added to the managerialist ideology in business and, with something of a lag, it replaced the public administration ethic in the public sector.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the dominant strategic management discourse and its view of strategy as essential for organisational improvement. The roots of this discourse can be traced to Taylor's (1911) 'scientific management'. The dominant discourse constructs a series of disconnections: between the leader and the followers, the planned and the realised strategy, the vision of an ideal future state and the 'messy' reality of everyday practice. These disconnections provide clues as to 'why planning fails' (Fullan 2001: 63) and why the transformation of UK primary education into a 'world-class system' is proving difficult to achieve. Critics of the dominant discourse challenge its hidden political agendas (Alvesson et al 2009) and provide alternative conceptualisations of strategy (Chia and Holt 2009). New Labour's *National Strategies* for primary education reflect the dominant approaches

to management and are therefore subject to their limitations. The chapter finishes with a review of research on the everyday experience of schools enacting improvement. It addresses research questions 2 and 3 and discusses negative consequences of the 'policy epidemic'.

2.2 Dominant strategic management discourse and its epistemological origins

Mainstream publications on strategy in business and education elevate the strategist to the position of a 'spectacular' individual and present strategising as a 'top' management competency (Beerel 2009; Senge 1999; Berman and Evans 2007). For example, Human Resources Management (HRM) is defined by Armstrong (2008: 34) as a coherent approach to managing people, whilst 'strategic human resources management' is presented as playing 'a strategic role in its success… and a major source of competitive advantage'. Textbooks on strategy are predominantly prescriptive and present recipes for 'what works', often based on case studies of successful companies captured at the peak of success (Chia and Holt 2009; Stacey 2007; Mowles 2011). Stacey (2010:10) refers to this body of literature and the concepts it presents as 'the dominant management discourse', in the sense that it 'reflects the most powerful ideology displayed in organizational practice and research as well as management education'. This discourse is underpinned by three important concepts which are 'unproblematically taken to be the truth' (ibid: 10). The first is the concept of the autonomous, rational individual; this notion, by extrapolation, assumes an atomistic view of the social and natural worlds as objects of individual control. The second concept is that of the objective, 'detached observer', 'system designer', who acquires knowledge of organisational reality by isolating cause and effect and testing hypotheses to arrive at universal laws. The third is the concept of linear, mechanistic causality, which ignores development over time and disregards the unexpected or the unpredictable.

These concepts originate in Taylorism and the 'sciences of certainty' (Stacey 2010). According to Taylor (1911: 3), 'scientific management' aims at improving efficiency and rests 'upon clearly defined laws, rules and principles... applicable to all kinds of human activities'. The rules are developed by the scientific manager through a systematic observation of workers and precise recording of their performance. In his

investigation into the efficiency of handling pig-iron, Taylor (1911: 30) asserts the epistemological authority of the scientific manager, at the same time denying the workers even the most basic understanding of their work:

> This work is so crude and elementary in its nature that... it would be possible to train an intelligent gorilla so as to become a more efficient pig-iron handler than any man can be. Yet... the science of handling pig-iron is so great and amounts to so much that it is impossible for the man who is best suited to this type of work to understand the principles of this science, or even to work in accordance with these principles without the aid of a man better educated than he is.

Taylor's argument lays the foundations for target setting in industrial management. It also constructs a hierarchy of roles which recurs in the contemporary distinction between the 'spectacular' strategic or transformational leader and 'ordinary' people at the frontline of organisational improvement (Chia and Holt 2009; Gunter 2004). In the post-war period, notes Stacey (2010), the reliance of management on the 'sciences of certainty' has been reinforced by the development of systems thinking, which is discussed next.

2.2.1 Systems thinking

Systems thinking was developed by Von Bertalanffy (1951). His key idea is that any kind of system (organised whole) could be described and explained by means of the same categories and the same formal apparatus (Alhadeff-Jones 2008). The applicability of the same formal apparatus to such diverse phenomena as weather systems, the economy, ecosystems, language, human interactions, in such diverse knowledge disciplines as cybernetics, evolutionary biology, economics and thermodynamics contributed to the growing popularity of systems thinking in many areas of activity, including leadership and management.

A fundamental distinction in systems thinking is between closed (simple) and complex systems (Stacey 2007; Morrison 2008; Davis and Sumara 2006). Examples of the former include the clockwork mechanism, the car engine and the central heating system. These systems can be controlled from the outside, based on linear causality or simple feedback loops, the purpose of control being system stability. In contrast, in open (complex adaptive systems), which are made up of many

components or agents, causality is complex and change emerges from agents following local rules (self-organisation). Since multiple causes can lead to multiple effects it is difficult, if not impossible, to predict how these systems will respond and adapt to change over time, as confirmed by the low long-term predictability of weather forecasts, or the emergence and rippling effects of the credit crunch of 2008 (Mackenzie 2008; Kitching et al 2009). The credit crunch is an example of the 'butterfly effect' in which small changes in initial conditions can, over time, lead to unpredicted effects on a global scale (Stacey 2010).

Complexity theory's worldview is in stark contrast to the Newtonian, mechanistic view prevalent in many scientific approaches in both natural and social sciences (Elias 1991). This latter view puts forth simplicity, stability and single cause - single effect causality. Newton's world is a closed system, a mechanism to be manipulated (Morrison, 2008), which can be changed by an autonomous expert observer. In contrast, complex systems approaches are characterised by non-linearity, dynamic relations in place of 'atomistic' facts and evolutionary perspectives on social development. They resonate with Mead's (1934) theories of social evolution and the 'sciences of uncertainty' discussed further in section 4.6 (p.76).

However, thinking about human interaction in terms of complex systems may also present a risk of 'getting stuck at the abstract level of systems' (Stacey 2010: 124). A weakness of systems thinking is that it presents abstract models, 'as if' they were reality. This encourages managers and policy-makers to disconnect from lived experience[4], privileging abstractions, categorisation, objectification, target setting and mapping, so that:

> the ordinary reality of the experience of local interaction between actual human bodies disappeared from view as attention was focused on objectively operating on abstractions as if they were reality. (ibid: 118)

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[4] 'Lived experience' denotes our everyday experience which, in its most basic form, involves our immediate, pre-theoretical and pre-reflective consciousness of life (Van Manen 1990). Stacey's (2010) argument about the paradox of the scientific manager 'looking at' the system as if from the outside and at the same time being immersed in the system, resonates with phenomenological insights into the nature of our involvement in the 'lifeworld'. By being human, we are inextricably involved in the 'lifeworld', the world of 'immediate experience' (Van Manen 1990: 182).

Despite its limitations, systems thinking appears to be in the ascendancy in education reform, as illustrated by the 'self-improving system' of UK public services discussed in Chapter 1 (Figure 1.1, p.12). The 'self-improving system' is a closed system, designed by a detached expert observer who can maximise potential benefits and minimise potential risks, 'if careful attention is paid to getting the detailed design conditions right' (PSR 2006: 3). This assumption privileges the simplicity and precision of the design over the complexity of everyday reality of working in schools. Consequently, this approach ignores the dynamic interplay between diverse local contexts in which schools operate and a multitude of other factors, such as pedagogy, child development and complex relationships that form the fabric of local interactions. The reasons for the appeal of systems thinking to the policy-makers are discussed in Chapter 3 (p.52).

2.2.2   *From strategy as a plan devised by top management to strategy as a 'process of learning'*

Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel (1988) provide a classic definition of strategy as '5Ps': plan, pattern, position, perspective and ploy. Underlying the '5Ps' of strategy is the discourse of rational choice and reliance on vision, or the 'big picture'. The authors aim at refining previous approaches to strategic management. These were based on Porter's (1980) notion of strategy as a set of techniques for analysing industries with a view to gaining a competitive advantage. Following the publication of Peters and Waterman's (1982) book *In Search of Excellence*, the focus of strategising shifted to planning and 'people skills' used by charismatic managers. Mintzberg et al try to transcend the prescriptive nature of these texts on strategy by pointing out that, in terms of organisational change...

> There is no formula for transforming an organisation, and that includes the very notion that the organization needs transforming in the first place. (ibid: 336)

Ultimately, however, it is down to the 'spectacular leader', who ''cracked a code'… [so that] energy was released and channelled to improve performance' (ibid: 337).

Mintzberg's (1991, 1994) appeals to move from strategic choice to the notion of strategic management as a process of learning can be read as an attempt at transcending strategic leadership prescriptions. In light of the complex, emergent nature of strategy, Mintzberg (1994: 16) questions Taylor's notion of scientific management, which relies on planning as 'the one best way'. He recommends descriptive approaches to strategic management and emphasises the distinction between the intended and realised strategy. Consequently, the manager's role shifts from formulating preconceived deliberate strategies to managing the process of strategic learning, which may allow for novel strategies to emerge.

Dominant educational leadership discourse replicates business management's reliance on techniques for improving organisational effectiveness. In their investigations into the relationship between leadership and school improvement, educational researchers draw on empirical research from both business and education. A significant proportion of this research is underpinned by large scale, statistical studies (Ouston 2003; Hallinger and Heck 2003). Authors who focus on the 'how to' of strategy rely on business textbooks (Fidler 2002; Davies and Ellison 2003), simplifying the more complex arguments, such as Mintzberg's (1994). Whilst business authors draw evidence from case studies of private sector companies (Senge 1999), educational texts often use their findings as ready-made 'recipes' for strategic leadership, thereby neglecting the important empirical evidence base to their claims to knowledge, e.g. Fidler (2002). Interestingly, the correlation between managerial excellence and sustainable success is questionable in view of the downfall of the exemplary companies which provided Peters and Waterman's (1982) universal prescriptions for organisational success (Mowles 2011).

2.3 Alternative perspectives on strategy, strategic leadership and systemic change

The limited theoretical underpinning and prescriptive nature of the dominant discourse result in constructs of strategy which lack criticality and acknowledgement of multiple perspectives. They promote 'technical-rationality' and values of the

marketplace. This section presents critiques of the dominant discourse and alternative conceptualisations of strategy and strategic leadership.

2.3.1 Change and strategy through the critical lens: Critical Management Studies and critics of government education reform

The overarching purpose of Critical Management Studies (CMS) is to question the authority and relevance of mainstream thinking and practice (Alvesson, Bridgman and Willmott 2009) and to de-naturalise the dominant management concepts, such as change (Morgan and Spicer 2009) and strategy (Phillips and Dar 2009). CMS challenges 'the classic management principles of organizing (e.g. efficiency, rationality, masculinity)', exposing the myth of objectivity and impartiality in management theory and practice (Phillips and Dar 2009: 420).

Morgan and Spicer (2009: 251) question the dominant ideology in which change is constructed as 'positive, necessary and all encompassing'. They contend that this ideology leads to unquestioned control over organisational processes and inequalities between the managers and the managed. They locate organisational contestation and struggle in the broader context of the changing dynamics of capitalism, which, with the emergence of the global financial empire, exacerbates social inequalities and domination of the many by the few. Ubiquitous change provides the rationale for more and more pre-packaged change programmes, 'often underpinned by utopian fantasies of a future perfect' (ibid: 260), which may not be necessary or irresistible. It also legitimises the narratives of unceasing organisational improvement and forces upon the employees a state of constant mobilisation of effort:

> The final consequence of the constant change is widespread "precarity"… a situation where all rules are "temporarily" suspended and we are placed into a permanent "state of emergency." The result is that nearly everything becomes permissible… the organizations we work for can ask of us almost anything they like. (ibid: 259)

At the same time, this ideology dismisses the social suffering produced by change, a 'heightened anxiety, a pervasive sense of insecurity, the destruction of common bonds, and the destruction of livelihoods and ways of life across the world' (ibid: 252).

CMS provide an analysis of strategy viewed at different levels: strategy as ideology, as discourse, as political economy and as practice. According to Phillips and Dar (2009), strategy framed as ideology reveals the hidden agenda of strategy literature to serve the interests of practising managers and naturalise the status quo. They go on to argue that, at the level of discourse, strategic language legitimises rationality, objectification of people and the environment, simultaneously silencing alternatives. As political economy, strategy is crucial in deploying economic resources. Strategy as practice focuses on how strategy is performed and lived out through everyday interactions of people working in organisations. Phillips and Dar (2009: 429) also express concern about the impact of strategic thinking on 'large numbers of people in and around organizations, their lives, and ultimately the choices available to them'.

In the field of education, Hatcher's (2012) argument resonates with those of Phillips and Dar (2009). Hatcher argues that educational leadership orthodoxy is closely aligned with the functions of schooling under capitalism, where education...

> ...performs a key role in terms of reproducing the labour power essential to meet capital's needs, and transmitting the values and beliefs capable of sustaining a social structure based on inequalities of power and wealth and driven by principles of market exchange. (2012: 269)

Similar arguments are developed by Gunter and Forrester (2009: 498), who investigate the reasons why 'particular research methodologies and methods are preferred and who has been involved in the production of these ways of knowing'. They note that the neoliberal state operates through the interplay between hierarchy, markets and networks. These configurations of power and interest include some and exclude others. Both the Thatcherite and New Labour governments excluded teachers and local authority personnel for displaying 'unmodern professional attitudes' and replaced them with 'attractive outsiders' (Gunter and Forrester 2009: 499). 'Attractive outsiders' consist of networks of ministers, civil servants, government think-tanks, NCSL, private-sector advisors and consultants, as well as some advisors from local government, universities and schools. They all recognise centralised policy as crucial to delivering reform, hold the neoliberal view of the

school as a business firm and, epistemologically, emphasise the science of measurement and linear causality, linking effective leadership to student outcomes (ibid).

To explain the dynamics of the locus and practice of power, Gunter and Forrester draw on Bourdieu's (1990, 2000) analysis of practice. They define 'leadership of schools' (as distinct from 'educational leadership') as:

> a *game in play* where entry is based on dispositions to take up a position through the staking of *capital* as being knowledgeable about leadership through professional experience and/or as researchers who align with school improvement and effectiveness. (Gunter and Forrester 2009: 510)

According to Gunter and Forrester, 'leaders of schools' stake the claims to 'positivist' knowledge as 'normal and necessary' (ibid: 507). Their 'game' is that of domination, predicated on a transaction between the government and private capital where 'the government gives private capital access to new markets and private capital gives government access to a modernising 'kulturkampf' (ibid: 507). It is also about substantial profit for private companies. Stephen Ball (2009) points out the widespread retailing of school improvement packages, policy solutions, tests and other educational 'commodities'. As part of leadership development, generic models of change management are repackaged and sold as 'modern' and relevant to local contexts. Ball draws attention to how private sector companies have been profiting from New Labour's education reform. For example:

> The Department for Education and Skills has increased its spending on private consultants from £5 million to £22 million in three years, without considering using its own staff…   (ibid: 89)

This discussion now offers a brief critique of Fullan's (2001, 2003) and Morrison's (2002) application of complexity thinking in educational leadership.

2.3.2   Complexity thinking in educational leadership literature

Complexity sciences have been introduced to educational leadership by Michael Fullan and Keith Morrison. Fullan's work (2001, 2003) focuses on the meaning of change as constructed by those positioned at its grass roots – the teachers. He

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advocates 'real', deep change in organisational culture, in contrast to superficial attempts at raising standards. He also acknowledges a potential gap between planned and realised change:

> …the crux of change involves the development of meaning in relation to a new idea, program, reform, or a set of activities. But it is individuals who have to develop new meaning, and these individuals are insignificant parts of a gigantic, loosely organized, complex, messy social system that contains myriad different subjective worlds. (2001: 92)

Whilst Fullan's discourse ventures out of the technical-rational paradigm, he tends to finish his argument with 'lessons' which simplify complexity into prescriptions, for example: 'the only thing that works are virtuous circles' (Fullan 2003: 46); 'Rather than pushing an old lever beyond its natural limits, policymakers would be wise to search for new levers' (ibid: 6). The notion of levers implies a closed system (Alhadeff-Jones 2008). It is also implicit in the following analogy presented by Morrison (2002: 17):

> ...feedback must occur between the interacting elements of the system... Negative feedback brings diminishing returns... Negative feedback is regulatory; it signals deviation from the norm like a thermostat which regulates temperature, causing interventions whenever too much deviation occurs... The implication for schools, perhaps, is to find the appropriate systems, people or resources to act as equivalents to thermostats, sensing the environment and making internal adjustments.

The analogy of a thermostat controlling the temperature in the simple, closed system of central heating, reduces people to regulatory mechanisms and actually undermines Morrison's later point regarding 'schools as complex adaptive systems' (ibid: 26). The point about 'interventions' to regulate 'deviation' resonates with the dominant discourse and contradicts the complexity notion of diversity as essential for deep system change.

Complexity and ambiguity are also explored by other researchers, albeit without explicit references to the complexity sciences. For example, Johnson and Scholes (2003) and Simkins (2003) highlight the complexity of educational change and the fallacy of rational planning which does not account for organisational politics.

Whilst reflexively evaluating her contribution to the SESI movement, Ouston (2003: 254) admits that it is impossible to disentangle causes from effects:

> Looking back I can see that we were very naïve… We were asking a question that I think no one has cracked in the rigorous way we sought, and it may actually be uncrackable: how do changes in the management of a school lead to changes in student outcomes, and how can you see that happening in real time?

Therefore, it becomes problematic to claim a direct relationship between leadership and school improvement.

2.3.3 Strategy without design?

An examination of strategy as practice highlights the complexity and 'messiness' of everyday organisational reality and the emergent nature of strategy. Emergent strategy, developed at the level of 'local actions and adaptations without the oversight or pre-authored design of 'big' strategists' is explored by Chia and Holt (2009: ix). Like Stacey (2010, 2012) the authors support their discussions by drawing on Elias's (1989) theory, which presents social development as evolutionary and emergent, rather than designed and controlled. They argue that deliberate strategic planning is often both limited and self-defeating:

> Ambitious strategic plans, the 'big picture' approach that seeks a lasting solution or competitive advantage through large-scale transformations, often end up undermining their own potential effectiveness because they overlook the fine details of everyday happenings at 'ground zero' level. (ibid: 18)

Apart from ignoring the implementers, ambitious strategies are often an expression of strategy-makers' ambition to realize their goals in a spectacular manner, in tune with the Western 'obsession with the dramatic and the spectacular' (ibid: 187). As exemplified by the metaphor of the *phalanx*, a 'spectacular intervention' is the preferred Western mode of engagement, whereby leaders orient themselves towards directly confronting and overcoming obstacles and mobilising all technological and human resources for one decisive attack. An expectation of a quick win ignores both the 'gritty' reality of everyday life and the possibility of losing the battle. Strategic leaders' deployment of people, assets and other resources 'around the 'territory', as if on a chessboard' (ibid: 21), is, for Chia and Holt, symptomatic of methodological

individualism, our underlying tendency to perceive ourselves as autonomous individuals, detached, objective observers.

The authors argue for a re-conceptualisation of strategy as 'indirect action', by juxtaposing the 'silent efficacy of indirect action' with the forcefulness, superficiality and externality of strategy devised and executed as a direct intervention. Whilst direct strategy interventions can lead to resistance and superficial change, indirect action leads to a gradual reconfiguration and integration of multiple perspectives and is therefore a process of a profound, albeit slow, change:

> …silent transformation occurs through its tireless continuity and pervasiveness, and that is what makes it eventually effective. Transformation, because it is continuous and operates at a mundane everyday level, normally passes unnoticed. The skills and knowledge are absorbed unconsciously and applied in situ and sponte sua from moment to moment… The efficacy of such everyday coping actions is all the greater the more discreet and unnoticed it is. (ibid: 192)

Paradoxically, 'a strategy-less strategy' which relinquishes positions, plans and objectives, leaves us open to change whilst simply engaging in everyday practice, for '[w]e only know as we go' (ibid: 187). It also counters the instrumentalism of the dominant, outcomes-oriented strategies. Whilst the latter confront the environment as a stock of human and material resources, controlled, deployed and utilised for building a competitive advantage, the 'strategy-less strategy' encourages respect for the world and its resources as something we rely upon.

2.4 New Labour's *National Strategies* for primary education

The *National Strategies* reveal the instrumental, outcomes-focused orientation of the dominant discourse. For example, the 'transformation' promoted by the *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners* (DfES 2004) encourages school leaders and teachers to think in terms of means and ends, abstract measures of attainment, targets and standardised objectives. Their prescriptive character, coupled with sparse theoretical underpinning, locates the *National Strategies* in the paradigm of technical-rationality. For example, Tony Blair's 'chief strategist' and architect of the *National Strategies*, Michael Barber appears to conceptualise education as an

industrial production line put in motion by the Taylor-style scientific manager. Aided by fifteen rules of the science of 'deliverology' (Barber 2011), the system designer controls the system which is imagined as a delivery chain of educational targets.

2.4.1 The first wave of the National Strategies: National Literacy (DfEE 1998) and National Numeracy Strategies (DfEE 1999)

The *National Literacy Strategy* (NLS) made a double promise 'to raise standards and to improve the life chances of many children' (DfEE 1998: 4). This promise was underpinned by a claim that high standards of literacy bring both individual and economic benefits. With regard to the former, they promote 'valuable ways of thinking about and understanding the world and ourselves' (Beard 2000: 7), whilst economically they develop a more efficient workforce:

> Weaknesses in processing written information can make a workforce less efficient and the companies which employ them less competitive in world markets… 60% of all jobs now require reasonable reading skills e.g. being able to understand and act on written instructions, obtain simple information and understand a price list. (ibid: 8-9)

The *National Literacy Strategy* promoted teaching methods which had been originally designed as intervention programmes to meet specific needs of disadvantaged pupils. These programmes were still at the pilot stage when the NLS was rolled out in the UK. This was, however, dismissed:

> While none of these programmes have yet run their full course, their overlaps with the NLS indicate the general direction of global thinking. (ibid: 12)

As the *National Literacy Strategy* was rolled out in all primary schools, unless they could demonstrate higher levels of effectiveness, an adoption of these pilot programmes prior to their completion and evaluation gives the NLS an air of a large scale experiment. Despite this, the *National Numeracy Strategy* (NNS), constructed around a similar, highly prescriptive content, was introduced the following year.

The NLS and NNS promoted a prescriptive aims-and-objectives curriculum (Ross 2000; Kelly 2004; Pring 2013) to be 'delivered' by teachers who, instead of having

to 'reinvent the wheel', 'can now focus their energies on... intelligently implementing well-designed models' (Beard 2000: 12). The notions of practice divorced from theory and professionals skilled in the delivery of an 'off the shelf' curriculum were reinforced by subsequent Ofsted inspections. The design of the *National Literacy* and *Numeracy Strategies* made it 'the most ambitious large-scale reform initiative anywhere is the world' (Fullan 2003:1). They prescribed actions to be taken at every level, ranging from central government curriculum and resourcing policy to daily lesson plans for teachers. For example, the teaching model for literacy was based on teaching at word, sentence and text levels to be fitted into the appropriate parts of the accurately timed literacy hour:
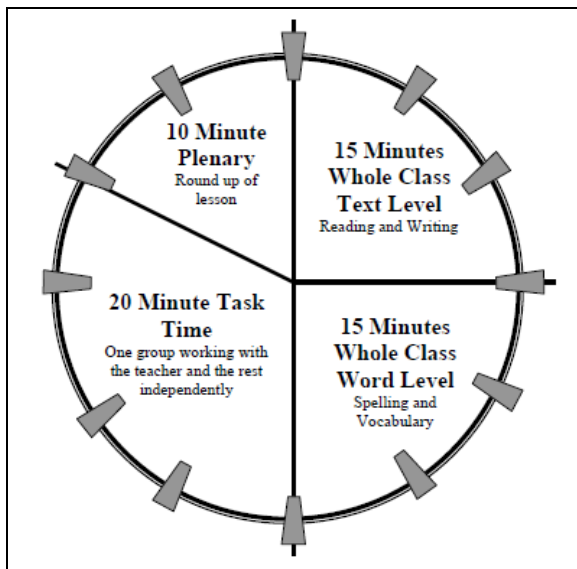
Figure 2.1   The Literacy Hour clock (adapted from DfEE 1998: 8)

The NLS seems to draw on the dominant definitions of strategy, by outlining that this is a 'steady, consistent strategy' for raising standards… which could be sustained over a long period of time and be made a central priority for the education service as a whole' (Beard 2000: 5). However, both the NLS and NNS are in effect curriculum documents, providing detailed frameworks for teaching English and Mathematics. They introduced national targets, despite paucity of research on targets in education; target setting being 'derived from its long-standing use in industrial management and its increasing use in improving public services' (ibid: 10). Neither

of these *National Strategies* considered possible unintended consequences of transplanting target setting from industrial management into education. Instead, the use of target setting seemed to be taken for granted as they began to colonise policy-makers' language and everyday educational conversations.

2.4.2   The second wave of National Strategies

Despite the promise made by the first wave of *National Strategies* to be there for a long time, and contrary to concerns about the over-prescriptive, technicist approaches of the NLS and NNS (e.g. Dadds 1999; Alexander 2004), two further strategies followed in 2003 and 2004. *Excellence and Enjoyment: a strategy for primary schools* (DfES, 2003) was published in the aftermath of 2002, the year designated as the deadline for reaching the targets set in 1998. Despite missed targets and research findings to the contrary, *Excellence and Enjoyment* repeatedly refers to the success of the NNS and NLS:

> Our primary schools are a success story. (DfES 2003: 2)
>
> Ofsted have also celebrated the success of schools that make a broad and rich offering to their students.   (ibid: 9)
>
> Literacy and numeracy consultants have been key to the success of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. (ibid: 63)

The explicit aim of *Excellence and Enjoyment* is to build on success and challenge schools to continue to raise standards. The next step in the standards agenda is an imperative for the children to develop 'ownership' of their targets:

> We want every primary school to review its performance and to set targets for Level 4 and Level 5 up to 2006 which are… [o]wned: understood by the school, including governors and pupils, and having a visible life and meaning in the classroom…   (ibid: 19)

A new focus in *Excellence and Enjoyment* is on strategic leadership. The document shows an ambition of developing a 'vision', or even 'a blueprint for the future' (ibid: 69) and draws on strategic leadership concepts such as 'moving forward together' and 'frontline services'. It highlights the importance of Headteachers in 'realising the vision' and creates a post for Primary Strategy Manager in each LEA. Still missing

here are references to transformation, which is introduced in the next strategy document, the *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners.*

This new *National Strategy* followed in 2004, within a year of *Excellence and Enjoyment*, thus adding to the phenomenon of the 'policy epidemic' (Levin 1998: 138). The 'policy epidemic' could be explained as linked to a rapid succession of Education Secretaries, five in the thirteen years of New Labour, each intent on making a difference and each moving to a different post before being held to account for the changes he/she introduced. Chia and Holt (2009: 77) would, however, locate the 'policy epidemic' within the broader context of management operating in the conditions of 'liquid times' (Bauman 2007), when 'anything with duration is treated with suspicion, as it hints of backwardness'. In business management, strategy is a continual practice of searching for new favourable positions vis-à-vis the environment. This results in a relentless pursuit of unlimited growth, production of ever increasing output and... waste. Inevitably, 'the wasteland grows' (ibid: 79) as a result. New Labour's education reform is couched in novelty, innovation, and modernisation: 'bright new teachers' (Morris 2001: 1), 'a new era of teaching' (Holley 2009), 'a new masters qualification for new teachers' (Beckles 2008). However, this pursuit of novelty results in an accumulation of 'waste' in the form of piecemeal initiatives, discarded projects and resources which could have been utilised differently.

A compulsion to continuously reform dominates the rationale for *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners* (DfES 2004: 9): 'So we have to sustain progress, with new and more radical reforms'. The notion of transformation, replacing improvement, is implicitly constructed as 'real change', made 'quickly':

> As well as transforming life-chances, our reforms have shattered myths about education and shown that it is possible to make real change and improvement quickly at every phase and stage of learning. (ibid: 14)

Transformation is referred to 27 times in this text, in such phrases as: 'transforming standards', 'transforming life chances… aspirations and opportunities', 'transforming skills'. School leadership is also constructed in terms of

transformation, as the 'ability to manage people and money with the creativity, imagination and inspiration to lead transformation' (ibid: 109). The 'evidence' of transformation effected to date is provided by case studies which have a flavour of anecdotal evidence:

An example of more strategic use of undergraduates working in schools – the Student Associates Scheme

Rohan, a science undergraduate, recently completed a placement at an inner city comprehensive in London. He taught a whole class, under supervision, across the range of science subjects, covering topics such as DNA and genetics. Rohan was able to capture the imagination of pupils with practical experiments which included extracting DNA from kiwi fruits. He added to the development of pupils' skills by encouraging and supervising internet based activities.

The school were very pleased with the placement which they felt benefitted both the pupils and the staff. Such was the impact of his work he has already been offered a further placement this academic year.

Rohan feels that he has greatly benefitted from his placement, which he found overwhelmingly positive. Despite the challenging surroundings he was able to make a real impression, and he has gained experience which would otherwise have been unavailable to him. He also felt well supported by the head of department and other staff team members at the school.

Table 2.2 Example case study (adapted from DfES 2003: 109)

2.4.3   Chief strategists: Michael Barber and Brent Davies

Michael Barber, the designer of the *National Strategies*, was appointed in 1997 as Head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit and Chief Adviser to the Secretary of State for Education on School Standards (Fullan 2009). Barber's (1996: 5) 'envisioning' of New Labour 'revolution' in education is based on the re-engineering model developed by Hammer and Champy (1993) as a blueprint for a 'business revolution'. The model relies on a complete departure from existing practice, a radical break with tradition and inventing entirely new ways of working:

'Re-engineering a company means tossing aside old systems and starting over.'… 'Companies… see re-engineering as an opportunity to further their lead over their competitors'. Hammer and Champy point out that those who succeed in re-engineering deliberately broke traditional rules. Assumptions which had governed the way they worked for generations were deliberately challenged and overturned. (ibid: 249-251)

Critiques of Barber's contribution to reform are presented in numerous publications (Coffield 2011; Ball 2012; Bates 2012). Crucial to this thesis is Barber's role as the designer of the *National Strategies* and the accompanying apparatus of targets, standards and inspections. As a 'hero' of reform (Ball 2007: 3), Barber is an example of 'characters of new capitalism' (Fairclough 2003: 213) who have utilised the 'policy epidemic' to build their own private consultancies (Ball 2012). Some of the 'policy entrepreneurs' (ibid) increased their stake in the game through collaboration with the National College of School Leadership.

The opening of the NCSL in 2000 was part of New Labour's approach to governance through the 'decentralisation/centralisation nexus' (Mahony and Hextall 2000: 32). However, the devolution of (some) power to school leaders was limited, because 'leadership knowledge' was increasingly constructed as compliance with the reform agenda and efficient implementation of policy (Gunter 2004). For example, Tony Blair asserted that 'leaders must pursue decisively higher standards' (ibid: 30). Similarly, the NCSL guidelines stated that school leadership must...

- Be purposive, inclusive and values driven
- Be futures orientated and strategically driven
- Be served by a support and policy context that is coherent and implementation driven
- Be supported by a National College that leads the discourse around leadership for learning   (NCSL 2001: 5)

Implicit in the passive voice, repetition of 'driven' and reference to the leading role of the National College is its power over future leaders and their schools.

Strategic competency is one of the NCSL criteria for National Leaders of Education (NCSL 2006). These leaders were designated to support schools in special measures and other challenging circumstances. A National Leader of Education (NLE) is an

outstanding individual, with a track record of sustained high standards, who is also articulate, creative, solution focused and able to inspire and energise others (ibid). Implicit here is an assumption that changing schools in challenging circumstances relies on the leadership of a 'spectacular' individual who possesses a set of desirable characteristics, coupled with a strategic approach and expertise in raising standards. The causal link between leadership and school improvement is a typical feature of the dominant discourse. The NLE criteria resonate with the reductive approaches to leadership which isolate leaders' traits, practices and capacities (Leithwood et al 2003) or list what strategic leaders do and the characteristics they possess (Davies 2006). Such research sustains the notion of the heroic leader (Stacey 2010) and ignores the complex, context-bound nature of leadership (Senge 1990; Grint 2000).

Much of the NCSL-sponsored literature replicates the dominant business management literature, as exemplified by Brent Davies's (2006) research project *Success and sustainability: Developing the strategically focused school*. Underpinning his model of strategy are the notions of success and sustainability, sustainability being defined as an ability to continue to adapt, improve and be successful. That strategic leadership is essential for improvement is asserted thus:

> It is difficult to imagine that a school can find a way forward without the school leader being strategically intelligent. (Davies and Davies 2009: 34)

Unequal power relations between the leader and followers are implicit in such phrases used by Davies (2006) as: '[leaders] harness the abilities of others', 'headteachers and their staff', leader 'awakening the people' and 'aligning the people'. The leader is a 'spectacular' individual taking on the roles of: 'historian', 'anthropological sleuth', 'visionary', 'symbol', 'potter', 'poet', 'actor', 'healer' (ibid). Through these symbolic roles, the strategic leader becomes also a moral guardian of education.

Although Davies (2006: 19-20) addresses this often disregarded aspect of strategy, he frames an organisation's moral purpose as a list of simplistic criteria for 'strategically useful, school's basic beliefs' (ibid: 35). Such beliefs are to be:

- universal - applicable 'at every level of the school… every function… every location, with no exceptions';
- realistic - expressing 'attainable goals for continuous implementation';
- measurable - by identifying 'kinds of observable behaviours and standards';
- demonstrable - seen 'in action';
- consequential - 'if a school's basic beliefs have no impact on its decision-making, they are irrelevant'. (ibid: 35)

The universal applicability of 'strategically useful' beliefs locates them in the Newtonian paradigm. The prescription for 'realistic', 'measurable' and 'demonstrable' beliefs frames them as 'SMART targets': specific, measurable, ambitious, realistic and time-limited (Barber 2008). The criterion of 'consequentiality' aligns a school's beliefs with a utilitarian principle of their usefulness (Freakley and Burgh 2001).

Another prominent feature of his writing is that of mapping strategic functions and processes, as in Figures 2.3 and 2.4:
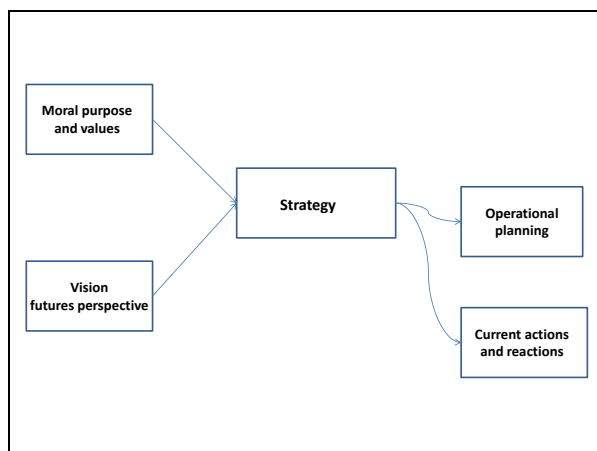
Figure 2.3 The function of strategy (adapted from Davies and Davies 2009: 16)

The function of strategy is to 'translate' the moral purpose and vision into reality. This can be achieved following the step-by-step prescription labelled as the 'ABCD approach':

44

Articulate	1	Strategy
Build	2	Images
		Metaphors
		Experiences
Create	3	Dialogues - conversations
		Cognitive / mental map
		Shared understanding
Define	4	Strategic perspective
		Outcome orientation
		Formal plans

Figure 2.4 ABCD approach of translating strategy into action (adapted from Davies and Davies 2009: 17)

As with many leadership models, the high level of abstraction of the ABCD model shows a disconnection from strategising as a process of interactions amongst real people working together (Stacey 2010). The mnemonic of ABCD raises doubts as to whether the sequence of steps from 'Articulating' to 'Defining' is here to fit into the sequence of letters in the alphabet. Especially in light of Step 2, which can be interpreted as a licence for the strategic leader to manipulate followers by 'building experiences'.

Davies focuses on 'leadership voices' (2006: 4) and excludes the voices of the followers. This discourse is aligned with New Labour's technical-rational approaches as well as with the NPM model which uses regulation, standards and league tables as levers for increasing effectiveness.

2.5 At the chalk face, at the frontline: everyday experience of schools enacting strategies for improvement and 'transformation'

This section focuses on research questions 2 and 3, which are concerned with the everyday experience of school leaders and teachers engaged in enacting improvement strategies. As stated by Gray (1999: 20), strategy is developed to 'serve policy goals which are instrumental in relation to a polity's broad vision of the desirable'. This link between strategy and policy highlights the relevance of studies of education policy enactment (e.g. Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012) to this thesis. There are a number of commonalities between my study and research by Hollins, Gunter and Thomson (2006), Barker (2006a, 2006b), Ball, Maguire and Braun

(2012). Through case study research, these authors investigate the effects of policy on everyday practice, educational values and teacher subjectivities. They reveal how the levers of standards, performance management and accountability create a particular, dominant version of a 'good school' (Ball et al 2012). These studies are characterised by criticality, social justice, focus on the realities of practice and reflexivity.

2.5.1 A case for understanding the complexity of school leadership and transformation

Bernard Barker (2005, 2006a, 2006b) points to the illusions and contradictions in the interpretations of 'transformation' as 'sustained improvement in results' (Barker 2005: 111). Based on case study findings, he argues against the dominant claims that such improvement relies on leadership 'styles' recommended by the NCSL. In this respect his writing echoes Helen Gunter's (2007) critique of the 'tyranny' of workforce remodelling. Both authors emphasise the paucity of research evidence on the impact of leadership on student outcomes. They defend the case study methodology as ensuring the 'close-up' perspective which can help researchers and policy-makers to understand 'the complexity and subtlety of leadership and change' (Barker 2006b: 281).

The contradictions in government approaches to education reform have been self-defeating, argues Barker (2008). In using their 'own past failures to justify new interventions', the policy-makers 'have themselves become an important obstacle to improvements in the quality of education' (ibid: 679). Amongst the negative consequences of reform, Barker (2010, 2012) lists an erosion of local communities, grade inflation, emergence of educational managers-implementers, growth of inequality and disadvantage and decline in social mobility.

2.5.2 'How Schools Do Policy': a case study of policy enactment

A conceptualisation of policy as practice leads Ball et al (2012: 43) to an inquiry into '*how* policy and practice get done in schools'. Their research is premised on two insights which resonate with complex responsive processes theory. Firstly, that policy-makers do not take into account the reality of the school; instead, they use and

manipulate standards to 'steer' schools 'at a distance' (ibid: 73). Secondly, that they dismiss the importance of discursive processes which, because of their contingency and instability, affect policy enactment in complex ways. However, despite these instabilities and complexities, the totalising discourse of standards and the accompanying logic of performance, often enacted in schools with an 'unreflexive ease' (ibid: 95), 'colonise[s] the most immediate interaction between teachers and their students' (ibid: 97). Such changes are made possible not just because of the highly effective mechanisms of surveillance and other disciplinary apparatus designed to 'police' schools, but also because of the constitutive power of discourse. The authors draw on Foucault to explain this process:

> Foucault writes that discourses are 'the set of conditions in accordance with which practice is exercised, in accordance with which that practice gives rise to partially or totally new statements, and in accordance with which it can be modified… Discursive formations are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (ibid: 122)

Over time, a particular version of a 'good school' emerges. This school offers 'the pleasures of performance to those who can inhabit these [discursive] positions with a sense of achievement, although they are premised on the positioning of 'others' outside of such pleasures' (ibid: 136). The paradoxical nature of educational change, at the same time 'totalising and individualising' (Ball 2009: 87), leads the authors to the following poignant summary of the consequences of the 'policy epidemic':

> our analyses would suggest that some profound changes are taking place in what it means to be educated, and what it means to be a teacher and a learner – as effects of policy. However, despite their profundity these changes are also incomplete, other versions of education can still be glimpsed, other rationalities are still being murmured. (Ball et al 2012: 150)

The reasons why this process is not, and perhaps can never be complete, could be linked to Stacey's (2010: 214) argument that whilst policy-makers can select improvement agendas, they are 'unable to choose the responses of others'. As signalled in Chapter 1 (p.17), both policy agendas and 'policy enactment' emerge from ongoing local interactions at two levels. Policy agendas are selected in the process of local conversations at the level of policy making. They are enacted through local interactions at the school level. As policy is talked about and

interpreted by school teachers and leaders, it is changed through the complex interplay of their intentions, power play, aspirations, compliance and resistance. Consequently, centrally designed improvement agendas...

> ...promise what they cannot deliver because they are predicated on ideas of predictability and control and imply powers of intervention on the part of managers and consultants which they cannot possess... The interweaving of intentions, hopes, aspirations and behaviour of people... will bring about outcomes which no one has predicted and which no one has planned. (Mowles 2011: 9)

A number of other findings from *'How Schools Do Policy'* resonate with the findings presented in Chapter 7 (p.123), where these commonalities are highlighted.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed diverse conceptualisations of strategy and strategic leadership in the fields of business and education. The epistemological origins of government strategies in the 'sciences of certainty' (Stacey 2010; Mowles 2011) lead to the development of normative, reductive approaches to educational improvement. By assuming simple, linear causality which links blueprints for improvement directly to the expected effects, strategy designers ignore the complex interplay of contextual, human and other factors. Because of this complexity, it is impossible to predict the precise long term consequences of such strategies.

In the context of voices critical of government approaches to educational improvement, complex responsive processes theory addresses the 'why' and 'how' questions at the level of local conversations. Whilst Ball et al (2012) aim at developing a theory of policy enactment to explain 'how' policy and practice get done in schools, this thesis draws on complex responsive processes theory to explain 'how' improvement strategies affect practitioners' conversations about everyday practice. Underpinning my research questions concerning the origins and dissemination of government strategies is also a desire to understand 'why' 'self-defeating' approaches to reform (Barker 2008) seem to have an enduring appeal for the policy-makers. These questions are considered in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Conceptual framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conceptual framework of complex responsive processes theory (Stacey 2007, 2010, 2012; Griffin 2002; Shaw 2002; Mowles 2011) summarised in Figure 3.1 (p.50). This theory offers powerful insights into social phenomena, such as how government improvement strategies affect education professionals and why they often bring about unplanned or undesirable consequences. According to the theory, social change emerges through local interactions as local patterns of conversation characterised by a complex interplay of actions, values, power relations, improvement strategies and personal agendas. This explanation challenges the *National Strategies* approach to school improvement which is predicated on centrally designed strategies. Complex responsive processes theory also departs from the paradigm of 'certainty' in which government strategies are located (see section 4.6, p.76). In contrast to the neoliberal view of humans as autonomous and independent, the theory assumes that humans are interdependent, mutually dependent on each other, existing in and through social relations.

To explain the processes of human organising, complex responsive processes theorists (Stacey et al) draw on the complexity sciences (e.g. Kauffman 1993; Prigogine 1997) as a source of analogies. For example, analogous to self-organising interactions amongst agents in complex adaptive systems such as ecosystems (see section 2.2.1, p.27), people in organisations interact locally, following local self-organising influences such as power, choice and local patterns of conversation. Because self-organisation patterns itself from within, global patterns emerge from local interactions following local rather than centrally-set rules. Stacey et al link analogies from the complexity sciences to the sociological theories of Elias (1970, 1991), Mead (1934, 1956), Scott (1990, 1998) to form a 'whole spectrum of theories of human organization' (Griffin 2002: x). Accordingly, in discussing the conceptual framework applied in my thesis, this chapter also refers to these sociologists, as summarised in Figure 3.1 below. The chapter then goes on to discuss the limitations of complex responsive theory. As signalled in Chapter 1 (pp.17-20), the theory provides powerful insights into processes of organisational change, articulated and

enacted through everyday interactions. Combining these insights with discourse analysis (Fairclough 2003) facilitates a more detailed exploration of meaning of the actual patterns of conversation. The relationship between these two bodies of theory is illustrated by Figure 3.2 (p.62).

3.2 Conceptual framework of complex responsive processes theory applied in this research

Figure 3.1 provides a summary of the key concepts of complex responsive processes theory applied in my research and presented below. According to complex processes theory, global patterns emerge from local interactions, a complex interplay of values, power relations and intentions of interdependent people engaging in everyday practice. Organisational change is equivalent to changes in patterns of interactions, and consequently, changes in the patterns of everyday conversations.
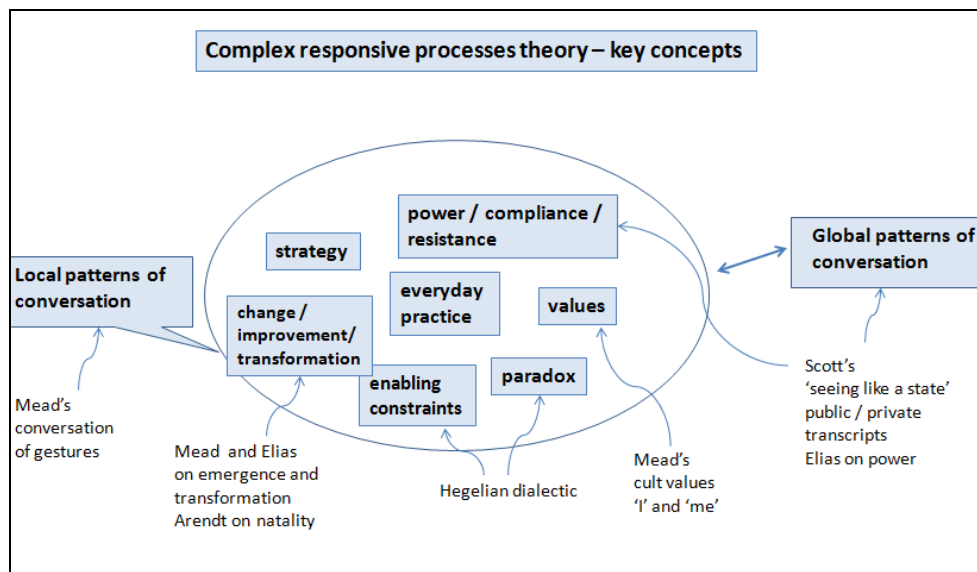
Figure 3.1   Complex responsive processes theory - key concepts

Although a centrally imposed improvement strategy may introduce new patterns of conversation, the way it is taken up, interpreted, complied with or resisted at the level of local interactions in schools is complex and therefore unpredictable in advance. From the complex responsive processes perspective, educational transformation is, therefore, an emergent, essentially political process. The following

sections focus in detail on the concepts summarised in Figure 3.1, explaining 'how' transformation emerges in local interactions and 'why' the dominant approaches to education reform prevail, even when they do not appear to bring about the desired outcomes, or lead to unpredicted negative consequences.

3.2.1 Transformation and 'transformative' strategy

Complex responsive processes theory defines transformation as profound change rooted in our interdependence and premised on transformative causality. To explain interdependence, Stacey refers to Mead's (1934) distinction between 'I' and 'me', which constitute the self. The 'I' represents the emergent, spontaneous sense of self and the 'me' the sense of what others would think of the 'I' (me):

> The "I" reacts to the self which arises through the taking of the attitudes of others. Through taking those attitudes we have introduced the "me" and we react to it as an "I". (ibid: 174)

The 'me' constrains the 'I' and, together, the 'I' and 'me' constitute two dialectical phases of the same process of the formation of the self. Mead emphasises that the self 'is essentially a social process going on with these two distinguishable phases' (ibid: 178). It follows that any far-reaching social change requires a sharing of common interests by the individuals involved:

> Any such social reconstruction... presupposes a basis of common social interests shared by all the individual members... and it is shared by all the individuals whose minds must participate in, or whose minds bring about, that construction... (ibid: 269)

Reaching a shared basis of common interest is crucial, because 'the changes that we make in the social order in which we are implicated necessarily involve our also making changes in ourselves' (ibid: 269). Mead describes here transformation understood as profound social change which effects self-change as well as social change. Such change is underpinned by transformative causality whereby individuals transform and are simultaneously transformed through such relations (Stacey 2010).

In contrast, the kind of causality assumed by the dominant conceptualisations of change is referred to by Stacey (2012: 13) as 'if... then' causality. It is derived from

the 'sciences of certainty' and premised on an assumption that '*if* action A is taken, *then* outcome B will occur' (Stacey 2012: 13). For example, this causality underpins Barber and Mourshed's (2007: 2) findings that for any school system to stay on 'top' in international comparisons, 'three things matter most: (1) getting the right people to become teachers, (2) developing them into effective instructors and (3) ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction for every child'. In other words, if UK education is to become a 'top' system, then actions (1), (2) and (3) need to be taken. In the field of strategy, this causality leads to a belief that choosing a vision and performance targets and monitoring their implementation, allows managers to stay in control of improvement.

Stacey (2007) argues that the transformative potential of improvement strategies is predicated on active participation in communication 'enabling people to search for meaning for themselves' (ibid: 287). Because strategic leadership is fundamentally conversational, the role of leaders and managers is that of participating in, and encouraging, ongoing conversations which open up, rather than closing down, multiple meanings and possibilities of action (Stacey 2010). Because of organisational dynamics which include negotiation, conflict, power games and diverse organisational narratives, these relationships transform human agents and organisations in non-standardised, diverse and unpredictable ways.

3.2.2 Managing 'like a state'

In seeking to explain why simplifications and abstractions characteristic of technical-rationality and systems thinking are attractive for policy-makers, Stacey (2010) argues that, paradoxically there would be no state policies for improvement without the activity of abstracting, simplifying and leaving behind real people. He draws on the work of Scott (1998; 1990) to offer an explanation for the appeal of abstraction to decision makers. In *'Seeing Like a State'*, Scott explains that simplification, abstraction and mapping are essential techniques of modern statecraft. The development of the modern state has been predicated on radically simplified designs for social organisation. This is because simplification...

> makes the phenomenon at the center of a field of vision more legible and hence more susceptible to careful measurement and calculation. Combined

with similar observations, an overall, aggregate, synoptic view of a selective reality is achieved, making possible a high degree of schematic knowledge, control and manipulation. (Scott 1998: 11)

Simplification enhances the knowledge and power of state officials necessary for managing change. Similarly, the logic of standardisation offers possibilities for centralised management and supervision and for the development of technical disciplines that can be codified and taught. However, it does so at the loss of local diversity, practical wisdom and impoverishment of local relationships. Scott illustrates the dangers of a hegemonic planning mentality with historical examples ranging from the development of scientific forest management in the 19th century to Soviet Collectivisation. When managing like a state becomes so fixed on isolating simple elements of instrumental value that it dismisses complexity, diversity, tradition, local knowledge and resistance, the results may be not only detrimental but also disastrous. Centrally designed schemes for social improvement fail when they combine a 'utopian ideology of control and improvement' with 'the unrestrained use of power to achieve the aspirations and when this power blots out the local interaction which could resist or adapt the plans' (Stacey 2010: 105). Unfortunately, just like the 'master builders of Soviet society' (Scott 1998: 193), English policy-makers seem to dismiss the importance of diversity and tradition. An example of such an impervious approach is Barber's (1997) blueprint for 'education revolution' based on the re-engineering model discussed in Chapter 2 (pp. 41-42) .

3.2.3   *Local patterns of conversation: a conversation of gestures*

Complex responsive processes theory explains patterns of conversation by drawing on Mead's (1934) 'conversation of gestures'. A conversation of gestures involves one body making a gesture to anther body and simultaneously evoking a response in the other body. The response is a gesture back, evoking another response. As Stacey (2007: 271) points out, this conversation of gestures is an ongoing responsive process in which meaning...

> arises in the responsive interaction between actors; gesture and response can never be separated but must be understood as moments of one act. Meaning does not arise first in each individual... nor is it transmitted from one individual to another but, rather, it arises in the interaction between them.

Mead (1934) emphasises that we cannot predict or control how others respond to our gestures, we cannot therefore transmit our meaning to the other through gestures. Rather the function of a gesture is to make adjustments possible by entering into the attitude of the actors implicated in the social act.

This understanding of local interactions as communication between the actual 'embodied' people brings the human factor back to abstract leadership models, such as Davies's (2009) ABCD (Figure 2.4, p.45). It also illuminates the problematic, 'command and control' way in which the *National Strategies* were disseminated in primary schools, profoundly affecting professionals' agency, 'ownership' of school improvement and quality of their relationships with children. The effects of the refusal to enter into the attitude of practitioners exhibited by strategy designers such as Michael Barber, and strategy auditors, such as Ofsted inspectors, are presented in Chapters 6 and 7.

3.2.4 Articulating power, compliance and resistance: public and private transcripts
In explaining power relations, complex responsive processes theory draws mainly on the work of Elias and Scotson (1994). Power is rooted in our interdependence:

> Since I need others, I cannot do whatever I please, and since they need me, neither can they. We constrain each other at the same time as enabling each other and it is this paradoxical activity that constitutes power. Furthermore, since need is rarely equal, the pattern of power relations will always be skewed more to one than to another. (Stacey 2012: 28-9)

Elias and Scotson (1994) explain that figurations of power, with their dynamic of inclusion and exclusion mean that our everyday relations are essentially political. Because of interdependence, these relations are also fluid and mutual. The mutuality of power relations leads to an understanding of power as an 'enabling constraint' (Stacey 2011). Whilst organisational hierarchies and norms constrain individual behaviour, they are also affected and changed by individuals engaging in the ongoing processes of local interaction. As a result of such countless interactions, individuals and institutions do transform, albeit in unpredictable and unexpected ways which defy centralised control. As Stacey (2012) contends, such insights into power are discarded by the dominant management thinking in favour of techniques

which codify patterns of organisational interaction and maintain the impression of managers being in control, even though the techniques cannot be claimed to be the direct causes of stability or change. The core reason for their utilisation is not improvement in organisational outcomes, but the maintenance of disciplinary power (ibid). By drawing on Foucault (1979), Stacey explains that disciplinary power operates through the use of simple techniques of hierarchical surveillance, judgement and examination. Modern leaders, therefore, are 'prime agents administering the techniques of discipline', who are simultaneously also subject to disciplinary constraints themselves (ibid: 66-7).

Power relations, domination, compliance and resistance are expressed through language. Scott's (1990) distinction between public and private transcripts is helpful in gaining a deeper understanding of our experience of social lifeworlds. From the position of a subordinate group, the public transcript is the language which expresses compliance with the official, dominant themes imposed by the powerful, whereas the private transcript is 'discourse that takes place "offstage", beyond direct observation by powerholders' (*ibid*: 4). This 'backstage discourse' takes the form of anecdotes, jokes and euphemisms which assert resistance to the public transcript. Whilst powerful elites consciously perform in public the rituals of domination, subordinate groups rarely speak the truth 'directly and publicly in the teeth of power' (ibid: xiii). As a result...

> the public transcript will typically, by its accommodationist tone, provide convincing evidence for the hegemony of dominant values, for the hegemony of dominant discourse. It is in precisely this public domain where the effects of power relations are most manifest, and any analysis based exclusively on the public transcript is likely to conclude that subordinate groups endorse the terms of their subordination and are willing, even enthusiastic partners in that subordination. (ibid: 4)

Such publicly expressed compliance has important implications for understanding the concept of values, discussed in section 3.2.6 and explored in data analysis sections 7.2 (p.124), 7.4 (p.135) and 7.5 (p.140).

3.2.5 From local to global patterns of conversation

As signalled in 3.1 above, complex responsive processes theory views continuity and change in terms of changes to patterns of conversation. Stacey (2010: 160) turns 'the dominant discourse on its head' by arguing that transformation emerges in local interactions rather than being chosen by policy-makers or managers. Wherever one is in the organisational hierarchy, s/he is always interacting locally, with a relatively small number of others. This local communication is guided by patterns, habits and routines which may be spontaneously adapted to the particular contingencies of the situation. At the same time, local interaction is also constrained by population-wide patterns which Stacey (2010: 160-1) terms 'global':

> ...no matter who we are, we are constrained in what we do together by what may feel like major *external forces* beyond our control, widespread, overall *structures* we have to take as given, *institutionalized instruments of power* which we have no option but to submit to, pre-existing *technologies* that shape what we do, and *allocation of resources* about which we can do little.

By referring to Mead's (1934) distinction between generalising and particularising, Stacey explains the interdependent relationship between the local and the global. Generalising is about individuals acting in accordance with what is common, for example, social norms and values, whereas particularising is about responding to these differently in different circumstances. Intentionally designed change, Stacey points out, is a generalisation and what it means can only be experienced through particularisation, 'in the interplay between the intentions of the designers of the generalization and the intentions of those who are particularizing it' (Stacey 2010: 166). Because particularising involves an interplay of many intentions and values, this interplay 'cannot be intended or designed, except temporarily in fascist power structures and cults' (ibid: 167). What this entails in the context of educational transformation is that, rather than seeking closure and certainty, an effective policy-maker or school leader would be open to not knowing in advance. S/he would protect local conversations and encourage reflection on the usefulness of 'public transcripts' of improvement. This would create conditions for the emergence of new understandings of how educational improvement can be particularised depending on the contingencies of the local context.

3.2.6 Values, cult values and the totalising logic of public service reform

By applying an analysis of values developed by Mead (1914, 1923 cited in Griffin 2002), complex responsive processes theory provides a compelling critical evaluation of 'reculturing', one of the essential tasks of a strategic leader. As discussed in section 2.3.2 (p.33), for change theorists such as Fullan (2001), 'transformation' is predicated on changes in organisational culture. Culture, defined as a set of common beliefs, values and basic assumptions shared by people in organisations (Schein 1984), is thus linked to the vision and mission of strategic leadership. As Mowles (2011) argues, mainstream literature presents values as a management tool. Values can be audited, measured and 'used' to legitimate management interventions and 'align' people in the organisation in pursuing one common purpose. An extreme example of this 'use' of values is the writing of Brent Davies (2006) presented in section 2.4.3 (p.41). Mowles (ibid: 147) points to similar simplistic approaches, in particular to the dualism which suggests 'that sharing values is always good, while having differing values is potentially destructive and confusing'. This enables managers to identify values which could bring a desired behaviour change. An appeal to these values is then used to reward or discipline through inclusion or exclusion from the dominant group (ibid). Values thus interpreted are embedded in the 'sciences of certainty' and based on an assumption that people's behaviour and their innermost beliefs can be moulded by a charismatic manager, through his/her expertise in using motivational techniques.

In developing an alternative approach, Mowles (ibid: 152) emphasises that organisational value statements are idealisations, 'which by their very nature are unachievable in any direct manner'. The paradox of values, Mowles (ibid: 156) explains, is that they are 'voluntary compulsions'; 'values are compelling in a voluntary sense: we choose to be constrained by our values'. They give our lives meaning and purpose, but, as idealisations, they require an interpretation of what they might mean in the contingencies of everyday practice. Values are thus highly individualised, internal and imbued with strong feelings. However, when values are 'used' as a management tool, for creating universal, overriding group norms, they may become a form of 'coercive persuasion' (ibid: 163). Mead (1923) refers to such group idealisations as 'cult values' and explains that they are problematic when they

have become group norms to which all individuals must adhere or risk exclusion, threats to identity or belonging and shame. Conversely, shared values can also give people a sense of a 'we', of a community connected in a pursuit of common goals. As Mowles (ibid: 15) concludes,

> there is no surprise that human values should become another area of human experience which the managerialism might consider a legitimate object of management manipulation and moulding. People's values could be bent to the utility of the organisation.

One of the most common cult values maintained by the dominant management ideology is the 'cult of positivity' (ibid: 21). It operates on the level of discourse as a 'can do' approach, suggesting that all our human pursuits can be managed. In private sector companies the cult of positivity appears to borrow from sales techniques (ibid), whereas in the educational context it can be exemplified by the famous statement by the former Education Secretary David Blunkett: 'if you are not with us, then step aside for… [t]his is a can-do government and you must lead a can-do service' (Ward 1997). This statement formed the 'discourse of derision' (Ball 1990) and articulated threats of exclusion to 'moaning cynics', teachers who might not adhere to the cult of positivity. More recently, in a similar assertion of his cult of academies, Michael Gove used the phrase 'enemies of promise' (Harrison 2012) to discipline and shame schools reluctant to convert to Academies.

However, it is not adherence to universal cult values, but diversity that, in light of the complexity sciences, leads to novelty. The 'suppression of difference is likely to lead to stuck and potentially destructive patterns of organising' (Mowles 2011: 165). In education, the totalising logic of performativity leads to an erosion of pedagogical relationships and adversely affects professional engagement in action. For Hannah Arendt (1998) action is predicated on our plurality and diversity as individuals. Action is a way of expressing our individuality, but also our connectedness as we act 'into a web of pre-existing relationships' and therefore 'begin something anew' (Mowles 2011: 133). Whilst the cult of performativity compels practitioners to perform to a pre-prepared script, or 'public tran-script', it is action, unplanned and

unknown in advance, but emergent in the process of human interaction, that has a transformative potential.

3.3   Limits to complex responsive processes theory

As signalled in the introduction to this chapter, complex responsive processes theory has been developed through bringing together analogies from the complexity sciences and sociological theories which illuminate the processes of human interaction. This enables Stacey and colleagues to explain diverse aspects of organisational change. For example, Griffin (2002) focuses on 'linking self-organisation and ethics', Shaw (2002) develops approaches to 'changing conversations in organisations', Stacey (2010) locates the theory in the context of the recent credit crunch and the 'collapse of investment capitalism', whilst Mowles (2011) challenges dominant management thinking by drawing on more 'radical insights from the complexity sciences'. The theory itself could be viewed as an interactive process of researchers conversing together, responding to previous publications and contributing new insights based on a widening range of theorists. For example, as explained in 3.2.4 above, Stacey (2012) turns to Foucault's (1979) *Discipline and Punish*. Although such an 'eclectic' approach could be critiqued as lacking theoretical or methodological 'purity', its generative potential is rooted in the 'we-centredness of knowledge' (Elias 1991: 113). Elias challenges the traditional view of knowledge as a product of an individual, 'I-centred' activity. Knowledge creation as a 'we-centred' process has 'the character of messages from person to person' and draws on the 'humankind's social fund of knowledge' as well as contributions by single individuals (ibid: 113).

As mentioned in Chapter 1 (p.18), my thesis aims to make a contribution to the theory by taking it to a relatively unexplored level of analysis, that of the actual patterns of conversation articulated in the two case study schools. Because complex responsive processes theory has been developed mainly at the conceptual level, the analyses it affords are limited to theoretical explanations. For example, Shaw (2002: 171) explores the following change issue: 'How do we participate in the way things change over time?' In her answer she refers to such complex responsive processes

theory concepts as: narrative sense-making and power figurations. However, in her analysis, she stays at the level of abstractions, as illustrated by the following:

> We met several times together to talk about this and, as we did so, we both developed the personal resources to draw attention differently, to point to and sustain different possibilities in the conversational life of the Borough. We developed together a shift in the way we could speak of our organizational practice... (ibid: 98)

Without the actual empirical data, the references to 'personal resources to draw attention differently' and 'shift' [in patterns of conversation] appear to be abstractions from the actual conversational patterns.

In order to analyse the empirical data collected in this research, I have also turned to Fairclough's (2003) discourse analysis tools discussed below (see Appendix 3c, p.215). That complex responsive processes theory may be developed in this direction in the future is signalled by Stacey's (2012: 118) recent reference to 'linguistic and pragmatic devices' of help to leaders who wish to be more attuned to the rhetorical potential of language to persuade or influence.

3.4 Discourse of 'new capitalism' and its transformations

As signalled in Chapter 1, the policy-makers' discourse of educational transformation is a generalisation, a global pattern of conversation, which is simultaneously expressive and enactive. Although a 'strategy for educational transformation' could be considered to be government rhetoric, once it is particularised in schools at the level of everyday practice, it may indeed transform education 'through its tireless continuity and pervasiveness' (Chia and Holt 2009: 192). Fairclough (2003: 12) explains such transformation by highlighting the constitutive and enactive nature of discourse:

> Discourses not only represent the world as it is (or rather is seen to be), they are also projective, imaginaries, representing possible worlds which are different from the actual world, and tied in to projects to change the world in particular directions.

Fairclough's position is thus based on the premise that, as a salient and potent element of social life, discourse may have transformative effects on other elements with which it is interconnected.

Fairclough (2003: 4) argues that capitalism overcomes its crises by 'radically transforming itself periodically, so that economic expansion may continue'. Characteristic of 'new capitalism' is a 're-structuring' of relations within the economic, political and social domains and a 're-scaling' or relations between the global, the national and the local. These processes of re-structuring and re-scaling are facilitated by the neoliberal ideology. The parallel weakening of democracy and public debate (ibid) is reflected both in the global discourse of 'new capitalism' and its particularisations at the level of education 'systems', which are being transformed into sites for training the skilled workforce for the marketplace. The pursuit of 'transformation of British education' (DfE 2010a) may thus be linked to the current transformation of capitalism.

Although Fairclough refers to himself as a 'moderate' constructionist (ibid: 9) simultaneously expressing affinity with critical realism, his view of language as both constructed (constituted) and constitutive resonates both with complex responsive processes theory and the paradigm of social constructionism discussed in Chapter 4 (pp.74-9). Because processes of social change appear to be initiated and driven by changes in discourse, discourse analysis is helpful in developing a deeper understanding of how discourse positions various social agents in the processes of continuity and change (ibid). For example, at the level of linguistic markers of agency, elision of agency (and obfuscation of responsibility) through the use of nominalisation is a typical feature of policy-makers' discourse. Nominalisation is defined as a grammatical metaphor which represents processes (usually represented as clauses containing the Subject/agent) as entities (by using nouns) (ibid: 220). In the following example the noun 'world' represents the process of someone in authority making a number of assumptions (unsupported by 'evidence') about desirable and undesirable values:

> The world is indifferent to tradition and past reputations, unforgiving of frailty and ignorant of custom or practice. (Barber and Mourshed 2007: 6)

At the level of genre and semantic relations, a typical dominant textual representation constructed by characters of 'new capitalism', politicians and 'management gurus', is the 'hortatory report' (Fairclough 2003). Such report is based on the 'logic of appearances', which builds up a static 'big picture' of 'how things are' through addition and listing of often disconnected 'facts'. An alternative would be 'explanatory logic', which reveals causality, illuminates underlying processes and therefore opens up different possibilities. The 'hortatory report' aims at promoting and legitimating the existing systems of authority. The introduction to *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES 2003) discussed in section 2.4.2 (p.41) reveals features of a 'hortatory report'. Mainly anecdotal examples of the apparent success of the previous *National Strategies* (the NLS and NNS) are simply listed in the opening pages of the DfES (2003) document.

Figure 3.2 presents the discourse analysis tools applied in the analysis of the case study data (see also Appendix 3c, p.215). Combining the conceptual framework of complex responsive processes theory (Figure 3.1, p.50) and Fairclough's (2003) discourse analysis tools has facilitated the detailed exploration of meaning in the empirical data. This relationship between complex responsive processes theory concepts and Fairclough's (2003) tools is discussed further in Chapter 4 (pp.70-3).
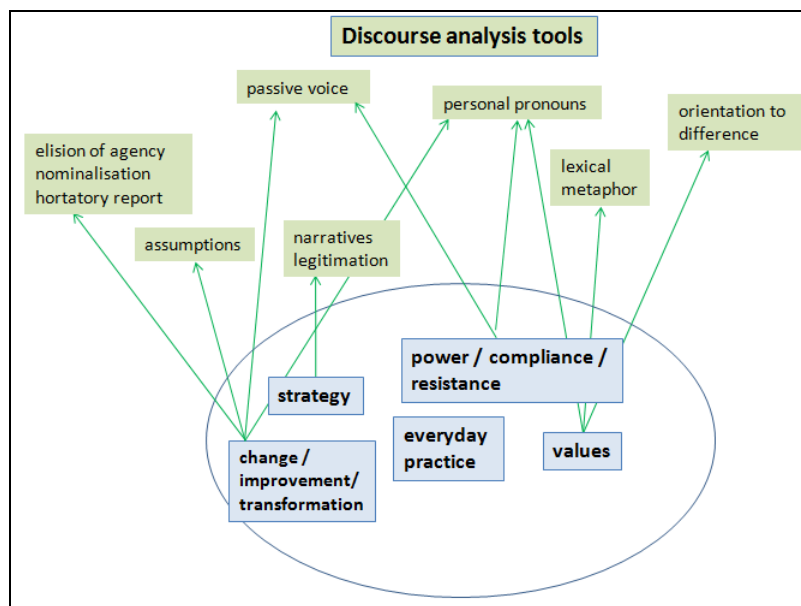
Figure 3.2   Discourse analysis tools applied in the analysis of patterns of conversation in the case study schools (based on Fairclough 2003)

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter discussed complex responsive theory and discourse analysis tools used in the analysis of the case study data. As highlighted in section 1.6 (pp.18-20), consistent with his critique of the manager as a detached, 'objective' observer of social phenomena, is Stacey's (2010) recommended research methodology. This methodology is based on the researcher's reflexive engagement with his/her own professional practice. The value of research is in 'taking one's own experience seriously' (ibid: 226), the core purpose being...

> ...to develop the practitioner's skills in paying attention to the complexity of the local, micro interactions he or she is engaged in, because it is in these that wider organizational pattern emerge. (ibid: 222)

The case study design discussed in the following chapter could be interpreted as positioning me as an 'outsider researcher' and therefore in tension with the 'insider researcher' methodology recommended by Stacey (2010). However, as explained in Chapter 1, my interest in strategy and strategic leadership originates in my lived experience of implementing the *National Strategies* as a former primary practitioner. It is also embedded in my current practice of a leadership and management educator. I would also contend that, in the context of education reform the organisational boundaries of a school are less idiosyncratic than in a private sector organisation, or 'the firm', which provides the key context for Stacey's writing. The 'inside' and 'outside' of organisations which comprise education as a public service 'system' is a matter of perspective. The overarching aim of this research has been to develop a better understanding of how, in education reform, local interactions lead to the emergence of global patterns by being attentive to the complexity of interactions in which I have participated as a practitioner and researcher.

Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion of the case study approach adopted for this research, which draws mainly on Stake's (1995, 2005) qualitative, instrumental case study design. I then proceed to explain the data collection instruments, sampling method and tools for data analysis. In what he terms the 'art of case study', Stake (1995) promotes research whose function 'is not necessarily to map and conquer the world but to sophisticate the beholding of it' (ibid: 43). Because this implies a detached artist-observer perspective, it is important to reiterate my positioning as a researcher and educator discussed in Chapter 1. As an educator, I am immersed in the world of school improvement. As a social constructionist[5] researcher, I acknowledge that...

> [n]o human being can step outside of their humanity and view the world from no position at all, which is what the idea of objectivity suggests, and this is just as true of scientists as of everyone else. (Burr 2003: 152)

For social constructionists it follows that knowledge is embedded in a perspective and no knowledge is value free. As a result, social constructionists are interested in the constitutive power of language and analysis aimed at revealing how discourses work to create a particular vision of the world (Burr 2003). This research focus aligns the social constructionist paradigm with complex responsive processes theory. The discussion of the relationship between the two is followed by a reflection on the ethical, personal and ideological issues raised by this study. A reflexive evaluation of my research concludes the chapter.

4.2 Case study design

The focus of this case study is on government improvement strategies and their 'real-life' manifestations in the everyday practice in two primary schools. Of the diverse

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[5] The term 'social constructionism' is used in most published sources, including *The Handbook of Constructionist Research* (Holstein and Gubrium 2008). Where references are made to the 'constructivist paradigm' or 'constructivism', I have adhered to authors' original terminology.

case study types used by researchers (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007; Robson 2002; Yin 1994), the instrumental case study (Stake 1995, 2005) seemed to be suited to the aims of this research. The instrumental case study is driven by extrinsic aims rather than by an intrinsic interest in the case itself; the aims being to facilitate the understanding of a phenomenon or provide theoretical insights (Stake 2005). As indicated in research questions 2 and 3, the phenomenon under investigation was the enactment of government improvement strategies in the everyday practice of teachers and leaders in two case study schools. The case study data provide an illustration of how the dominant conceptualisations of improvement are taken up locally and how they are narrated by research participants talking about 'their ordinary pursuits and milieus' (Stake 1990: 1). A sample of two schools from the same locality was deemed to be appropriate in terms of the scale of this research, the focus on conveying 'local diversity' and the complexity of changes brought about by the 'policy epidemic' (Levin 1998).

An advantage of case study designs based on a small number of cases is the opportunity they afford for understanding the particularity and complexity (Simons 2009), as well as for preserving the wholeness of the case and the people being studied (Stake 1995). Stake's claim that it 'startles us all to find our own perplexities in the lives of others' (ibid: 7) points to the commonality which can be found in studying particular cases. In defence of enquiry into particular examples, Mowles (2011) points out that they are a rich source of more general themes. Following in the footsteps of Stacey (2010) and Mowles (2011: 75), I pursued an interest in 'the process of organisational becoming', in how government strategy is taken up and enacted in everyday practice.

4.2.1 The research pilot
The pilot study was scheduled for January 2011 (Appendix 2a, p.187). My plan was to conduct two semi-structured interviews, an initial documentary analysis (i.e. Ofsted Reports, Literacy and Numeracy policies) and observation in the communal areas at the beginning and end of the school day (details in Appendix 2c, p.192). The aim of the pilot study was to test research instruments and conduct a preliminary data analysis, in order to refine my research design. However, 'Abbey Primary' (AP),

where I conducted the pilot study, agreed to participate in the full scale study. The subsequent revisions to my research schedule and semi-structured interview schedule are detailed in Appendix 2a and 2c respectively.

4.3 Data collection

That the original meaning of 'data' / 'datum' means something 'given' or 'granted' has two major implications (Van Manen 1990: 54). Firstly, research participants can make a choice regarding what they are willing to 'give' and what to withhold. The power to 'give' or withhold data is therefore theirs. However, once data have been 'given', the power to interpret and make sense of the data shifts onto the researcher. What is also important to realise, writes Van Manen (ibid: 54) is that accounts of lived experience, 'whether in oral or in written discourse – are never identical to lived experience itself'. This insight resonates with Stacey's (2010) distinction between immersing and abstracting. Immersing denotes a pre-reflective state of being involved in experience. Abstracting is the opposite movement, of drawing away from experience, of becoming aware of what we are engaging in. Narrating our experience is a process of abstracting. In the process of narrating, we detach from experience, becoming more aware of it and at the same time ceasing to be immersed. The second implication of the nature of data as 'given', and therefore detached from the lived experience itself, affects the validity and reliability of research discussed in section 4.4.2 (p.73).

Following Stake (1995), the main data collection instruments in this study were observation, semi-structured interviews and documentary review. Observation is for Stake an important first step in getting acquainted with the case. Interviews provide an insight into multiple realities, whilst documents 'serve as substitutes for records of activity that the researcher could not observe directly' (ibid: 68). Observation, interviews and documentary analysis assure data source and methodological triangulation. These methods, Stake argues, are best used in a flexible manner, whereby initial research questions provide the researcher with initial foci for data gathering, but do not exclude the possibility of a change of plan as a result of unanticipated happenings that may lead to deeper understanding.

Two key events of this kind occurred in the course of this research. Firstly, because I relied on 'Stephen' (Headteacher of 'Green Lanes Primary') and 'Alice' (Deputy Head of 'Abbey Primary') for organising interviews with their colleagues and arranging supply cover, my interview sample depended to a large extent on their decisions. Data collection in both schools spanned two academic years and, during this time, Green Lanes Primary was inspected by Ofsted in October 2011 and graded as 'improved' from a 'satisfactory' to 'good'. This gave me an opportunity to conduct second interviews with Stephen (Headteacher) and Miriam (Deputy Head) in order to explore their perceptions of how this improvement was achieved (Appendix 2c, p.194).

Secondly, critical incidents which occurred during fieldwork provided more opportunities for progressive focusing (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011). One such incident occurred on 6 December 2011, my last day at Abbey Primary. Whilst looking through children's exercise books ('book scan') I came across the following entry in six-year-old Millie's *Home-School Liaison Book:* 'I have dun my target' (see also Figure 7.5, p.152). Listed with other targets in *My targets for this week* chart, such as 'I will set cwiot on the carpit' and 'I will not bite my nais in class', this reference to a 'target dun', written by a six-year-old, was for me at the time a poignant confirmation that the language of targets has entered the children's world. Participating in an Infant Nativity Play rehearsal during my last research visit at Abbey Primary, helped me to work through the strong feelings experienced on seeing Millie's writing about targets. It triggered reflection on the phenomenon of natality, the renewal of life and the new possibility of freedom brought into the world with each new birth (Arendt 1953, 1998). This critical incident opened up new lines of enquiry resulting in the theme *Children and renewal* (section 7.8, p.156).

4.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

Researchers relying on interviews recognise interaction as central in knowledge production processes (Cohen et al 2011). Interaction is especially important in research which explores multiple realities of diverse actors participating in social situations. As Kvale (1996: 14) points out, 'inter-view' allows an interchange of views. However, to what extent the interview is capable of producing accurate

representations of social reality is a complex issue. As Alvesson (2011) explains, this will depend on the researcher's approach to interviewing, the informant's motives and the contingencies of the interview situation, seen as complex socially and discursively. As a result...

> Interview talk may say more about role-playing and adapting to social standards in the name of impression management – including how to appear authentic – than about how people really feel or what social reality is really like. (ibid: 3)

Alvesson identifies three main approaches to interviewing and knowledge claims extrapolated from each. The neo-positivist approach assumes that interview responses accurately reflect the experiences of interviewees. Impersonal, neutral, based on rules and procedures for avoiding bias, neo-positivist interviews may however produce superficial or cautious responses. A less formal, empathetic, 'warm' approach is labelled as 'romanticism' (Silverman 2006). It advocates a more 'genuine' interaction which views data as 'authentic subjective experiences' revealed through unstructured, open-ended interviews (Alvesson 2011: 14). This approach can be critiqued as not guaranteeing realistic or 'truthful' statements. The third approach is termed as 'localist', as it emphasises the local, specific context in which interviews happen. 'Localists' would argue that interviewees 'are not reporting external events but producing situated accounts' (ibid: 19). This approach runs the risk of following a 'myopic interest in details around what is happening in the interview situation' rather than interest in broader phenomena (ibid: 20). My approach to interviewing was a combination of 'romanticism' and 'localism'; I sought to connect to my research participants and the particular identities they articulated during our interaction (Appendix 2e, p.199). In accordance with complex responsive processes theory, such interaction can be regarded as a paradox, at the same time situated, emergent, fluid, 'of a moment' and representative of the patterns of conversation shared in specific organisational contexts.

4.3.2 Observation

According to Angrosino (2005: 729), observation is 'the fundamental base of all research methods' and every social scientist is an observer of activities and settings which provide a backdrop to human activities. The strength of observation is in the

opportunity it affords for collecting ''live' data from naturally occurring social situations... looking directly at what is taking place *in situ* rather than relying on second hand accounts' (ibid: 396). However, Angrosino questions 'traditional' definitions and classifications of observation, based on two points. The first one is an assumption that researchers are able to 'see events through the eyes of the people being studied' (ibid: 732). The second is a possibility that observation may be intrusive. To address the latter, Angrosino suggests a 'peripheral member' positioning of the researcher, underpinned by 'responsibility for doing everything possible to avoid hurting or embarrassing people who have been trusting partners in the research endeavour' (ibid: 736). He also recommends that the researcher-observer is mindful of the extent to which her own perception plays a role in gathering fieldwork data:

> No faith can be more misleading than an unquestioned personal conviction that the apparent testimony of one's eyes must provide a purely objective account... Utterly unbiased observation must rank as a primary myth... (Gould, cited in Angrosino 2005: 743)

Having assumed a 'peripheral member' position, I refrained from taking notes in the staff meetings which I attended and completed detailed field notes immediately after the event. I followed the same routine when participating in the schools' public events, such as Infant Sports Day at Green Lanes Primary or assemblies in Abbey Primary. Due to my work timetable of evening lectures, I was unable to participate in more staff and governors' meetings, scheduled in both schools in the evenings. Observation of these events could have provided an opportunity for further triangulation of interview and documentary data. On the other hand, the point made by Gould (cited in Angrosino 2005: 743), that 'we can only see what fits into our mental space' weakens the potential claims to validity which could have emerged from such triangulation.

4.3.3 Documentary review

Official documents available to the researcher conducting organisational research provide a valuable source of the 'public transcript' (Scott 1990) which institutions generate to define their culture and values and make it available for view by different audiences. Documents thus 'offer a lens to interpret events in order to gain insights

into the relationship between the written and unwritten, spoken and virtual, public and private, past and present' (Fitzgerald 2007: 279). Because of the constitutive nature of language, documents produced by schools can also be approached as enacting institutional values. Schools do this through the production of policies, rules and regulations which are often presented in the form of artefacts and displayed as part of the physical environment of the school (Ball et al 2012, Maguire et al 2011). Data collected in this study included a range of such documents: texts available for public view on school websites, policies available to visitors, texts on display in the communal areas and classrooms and more 'private' documents, such a school policies, School Evaluation Forms and children's books (Appendix 2b, p.188).

4.4 Data analysis and interpretation

The iterative, cyclical process of data analysis in case study research centres on the search for meaning, which, for Stake (1995), emerges as patterns and consistencies. Although Stake admits that data analysis is a subjective affair, he emphasises that 'subjectivity is not seen as a failing needing to be eliminated but as an essential element of understanding' (ibid: 45).

My initial analysis of data consisted of repeated reading of documentary data, field notes and interview transcripts and writing analytic memos (Appendices 3b, p.212 and 3c, p.215). I then proceeded to coding using NVivo 9.2 (Appendix 3a, p.210). A number of codes correspond to complex responsive processes theory concepts discussed in Chapter 3, for example: 'values' and constructions of 'improvement'. What also emerged from the data is a number of themes recurring in the conversational patterns in the two schools, which, following Van Manen (1990), have been approached not as generalisations or objects, but 'knots' of lived experience which encapsulate its meaning. In tune with Van Manen (ibid), complex responsive processes theorists also argue against the reification of everyday, local interactions into abstract models and generalised prescriptions (Stacey 2010; Mowles 2011). Crucial to complex responsive processes theory are patterns of conversation, recurring organisational themes and the ways people communicate them in different situations. Fairclough's (2003) discourse analysis tools provided an additional level of analysis, enabling more subtle insights into the meanings conveyed through

particular linguistic choices (Appendix 3c, p.215). Figure 4.1 presents the complete analytical framework developed for the analysis of case study data:
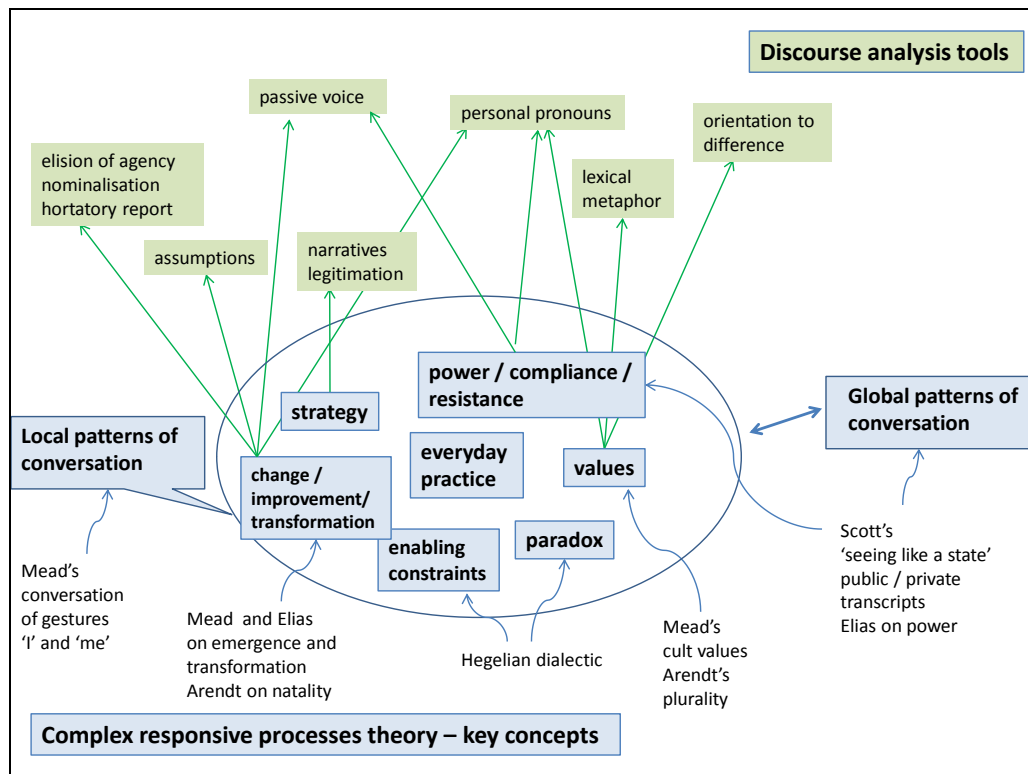
Figure 4.1 The complete analytical framework applied in the analysis of case study data

The example in Table 4.2 below illustrates an analysis of responses to interview question 6 which explored participants' articulations of school improvement. Following Stacey (2007, 2010), in my analysis of responses to question 6, I focused on patterns of convergence with and divergence from the dominant discourse. The focus here was also on Fairclough's (2003) discursive markers of modality, evaluation, assumptions, dialogicality and orientation to difference (the complete set of analytic memos can be found in Appendix 3c, p.215). Further reading of each transcript was conducted to deduce how participants positioned themselves in relation to the dominant constructions of improvement and to what extent they saw themselves in control of enacting improvement in everyday practice.

NVivo code	Convergence with the dominant discourse, extracts from responses	Analytic memo: discursive features and interpretation
Targets / standards / SATs	**Pete**: ...some people see it as a drive for standards: 'how can we get our 98% level 4 in Maths...?' Yes, it is, because we want every child to do their absolute best and that's what we're striving for. And giving them every opportunity that we possibly can, because ... so we have to make sure that...	Use of 'some people' brings in dialogicality but not difference. Use of addition, elaboration and exposition to construct an argument which is, however, weakened through mixed modality. Use of inclusive 'we' (removing distance) or to bracket difference? Assumption: a focus on standards = striving to help every child to do their absolute best. Positions himself as an 'implementer', based on someone else's perspective leads to modalised prescription. In the rest of interview 'strategic' in visioning and taking opportunities as they arise, likes the challenge of managing change.
Control: government (Ofsted) or local 'systems'	**Fiona**: I think looking at what you do, again involving everyone, stakeholders, governors, office staff, cleaners, children. Getting everyone's viewpoints and then coming together as a leadership team, bringing all those ideas together... We are an outstanding school, I do truly believe that, but there are always things that we could be doing better and I think that's what improvement is... (*prompted*) we break it all down into small teams, so that everyone's got a responsibility and then obviously we are responsible for going and making sure that those things are carried out: action plans, targets... impact... reviewing, reflecting...	Improvement as consulting everyone and doing... in order to reach 'outstanding'/be the best. 'Everyone' is presented as a hierarchy. Talks about consultation but no dialogicality. Apart from an allusion to 'good' Ofsted judgement. Balance between categorical and modal assertions. Categorical assertions when reporting the leadership 'processes' and systems - this is where her expertise is. Use of gerund puts emphasis on 'doing'. Positions herself as a 'reflective-proactive expert senior leader', an 'enthusiastic implementer in touch with her feelings'
National Strategies etc	...	...
'Local' initiatives	...	...
'Quality of children'	...	...
Other	...	...

NVivo Code	Divergence from the dominant discourse, extracts of responses	Analytic memo: discursive features and interpretation
Targets / standards / SATs	**Jenny**: I don't think it's just about SATs, because you can improve SATs as long as you improve everything else about the school... As I was saying, teacher expectations, if... then.... So school improvement is about everything across the board... It's got to be everything... SATs are a measure and it's good because... But not the only one... *also supporting other schools (measured by SATs too)*	Denies reductionism but asserts the desirability of 'measures'. Explicit about values through exposition. Positions herself as an 'expert'. Evaluation consistent with her values previously spoken about, 'I' makes herself 'accountable'
...		
'Local' initiatives	**Gemma**: I suppose in my co-ordinator role I would be responsible for leading improvement in this subject. So that's something that I'm quite often looking at...in Early Years, when we noticed that... the method that we were using with handwriting for some children just really wasn't appropriate. So it was like, 'right here's a problem, we need to improve it...' On a bigger scale, I know that Pete is often looking at new things... and obviously being a head,... which is useful actually. And he is slowly making changes... which I think is nice actually...	Modal expression in reference to co-ordinator role suggests a lack of confidence. More assertive when talking about the problem-solution with handwriting. Dialogicality and inclusive 'we'. Positive evaluation of new head but without explaining why slow change is more desirable. Positions herself as an Early Years teacher, junior and not so important - her contribution to improvement is 'small scale'
...		
Other	**Carol**: I think it comes under so many different subheadings, because you can break it down into the sort of nuts and bolts of your buildings that constantly need to be updated and just kept nice, there's the resource side of things because of course technology is going ahead at such a pace... and of course that all comes down to money. You've then got improvement as in constantly looking at the way you're teaching... I don't think anything is ever perfect enough. There are always improvements to be made...	Elaboration and exposition underpinned by value and existential assumptions that 'nothing is ever perfect enough' The use of generic 'you', non-personal subject (there is...) and passive voice enables elision of agency. The general references to different 'systems' that can be improved resonate with a certain lack of clarity about specific improvements or the purpose of improving 'imperfection' characteristic of answers by Stephen, Alison, Sandy and Angelika. Positions herself as a 'wise expert'

Table 4.2   Analytic memos sample: responses to interview question 6 (*What does school improvement mean for you in your everyday work?*)

The findings relating to the analysis of participants' conceptualisations of school improvement are reported in Chapter 7 (pp.128-35).

4.4.1 Case study reporting

The task of writing up this research has been an iterative process in which narration and reflexive evaluation (Guba and Lincoln 2005) have been of central importance. For reporting findings I followed Stake's (1995: 87) narrative approach which aims at providing the reader with a 'vicarious experience'. As a case study researcher, I do not consider myself to be a 'detached', 'objective' observer, and therefore have not sought to capture the world through generalisations or universal laws, nor have I sought to 'sophisticate the beholding of it' (Stake 1995: 43). Through paying attention to conversational patterns in the two schools, I tried to connect to my research participants' experience of enacting improvement. In consistency with the complex responsive processes theory I also sought to convey its complexity and ordinary 'everydayness'.

4.4.2 Validity, reliability and generalisability

My search for diverse understandings and constructs of school improvement and endeavour to preserve the unique and the particular inevitably affect the claims to validity, reliability and generalisability of this study. In terms of generalisability, a qualitative case study leads to intuitions that 'what is known about one case may well be true about a similar case' (Stake 2005: 454) or 'fuzzy generalisation' (Bassey 1999: 12). Bassey (ibid: 12) explains that, whilst traditional (inductive) logic leads to predictive statements of the type: 'In *this* case it *has been* found that…', fuzzy logic leads to predictive statements such as: 'In *some* cases it *may be* found that…'. In defence of case study's usefulness for policy making, Helen Simons (2009: 167) emphasises that, paradoxically, in-depth particularisation, may lead to universal understanding:

> The tension between the study of the *unique* and the need to generalise is necessary to reveal both the *unique* and the *universal* and the *unity* of that understanding.

This outlook is shared by Stake (2005: 454) who argues for 'the epistemology of the particular' which may lead to 'naturalistic generalization', whereby a particular experience or case adds to our socially constructed knowledge. Although the constructionist approach questions claims to validity and reliability of all social science research, both qualitative and quantitative, the researcher's honesty and rigour can validate claims to new knowledge. In this regard Stake (ibid) recommends triangulation, researcher awareness of subjectivity and deliberate effort to question and disconfirm her own interpretations. A reflexive evaluation of this study, discussed in section 4.8 (p.80), revisits these in greater depth.

4.5 Social constructionist paradigm

The beginnings of social constructionism are associated with the publication of Berger and Luckmann's *Social Construction of Reality* in 1966 (Best 2008). Berger and Luckmann's (1966: 30) theory explaining how social reality is constructed stems from the following core question: 'How is it possible that subjective meanings become objective facticities ['facts']?' To answer this question, the authors start by considering 'what people 'know' as 'reality' in their everyday, non- or pre-theoretical lives' (ibid: 27). Foremost in this context is the 'I', experienced as embodied, intentional and subjective. With the insights afforded by the phenomenological analysis of everyday life, Berger and Luckmann emphasize that the consciousness of the 'I', as well as consciousness in its broadest sense, is intentional, 'it always intends or is directed towards objects' (ibid: 34). The world presents itself to consciousness as consisting of multiple realities:

> Different objects present themselves to consciousness as constituents of different spheres of reality. I recognize the fellowmen I must deal with in the course of everyday life as pertaining to a reality quite different from the disembodied figures that appear in my dreams. The two sets of objects introduce quite different tensions into my consciousness and I am attentive to them in quite different ways. (ibid: 35)

Our sense of self is only possible because other selves are implicated in our everyday experience: '*Homo sapiens* is always, and in the same measure, *homo socius*' (ibid: 69). By drawing on the theories of Mead (1956), Berger and Luckmann emphasise that, despite our subjective 'I', the reality of everyday life appears to consciousness

as 'already objectified, that is, constituted by an order of objects that have been designated as objects before my appearance on the scene' (ibid: 35). Three processes are involved in such experience of reality: *externalisation*, *objectivation* and *internalisation*. *Externalisation* consists of attaching subjective meanings to objects or turning the meanings into signs. It is mainly through the signs of language that we externalise our personal meanings and make them available to others. *Objectivation* consists of assigning the character of objectivity to externalised products of human activity and expression. *Externalisation* and *objectivation* are moments in the same, continuing dialectical process. For example, an object such as a knife may be used as a weapon externalising the subjective feeling of aggression and can consequently become an objectification of aggression, when used by others as a sign of aggression. *Internalisation*, the third moment in the process, and opposite to externalisation, is about internalising the objectivated social world in the process of socialisation. These three processes, enabled by the use of shared symbols of language, construct what appears to be an 'objective' social 'reality':

> linguistic signification attains the maximum detachment from the 'here and now' of everyday life, and language soars into regions that are not only *de facto* but *a priori* unavailable to everyday experience. Language now constructs immense edifices of symbolic representations that appear to tower over the reality of everyday life like gigantic presences from another world. Religion, philosophy, art, and science are the historically most important symbol systems of this kind. (ibid: 55)

The result of the interplay of *externalisation*, *objectivation* and *internalisation* is a paradox 'that man is capable of producing a world that he then experiences as something other than a human product' (ibid: 78). This paradox is sustained by socialisation and the power of language to force us into ready-made patterns for the ongoing, habitual objectifications of everyday experience. Because our everyday experience involves engagement in many complex activities and interactions with many people, actions that are frequently repeated are *habitualised*, cast into patterns which enable us to act routinely rather than define each situation anew. Some of these actions will become *institutionalised* – shared with members of a particular group. The maintenance of an institutional universe involves appeal to tradition, exclusion of deviant behaviour and use of power 'to determine decisive socialization

processes and, therefore, the power to *produce* reality' (ibid: 137). In all, these processes explain how seemingly 'objective' reality is socially constructed in social practice and at the same time experienced as if the nature of this reality were fixed and pre-determined.

Following the publication of Berger and Luckmann (1966), social constructionism grew as a research paradigm in its own right, alongside other theoretical orientations, such as postmodernism and critical realism (Burr 2003). These theoretical orientations challenge taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world and seek alternatives to realism and positivism / post-positivism (Figure 4.3). They acknowledge that all ways of understanding are rooted in history, culture and social institutions. Consequently, the notion of 'truth' is problematic, as is the idea of language being a 'neutral' medium for representing reality. As Ian Hacking (1999: 6) explains, social constructionism is critical of the status quo, based on the thesis that:

> X need not have existed, or need not be at all as it is. X, or X as it is at present, is not determined by the nature of things; it is not inevitable.

One of the consequences of viewing knowledge as political acts which attempt to legitimate preferred representations of the world and invalidate others, is that social constructionists face the difficulty of validating their own analyses. The criteria of 'trustworthiness' or 'soundness of analysis' may not appear as convincing as the criteria of reliability and validity which legitimate research in the realist and positivist paradigms (Burr 2003). Because social constructionism avoids 'playing the truth game' , offering instead ideas as 'possible resources for living' (Gergen 2009: 160), it is vulnerable to attack from the more normative positions of realism and positivism. In fact, in the spirit of reflexivity discussed in section 4.8 below, social constructionism needs to recognise itself as a social construction on the par with the ways of accounting created by other paradigms (Burr 2003).

4.6 The relationship between complex responsive processes theory and social constructionism

As signalled in Chapter 1, complex responsive processes theory and social constructionism share the same interest in the participative and discursive processes

at play in the social construction of reality. In this regard, the ideas of G.H. Mead provide the intellectual antecedents for both. As a self-pronounced philosopher of evolution, Mead (1956) rejects the Newtonian, mechanical explanation of change as a manipulation of social structures (forms) based on what Stacey (2010) refers to as 'if... then...' causality (discussed in section 3.2.1, p.51). This perspective on change, Mead explains, gives rise to a static view of a fixed reality, where objects can be changed by the subject manipulating them. Mead (ibid: 7) is against this 'pre-evolutionary' mechanical conception of the world, because it does not give 'any explanation to the form of things'. This 'pre-evolutionary' conception appears to invite the kinds of explanations exemplified by Ovid's account of the world being created and formed by God (section 1.1, p.9). In contrast, Darwin's 'Origin of Species' posits that species (Latin for 'forms') arose through the life process itself, and it is this process that determines the form: 'every activity of the form altered the form itself' (Mead 1956: 9). In other words, the 'structure is simply something that expresses this process as it takes place' (ibid: 14). In the context of social development, the processes enabling societies to progress to higher developed, more advanced stages are those of human communication and participation. Mead's theory resonates both with Berger and Luckmann's (1966) explanation of how social structures emerge from interactions amongst social agents and complex responsive theory explanation of social evolution as a process involving people in jointly constructing social reality (Griffin 2002).

The distinctiveness of complex responsive theory in relation to social constructionism is in its underpinnings in the 'sciences of complexity' (Figure 4.3). They are discussed in more detail below, in juxtaposition to the 'sciences of certainty'.

Figure 4.3 of the diagram content:

- **Epistemology** (vertical axis)
- Provisional nature of knowledge
- Certainty Structure
- **Order**
- **Ontology** (horizontal axis)
- Objective — Subjective
- Chaos: defined as random behaviour in deterministic systems
- The paradox of Mathematics of chaos / Iterative equations
- Postmodernism / Deconstruction
- Social constructionism
- Complex adaptive (open) systems
- **The sciences of complexity**
- 'Fuzzy' generalisations
- Critical realism
- Theory of evolution
- Universal laws / If... then... causality / Statistical calculation / Linear or differential equations / Technical-rationality / Post / positivism / Newtonian mechanics / Closed systems
- **'Sciences of certainty'**

Figure 4.3 Social constructionism, the 'sciences of certainty' and the sciences of complexity[6]

The 'sciences of certainty' are rooted in classical, Newtonian mechanics, which relies on differential equations. As Stewart (1997) points out, differential equations explain rates of change and can therefore be applied to predicting regularities. These regularities can then be captured in the form of universal laws and used for explaining and controlling the natural world. However, many universal laws of the Newtonian world seem to 'work' when important features of the environment are disregarded, for example, when the formula for the motion of a pendulum excludes such conditions affecting its motion as the friction at the pivot and air resistance (Stewart 1997). Universal laws thus 'work' when two elements are investigated in

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[6] I owe the idea for this mapping to 'Stacey Diagram' (Stacey 1996). Stacey has 'since come to regret' introducing his diagram because it was subsequently misinterpreted or trivialised by some management practitioners and researchers (Stacey 2012: 151). My adaptation of the diagram aims at explaining the connections which I see between the dominant discourse and its underpinnings in the sciences of certainty. The complexity of these connections is difficult to represent clearly in a 'linear' text.

isolation from others, or when complexity is simplified and reduced to small units and controlled in mechanistic, highly technical ways:

> In technology we don't so much understand the universe as build tiny universes of our own, which are so simple that we can make them do what we want. The whole object of technology is to produce a controlled effect in given circumstances. We *make* our machines so that they will behave deterministically.   (ibid: 36)

However, the reductive, deterministic 'if... then... ' causality (Stacey 2010) assumed in technical-rational thinking does not apply to many natural phenomena and the world of humans. As Stewart (ibid: 33) playfully points out, '[i]f Newton could not predict the behaviour of three balls, could Marx predict that of three people? ' Further problems with the application of the 'sciences of certainty' to human behaviour arise from the will to control and engineer social change, which permeates the discourse of strategies for educational transformation.

The regularity and predictability of the 'sciences of certainty' have been shaken by the discoveries of the complexity sciences (also referred to by Stacey et al as the 'sciences of uncertainty'), such as quantum mechanics, thermodynamics and the new mathematics of chaos. For example, in an attempt to explain phenomena which were not even 'seen' by Newtonian scientists, such as the chaotic behaviour of gas particles (thermodynamics), mathematicians ended up with two sets of laws, one for ordered and one for disordered patterns of behaviour, differential equations and statistical calculations respectively (Stewart 1997). Paradoxically, however, helped by modern computers which quickly calculate even the most complicated equations, what we perceive as 'chaos' turns out to be 'lawless behaviour governed entirely by law' (ibid: 12). The mathematics of chaos models what appears to be random, chaotic behaviour through using iterative equations. A core insight here is that the iteration (repetition) of small errors or insignificant differences may over time lead to huge differences and undesirable consequences, such as the recent credit crunch (Mackenzie 2008) discussed in section 2.2.1 (p.27). Iteration underpins the processes of *habitualisation* and *institutionalisation* (Berger and Luckmann 1966) and the emergence of global patterns of conversation from many everyday local interactions repeated many times, albeit with small changes, as we engage in everyday practice.

4.7 Ethical, personal and ideological issues raised by the research

Following ethics guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2011) regarding consent, privacy, confidentiality and research with children, I gained permission from the Headteachers of the case study schools and, subsequently, consent from all adults participating in the research (Appendix 1, p.185). To these guidelines Pring (2000: 144) adds moral principles and values such as truth, trust, democracy and Bassey (1999) adds respect for the person. I also rigorously followed the guidelines set by Roehampton University's *Ethics Guidelines* (2011) and *Code of Good Research Practice* (2010) for minimising the risks to the researcher and participants and resolving unexpected ethical issues.

As explained in Chapter 1 (p.18), underpinning this research is care for the 'whole child' (Maguire, Wooldridge and Pratt-Adams 2006: 35). In this respect, Van Manen's (1990: 135) emphasises the importance of avoiding the tendency to abstraction, which may make educational researchers to lose their ability to see the contemporary 'erosion of pedagogic meaning'. However, I am aware that, just like 'statecraft' (Scott 1998), the researcher's craft also relies on abstracting from the world of everyday experience. Consequently, data analysis processes necessarily entail a degree of data reduction and categorisation, as explained in 4.4 above.

Another tension inherent in the research process arises from the intertwining of power/knowledge (Foucault 1979: 27):

> ...power produces knowledge... power and knowledge directly imply one another... there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.

From the complex responsive processes perspective, interdependence entails the mutuality of power relations. This point is developed in the following section.

4.8 A reflexive evaluation of my research

The constructionist premise that 'no human can step outside their humanity' to become an objective, expert knower of the 'truth' (Burr 2003: 152), signalled in 4.1

above, is crucial for understanding reflexivity. Reflexivity, however, is also about detachment (Elias 1987), which allows the researcher to distance herself from the research to reflect on her epistemological influences. These have a bearing on all stages of a research project, from its conception to completion and evaluation (Grace 1998). For a social constructionist, reflexivity entails acknowledging the personal and political values informing research (Burr 2003). It is also about recognising that research is a social process in which data are co-constructed by the researcher and participant 'selves-in-relation' (Mauthner and Doucet 2003: 422). Reflexive accounts, therefore, need to explicitly articulate the researcher's social location, theoretical perspective, emotional responses and reflections on the research process (ibid).

How reflexivity is practised can be problematic, particularly in relation to the purpose of reflexive accounts (Skeggs 2002). Skeggs (ibid: 352) points to the indulgence of accounts which construct reflexivity 'as a normative requirement of rigorous methodology, when really it is merely a mechanism by which the romantic aesthetics of the whole and coherent self are put into place in the name of intellectual practice'. Skeggs highlights the difference between claims to reflexivity as a technique for authorising oneself and doing reflexivity in practice. Assuming a position of a detached spectator, a position of power over research participants, may lead to objectifying others as 'resources for self-formation' (ibid: 369). Reflexivity as practice, however, is about researchers repeatedly asking: 'Can we hear?' Reflexivity in action is about...

> ...a movement from telling and confession to practice and positioning. This is a call for accountability and responsibility in research, not for self-formation and self-promotion. (ibid: 369)

The tension in accounts of reflexivity as practice is, however, inevitable, because of the abstraction inherent in the process of accounting. The very process of telling is a movement away from immersing in practice to narrating action (Stacey 2010). It is therefore a process of externalisation and objectivation (Berger and Luckmann 1966). As I narrate my experience of being reflexive in action, in my research practice, I use the signs of language and, to make my personal meanings available to

the reader, I refer to reflexivity objectified as definitions, conceptualisations, accounts and insights by other researchers. Such 'intellectualisation of method' (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009: 1) draws me further into abstraction and away from reflexivity as practice.

However, I also recall moments, during interviews, when observing school assemblies, or listening to audio recordings of interviews, moments of being immersed, of receiving from my research participants the gift of their stories and thoughts, 'their data'. These were moments of feeling connected to them, moments of 'being there'. In these moments I was fully aware of the 'I' and the 'me' (Mead 1934) and fully in the presence of the other, 'my research participant'. In these moments I experienced *being* reflexive; moments of connection, of genuine desire to hear the stories, a wish to honour the voices of practitioners, moments of enormous gratitude for their time and the gift of their data. In these moments there was a mutuality of power, power to gesture (Mead 1934) as little or as much of ourselves to the other as we choose to in the moment, in response to the other. It is these moments of *being* reflexive that I have tried to remember when transcribing interviews, analysing data, and writing this thesis. Realising that writing *about* reflexivity, or constructing oneself as a reflexive researcher, is not the same as *being* reflexive, I hope that the latter can be read from the passages where I identify my values and political habitus and where I reflect on or evaluate my research.

4.9 Conclusion

An underlying theme which links this chapter to the previous chapters is the expressive and constitutive power of language and the ensuing importance of communication. In many respects, the theory of complex responsive processes appears to be an elaboration of social constructionist tenets, explaining the interdependent relationship between local and global patterns of interaction. Or, to draw on Berger and Luckmann (1966), the ongoing cycle of *externalisation*, *objectivation* and *internalisation* leads, over time, to *institutionalisation* and measures to maintain the emergent 'universe of discourse' (Mead 1956: 36). What we communicate and how we articulate our understandings of the purposes of schooling constructs a world into which pupils are socialised, a constructed world

which will inevitably be taken-for-granted as 'real'. The responsibility of educators, therefore, reaches beyond delivering the curriculum and transforming performance. The transformation which, as educators, we are responsible for is rooted in the kind/s of world we construct for children and the modes of engagement in this world which we convey as legitimate.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 discuss the case study data. Whilst writing about his research findings, Chris Mowles (2011: 85) points out that...

> after Mead, I assume that my findings are a gesture the full meaning of which will only become apparent once the people I am working with have responded. There is no guarantee that any observation I make, or judgment that I offer will be interpreted or made use of as I intend.

The following chapters are one such gesture, which can acquire the full meaning with the response of the reader.

Chapter 5:   Local diversity: places, people and patterns of conversation

5.1   Introduction

Chapter 5, together with Chapters 6 and 7, discusses the case study findings, focusing in particular on conversational patterns which emerged from the data collected at Abbey Primary and Green Lanes Primary. As discussed in Chapter 3, the conceptual framework of the complex responsive processes theory is helpful in developing a deeper understanding of how the dominant discourse of school improvement is taken up locally and how, over time, it changes schools in complex ways. In order to develop more subtle understandings of how dominant discourse affects participants' conversations and perceptions of everyday practice, the complete analytical framework applied in this thesis consists of the key concepts of complex responsive processes theory and Fairclough's (2003) discourse analysis tools (Figure 4.1, p.71).

In aiming to convey 'local diversity', Chapter 5 focuses on the unique settings and distinctive patterns of conversation about values espoused by the schools' communities. Epistemological roots of government improvement strategies, discussed in Chapter 2 in answer to research question 1, surface in participants' conversations about values as the Newtonian 'pushing' metaphor. Chapter 6 addresses research question 2 and presents the 'story' of the *National Strategies*, emphasising the command and control regime established by strategy designers. The meaning arising in the interaction between the policy-makers and practitioners highlights asymmetrical power relations which diminish practitioner knowledge and voice. Chapter 7 presents the consequences of these power relations, as they are played out in everyday practice. The key focus here is on research question 3. Although the local patterns of conversation in both schools converge with the dominant discourse of school improvement, the resulting changes to everyday practice are complex and diverse. An analysis of accounts of practice suggests that government reform agendas constrain practitioners within the dominant view of improvement and limit opportunities to connect to fundamental questions about the meaning of education and deeper purpose of school improvement. Technical-

rationality which is at the root of government's *National Strategies* is being taken up by practitioners, impoverishing 'what it *means* to educate' (Pring 2013: 64).

5.2   Abbey Primary: 'Grade 2, good with many outstanding features'

Abbey Primary (AP) is a three form entry primary school. It includes the nursery and provides places for 700 pupils. Located in ample grounds in a residential part of outer London, it has three large playing fields and light, airy, one-storey buildings. It is heavily oversubscribed, implying that Abbey Primary is the preferred choice for more families than the school can accommodate. In the last six years the school expanded from two to three forms, but is still unable to offer places for all applicants. Following an Ofsted inspection in 2007, the school was judged as 'good with many outstanding features'. Ofsted grades are standardised judgements based on an assessment of how schools provide for pupils' needs (Table 5.1). Performance in the final year of primary school tests, Year 6 SATs (Standard Assessment Tasks), reported in national league tables, is the ultimate yardstick of schools' provision. Before the inspectors visit a school and spend two to three days observing lessons and interviewing, they will have scrutinised SATs results for the last few years, as well as other data which schools are required to collect (Ofsted 2011b)[7].

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of a reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Table 5.1   What inspection judgements mean (Ofsted 2011a)

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[7] Ofsted (2011b) outlines inspection protocols at the time of data collection and analysis. These have recently been changed under the new Chief Inspector of School, Michael Wilshaw (Ofsted 2012a, 2012b). Notably, the 'satisfactory' grade has been changed to 'requires improvement' (Ofsted 2012a: 5) and the statutory inspection notice reduced to less than a working day (Ofsted 2012b).

According to Abbey's Ofsted Report (2007), Grade 2 for the overall effectiveness of the school was arrived at through a standardised mapping, which consisted of grade judgements in each of these subcategories. With Grade 1 ('outstanding') in most of the above categories, a possible reason why the overall judgement did not average as 'outstanding' stems from the *Achievement and Standards* category, based on Year 6 results. The Report emphasizes that: 'the trend in achievement over the past three years has been variable. In 2005, test results in Year 6 showed a significant dip. However, in 2006 results were exceptionally high'. The remainder of the Report is glowing. As confirmed by the data collected in this study, this is an exceptional school. Parent surveys indicate 95% satisfaction with what Abbey Primary offers to the school community. Jenny, the Headteacher, is a National Leader of Education (NLE), a title awarded nationally to a few Headteachers in recognition of their contribution to more than one school, including schools 'identified as being in need of significant improvement' (NCSL 2012: 8). Sophie, the Deputy Head, has taught since 1971and been a lead facilitator of esteemed *Improving* and *Outstanding Teachers Programmes*. Three Abbey teachers work also as Lead Teachers and contribute to teacher development in schools across the Local Authority. All Abbey teachers provide children's after-school or lunchtime clubs in their non-contact time. The pupils are encouraged to take on responsibilities in the school and the local community. For example, they organise regular 'Silver Surfers' meetings with the local elderly people; run a 'Fruity Friday' tuck shop; regularly help mid-day supervisors with Infant lunch; troubleshoot ICT problems for teachers round the school. The school's SATs results have consistently risen above the national and Local Authority average for the last ten years. Apart from the 'significant dip' in 2005, which, according to Abbey staff, influenced Ofsted's overall judgement. Jenny recalls her experience of Ofsted inspectors thus:

> …some of them just come in and criticise… a lot depends on the team, it really does. If you've got somebody that knows what they're talking about, you can have a proper conversation. But if you've got somebody that's just chanting from a bit of paper… whatever evidence we gave them, they kept chanting the rules…

The role of an inspector is to see 'like a state' (Scott 1998), to be systematic and efficient in gathering the synoptic knowledge of a school's performance measured through SATs results. This efficiency, however, is based on a myopic view, so intent on performance that it may fail to register anything beyond its narrow focus. As the state privileges the view of its auditors, Ofsted inspectors hold the official power of raising standards, whilst schools merely provide a 'levelled social terrain' (Scott 1998: 5) where the process of raising standards has been designed to happen. What this means for the school is that the '*techne*' of the outsider-spectator, skilled in efficient observation and mapping of reality onto the schema of Ofsted criteria, is deemed superior to teachers' perceptions of achievement, their commitment and other dispositions which form the local 'ecology of practice' (Stronach 2010: 65). The interaction between Abbey teachers and Ofsted inspectors is an example of the potentially damaging effects of abstract performance measures built into the self-improving system (PSR 2006). Ofsted judgement, based on the dip in SATs, undermined the local articulation of hard work and sense of achievement, without regard to the loss of commitment that this could engender. Paradoxically, however, this 'objective' judgement was subsequently unofficially contested by Jenny and her staff. 'Some of them just come in and criticise' became an organisation-wide pattern of conversation (Stacey 2010) in Abbey Primary, following the inspection.

5.3   The transformation of Green Lanes Primary

Stephen, the Headteacher of Green Lanes Primary (GLP), compares a primary school to a 'complex organism' where change is a 'two-way process' involving school leaders sharing their values and absorbing 'a lot of the school culture as well'. When he took up his first headship post at GLP four years ago...

> What surprised me was how quickly people picked up on the way that I said things, that people learned very quickly what was important to me, even though I wasn't standing on a pedestal and saying: 'This is what's important to me'... and I think I connected and I think that I showed that I'd made the right choice with regard to feeling comfortable at the school and having a team of staff that I think I would hopefully be able to mould and also from whom I could learn a lot as well.

The narratives of the development and expansion of GLP told by the school staff point to many complex changes they participated in and witnessed in recent years.

However, as explained in Chapter 1 (p.21), seeking to write about complex phenomena has to involve a degree of simplification and reduction. The present account of the transformation of Green Lanes Primary is therefore partial and incomplete.

The last twenty years of the school's history are closely interlinked with the changes in its immediate locality, as well as broader educational and social change. Stephen emphasizes that...

> A lot of people get the wrong impression of the school… the façade, the local roads tell a story of middle class aspiration… high achievement… that's added to by the mature trees in the ground… a kind of countryside look to it… There are enormous pockets of hardship around here... a very, very needy local estate...

Thirty years ago the school was attended by middle class children living in the big houses in the school's vicinity. As Jeanne, the Receptionist, states, 'it was almost like a private school. We had bowler hats for girls, blazers for boys. The Headteacher you hardly saw at all, unless something drastic happened'. With time, the big houses were converted into flats, and the 'very needy' council estate was built nearby. These changes in the neighbourhood affected the socio-economic mix of the school. The more recent effects of globalisation brought large numbers of ethnic families into the local area and the school.

That the school is now very diverse, both socially and ethnically, becomes apparent on entering the Reception area, which displays *Welcome* booklets with information in ten different languages. Jeanne has known the school for thirty years, when her children attended GLP. She started working in the school twenty years ago as a 'school helper' and, with time, her job evolved to working in the office and then Reception. Jeanne highly appreciates the diversity, openness and inclusion that have developed over the years in the school community:

> Obviously, we are a part of the bigger world... And because we're so diverse and unique to the Borough in terms of our intake and cohort, I think it's lovely for the children, it's going to make them so much better going into the real world because they've got so much diversity here already.

On becoming Headteacher in 2007, Stephen had an idealised view of education, central to which was 'giving children who might come from a less privileged background every opportunity to succeed'. His key priority was to improve the outside play space, because half of Green Lanes children do not have their own back garden. A small environmental project snowballed into a building site. New first-floor classrooms were built to enable the school to take on an extra Reception class in order to alleviate the predicted shortage of primary places in the Borough because of a demographic peak. Prior to extending, the school had two separate staffrooms for Infant and Junior teachers; one of the newly built spaces is now being used as a joint staffroom. Spacious, light and airy, well furnished and decorated, with skylights and ecological lighting, it is a big improvement on two small staffrooms used before, cluttered with bookshelves and folders. Stephen hopes this new addition will help create a more cohesive team, with everybody meeting in the common space where...

> it's not Infants and Juniors, where it's not teachers and ancillary staff and teaching assistants, but where we hopefully share common values and we recognise that we are all trying to move in the same direction together.

Miriam, the Deputy Head, also started working in GLP in 2007. One of her first tasks was an application for *Food for Life Partnership* funding, which enabled the development of a small garden for the children to grow vegetables. A decision to organise after school clubs secured extended school subsidy, which Miriam divided 'very creatively' amongst children who cannot afford to pay for the clubs. Keeping the school open in the afternoons provided an opportunity for a computer club for parents; this led to contacting the local Adult Education College and organising classes for parents who do not speak English.

An Ofsted inspection in 2008 judged the school as 'satisfactory' (Grade 3). A more recent Ofsted inspection, in October 2011, resulted in Grade 2, 'good'. Carol (Admin Officer) recalls a meeting in the new staffroom to discuss inspection results thus:

> We all got together and cheered lots and laughed and cried. I think there was a relief that they've finally gone and the relief that the outcome was good, because we so desperately wanted it.

The favourable Ofsted judgement created an opportunity for the school to expand further, by taking on two extra Reception classes from September 2012, in response to a Local Authority request. For the school, this means extra funding. However, Stephen is concerned about the long-term implications of the expansion which, in seven years will mean 700 children and, in the meantime, another building project:

> I would hate to work in a school where I didn't know the names of all the children and our capacity to absorb three forms of entry... that's a challenge. We are a school that does have a reputation for a friendly, welcoming community and I would hate us to compromise that in any way...

One of the key messages of the Green Lanes 'story' is that a focus on creating and sustaining a caring, inclusive environment could be as important as academic success. Jeanne, who calls herself a 'bridge' between home and school, sums it up as welcoming all new families, 'making them feel part of us'. One of the yearly highlights in Green Lanes' calendar is International Evening, when all families are invited in to cook and taste traditional food. Stephen recalls International Evening 2010 as follows:

> to get communities working together it was **just brilliant**... you can imagine the health and safety aspect of it, that was just a nightmare (*we laugh*)... we've got a lot of Asian families who historically haven't engaged much with the school and with other parents. I mean it was just fantastic; a whole group of them got together in the school's kitchen and were just cooking up a storm! And when they turned up with their pecoras, and their bhajis, it was just brilliant!

Over the years, Green Lanes Primary 'evolved' from a 'little cosy middle class enclave' (Jeanne) to a community school. This transformation has been a complex process which emerged as a result of government policy as well as changes within the school and its immediate environment. More than a central blueprint, the process of community building involved good will, flexibility and sensitivity to the needs of the community which the school serves. And opportunities to celebrate together.

5.4 The people

Recent changes in both schools appear to be closely intertwined with the values articulated by the schools' headteachers. This is reflected both in the patterns of conversation about the schools' values and the kind of people who work in each

school (Figure 5.2). The majority of Abbey Primary teachers are in their twenties or early thirties and were employed by Jenny within a year of taking up Abbey Headship. Conversely, most of the teaching assistants (TAs) and administrative staff are the parents of former Abbey pupils, who have worked their way 'up' into their current positions through volunteering to read with children or doing ancillary part-time work (Appendix 2d, p.195). The TAs and administrative staff at Green Lanes Primary followed routes to their current positions similar to those at Abbey Primary. Most of the teachers, however, have worked in the school for many years (Appendix 2d, p.197) and are in their late thirties to late forties.

Abbey Primary		Green Lanes Primary	
Alice	Deputy Head	Alison	Teacher, SLT
Annabel	Teacher, SLT	Angelika	Teacher, SLT
Angie	Teacher	Carol	Admin Officer
Emma	Teacher	Jeanne	Receptionist
Eve	Bursar	Louise	Bursar
Fiona	Teacher, SLT	Miriam	Deputy Head
Gail	Support staff	Sandy	Teacher
Gemma	Teacher	Stephen	Headteacher
Jenny	Headteacher		
Liz	Teacher		
Lynn	Teacher Assistant		
Maggie	Teacher, SLT		
Maria	Teacher, SLT		
Mark	Teacher		
Pete	Headteacher		
Sophie	Deputy Head		
Sylvia	Receptionist		

Figure 5.2 Interview participants from Abbey Primary and Green Lanes Primary

The staff at Green Lanes Primary being 'extraordinarily loyal', the only new appointments Stephen made during his four years at GLP are Anna, an SEN inclusion leader, Louise, the bursar and Carol, an Administrative Officer. He admits that the low turnover of staff is a 'double-edged sword'. Although it ensures stability and continuity, it is also 'a real privilege for new Headteachers to be able to appoint their own staff... that share their values' (Stephen). Susan (KS1 leader) shares Stephen's view: 'the staff have **all** been here quite a long time, so it's been difficult

trying to introduce new things'. Similarly, Alison (KS2 leader) mentions some colleagues' reluctance to change their practice, because 'they've always done it like this...'. However, Stephen appreciates 'organic' growth and, as a 'reflective democrat', acknowledges the importance of mutuality in leader-followers interactions:

> Like all incoming Headteachers, I did sort of spout the cliché about having two ears and one mouth so that, you know, staff knew that I wasn't coming in with a fixed agenda... the way forward can't just come from one person, and you've got to listen to the voices outside of your own head.

Stephen finds his greatest support in Miriam, the Deputy Head: 'an absolute godsend, somebody who is very good at the things that I'm not very good at, so I hope that we complement each other well'.

On joining Abbey Primary in January 2000, Jenny had 13 years' Headship experience in three schools in deprived areas. Her experience also includes 15 years of teaching in deprived areas, first 'by the docks in Manchester' and later in East Ham in London. In September 1999, Jenny was seconded by the Local Authority to Grange Primary, to 'turn the school around', where she met Sophie, also seconded to Grange Primary as a Deputy Head. By the end of the academic year the school was taken out of special measures and Jenny left to take up the post at Abbey.

At the time of her arrival, Abbey was a 'coasting' school, previously led by a Headteacher nearing his retirement and absent a lot because of ill health. This resulted in more ambitious parents moving their children to other schools. Jenny identified two key priorities. Firstly, to improve relationships with parents. Secondly, to 'battle' for a better school ethos, which, at the time, was characterised as a 'lack of teacher expectation', especially in relation to the children from the local council estate:

> ...when I came here, the attitude was: 'if the children are from the Estate, they are not going to do anything'... And I said: 'That's not good enough!' ... It's hard... because a lot of teachers who've been here for a long time were entrenched. And I had to face battles with some of them and then they moved... I don't care if I win, but I want to be the best that I can be.

The big exodus of teachers by the end of the first year enabled Jenny to employ new, young staff who shared Jenny's aspiration to 'be the best that I can be'. It also provided an opportunity for building a more cohesive team, because 'the school was very divided at that point, there were the Juniors and then the Infants and they didn't talk to each other and they fell out over the pencil stock' (Sophie). The 'battle' with parents took even longer and involved both Jenny and Sophie, who joined the school as a new Deputy Head a year later:

> I thought that the best way, because I know what they're like out there, yakking (*laughs*)… so I thought 'bring them in'... so we introduced coffee mornings, every week. I would sit there, usually with Sophie, and we'd just get this **barrage** of abuse, week after week after week…

Jenny believes that 'battling' with parental and teacher attitudes requires headteachers to be 'thick skinned', 'determined' and 'relentless':

> And it took us, oh, over a year to start turning it round and getting positive. And then it got to the stage where, if somebody came and said something negative and other parents said 'well no actually, that's not true'... if they were unhappy about something, I would get them in and discuss it, and... I'd then follow it up, and make a little card saying: 'Have we resolved your problem? Have we not resolved it to your satisfaction but do you think we've listened to it properly, or would you like to come in and discuss it further?' And one mum was in nearly every week, we had six months before I finally wore her down... (*laughs*) And we still get it and they still moan, that's what they do, that's what school gates are for.

Jenny's sense of humour seems to deflect from talking about the difficult choices she made in her first year at Abbey, which resulted in an exodus of staff. Her understanding of educational success originates from 'life', 'intuition', rather than management textbooks or policy agendas, and is premised on expectation. It is also rooted in her long experience of working in schools in deprived areas:

> So it's about teacher expectation, that's the biggest thing... Expect a child to fail, they'll fail... You cannot make a school in a deprived area as successful as here, because you've got all those other things you've got to battle against, but you can still make a huge difference...

During the eleven years of Jenny's leadership, Abbey Primary changed radically, as described in 5.1 above. In terms of SATs results, the percentage of children

achieving Level 4 rose from 70% in 2001 to 98% in 2012. Jenny's ethos of hard work is underpinned by an understanding that it is impossible to constantly demand people to work hard without rewarding them accordingly and without… 'having a laugh'. As a 'great believer in developing people' (Sophie), Jenny offers her teachers 'fantastic' leadership development opportunities for which the school is famous in the Local Authority and therefore attracts ambitious, hard-working young teachers. For Jenny, this is a 'win-win' approach...

> because I've got keen people, and if I only get three or four years out of them working hard as anything, the school gets something out of it, they get something out of it, because they've then got the experience to go on and get another job.

5.5 Diverse patterns of conversation about values: *'what you say and what you do is just hoovered up by the school community'*

Gunter and Forrester (2009: 497) argue that New Labour's most effective strategy for policy implementation was the creation of the National College for School Leadership and, under its aegis, developing a new cadre of school leaders to act as 'direct agents' of government reform. This strategy is premised on the power and expertise of school leaders in bringing about organisational change. The power of headteachers to influence organisational patterns of conversation is implicit in the website texts produced by both schools and the discourse observed in staff meetings and interviews. Whether it is 'repetition... chanting the same old mantras' (Jenny) or 'giving off signals about what you think is important... almost by osmosis' (Stephen), the values expressed by both Headteachers appear to infuse the language used by the staff working in both schools. Stephen finds his influence astonishing:

> it just never fails to amaze me that what you say and what you do is just hoovered up by the school community. You have to be careful with your words... you have to trust that what you're thinking is based on, is based on a belief system and a value system, which has some kind of merit in our society.

Jenny articulates this more bluntly: 'once you start appointing good people and training them up, it's not just **you** saying it'.

The greatest convergence in values and aspirations is implicit in the discourse of teachers working most closely with both Headteachers. For example, Stephen's aspiration to be 'visible' and to 'raise our profile in the local community', is taken up by Miriam. When talking about her responsibilities, she lists: 'raising the profile of caring and community spirit'; 'raising the profile of subject leaders'; 'raising the profile of partnership between parents and the school'. The visibility, high profile and good reputation are of importance to Louise (bursar), who appreciates both Stephen and Miriam for how they will...

> turn up, be as enthusiastic as they always are and be very visible and high profile around the school, not just with the staff but with the parents. And being seen to do their job well.

A similar complementary working relationship is expressed by Sophie and Alice (Assistant Head, AP). Jenny's 'mantra' of expectations is taken up by Sophie who asserts, that 'we expect people to work very hard', but also refers to 'unrealistic sometimes expectations' that have been part of government education reform agenda. She thus echoes Jenny's recognition of the limits to what can be achieved in schools, depending on the local context. Alice talks about: 'high expectations of all our children'; 'expectations of good behaviour from pupils'; 'expecting a lot from the phase and year group leaders'. 13 out of 17 participants referred during interviews to 'high expectations' of the children and staff as a shared value at Abbey Primary once or more often (Appendix 3a, p.210).

Other core values at Abbey Primary which do not feature as much in the conversational patterns at Green Lanes, are hard work, high ambition, support, trust and rich curriculum. These values recur in interviews with all participants, as well as in the Vision Statement displayed on the school's website. High ambition and hard work underpin the everyday activity at the school, which is repeatedly expressed as the Newtonian 'pushing' metaphor: 'pushing in the right direction' (Mark), 'rigour, drive and push' (Sophie); 'we are always pushing to get to the outstanding criteria' (Maggie); 'pushing the school forward and not letting it stand still'(Maggie). 14 out of 17 participants refer to 'pushing' as positive and desirable (Appendix 3b, p.212). This includes teachers who are new to the school, for example Maria (KS2 teacher),

who within a year of working at Abbey appears to have internalised the values of 'hard work' and 'pushing for improvement'. Whilst talking about her fast promotion to the Literacy Leader of Learning, she reflects on...

> how hard I work and how I want to push the school forward as well... supporting staff and pushing your own subject as much as you can, not standing still...

References to 'pushing the children' (Emma, Gemma, Maggie and Pete) place the reference to 'the children' in the position of the sentence object, implying an objectification of the pupils. In the context of 'military' language, they also sustain the image of learning as a struggle:

> ...so we have to make sure that we just keep bombarding them with learning opportunities and opportunities outside of learning, so there are lots of collisions in their learning and they can develop as they need to, and we can identify that and push them on. (Pete, New Headteacher)

There are also voices questioning the culture of 'pushing for results' and 'pushing children':

> a lot is pushed towards these SATs tests and that makes the school look good… And I just don't think that's right.' (Sylvia, Receptionist)

> It seems very harsh for 6 to 7 year olds to be sort of pushed into this kind of environment... (Eve, Bursar)

> ...do you want to push these young children before they're actually meant to, and should you push them? (Fiona, Early Years Teacher, Assistant Head)

The above are, however, minority voices at Abbey, in contrast to Green Lanes Primary, where 'pushing' does not dominate the conversational patterns (Appendix 3b, p.212). Stephen mentions 'pushing children on' in the context of new Ofsted targets for the school following Ofsted inspection in 2011 and when talking about the accountability created by schools' league tables. In this context, therefore, the concept of 'pushing' appears to originate in the external power and control structures, rather than from within the school. 'Pushing children' is questioned by Sandy (KS1 teacher) who asserts that 'there's too much pressure. You're pushing those children

and not enough fun.' Angelika (KS2 teacher, Literacy Leader) points out that 'pushing initiatives' may be unrealistic in the light of heavy teacher workload and time constraints:

> But certain practices which I have tried to encourage over the years, I do expect to see, and I don't always see them. And it is a workload and a time element. And that's what makes it quite difficult to push and to get people on side with the vision. Because it is a workload related issue and already teaching at its most basic is highly, it's a huge workload.

Whereas 'pushing' seems to be both desirable and non-negotiable at Abbey Primary, at Green Lanes Primary changes in practice appear to be 'encouraged', rather than 'pushed', and viewed in the timeframe of 'years', as in Angelika's comment above.

This more relaxed approach to implementing change at GLP is articulated by most participants and linked to Stephen's values of caring, seeking balance and creating 'memorable' learning experiences for the children. His vision of a 'caring community' features in the school's 'strap line' and is displayed on the home page of the website and in the School Development Plan (for ethical reasons, the 'strap line' cannot be cited here in full). It is echoed by Miriam and other members of staff, for example, Jeanne and Louise, who care about 'children being happy and safe at school'. The care ethos is manifested also in caring for the staff; both Fiona and Stephen are appreciated for their wisdom of managing the school 'without putting a lot of pressure on everybody else' (Alison). Sandy is also appreciative of their realistic, balanced expectations:

> I don't think the leadership put excessive pressure on us here. I know that at some other schools planning is excessive, differentiation is near enough different for every child.

Stephen's wish to lead a school where he would feel 'comfortable' and 'welcome' results in a balanced working environment, which is highly appreciated by Green Lanes teachers. Sandy appreciates Stephen's understanding of 'work-life balance':

> He's got a very good work life balance, and he tries to promote that to the staff which I think is a positive thing because obviously we're all under pressure.

Angelika's reflection summarises the 'subtle balance' valued by the staff at GLP as follows:

> And there's a subtle balance I think in keeping a happy school, between keeping your eye on standards and on monitoring and all the aspects that cause standards to rise, but also in treating people, respecting them for their expertise and their differences, and their slightly different approaches to teaching and so on.

The focus on standards is in balance with Stephen's encouragement for teachers to take risks, to 'be bold enough to do things differently', in order to create 'memorable learning' which the children will remember for years. The balance is also a focus of his communication with parents:

> I want the children to climb trees and do things like that, I've written about that in my newsletter... the fifty things that children should do before they're 11 and three quarters... National Trust have put up a list, and it's all about going rock climbing, flying a kite, rolling down a big hill and all this sort of stuff. I've said to the parents 'look it up, have a look at it, if you're not sure what to do with your children over a weekend.' They don't cost anything as well, they're all free.

The above data suggest that the culture in both schools is imbued with values which have been shaped by the Headteachers. Notably, few participants mentioned standards in this context, apart from Sophie, Alice (AP) and Angelika (GLP). A tacit understanding of values as 'voluntary compulsions', arising from within and 'compelling' in a 'voluntary' sense (Mowles 2011: 156) is expressed by Angelika talking about the culture at GLP:

> I think there is a sort of natural pressure, it's not an imposed pressure that's in terms of standards... I think there's a certain amount of understanding that everyone has their strengths and their special qualities and that you can't be robots as such and clocking in this time, going out that time. And I think that's an important part of why people feel comfortable here.

The feeling of comfort and acceptance (if not celebration) of diversity and difference is also appreciated by Stephen, Jeanne, Louise and Susan (KS1 teacher). Most participants refer to a culture of inclusion created by Stephen and Miriam. This

pattern suggests an absence of 'cult values' in the conversations I have witnessed at GLP. As Mowles (ibid) points out, shared values can enhance the meaning and purpose of common endeavour and thus strengthen the community in their pursuit of common goals, provided difference is embraced. As explained in section 3.2.6 (p.57), values become 'cult values' when they change into norms which must be adhered to at the risk of exclusion or shame.

The situation seems to be different at Abbey Primary, where the culture esteemed by many participants is that of 'everyone pushing in the right direction' (Mark). The common goal for the school expressed by Jenny as 'being the best that one can be' has created the practice of employing 'good people'. This has been interpreted by Sophie as 'We can do it all' and having...

> the right people on the bus... getting the right staff and looking after them properly and making them feel valued and giving them an opportunity to take responsibility and developing them.

Standards are an important 'measure of value' for Alice:

> I think we should expect high standards of everybody, I think we should expect everybody to be good or outstanding teachers... and we shouldn't be accepting less than that.

The 'value' of aspiring to expected standards is being brought up occasionally by Sophie in her communication with staff:

> And sometimes having to be a bit tough if you've got people who are not doing the job right, because it's the children who matter. And being prepared to air it on the line and say: 'You've got to meet the standards'.

The cult of standards was used in Jenny's 'battle' with the previous teaching team who, as Jenny maintains, were not working as well as they could - they had been allowed 'to get away with murder' by the former Headteacher:

> And there were quite a number of teachers here who did not want to work any harder than they were working and that wasn't working hard enough to get the results we wanted, so we really had to start almost from scratch... There was a really, really big staff turnover, there had to be... (Sophie)

A key theme which emerges from the tale of the transformation of Abbey Primary from a 'coasting' to a highly successful school is that of values, of a significant change in values, promotion of the 'right' values and exclusion of difference. The teachers who share the dominant values are amply rewarded with leadership development. The inclusion/exclusion is reflected in the lack of a continuing professional development structure for the TAs working in the school (Lynn, Gail). It could have also been experienced by teachers who did not participate in my research.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter aimed at introducing Abbey Primary and Green Lanes Primary and beginning to explore the unique ways in which these two local schools have changed in recent years. The changes in both schools appear to be shaped by many internal and external conditions. These include: government improvement agendas and their epistemological underpinnings; changes in the immediate locality resulting from wider economic and demographic change; the discourse and values of the Headteachers which are 'just hoovered up by the school community', to name but a few.

The articulations of values espoused by the two schools beg a number of questions. Firstly, can Stephen and his colleagues 'hold on to' the ethos of care as Green Lanes Primary expands into a three-form-entry school and continues to work towards a higher Ofsted grade? Secondly, are the extremely positive accounts by Abbey Primary teachers an expression of a 'cult of positivity' (Mowles 2011), or David Blunkett's cult of 'can-do service' (Ward 1997), discussed in section 3.2.6 (p.57). Should this be the case, is the hard work, which leaves Abbey teachers 'exhausted' in what Maggie calls the final, 'killer' half-term of the year sustainable? To what extent is the pressure of always 'pushing to get to the outstanding criteria' (Maggie) transferred onto Abbey children? Can the ethos of academic achievement create 'included/excluded' experiences for the children? The following chapters revisit these questions in the light of further case study data.

Chapter 6: Making sense of 'strategic' leadership and the *National Strategies*

6.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses research question 2 and focuses on accounts of the *National Strategies* narrated by the practitioners working at Abbey and Green Lanes Primary. As discussed in Chapter 2, the *National Strategies* were designed and disseminated in primary schools as a 'spectacular' intervention, expected to deliver a significant rise in KS2 SATs results in one massive 'attack'. This intention is implicit in the following narrative by Michael Barber, Tony Blair's Chief Strategist, responsible for the dissemination of the *National Strategies*:

> So from 1997 to 1999 we went at this first phase with enormous energy and drove reform with great speed. It was a completely mission-driven agenda… Large-scale reform driven from the top down; designing all the materials at the national level and training everybody in a cascade out; using the accountability system to publish results and school inspection to check that people were adopting better practices… A lot of people within the system say we went too far too fast and should have made more effort to get buy-in. I personally don't believe that. (Mead, S. 2006)

The determination of the designer of the 'spectacular' intervention to drive his agenda to the exclusion of other considerations was a powerful gesture expressing the unwillingness of Barber and officials working in his Delivery Unit to enter into the attitude of teachers tasked with implementing the *National Strategies*. Interpreted as a conversation of gestures (Mead 1934), this approach to large scale education reform lacked the reciprocity which would make the implementation a more meaningful process. According to Mead (ibid), meaning does not arise in an individual nor is transmitted in a gesture, but arises in the response of the other. It is this response that makes adjustments possible, as participants enter into the attitude of the other (see section 3.2.3, p.53). Rather than waiting for a response from practitioners, Barber's Delivery Unit introduced 'accountability' and 'checking' systems to 'get buy-in'. The upshot of this approach is to construct the change process as superficial and transactional. A command and control approach to education reform premised on teacher 'buy-in' stifled opportunities for communication which could enable the emergence of reciprocal understanding.

Practitioner responses to this gesture ranged from an exodus of a whole generation of teachers who refused to 'buy into' the *National Strategies*, to 'severe identity crises', 'strategic' adjustment and 'game playing' of those who remained in the profession (Woods and Jeffrey 2002). As conveyed in Abbey and Green Lanes accounts, despite the 'structure' and 'progression' provided by the *National Strategies,* their over-prescription adversely affected teachers' confidence and ability to do their own planning (Sophie, AP). Alison and Susan (GLP) emphasised that the *National Literacy Strategy* resulted in a generation of children who were turned off reading books. After several years of adjustments made to the *National Strategies* by practitioners, they 'began working' (Alison). However, the story ended with the Coalition government's decision to 'scrap them' and 'close the websites down' after coming to power in 2010 (Stephen). What seems to continue, is the command and control communication which compels teachers into implementing reform even if it fails to 'meet the needs of our children' (Pete) and therefore does not make sense to teachers.

6.2 Two generations of practitioners making sense of... *'lots of folders'*

The accounts of the *National Strategies* told by participants varied between 'generations', demarcated by the introduction of the first *Literacy* and *Numeracy Strategies* in 1998 and 1999 respectively (Figure 6.1). Teachers from the 'older' generation, who had taught before 1998, vividly remember being 'exposed to this idea of the literacy hour and the numeracy hour' (Stephen). Their accounts convey the 'time depth' (Fairclough 2003) crucial to understanding their complex consequences. The 'younger' generation comprises teachers who worked with the *National Strategies* having learned about them during Initial Teacher Education, as well as teachers with less than 7 years' teaching experience, whose knowledge of the *National Strategies* is based mainly on using *Literacy and Numeracy Strategies* website resources.

	'Older' generation of teachers (over 15 years of teaching experience)	'Younger' generation (7-15 years of teaching experience)	'Younger' generation (less than 7 years of teaching experience)
Abbey Primary	Jenny Sophie Pete	Alice Fiona Maggie Maria Emma	Mark Annabel Liz Gemma Angie
Green Lanes Primary	Stephen Miriam Alison Susan Angelika	Sandy	

Figure 6.1   Two 'generations' of teachers at AP and GLP

The initial response to the detailed, highly prescriptive *Strategy* disseminated to schools as 'lots of folders' (Miriam) was that of 'teaching for the sake of it':

> When it first came in everybody felt really tied to it, and I think we went through a period where we were teaching for the sake of it. We had to cover this, this and this, it didn't matter whether children enjoyed it, we had to say we'd cover it. And what's more, I don't think the children were getting much from it, because we couldn't adapt it, or we felt we couldn't adapt it. (Alison)

The accounts of the *National Strategies* told by the 'older' generation recur in the accounts of the 'younger' teachers, albeit without the same depth of explanation. For example, Jenny recalled the stage of adapting the *Literacy* and *Numeracy Strategies* thus:

> ...like many schools... we went along with it to begin with. And then we thought, that doesn't suit us that bit, so we'll keep that but we're ditching that... Because in some things we were finding that our children were not doing well in things, because we were doing it in that prescribed way, so we changed it.

This was echoed by her 'younger' staff:

> When I then became literacy co-ordinator and I was teaching in year 6, I didn't feel that that was right for our children here. (Alice)

> Obviously, we follow them as we're meant to, and we make them work for

us and for the children, we may have to adapt things slightly but we do cover it. (Fiona)

...we then took on the literacy and we kind of tweaked a little bit, we didn't use it as religiously as we did the maths one. (Maggie)

The *Literacy Strategy* was criticised for being 'deadly dull' (Caroline), 'a bit wishy-washy' (Mark), 'quite blurry' (Stephen), 'regimented' (Angelika), 'limiting and... just boring' (Susan). Practitioners soon realised that using the *National Strategies* 'religiously' de-motivated children and started turning teachers into 'robots' (Alison). The outcomes depended on the school context, as highlighted by Pete, who at the time of their introduction worked as a Local Authority consultant. In one of the schools...

...the teachers actually weren't very good at planning, because they hadn't been through those *Strategies*[8]. And I think we then had to do a lot of work with the staff on proper planning, differentiation, all of those things and looking at objectives.

Paradoxically, however, a refusal to implement the *National Strategies* at another local school turned out to be beneficial:

And one thing we found was, in a way it was positive that the school hadn't gone through the *Strategies* because it wasn't just doing it from a book. They were more able to **think** about their planning and think about [children's] learning.

'Ditching', 'tweaking', 'adapting', making them 'more up to date and modern and exciting for the children' was the practitioners' way of making the *National Strategies* meaningful for them and their children. Interestingly, the texts written by the schools for public view show a high level of convergence with the *National Strategies*. For example, Abbey *Literacy and Numeracy Policies 2011* explicitly refer to 'following the national frameworks', use direct quotes from the NLS and NNS and align the aims, objectives, planning and teaching methods with those of the

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[8] When referring to '*Strategies*', the participants talked about the *National Literacy* and *Numeracy Strategies* and did not seem to remember the two later strategies, *Excellence and Enjoyment* (DfES 2003) and *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners* (DfES 2004).

National Strategies. Similarly, the references to 'rich' and 'enriched' curriculum highlighted in interviews at Abbey, are not included in these written documents. Unlike interview accounts, the school's policies demonstrate standardisation and adherence to the official discourse.

The processes of making sense of and adjusting professionals' responses to the *Literacy Strategy* did take time, as implicit in Alison's reflection below, whilst adversely affecting children's 'love of reading' (Susan) in the meantime. Alison's reflection articulates tension between being obliged to 'deliver' the Literacy curriculum despite children not learning from it:

> I remember going through a period, only a couple of years ago, saying 'Ah, I can't get it done, and the children aren't learning from it. I was thinking, 'don't tie yourself, do what you do well.' (Alison)

The above accounts of practitioners' responses to *National Strategies* resonate with Mead's (1934) point about the impossibility to predict or control how others respond to our gestures. Consequently, the function of a gesture is not to transmit 'our meanings' to others, but to make adjustments possible by entering the attitude of the actors implicated in the social act. The unbending will of the policy-maker who refuses to consider the attitude of others makes an impact, 'for good or for ill' (Stephen) and it is this impact which is discussed next.

6.3 Evaluating the *National Strategies*: *'a double-edged sword'*

'Cascading out' and 'checking' the outcomes of large scale reform (Barber in Mead, S. 2006) is different from the everyday experience of implementing it at the 'frontline'. Since proclaiming a 'spectacular' success of the *National Strategies*, Michael Barber has been selling what he claims to be a simple, foolproof blueprint for delivering success (e.g. in his 2011 book *Deliverology 101*) to readers and education systems world-wide (Ball 2012). Practitioners' evaluations of the *National Strategies* are more complex, especially when analysed from the perspective of time. It is only analysis and evaluation which introduce time depth that can develop 'real' understanding of events (Fairclough 2003). Without such analysis, we are in danger of losing the sense of the contingency of events and stop thinking about 'how

changing things at one level could produce different possibilities' (ibid: 95). Closing choices down privileges one version of improvement and excludes others, with different sets of consequences. In the case of the *National Literacy Strategy*, the command and control communication between the policy-makers and teachers resulted in dependency, as Sophie's story illustrates:

> How helpful they were… variable, I think…I think there were starting points where we needed to have starting points, but they then became the masters and the effect was to take away teachers' confidence in their professionalism overall. And when we made the decision here that we would not continue with the *Literacy Strategy* because we felt we could do a much better job, it was very interesting because we went to our staff and said 'Alright, you don't have to stick to the *Strategy* anymore. We'll look at the planning together but you don't have to stick to the *Strategy*'. And we thought everyone was going to be happy. But actually, it was only the teachers over a certain age who said: 'We can be teachers again'. But the young ones were so engrained, so trained and dependent upon the *Strategies*, that at that point, they didn't know what they were going to do without it.

Stephen is aware of the time depth needed for a full evaluation of the impact of the *National Strategies*. As he points out, 'enough water has passed under the bridge' to realise that...

> ...a lot of good came out of that. First of all, it raised the profile of literacy and numeracy. And it kind of boosted this idea of entitlement, you know that these were very important subjects, we had to get a little bit away from some of the wishy-washiness which had been rife in certain pockets of primary education. And it did send out a strong message to the world that numeracy, we need to raise standards in numeracy, and in literacy, OK? That's the positives. Because there were schools that were underselling... no, that were selling their children short by not providing a rigorous diet of two key subjects.

The rigour of the *National Strategies*, however, turned them into a 'double-edged sword':

> Obviously the rigour, which on one hand was a good thing, became a problem as well... some of the texts were so dry and inaccessible and inappropriate for certain... for certain children, I can't explain it anymore than that. There's a fear that some children got turned off the written word by the way of: 'oh it's another literacy lesson, another printed sheet for me to look at.' And it became so kind of stylised, you know 'this is the way we

did it,' that even children who were talented readers and talented writers could get switched off.

In his evaluation Stephen enters the attitude of the children, teachers and, as apparent below, policy-makers:

> You can understand why a government might want to do that, sort of almost moving towards a French model of 'on this day of the week, we're all going to be studying this at a certain time', so that everybody gets the same experiences across the country.

Despite official claims that the *Literacy* and *Numeracy Strategies* transformed 'life-chances... and shown that it is possible to make real change and improvement quickly' (DfES 2004:14), practitioners' evaluations point out that they were 'not always plain sailing' (Mark). The feeling of 'being released from the rigour of the Strategies' (Stephen) was articulated in the context of new concerns arising from new policy of the Coalition government and the continuing concerns with Ofsted, discussed next.

6.4 The power of Ofsted: *'It's a black cloud that Ofsted are coming'*

This section discusses the impact of Ofsted inspections on teachers. For Michael Barber, the function of Ofsted was simple: to 'check that people were adopting better practices' (Mead, S. 2006). Underpinned by an assumption that it is possible for an outsider-observer to make such judgments, based on statistical data and other 'evidence' collected during a visit of two or three days' duration, Ofsted claim the power 'of raising standards, improving lives' (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2 Ofsted logo (Ofsted 2012a: 1)

As suggested by the case study data, however, the role of Ofsted is more complex than providing an 'objective' judgement of a school's performance. Ofsted holds

power to construct an official account of the school, a public stamp of dis/approval which can affect the school's sense of self worth. The relationship between 'them' (Ofsted) and 'us' (the school) resonates with Mead's (1934) dialectic of 'I and me', where Ofsted has the symbolic function of 'others' in the formation of a school's selfhood (see section 3.2.3, p.53). The 'I' ('we') expresses the school's sense of self, which emerges from within and is constrained by 'me' ('us') formed by the Ofsted judgement. The references to 'we' and 'us' are suggestive of this dialectic:

> Ofsted looked upon us more favourably this time... because we've managed to maintain standards. (Stephen)

> ...obviously we'd be doing our own evaluation... we didn't feel that we could be graded as 'satisfactory' for ourselves for a long, long time, and so it just felt: 'Oh, thank goodness!' It was a really good relief [that Ofsted graded us as 'good']. (Angelika)

It is because of the tension between 'we' and 'us' that responses to Ofsted can be riddled with contradictions, as demonstrated by the 2007 inspection at Abbey discussed in section 5.2 (p.85) above. Jenny's point that 'it all depends on the team' was repeated by Stephen and Miriam, who, following a positive Ofsted judgement, were relieved and concluded that the judgement was 'fair' (Miriam). Whereas the 'positive' Ofsted grade caused positive responses at GLP, the unfavourable Ofsted judgement for Abbey Primary, which contradicted the school's own self evaluation, was eventually dismissed by Abbey staff as Ofsted team's bias. Paradoxically, however, Jenny's only regret on retiring from a forty-year career in education was that she has not had the experience of leading a school judged as 'outstanding' by Ofsted: 'the one thing that I do regret is that we have not yet been judged outstanding'.

Recurring in accounts of Ofsted inspections is a theme of chance influencing Ofsted judgements. The 'element of chance' is a result of the interplay of a number factors: the team and their 'script', the timing of the inspection, the school's 'performance' and the 'us' - 'them' interaction on the day (Table 6.3):

'Element of chance'	Participant's reflection
Ofsted team	I think we've been very lucky with the two teams that we've had... and I think it's a reflection on the team leader. (Stephen) So I think it was the team and also the fact that we'd been here longer and we'd been in our roles longer. Yeah, it was a fair team. (Miriam)
Timing of inspection	I think we were fortunate we got it in, and because we weren't expecting it until December at the earliest, but it came earlier than we were expecting which I think is a blessing because otherwise it's there, it's a black cloud that Ofsted are coming... And we were lucky, we were told on the Thursday I think, and they came in on the Monday, so we did have a weekend. Well it wasn't really a weekend because we were all in here. But it was useful. (Miriam)
School's performance on the day	People put phenomenal effort into the visit and really put themselves forward in a very positive way. The children, everyone was fantastic. (Angelika) By and large though, I do think they got a good snapshot. (Stephen)
Interaction with Ofsted inspectors	But we knew that we had to perform and when a couple of lessons didn't go as well as the teacher would have hoped, very impressed with the way that the Ofsted team dealt with it. It was really sensitively done. (Stephen) And I found when I had the one to one interviews with them it was very useful because it wasn't just interrogation, it was very constructive advice that I got... I've never had a team that involved me personally as deputy head quite so much, so I do find that quite useful. And the leading inspector came down at the end of the first day and said, you know, how it had gone that day, so you feel quite informed. (Miriam)
Ofsted inspectors' 'script'	They were much hotter this year, I mean it's still the end of the old regime, late autumn 2011 before the new Ofsted kicked in, but they were very much, much tighter on the way we carried out lesson observations... we're all clever enough to know that the next Ofsted inspector will have a different script, a completely different script. (Stephen)

Table 6.3 'Element of chance' in accounts of Ofsted inspection at GLP

Despite the element of chance, the dominant theme in the 'ritual' of communication between Ofsted and the school is statistical data and other 'objective' evidence. At GLP, in accordance with official Ofsted protocols (2011b), the ritual of interaction consisted of a pre-inspection briefing, the actual inspection visit, feedback meeting and official report containing letters to the stakeholders. The focus on statistical data and evidence was established from the outset and continued during the visit:

> in their pre-inspection briefing they'd picked up from our SEF that our Pakistani pupils in last year's year 6 hadn't performed ahead of the rest...
> And they were very good at coming back to us if they weren't hundred percent sure on something, so for example they wanted more evidence of our community cohesion, so we were able to find that evidence. (Miriam)

The purpose of the feedback meeting on the last day of inspection was to report the preliminary findings and advice for how to move the school forward:

the Ofsted team invited not just Stephen into the meetings but myself... And I found that very useful and I learnt an awful lot from that because they talked us through their decisions, they said 'we're plumping for this grade because…' and then they gave us some constructive feedback, they were saying things like 'well if we were head of this school, this is something that we would look at, this is somewhere where we'd want to go next.'... they give you your key targets to work on, but because we were involved in their feedback meeting, we were also able to pick up a lot more than is written down. They were very good, we were allowed to make copious notes on everything that they were saying so that we made our own sort of if you like targets from that... I did find it as positive as an Ofsted can be! (Miriam)

The image of Miriam and Stephen making 'copious notes' in the feedback meeting is symbolic of the power relations in the Ofsted-school interaction. Only senior school leaders are invited to the meeting and the lack of mutuality in the interaction is signalled by phrases such as: 'they talked us through', 'they give you your key targets to work on', and the use of passive voice in 'we were allowed to make copious notes'.

It is not only the schools that 'perform' for Ofsted (Perryman 2009), the inspectors themselves work to a 'script', of which an official report is the final act. The report for GLP turned out to be a gesture asserting that, indeed, the last word belongs to Ofsted. Miriam had addressed the initial query about the performance of the group of Pakistani boys with an analysis supported by detailed pupil data: 'they were pleased that we were able to lay our hands on that data and then use it to provide analysis. So we did show them that, yes.' However, the final Ofsted report pointed to the 'underachievement' of the same group of boys as one of the school's weaknesses, much to Stephen's disappointment:

> The only sticking point really in the report was that they honed in on a very small, probably unrepresentative group of students and made a generalization about the progress that Pakistani boys made. And we weren't comfortable with that, because we dredged through our data and showed that often children, their identity is defined not just by their cultural background, but also they might well be on the SEN register as well, and free school meals. I just thought they kind of extrapolated something which didn't really reflect. Because I think it might have caused concern to parents from a Pakistani background, there was just a suspicion that they didn't make the progress they should.

In contrast to Ofsted, Stephen is thinking about the significance of the report for the parents of this group of boys and parental concern the report may raise.

The meaninglessness of aspects of Ofsted's 'performance' is illustrated by Ofsted letters to children following the inspection. In accordance with children being perceived as stakeholders in schools, Ofsted inspectors are obliged to draft a letter to pupils, 'thanking them for their involvement and providing information about the main outcomes of the inspection' (Ofsted 2011b: 27). These standardised Ofsted letters inform the children of the grades their school has been given, by telling them, for example that they 'attend an excellent school', or that their school's 'overall effectiveness is satisfactory'. In the case of the inadequate judgement, the wording will express that 'the inspectors feel that many of you are not making the progress that you are capable of... so we will be checking on your progress very carefully' (Ofsted 2011c). For five-year-olds, or eleven-year-olds a school is a place where they belong, where their friends are, where children from unstable homes may find stability. Interpreted as a gesture (Mead 1934), Ofsted letters signify a meaningless intrusion of the state and its officials into the children's world (Figure 6.4):

Extracts from Ofsted (2008) letter to pupils:

Dear Pupils

Thank you very much for helping us with the inspection of your school... We agree with your headteacher, the staff and governors that the school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory...

Extracts from Ofsted (2011) letter to pupils: This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children...

Dear Pupils

We agree with you that your school is good and that you learn new things quickly.
These are some of the things we found out about your school...
- All of the adults in the school look after you well. They give you good help when you are struggling with your work.
- The school is led and managed well and all of the adults are working very hard to make the school even better.
This is what we have asked your school to do next...

- Make sure that all leaders are able to visit lessons to see how well you are doing...
- Make sure that marking and target setting give you a clear picture of the next steps in your learning.

Figure 6.4   Extracts from Ofsted letters addressed to Green Lanes pupils (details which could compromise the anonymity of the school have been removed)

Despite the contradictions and inconsistencies and despite 'the way it can damage schools just by sweeping judgments and things it doesn't know enough about' (Pete), Ofsted's claims to 'objective' judgements appeared to be taken for granted by most participants. That some of the judgements are arbitrary and superficial is implicit in Stephen's account:

> So on that first morning I was kind of put under the spotlight and how I graded the lessons that I saw. As it happened, the lead inspector who was with me was really hot, I mean he was a difficult guy to please, and he said to me that in something like 10 years he'd only given something like six 'outstandings' in all of the lessons. And he wasn't a monster, I mean his argument was that it's so difficult to prove that all of the children in that class have made above average progress in that one hour.

The lead inspector cast himself as 'a difficult guy to please' based on an interpretation of a difficulty to 'prove' the level of progress for all children a lesson. His justification for refusing to grade the lessons he has observed over 10 years as 'outstanding' has two implications. Firstly, it suggests an unwillingness to enter into the attitude of teachers; it is his role to 'give' grades based on his own interpretation of what he observes in a lesson. Secondly, he appears to take for granted an unrealistic and un-measurable criterion for an 'outstanding lesson' - 'proof' that all children in class 'have made above average progress in that one hour'. Stephen's evaluation of lead inspector's attitude highlights both the 'ridiculous' nature of Ofsted criteria for lesson grading and personal intentions behind the 'objectivity' of lesson grades:

> if you've got this bit in the level descriptors that says all of the children make above average, I mean you think that's a ridiculous thing to write in there in the first place, because it's just not attainable... He made the point that as a headteacher you wouldn't want somebody who turned out outstanding lessons day after day, because he said you cannot sustain that.

In the light of Pete's argument that 'school improvement should come from within', the Ofsted practice of setting unsustainable, unachievable criteria merits a question whether the ritual of inspection has purposes other than genuine, meaningful improvement. Ofsted inspectors' claims to authority appear to be sanctioned by the power of office and a privileged 'expert' perspective. By claiming a superior

epistemological position, Ofsted's 'rituals of verification' create a gulf between 'poorly rewarded 'doing' and highly rewarded 'observing'' (Power 1997: 147) which can damage the understanding embedded in practice. As Jardine (1998: 23) points out, educational practice does not need to be made meaningful by an expert observing the classroom from a privileged vantage point, because...

> ...something is already at play, and the living character of this setting is not waiting upon the inquirer for some beneficent bestowal of meaning. It is already meaningful, and these connections must not be severed in order to understand them; they must, rather, be delicately gathered in all their contingency, locatedness, and difficulty... Understanding this situation is something everyone in this classroom is already involved in, teacher and children alike.

6.5   The *National Strategies* and the marketplace: *'a waiting game'*

Ofsted's ritual of inspections, performed to legitimate claims to 'raising standards improving lives' gains a deeper significance when considered in the context of the neoliberal agendas of the New Labour and Conservative governments discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. As Fairclough (2003: 88) explains, following Max Weber's (1964) argument, 'every system of authority attempts to establish and to cultivate the belief in its legitimacy' and Ofsted appears to play a powerful part in this process. Michael Barber's account of a change in focus from the *National Strategies* to 'quasi-marketisation' of education reveals another layer underpinning government education reform agenda:

> Between 2001 and 2005 what Blair increasingly hankered after was a way of improving the education system that didn't need to be constantly driven by government. He wanted to develop self-sustaining, self-improving systems, and that led him to look into how to change not just the standards and the quality of teaching, but the structures and incentives. Essentially it's about creating different forms of a quasi-market in public services, exploiting the power of choice, competition, transparency and incentives. (Mead, S. 2006)

The stakes here are not just on legitimating the position and power of the policy-maker as a detached, autonomous observer claiming privileged knowledge of educational improvement. The stakes are also on legitimating the neoliberal ideology. At the 'grass roots of change', in the two case study schools, the

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manifestations of the 'quasi-market' ranged from competition in league tables, glossy brochures and websites with promotional messages to concerns about the more recent policy changes brought by the Coalition government, in particular the conversion to Academy status (DfE 2010a). Paradoxically, the relief of being 'released from the rigour of the strategies' (Stephen) has been accompanied by new concerns about funding cuts, new pay and teaching conditions and teachers playing 'the waiting game':

> Obviously the new curriculum was supposed to come out last year, but then the change of government meant that it's been held off, we're now obviously still waiting. It is very much a waiting game at the moment to see what they propose. I mean obviously they are all now suggesting that we'll become academies, very much giving us the business side... I'm unsure of what's going to happen... (Annabel)

In the process of legitimating the power to define and control education reform, the successive UK governments have established and continued a kind of communication where teachers seem to take the 'obviousness' of 'the waiting game' for granted. The dynamic in this conversation of gestures is premised on policy-makers' power to gesture and schools' response to 'wait' and 'obviously, follow them, as we're meant to' (Fiona). The resulting loss of teacher agency and reconstruction of the meaning of teaching and learning are discussed in detail in Chapter 7. This section focuses on the manifestations of the marketplace in the everyday practice of Abbey and Green Lanes Primary.

As articulated by some participants, the complexities and pressures of everyday practice are exacerbated by the neoliberal commodification of education, which obliges the school to be a 'top' provider in the marketplace, to be 'world-class'. This has led to 'very bad years for education in this element of competition and in this who's got what from Ofsted and somewhere along the line we seemed to lose the notion of working together and helping each other' (Sophie). Sophie was the only participant to express a concern about the consequences of the business orientation which some schools have been adopting:

> We have to work to a development plan, not a business plan, and we don't want to make a profit... You know, it's not a marketplace in that sense... in

some of the schools they've gone another road, and it might be terribly efficient and they've cut their staffing bills, but the quality for the children at the end of the day is not just measureable in how many level 4's or GCSEs or whatever those children have got. It's the life experience, it's the kind of person they're going to turn out to be. (Sophie)

Another concern of a moral nature was expressed by Alice talking about moral considerations shared in a governors' meeting in relation to the possibility of converting Abbey Primary to an academy:

…as an academy you're potentially taking money away from schools that need the money for the Local Authority support. They're going to have less… that's something we were talking about in governors' meeting, about our moral obligation really as a teacher is to all children, not just to children in our school. What's best for all children?

Most concerns related to the conversion to Academy status and voiced by staff at Abbey Primary were linked to the possible changes in teachers' pay and conditions of work:

We don't know about the academies. Local Authorities will go, what will that mean? And certainly if I was a teacher thinking that the school might become and academy it would be on the terms and conditions that might change and, if they are not going to change **now**, but two years down the line… (Jenny)

...when you think of academies, schools are going to have to become businesses. (Annabel)

...the fact that all schools are turning into academies, that's a real concern... We don't know what that means. The school's turning into an academy, what does it mean for us? Does that mean we lose contracts? Do we get less pay? Do our rights change? So at the moment people are talking about the school possibly turning into an academy, but we haven't been told what the benefits are, what it means for us as a staff, what's going to change... So we shall see what goes on. (Maria)

Whilst both Jenny and Maria express uncertainty about the meaning of the Academies policy, Jenny's astute observation that this may lead to teacher terms and conditions changing 'two years down the line' contrasts with Maria's passive expectation to 'be told' what it means for teachers. Such passivity is a recurring pattern in other accounts of concerns about recent government policy. Notable in

participants' 'worry over' uncertainty and concerns 'about' the impending changes was the absence of questioning 'why' these changes are being introduced and whose purposes they may serve. Implicit in questions about 'how' the changes may affect education was the imperative for schools to implement what the Government 'are going to decide':

> We have concerns about the way in which the new academies are going to work... How the Local Authorities are going to work now. (Alice)

> How does that then affect us, are we supposed to... (Annabel)

> Government will tell you how much you'll get per pupil and you'll have to cut your cloth accordingly to that. (Eve)

Maria's conclusion that 'we shall see what goes on' is a symbolic expression of the attitude of teachers 'waiting' to see what happens. Policy-makers' version of the conversation of gestures executed through command and control seems to have institutionalised teachers' role as 'policy takers' (Gunter and Forrester 2009). By playing 'the waiting game' teachers may be contributing to legitimating this way of communication.

6.6 'Strategic' leadership? *'I don't think we've come across strategic leadership just yet, so I'm not sure'*

Gemma's admission that she is 'not sure' about 'strategic' leadership encapsulates most participants' responses to the question about 'strategic' leadership. Some elements of the dominant conceptualisations of 'strategic' leadership feature in the schools' websites and other outward facing texts, i.e. School Development Plans and school policies. The schools' websites display characteristics of 'promotional genres': they simultaneously provide information and promote the school (Fairclough 2003). For example, each school's home page displays the vision and mission statement and a 'strap line' encapsulating the core values. The language is 'positive', pinpointing achievement, listing awards and providing links to SATs results and Ofsted reports. In neither school, however, has there been an explicit patterning of talk using the language of strategic leadership as defined for example by Brent Davies (2006). As discussed in section 2.4.3 (p.41), Davies promotes the model of a 'strategically

focused school' as crucial for sustainable school improvement. The word 'strategy' and 'strategic' were used in interviews mainly in relation to the *National Strategies* and most participants needed an explanation of 'strategic' leadership (Appendix 3a, p.211). Although 'strategic' thinking and 'visioning' play a part in some of the decisions taken by the leadership of both schools, they seem to provide a peripheral rather than core role in Jenny's and Stephen's approaches to headship.

Jenny labels her approach as 'distributed leadership', based on a 'broad' senior leadership team and a culture of 'developing people'. Her approach is a result of years of lived experience and common sense:

> ...no one person can do everything brilliantly, you've got to let other people help out... And different people have come on board, because you can only do so much yourself, and you get keen young people and they say 'oooh, have you heard about that? Should we be looking at that?' And I'll say 'yeah, let's do it, you're going to do it and I'll join with you.' So you gradually get people on board who want the school to be the best, and it's self-perpetuated, it grows and grows and grows...

Jenny's relationships with her staff are 'matriarchal', based on her belief in the 'power' of high expectation: 'same as you do with a class of children in a school full of teachers... teachers do the same'. She is trusting and generous in rewarding hard work and initiative with leadership responsibilities:

> ... she's very, very good. If you want to do something, and you've come up with a way to do it, she'll let you have a go... She's very good at saying: 'I don't know what's going on every day, it's a massive school, I expect one of you to know.' (Alice)

> ...and it's very much that delegation and the trust. And I suppose you need that in such a large school, Jenny can't do absolutely everything, so it's really nice she has that trust and that confidence in us... (Annabel)

> …she has trust in us really, that we can do these things... (Fiona)

Jenny's 'matriarchal', enabling approach is replicated by the middle leaders, who see their leadership responsibility as 'helping out' and supporting junior members of staff and delegating responsibility (Annabel, Emma, Maria, Maggie, Mark). Similarly, whilst talking about leadership, junior members of staff referred to their year group

or phase group leader as someone to 'go to and see' for support, with questions and problems (e.g. Gemma, Angie, Sylvia).

Jenny's 'métis' (Scott 1998), her practical knowledge and wisdom, win her staff's support and commitment in implementing government-driven reform:

> Certainly the way I've always approached it with teachers, is, because you can get this doom and gloom, whereas I said, 'well, we've got to do it, let's find the easiest way for us to do it.' No point moaning, they will make us do this, so let's find the easiest way, and the teachers will buy into that. They'll say 'ok, we've got to do it… but this will make it a bit easier for ourselves.'

Jenny's métis (see also section 7.3, p.128) and 'strategic' thinking ensured extra funding and reputation of being at the forefront of change:

> The other thing we **do** do here, we like to see what's around the corner... We like to try and be one step ahead, try hard to be one step ahead...

For example, the outreach programmes which are taught at the school...

> ... only started by chance. That again was me being asked by the Local Authority to support schools, and that started generating income. And then we thought 'oooh', and it was round the same time that schools were being given for example things like matched funding. Now a lot of secondary schools had bought into that, but primaries hadn't cottoned on. So our chair of Governors went 'oooh'. And so we managed to fund a lot of our building developments through matched funding. Now once other primaries cottoned on, the opportunities dried up a bit.

One of the last of Jenny's tasks at Abbey before retiring was to 'find' a Headteacher who would 'follow in her footsteps':

> And that was one of the things that the Governors said when they sent out all the details for the job, that they wanted somebody who was keen on distributed leadership because that's something that the Governing body recognise as a strength.

Having met Pete at a conference and found out that 'he thinks along the same wavelength', Jenny used her métis to win him over, as suggested by Pete's account:

I was in a conference with the head of this school who was retiring, and we were chatting about the job and about her school, and she said 'come and see it.' And I said, 'well, I'm not looking for a job,' and she said 'well, see it anyway!' (*we laugh*) ...So that's why I'm here... Jenny had been here quite a while and was an outstanding head, and I've got a lot to live up to...

Stephen calls himself a 'reflective democrat' and his approach has also won him great respect amongst his staff and put Green Lanes Primary on a path to improvement. Having completed the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), Stephen is aware of the importance of vision, because 'the v-word is one that's always thrown at you at NPQH'. His 'vision' is a result of a lot of thinking and reflection, in contrast to Davies's (2006) simplistic prescription for a vision to create 'meaning in people's lives':

to begin with you're starting with an empty cup in front of you, you think: 'I don't think I've got a vision', but when you actually explore what's important to you, what you do on a daily basis, you can then kind of extrapolate what are the things that are at the core, the reason why you went into education... So the things that were really important to me were communication... letting people know what you're doing and why you're doing it, and not just staff but children as well. If you want the children to be fair-minded, you have to explain to them why you're doing something...

Vision is also about visibility and being a role model, enabling everyone to consider questions such as: 'what do we feel about this? What will this look like to the children here?' Unlike Jenny, who focused on developing teachers but not teaching assistants, Stephen believes in involving and listening to everyone:

I want people, not just my senior teachers, but I want, you know, my midday supervisors to come up and say 'look, can we try doing this **this** way?' Because I think that's how schools develop and become better, when people feel that their voice matters, that they can come forward and say things...

Stephen's approach resonates with those of his staff, who define good leadership as listening, 'never making snap judgements' and 'taking it slowly'. For example, Miriam's door is 'always open':

> people do pop in, and everybody wants to speak to you about different things, and it's treating everybody's whatever they want to speak to you about as just as important... So I try to make sure everybody knows I'm listening to them, and I take what they want to say very seriously... everybody needs to be listened to... Everybody's important; everybody's needs to feel that they've got the opportunity to get their voice heard...

Stephen's and Miriam's leadership has created a 'relaxed working environment' (Alison), 'lovely, all inclusive atmosphere' (Angelika). The model of 'responsive-responsible' leadership espoused by the senior and middle leaders at GLP has been summarised by Louise as follows:

> ...leadership means you're responsible for a team, and you have to lead from the front... you're leading by example and you're leading by enabling your staff to do what they do best, and showing them what they can do, and appreciating what they can do... I have to be myself, I have to make sure that I'm seen to be enjoying my role, that I am good in my role, that I listen, that I act...

Far from espousing to the 'purity' of 'textbook' models, the approaches to leadership at Abbey and Green Lanes Primary work in practice and exemplify what Gunter (2012) would label as 'educational leadership', leadership underpinned by the lived experience of being an educator. The importance of having this experience has been highlighted by Miriam, Sophie and Alice, who, as Deputy Heads, could have chosen the detachment of 'office jobs' and given up teaching. None has chosen to do so. Alice understands that regular teaching maintains her credibility: 'if you're not in the classroom teaching, very quickly other staff become a bit disillusioned with what you're saying'. Miriam appreciates the 'working knowledge' that teaching gives her:

> I've got that working knowledge rather than it just being 'well I've looked on a piece of paper it says there this level so why haven't they made the progress?' I've been in there and seen.

Concerned about the recent drive for replacing Headteachers with Chief Executive Officers, Sophie pointed out that:

> it's essential that the leadership team are experienced teachers... I don't at all buy into the notion that you can bring somebody out of the industry and make them Headteacher of a school. Because I think first and foremost

Headteacher is to be Head**teacher**… And you can put in a business manager, no problems, to do all the finance and admin and all the rest of it, but you've got to have a lead teacher in there, somebody who really knows and understands what the job is about.

Sophie's argument applies equally to a manager from industry, an Ofsted inspector or a policy-maker. No claim to expertise or detached vantage point can replace understanding which has emerged from being directly involved in the everyday lifeworld of a primary school.

6.7 Conclusion

In addressing research question 2, this chapter focused on the *National Strategies* and patterns of communication between the policy-makers and schools which became habitualised in the processes of their dissemination, implementation and monitoring. Mead's (1934) theory of the conversation of gestures posits communication as an ongoing responsive process between 'embodied' participants. The meaning which emerges from communication is based not just on the actual 'content' expressed through linguistic symbols, but also on the patterning of the gesture and response sequence between the actual participants in the social act. The command and control communication institutionalised by the *National Strategies* established a pattern of interaction whereby schools 'wait' for policy-makers' gestures. The meaning arising in this communication is that of hierarchies in which the voice and understanding of practitioners are of little significance in relation to the superior knowledge of policy-makers. The main consequence of the lack of mutuality is teachers' dependency on policy-makers' decisions about educational improvement. This, in turn, prevents progressive change, predicated on democratic social relations in which everyone is simultaneously a 'sovereign' and a 'subject':

> One is to be a subject to the degree that he is a sovereign. He is to undertake to administer rights and maintain them only insofar as he recognises those rights in others. (Mead 1956: 274)

Tensions arising from essentially un-democratic relations between policy-makers, Ofsted inspectors and school teachers appear to reflect the tensions and pressures characteristic of 'new capitalism', which maintains its domination through forms of 'ritualization... widely affected through training' (Fairclough 2003: 73). Although

little was said in the two schools about politics, the over-prescription of the *National Strategies* and the 'training' (Barber in Mead, S. 2006) provided during their introduction and the subsequent Ofsted inspections suggest that the purposes of the *National Strategies* aim at more than raising educational standards. One of the purposes behind the rhetoric of school improvement is privatisation, dressed up as 'effectiveness' and premised on the generic expertise of the 'hero of reform' (Ball 2007), the 'management guru' (Fairclough 2003) and the 'auditor' (Power 1997). The gestures which intend to 'undermine schools' (Sophie) may be an expression of this underlying privatisation agenda. Teachers' 'waiting' response may be contributing to a message that schools 'are ready for whatever is thrown at them' (Jenny). The 'can-do' culture becomes a 'double-edged sword'.

To conclude, the *National Strategies* position teachers as 'policy takers' rather than 'policy-makers' (Gunter and Forrester 2009). The command and control approach institutionalised through the *National Strategies* and other government policies silences the insights gestured by practitioners. The two Headteachers whose leadership insights are discussed above spoke about responsibility for their schools and their staff teams. Reflecting on his responsibility for improving his school, Stephen said:

> ...this school, I think when I pass it onto someone else, is going to look and feel very different. And I just hope that the positives outweigh the negatives. In terms of legacy, I think that's all you can hope for.

The 'legacy' of education reform since the introduction of the *National Strategies* is discussed in detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 7:   Everyday experience of pursuing improvement

7.1   Introduction

Chapter 7 presents the 'legacy' of the 'policy epidemic' (Levin 1998) discernible in the documents produced by both schools and in participants' interview responses. The analysis of the data collected in relation to research question 3 focused on the particularisations of generalised policy prescriptions. As discussed in section 3.2.5 (p.56), complex responsive processes theory explains that these particularisations are contingent on people's intentions, values and other complex local factors (Stacey 2010). In contrast, the policy-makers' tendency to 'see like a state' (Scott 1989) results in a synoptic view of educational transformation. Central to this view is improvement in the standards of pupil performance in national tests (Key Stage 2 SATs). The data collected in Abbey and Green Lanes Primary suggest that conversations about 'improvement' are constrained by the control mechanisms of league tables and Ofsted inspections and the sheer proliferation of policies which schools are obliged to implement. However, despite participants' tendency to 'speak like the state' and 'do' what the state demands, their interpretations of government notions of improvement were not uniform nor totally compliant. Some participants appeared to hold on to alternative notions of 'improvement', for example a 'more rounded education' (Jeanne) and 'the whole child' (Sophie, Miriam). These notions existed in tension with the dominant improvement agendas imposed on the schools. Many participants conveyed a sense of being out of control. Some of them seemed to struggle for clarity when articulating their own personal understanding of 'school improvement'. Conversely, embracing the dominant construction of improvement as raising SATs results seemed to give professionals a sense of certainty, especially when coupled with career aspirations for a leadership role.

The 'performing school' (Perryman 2009) is becoming increasingly competent at 'performing' in examinations and for Ofsted inspectors, in tune with government prescription. It works very hard on developing sophisticated systems for 'tracking' the performance of pupils and teachers. However, the focus of local conversations on the minutiae of assessment and performance data diminishes opportunities for discussions oriented towards deeper understanding. The volume, timescales,

fragmentation and arbitrariness characteristic of the 'policy epidemic' constrain professionals in talking about how the 'new' educational 'good practice' (DfEE 1998) for which they are made accountable may affect the children in their care, beyond improving SATs scores and beyond their primary school years.

The proliferation of the 'public transcript' of educational 'transformation' produced by the Government since 1998 creates a strong physical presence in numerous, bulky folders with policies and other documents which take up the shelf space in the classrooms and offices. Sophie's small office is full of shelves with heavy folders, top to bottom on two walls. As mentioned in Chapter 6 (p.104), many of these documents have been created by the schools themselves, as 'local policies' based on the *National Strategies* and other central policies. Notably, I have not encountered a single reference to 'transformation' in school documentation or interviews in either of the two schools. That the 'policy epidemic' has profoundly affected and is transforming the practice and local conversations at both schools is however apparent from the data to which I now turn.

7.2   The public transcript of school improvement: *'they've just sort of airbrushed it out as if it doesn't matter'*

Analysis of interview transcripts revealed a significant convergence with the government discourse of 'improvement'. However, most articulations of the 'public transcript' (Scott 1990), the language which expressed compliance with the official, dominant themes of standards, targets and SATs results, acknowledged both the complexities of educational change and the particularities of the local context. The data discussed in this section reveal a range of contextual factors which have been 'just sort of airbrushed... out as if it doesn't matter' (Jenny) from the public transcript of school improvement.

Participants' tendency towards 'speaking like the state' is implicit in the following statements:

> Whether you like it or not, people make value judgements for our school based on results… Raising standards is priority number one… (Stephen)

> I think assessment and standards have always been very, very important which is something, being the assessment manager now, it's something I'll get my teeth into and focus on SATS and getting all the standards up. (Maggie)

The use of 'obviously' implies that standards and targets are unquestionable and inevitable - taken for granted:

> Obviously there are the basic ideas of teaching and learning and raising standards and we're trying to work on those all of the time. (Angelika)

> And obviously we have all our monitoring systems to ensure that our teaching is up to the correct standard... Should I see that results aren't up to standard, I'd go in and say 'what resources are you looking at? Obviously they're not working brilliantly; let's have a look at adapting and changing things.' (Annabel)

> Obviously, we're very driven in terms of targets… (Miriam)

At Abbey Primary, targets are set not just for the pupils, but also for the 'hard to reach families':

> We have our family support worker who will use targets for certain targeted families. We are good I think, if we've got any families we're finding hard to reach, at actually really targeting the families. (Alice)

The standards agenda has been also embraced by the parents. Despite the choice and voice rhetoric (PSR 2006), parents' aspirations for their children were also framed as achievement in SATs:

> SATs is one of the measures and it's good because it is a measure… It is a measure, but it's not the only one. That's one of the things here that parents like about us - everything else we offer the children. It isn't just academic – of course they love the academic - but they like everything else. (Jenny)

Abbey Primary seems to be caught up in between the 'hard to reach' families who 'wave the children off in the morning and... it's nothing to do with them any more' (Eve) and parents who have very high aspirations for their children. Emma, an Early Years teacher who had previously worked in a school serving families from a big local estate, finds Abbey parents 'quite pushy':

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I think a lot of the parents view this school almost as a private school and they expect their children to achieve. They will push us, the parents, to make sure that we change the reading books: 'Is this book hard enough?'

A *Home-School Liaison Book* communication between a parent and teacher (Figure 7.1) is an example of a parent implicitly 'pushing' for five-year-old Anya to be given books which are 'hard enough'. The teacher responds by affirming her professional judgment; Anya needs to consolidate her reading of the Consonant-Vowel-Consonant words:

Teacher: *Fluent, confident reading... great reading Anya, a good pace...*
...Read really well without any help. Well done. Finished book.

Parent: *No problem reading this book. Anya is finding these books a little repetitive and boring.*

Teacher: *Anya read well. These books do seem easier than previous books in the scheme, but are in fact the same level and help children to read CVC words. There are only four more in the scheme!*
...Anya tried really hard with her sounding out of new words. Lots of unfamiliar words but sounded out very well
...You are really improving Anya. Lovely reading, very fluent. Super star! And a star sticker!

Figure 7.1 Teacher-parent communication in a *Home-School Liaison Book*

Parental aspiration and concern are particularly pronounced in the context of secondary school transfer. For some Abbey children, as Liz (Year 5 and 6 teacher) points out, the process starts at the age of seven, with private tuition to prepare them for tests to selective local secondary schools. It reaches a peak in Years 5 and 6:

the practice tests and [selective schools] tests go on in Year 5 and obviously they have all of their tutors... and straight away parents' evening times we talk about different schools and different marks that they need to get... When we started in Year 6, they were having weeks off [school] for revision leading up to tests... So it's quite a lot of pressure... and then it's a knock on effect if they don't get it...

During the secondary schools test period, the children talk a lot about secondary transfer and 'their anxiety levels hit the roof' (Liz). Less than ten percent of Abbey children actually get into the selective secondary schools they apply for.

At the other end of the spectrum between parental aspiration and neglect, are troubled families. Several Abbey and Green Lanes teachers had worked in schools in deprived areas and taught children who were brought up in families which suffered poverty, drug abuse, mental health and other issues. The priorities in such schools ranged from finding money to provide food for children who came to school hungry (Angelika), giving them 'wraparound care' (Emma), to managing 'children throwing chairs' in the classroom and 'very aggressive parents' in the playground (Fiona). Jenny joked about 'parents knocking on your door threatening to kick you' in some schools where she used to work. In a serious tone, she noticed that...

> …we are now everything to everybody. We are social workers, we are... you name it. And the school is **it**. You sometimes feel like: 'drop them off at six months, pick them up when they're sixteen'… You are responsible for your community, we **do** do a lot of what social services used to do.

Schools in less deprived areas have other parenting issues as well, for example 'over-permissive parenting'. Sophie and Jenny first met at Grange Hill School, where the lack of parental discipline was notorious. Sophie recalled this experience as follows:

> And I remember very, very vividly standing in the playground on the first day, looking at her and her looking at me and saying: 'We must be mad, why on earth did we do this?' Because there were parents standing over with cigarettes, there were dogs running around, bikes racing around, Year 6's in dropping earrings and high heels and we thought: 'Where do we go with this primary school?'

Sophie spent her first months at Grange Hill 'sorting out emergencies':

> all our focus had to be on holding the day together and when we first went there I did nothing but patrol the corridors for hours on end, because the behaviour was so out of control in places...

The contingencies of local contexts mean that the relentless focus on test scores may be not only meaningless, but also unrealistic, as emphasised by Sophie and Jenny:

> it is so much more difficult to get children coming from a home background where there's terrible things going on at home, and you're expected to get them to a level 4. (Jenny)

> …the school is seen as the agency that should sort out all the social problems that we have… held more and more accountable for every issue in society... A lot of teachers find it quite distressing sometimes when they get the blame for not getting the best results from a child who comes without breakfast, never does homework, was up till 11 o'clock watching heavens knows what on television. (Sophie)

The policy-makers' focus on 'steering' schools 'at a distance' (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012: 73) fails to take into account the contingencies of local contexts, which mean that simply 'holding the day together' may be a nearly impossible achievement in some schools. The most recent state simplification which is causing concern in both schools is the abolition of the Contextual Value Added (CVA) measure, which used to include some of the contextual factors in test results statistics (Raiseonline 2011). 'And they've just sort of airbrushed it out, as if it doesn't matter', said Jenny and became silent for a while.

7.3 'School improvement' in everyday practice: *'Leave that for the power that be to decide'?*

The institutionalisation of dominant notions of improvement is premised on the power of discourse. Government discourse forces professionals into the dominant patterns for the ongoing, habitual objectifications of everyday experience (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Hacking 1999). Such objectifications are a result of repetition, silencing of alternative discourses and the use of power to control behaviour and eliminate difference. Discourse has therefore power to 'produce' what is perceived as the objective 'reality' (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 137). As the dominant conceptualisations of school improvement enter everyday conversations, they gradually 'materialise' in everyday practice, school 'systems' and structures as if they were 'objective' and 'real'. Once the assumption that SATs results are 'objective' measures of improvement is taken for granted, it loses its character of a 'social construct'.

This section presents an analysis of participants' understandings of 'school improvement' and how they enact it in everyday practice. It is underpinned by Sophie's insight that 'you can write policies or produce resources or whatever till

you're blue in the face, but at the end it's the teachers and the teaching assistants who make it work for the children'. In the course of ordinary everyday routines, when the inspectors have gone and policies have been put on a shelf, improvement may or may not be on the mind of an individual teacher or teacher assistant, as they are engaging in practice. Because interview articulations of school improvement are also 'of a moment', the following analysis has aimed at 'fuzzy generalisations' (Bassey 1999) rather than categorical conclusions regarding participants' conceptualisations of 'improvement'. As discussed in section 4.4 (pp.70-3), the mapping in Figure 7.2 below is based on the discourse analysis of participants' answers.
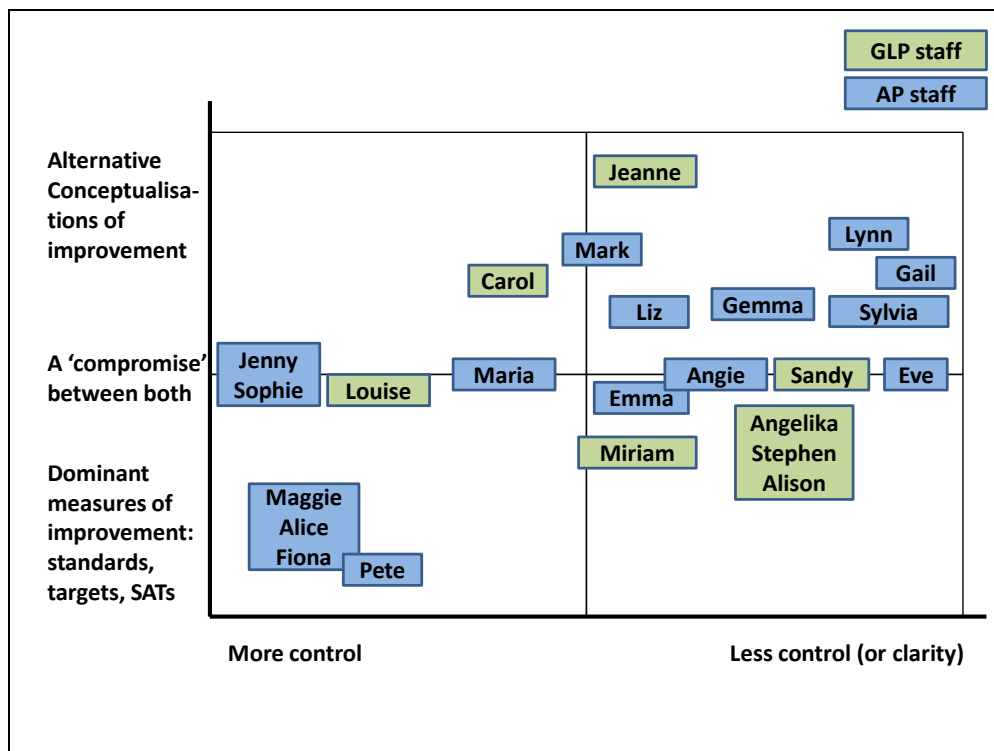
Figure 7.2   Construct analysis: participants' conceptualisations of 'school improvement'

As shown in Figure 7.2, the majority of participants appeared to concur with the dominant conceptualisation of improvement as the drive for standards, though half of them emphasised also that SATs grades are not 'the only measure'. Alternative conceptualisations of improvement could be categorised as: better teaching, improved physical environment and 'happy, confident and secure' children (Gail,

TA). In Jenny's understanding, improvement is 'about everything across the board... because you can improve SATs as long as you improve everything else about the school'. This understanding resonates with Sophie's:

> Though I do believe it is very, very important that we get the children to the highest possible academic standard before they go to high school, I believe that should be done alongside developing them as a whole person. So we should be sending out children who are confident and who have enjoyed their school experience and want to be in school and have experienced a wide variety of activities and found their strengths and areas that they enjoy, so they've done lots of different sports, they've had exposure to the arts in different forms and they are children who love reading for the sake of it. You've got to get **all** those things in there.

There was also a sense of the inevitability of the dominant notions of improvement:

> You can't escape the fact that there are certain measurable aspects that are easy to measure. School improvement you know, you've got to look at SATs results, you'd be stupid not to. (Stephen)

> Obviously, the overriding improvement has to be the scores on the doors... (Eve)

Noteworthy in Miriam's answer is the use of active voice, asserting agency and ownership, when talking about her own improvement priorities and the passive participle 'driven' when talking about targets:

> Obviously, we're very driven in terms of targets, but there are different priorities, for example you know how we have a very diverse population, we've got a large percentage of children without gardens or an outdoor space to play in. Obviously, our focus will be on providing opportunities for those children...

The use of the contrastive conjunction 'but' and further elaboration of the school's 'different' priorities implies that Miriam may not have embraced the targets agenda as her 'own' personal conceptualisation of 'improvement'. The use of the generic pronoun 'you' in the context of 'high targets' below, and a further repetition of 'but' implies the same:

> And obviously, you've got high targets, but in your school your focus is to meet the needs of the children, and their needs according to their home situation.

Most participants who expressed reservations about, or denied the dominant construction of improvement, positioned themselves as expert in their own roles in the classroom, but not in control of improvement in their school (see Appendix 3c, p.215 for detailed analytic memos). For example, Lynn denied what she perceives as the dominant focus of Abbey teachers on SATs results, but her use of modalised assertions, 'hedges' ('sort of') and repetition of 'I suppose' implies little authority in this regard in her role as a TA:

> I suppose for me personally it's different to what their [teachers'] improvement would be, obviously results and league tables, that sort of thing. I suppose our [TAs] improvement is seen purely as how children improve I suppose, you know we take it right down to that level because we're dealing with the children and are at the lowest point, so we're purely looking at making sure that those children improve. We're not interested in the jumps [in levels] that they make, but that they are improving term by term really.

The changes in pronouns from 'I' to 'we' express both the ownership of Lynn's own notion of improvement as supporting individual children in making progress irrespective of levels and belonging to a group 'at the lowest point' in the hierarchy, Abbey teacher assistants.

Noteworthy was the apparent lack of clarity or authority in regard to school improvement in the answers by Miriam, Stephen, Alison and Angelika, who, together with Louise (Bursar), constitute the Senior Leadership Team at GLP. Surprisingly, Stephen seemed to be at loss of words and concluded with: 'This isn't a very good answer, um...' Angelika's lack of clarity about improving literacy in the school is implied in the reference to 'things':

> I think you've always got that sort of pulsating going on between new ideas and the traditional ideas and it goes backwards and forwards a lot as things are tried.

The use of generic 'you' and the elision of agency through the passive voice in 'things are tried' recurs in Alison's discourse:

> So I think there's a lot, there's a lot of things to do, and well there will always be things to do to improve, because you can always do things differently.

Miriam also switched to passive voice when talking about the school improvement plan:

> all our leaders are involved in our improvement plan, they all work out their own action plans and then they review them... so it's very much not just a document that's just presented to people, it's very much a working document. And it's looked at throughout the year...

Paradoxically, this lack of clarity about 'improvement' could enable the team at GLP to develop local conversations reflecting on the usefulness of the 'public transcript' of improvement. The condition of not knowing in advance and the absence of strong 'systems' of local control which would force practice into habitualised actions or routine expectations is an environment for the novel to emerge (Mead 1956).

However, uncertainty and a sense of not being in control can be experienced as threatening, which would explain the appeal of the dominant conceptualisation of improvement. Apart from the status and power of the public transcript, standards, targets and SATs results represent the paradigm of certainty (Stacey 2010) and are therefore less susceptible to questioning than 'difficult to measure' alternatives, such as children's well being or happiness. A habitualisation (Berger and Luckmann 1966) of standards is apparent in the taken for granted assumptions articulated by some participants:

> some people see it [improvement] as a drive for standards: 'how can we get our 98% level 4 in Maths...?' Yes, it is, because we want every child to do their absolute best and that's what we're striving for. (Pete)
> *(The assumption here is that a drive for standards is equivalent to striving to help every child to do their absolute best.)*
>
> Yes, it's great for us as individuals to say: 'fantastic, our SATs results are great', but what we are saying by saying that is that our children are achieving their potential... (Louise)

(This is an explicit articulation of the taken-for-granted assumption that good SATs results are equivalent to children achieving their potential.)

I don't think anything is ever perfect enough. There are always improvements to be made... (Carol)
(Carol expresses a value assumption that 'nothing is ever perfect enough' and an existential assumption that it is a 'fact' that 'there are always improvements to be made'.)

That the dominant construction of improvement has permeated Alice's, Fiona's and Maggie's leadership practice is implicit in the way they talk about improvement. School improvement is 'looking at what you do' (Fiona), 'using' the school improvement plan and 'looking at' the data in Raise online (Maggie) and 'meeting regularly' to 'really look at the key teams and where they are going and how they are doing with their action plans' (Alice). As the Deputy Head and Assistant Heads respectively, Alice, Fiona and Maggie are in charge of performance management of their teams, each is also a phase leader, assessment co-ordinator (Maggie) and Early Years leader (Fiona). They therefore have considerable power and control over the structures and 'systems' of Abbey Primary. Their discourse of improvement focuses on doing and making sure that all systems run smoothly, for example consultation with 'stakeholders' and 'monitoring action plans and targets' (Fiona). For Maggie it is 'always pushing the school forward', looking at 'new strategies' or 'pulling everyone back together and saying: 'This is what you need to do, this is where we need to go, how are we getting on?' And for Alice it is about being active, 'doing':

> As a leadership team we meet regularly... We monitor the action plans of individuals... keep check of that... we performance manage quite big teams... We did the SEF altogether as a leadership team, the whole thing... Myself and her [Jenny] went to Ofsted framework training... we came back and we sat and went through the whole framework as a leadership team... So I think as a whole it's very much a leadership team, collective decision on everything. But then the rest of the staff do get a say into all of that as well.

The inclusive 'we' appears to bracket off difference amongst the leadership team and therefore denies the more complex notion of improvement expressed by Sophie and Jenny. Lost in the focus on 'doing' are the children and staff as individuals, time to reflect about the purpose of improvement, or opportunities for thinking more deeply

about what it is that the team are trying to achieve together. Alternatively, could impressions management (Alvesson 2011) be an underpinning objective of this talk? As Fairclough (2003: 112) points out, communication which simultaneously represents and advocates is indicative of the rise of 'promotional culture' in organisations and other social settings. The 'cult of positivity' (Mowles 2011) discussed in section 3.2.6 (p.57) and conveyed by Maggie, Fiona and Alice, could be interpreted as a manifestation of 'promotional culture'. Stylistically, semantically and structurally, their accounts could be categorised as 'hortatory reports', texts which constitute 'unordered lists of appearances... or evidences' (Fairclough 2003: 95).

Alice's reference to 'the rest of the staff' who 'get a say' reveals the subtleties of the hierarchies and power imbalances at Abbey. Firstly, the elaboration on the leadership team's activities is in stark contrast to a brief mention of 'the rest of the staff'; this contrast appears to undermine the school's distributed leadership practice discussed in section 6.6 (p.116). Secondly, 'getting a say' implies that agency and power are located in the leadership team and 'the rest' of the staff come last in the decision making processes. Lynn's comment below expresses both her powerlessness and an understanding that the dominant government notion of improvement embedded in the everyday practice at Abbey 'fails' some children:

> But that's the only thing that I see on a daily basis is that a few kids are failed, and we know that because they go onto high school and fail, and we hear about it... And I think it's obviously been like that for years and years and years, but I assume that they just can't find a perfect answer. Leave that for the power that be to decide.

It is these kinds of understandings which could contribute to the emergence of alternative local conversations about improvement. However, conversational patterns sustained by Alice, Maggie and Fiona may confine the communication at Abbey to the focus on positivity, uniformity and promotional language. An appearance of uniformity (Fairclough 2003) could, in turn, lead to the silencing of staff who, like Lynn, think differently. The next section discusses the 'hidden transcripts' and presents data which suggest that, despite the profound changes to practice brought about by the 'policy epidemic', 'other versions of education can still be glimpsed, other rationalities are still being murmured' (Ball et al 2012: 150).

7.4   The hidden transcripts, métis and resistance: *'Baker days, Gove plan'...*
'well, they just tinker'

As signalled in section 3.2.4 (p.54), the 'hidden transcript', articulating truths which 'cannot be spoken in the face of power' Scott (1990: xii), takes the form of jokes, anecdotes, codes and euphemisms which assert resistance to the public transcript. The most prominent themes of the 'hidden transcripts' articulated at Abbey and Green Lanes Primary were frustration with the 'policy epidemic' and concerns about negative consequences of government 'tinkering' (Jenny).

Whilst the majority of interviewees accepted the benefits of the *National Strategies*, the proliferation of policies which followed was considered problematic. The 'policy epidemic' is experienced in both schools as piecemeal, often contradictory or simply impossible to introduce within the prescribed timescales:

> It's very much government led… there's not that progression of consistency. (Alice)

> Every year something comes into the frame which is out of the blue, and it's new and it's completely different. (Angelika)

> Since I became Headteacher, there has not been a year gone past that has not been at least one, if not more, major, I mean **major** changes. (Jenny)

> I'm not sure how well thought through it's actually been, seems very very quick. (Eve)

> I think their problem is they can't seem to get to an idea and stick to it. They're constantly changing it... (Carol)

Both schools are concerned about the 'half-bakedness' that has become an absolute characteristic of government' (Angelika). The results are frustration, excessive workload and waste of resources:

> …the government can't say when things are going wrong, so they change it, they can't admit that they got it wrong. So I think they should take a step back and allow professionals to make the decisions in education. It's not fair to anybody, we put lots of effort into new initiatives and then they are not

given enough time to embed and a lot of money, huge amount of money is wasted… (Sophie)

…well they just tinker … if they'd only leave some of us alone to do what we needed to do, we'd get along with it much better. (Jenny)

...you're buying lots of stuff to back up the strategy that they've got, which then becomes defunct ... So it's a waste of money, it's confusing for teachers, it's confusing for students, and I don't know why they change their minds so much. (Carol)

The frustrations with the 'policy epidemic' have been expressed by all interviewees:

It's taken a good few years to implement this … and now it's **changing again**! Yes, I'm certainly quite calm, but… (Fiona)

The paperwork's just growing and growing and growing and growing. (Maria)

I think teachers get a bit fed up being told what to do. We're not completely stupid. (Sandy)

Frustration was also expressed in the form of jokes. For example, Stephen joked about how each new Education Secretary wanted to 'leave a legacy': 'they want things like 'Baker days', they want to be known as 'Gove plan' or something or other...'. 'Another one, new, OK' was Jenny's code for communicating new government initiatives to school governors:

We joke about it in the governing body: 'OK, another one, new, OK.' ... In fact, this year we've been a bit twitchy because we've been waiting for the changes, and they haven't told us! (*laughs*)

Many 'new' changes were simply a re-labelling of older agendas:

We go round in circles but we come up with a different name every time! (Sophie)

If you stand still long enough in primary education, you end up becoming an innovator. (Stephen)

Negative effects of 'initiativitis' (Ball et al 2012: 9) were also experienced by participants as confusion and loss of confidence in their own practice, particularly at

Green Lanes Primary. Alison remembered a period when 'they kept changing things too much, so you never got on top of anything'. Sandy spoke about a similar experience:

> ...the **constant** change leaves you feeling that you don't really know what you're supposed to be doing now... And never know if you're doing the right thing or not, or where the goalposts are.

Abbey Primary staff 'is ready for whatever they throw at them' (Jenny) and have 'that ethos of saying 'Yes' when something comes along' (Sophie). In contrast, professionals at Green Lanes Primary drew their confidence from working together on making sense of policies, even when they were not 'fully designed and... all over the place' (Angelika):

> I never quite understood the rationale exactly behind the revised curriculum. Never quite understood it... Eventually we got to the bottom of it and it was all about, the main message that came out of that one was to do with more flexibility. That was the message we took anyway.

The 'hidden transcripts' articulated in both schools suggest a disconnection from government improvement agendas. The repetition of the personal pronouns 'we' and 'our' in relation to school values and practices contrasted sharply with the use of 'they' in references to policy-makers. The sense of community, belonging and solidarity was evoked by such recurring phrases as 'our children', 'our Deputy', 'our ethnic mix', 'our school', 'our classes', 'our leadership team', 'our parents'. In contrast, policy-makers were referred to either as 'they', or eliminated altogether through the use of personification (Fiona and Maggie):

> They've given us too much paperwork. And taken the time away from actually enjoying teaching. (Maria)

> I can understand why they want to do it… (Eve)

> ...they're talking about change again… next year they could decide to bring in a new strategy (Mark)

> I hope they don't get rid of everything, I hope they just let it sort of bed down... (Alison)

> ...the new curriculum came in (Fiona)

...the new frameworks came in' (Maggie)

When referring to government change discourse, many participants used direct speech. The following examples illustrate how professionals in both schools experience and remember the messages from policy-makers:

> to keep teachers with you when they've spent a whole year implementing something, and then the government will say 'No!' And so we'll do something else, and the government will say 'No!' (Jenny)

> ...they tend to sort of bring something out and say: 'This is what you've got to do.' And then two years into that they'll actually say: 'No you're wrong with that, let's change it and now you've got to do this instead.' (Carol)

> ...the last government wanted us to be looking at creative curriculum and now that we're changing, the new government say: 'We want set subjects'. (Maggie)

> It's: 'Stop this, do this. Stop this, do this.' (Alice)

> 'Oh, you're not doing this anymore, you're doing that. And I want this!' (Maria)

The evaluation of policy agendas implicit in such reporting of government 'speak' is of an erratic, inconsistent nature of education policy which is more an expression of will imposed on schools through command and control than a systematic, considered approach to education reform.

What seems to help professionals when faced with 'another set of changes' (Alice) is 'métis', the practical knowledge and wisdom which arises from everyday experience, a capacity to understand the constantly shifting circumstances and adapt accordingly (Scott 1998). Interestingly, it was the 'older' generation whose accounts displayed 'métis'. For example, Jenny's headship experience, under the governance of many an Education Secretary, helps her to cope with the 'policy epidemic' thus:

> I never just accept… But with it comes a hell of a lot of responsibility… you've got to be brave and you've got to have the SATs results to back it up. But you can do it, you don't have to say 'we've got to follow this'… When something comes along we don't just say 'Oh dear', we look at it and we say

> 'Okay, what's the best way we can use this for us?' And it's the way we can get round it, the little loopholes, can we cut corners…

Jenny's wisdom and courage to stand up for her beliefs are highly respected by her staff. As Alice admitted: 'We have made stands on things like APP (Assessment of Pupil Progress), we decided it wasn't for us, because Jenny's a strong enough Head to say **No'**.

Similarly, Alison understands that asking staff to change practice does not automatically guarantee compliance. Rather than confront teachers who were 'not taking any notice', she set more realistic timeframes for staff reluctant to take up a new assessment regime (APP). Having considered the attitude of others (Mead 1934), the fact that some 'people can't see the point of it', she planned more staff meetings for voicing issues. The result was a decision made by the Leadership Team at GLP to introduce this new, time consuming form of assessment gradually:

> ...some schools have done APP for every child in reading, writing and maths, whereas we've done it gradually, and maybe if Ofsted come they will think those schools are wonderful, but we are not under the pressure. So we're not such stressed teachers for a start. (Alison)

When evaluating state improvement schemes, Scott (1998: 345) highlights that the majority of them 'were strongly committed to a more egalitarian society, to meeting the basic needs of its citizens'. However, the narrowness of vision and reliance on systems designed to facilitate administration and control inevitably led to local resistance. Similarly, the evaluations of education policy articulated in both schools acknowledged the focus on improvement as both important and worthwhile. However, the 'hidden transcripts' expressed also the negative consequences of the 'policy epidemic': frustration, excessive workload and, above all, enormous waste of resources. It appears that education policy has been employed as a mechanism for controlling professionals who would otherwise enact improvement in their own expert, diverse, often less costly ways. The superficiality of the dominant discourse, the use of power to twist meanings of words in an attempt to keep schools in the state of constant mobilisation (Morgan and Spicer 2009), has been poignantly evaluated by Stephen as follows:

> The thing that really got under my skin about... the new guy, Wilshaw, Sir Michael of course... it was this thing about 'satisfactory isn't good enough', and there's two ways of looking at that. First, well, 'satisfactory' means 'good enough'. But the other thing, it implied that a 'good' school was then happy. If my school was judged as outstanding, I'd still want to improve. So inventing this kind of new form of words, so that schools need to improve... **All** schools need to improve! We **know** that, and it's not just because the government tells you so, it's because you want the best for the children.

By expressing concern about '3,000 schools educating a million children that have been 'satisfactory' two inspections in a row' and claiming that this is 'not good enough' (Wilshaw 2012), the new Ofsted Chief Inspector, Michael Wilshaw conveys two key messages. Firstly, that, premised on his power to redefine improvement, his office makes him capable of improving 'coasting' schools. Secondly, that an Ofsted inspection judgement is an accurate measure of educational quality. Both messages assert his 'power to tell others what is and what should be' (Fairclough 2003: 180). This simultaneously undermines the power, expertise and integrity of teachers and school leaders; hence Stephen's frustration at being told what he himself knows and finds of great importance, doing 'the best for the children'. When 'new forms of words' enter the public transcript of improvement and begin to colonise the conversations at schools, they compete with and gradually force out existing discourses. The following section focuses on what could be labelled as the 'forgotten transcripts', conversational themes absent from the data collected in Abbey and Green Lanes Primary.

7.5   The forgotten transcripts: *'Hey, what exactly are we doing to our children?'*

A discussion of conversational themes and patterns would be incomplete without a consideration of 'significant absences' (Fairclough 2003: 37), the discursive elements which could have been present but are absent from the textual data collected at Abbey and Green Lanes. Child-centredness and professionalism constituted significant 'minority' themes in the schools' discursive patterns. A shift of focus from educating children to implementing improvement strategies leads to more holistic and humanistic purposes of education being redefined as 'success' in tests, favourable Ofsted judgements and raising standards. Similarly, references to professionalism were used mainly in the context of talking about 'professional development'.

A preoccupation with the dominant constructions of school improvement appeared to provide a distraction from what Jeanne expressed as: 'sometimes stepping back and thinking, 'Hey, what exactly are we doing to our children?' In the context of the relentless pressure to perform, the meaning of teaching was articulated as 'doing'. When asked about what teaching means to them, most participants talked about everyday activities of teaching, such as: planning, teaching, monitoring, meeting, restructuring, trying new things, setting direction, role modelling and many more. The 'performing school' (Perryman 2009) focuses on doing and this results in confusing 'the meaning of teaching or parenting with what we see teachers or parents do' (Van Manen 1990: 149). It also draws professionals away from such pedagogically important questions as 'What is this situation or action like for the child?' 'What is good and what is not good for this child?' (ibid: 145).

Sandy seemed to be the only participant to show a pedagogical orientation based on an awareness of 'what this situation may be like for the child' and trying to see the world through the eyes of a child:

> As soon as they come to my class, I say: 'The first thing I want you to do is to have fun. Because if you're having fun, then you'll learn'... I keep putting myself in the kids' place and think 'well I don't want to sit there listening to Mrs Rowling talking to me, no!'

In her relationships with children, there is reciprocity and togetherness:

> But yeah I love doing it; I love the kids they make me laugh. And hopefully I make them laugh now and again.

Sandy's understanding of 'improvement' was linked to children's learning, resonating with the notion of 'educating people for life' (Peters 1970):

> You have fun, you can learn, you can improve for the rest of your life in some sort of way.

The open-endedness of Sandy's notion of learning and improving 'for the rest of your life in some sort of way' could be interpreted as a tacit understanding of the distinction between education and training. For Peters (1966), skills and competencies developed through training have a limited range of applications. Unlike training, education nurtures commitment and a sense of being-in-the-world-with-others; it therefore enables children to develop a coherent pattern of life and ethical awareness (ibid). It is about 'learning to become human' (Pring 2013: 32). Education thus conceived starts with the teacher and her thoughtfulness, with ethics of care and knowing 'what is good and what is not good for this child' (Van Manen 1990), as illustrated by one of Sandy's stories of children she has taught:

> I had a boy in my class last year statemented for speech and language, never spoke anything... I always made sure he came into the class, when before he was excluded from the class. How can you exclude someone from a classroom who's got speech and language problems? That didn't make sense to me. So I insisted that he was always there. He made us and the TAs cry once when he came up and started to talk in front of the class, and one day in maths he stood up and showed one of the so called 'higher ability children' how to do a maths question... And that is how children should be, on their personality as individuals, not what they get one day on a piece of paper.

The concept of professionalism appears to have undergone a reconstruction, especially in the discourse of younger generation of teachers, who referred to it only in the context of 'professional development' (Alice, Maggie, Fiona, Gemma, Pete). The loss of professional status and professional confidence were of importance to the older generation, Sophie, Angelika, Sandy and Eve. The public service dimension to educational professionalism (Downie 1990; Pring 2013) was articulated as important by two participants, Stephen and Sophie. As discussed in Chapter 1, the dominant construction of education as a public service is underpinned by the notion of 'delivering' service (PSR 2006). An alternative awareness of 'service' as an obligation to children as recipients of education (Bates 2013) was another 'significant absence', with the exception of Stephen and Sophie. Sophie articulated the obligation of schools thus:

> We should be sending out children who are confident and who have enjoyed their school experience and want to be in school and have experienced a wide

variety of activities and found their strengths and areas that they enjoy… who love reading for the sake of it.

Stephen's aspirations for the children in his care were based on balancing 'good exam results' with personal attributes of passion and perseverance. His understanding of professionalism was closely related to educating 'good citizens':

> ...what I want for our children is I want them to be clever, and I want them to be good. And you know you can define 'good' in a variety of different ways, but I want them to be passionate and I want them to persevere... to be open minded and to be prepared to learn... But I want a balance of getting good exam results at the end of the day, but I want them to be good citizens as well. And we need to model that as professionals, we need to model that in the way that we treat each other and the way we treat the children.

The meaning of education as care, concern and being of service not only defies measures of effectiveness, but is also essential if educational professionals are to nurture the child and protect the rich web of connections that human beings are in the world. However, a 'fascination' with the measurable appeared to be leading some teachers in the opposite direction and advancing the process of reconstruction of professionalism into expertise.

7.6 The fascination with numbers: *'If a plant's growing, you don't pull it out of its pot, do you, to check its roots?'*

The recent intensification of 'governance by data' (Lawn 2011) is indicative of the use of data as a 'lever' to promote the dominant view of educational improvement. It is based on an assumption that improvement is equivalent to more efficient systems of data collection and 'data flow'. For example, the Unique Pupil Number (UPN) system traces each individual pupil's performance in national tests (SATs) and enables officials in Whitehall to 'see the progress' of any child in the UK 'at a push of a button' on their computer screens (DfE 2010b, Lawn 2011). This way of 'looking at' children is beginning to be embedded in both schools, especially by the teachers responsible for assessment, Maggie and Miriam. 'Teaching by data' can be considered as part of the broader social phenomenon of 'expertocracy' (Bauman 2005; Fairclough 2003), the rise of a 'new profession' of experts, who claim epistemic authority on the basis of 'facts' and 'figures'. Experts, writes Bauman

(2005: 1094), 'are almost by definition people who "get the facts straight," who take the facts as they come and think of the least risky ways of living in their company.' At the time of data collection, Miriam was developing expertise in APP (Assessment of Pupil Progress) at Green Lanes Primary and Maggie was confidently leading Abbey staff as assessment co-ordinator. Both Maggie and Miriam appeared to share a 'fascination with numbers' and this seemed to introduce a new kind of language into their accounts of everyday practice.

Maggie's account in particular, implies the colonisation of the language of educational lifeworld (Fairclough 2003: 71) by assessment systems. Her assessment manager role includes regular 'tracking' of all children in the school, plotting graphs to map the progress of each individual child and arranging regular 'tracking meetings' with teachers to 'go through every child in a year group for maths, English, reading and writing'. 'Tracking' develops a new way of 'looking at' children and their development plotted as line graphs:

> Some children, they sort of go like that in a straight line, so you think 'what have they done for two years?'

Abbey's assessment system is extremely efficient at minimising the risk that a child might 'slip off the teacher's radar' (Maggie). When asked what happens when the children are not 'on target', Maggie replied:

> Then we have to think and meet with the SENCO: 'are they on the SEN register? Is it a learning difficulty that's stopping them from progressing?' Sometimes it could be an issue at home and we take it into account, or is it an attendance issue, is it something we need to put an intervention group in, give them extra support, or is they just need a big kick up the backside and say: 'Come on, we know your capability of doing it but you're just being lazy'.

When the children are 'on target', the temptation is to divert support from them to those who are not: 'those children are on their target so I need not focus on them' (Mark). Apart from the issue of equality highlighted by Mark, for the system of assessment to work accurately and precisely, the children need to be tested every half term. As a result...

> …we're always assessing the children and there's always a lot of pressure to meet certain targets and results with the children… we seem to always be only a few weeks away from another assessment of the children's learning. I think, for the kids, it's not necessarily the best way… if you just do it to meet targets… (Mark)

As Ball et al (2012: 81) point out, all students are expected to improve, however, some "improvements' are strategically more important than others'. Assessment can also disrupt learning and put pressure, both on the children and teachers, as explained by Sandy:

> I think the pressures on assessment and testing I think is too great. I think the teaching and learning should take the high priority rather than assessment or stopping children every so often. We have assessment week, you know. You stop everything, you assess, and then you have to start again... If a plant's growing you don't pull it out of its pot, do you, and check the roots?

The notion of 'getting the facts straight' (Bauman 2005) in order to minimise the risk of children missing their targets recurs also in Miriam's account of introducing APP into the assessment system at Green Lanes Primary. By 'breaking down' expectations and level thresholds in writing, reading and maths, APP 'sharpened up ' teachers' assessment and focused them on what Miriam refers to as the complex factors which constitute 'the whole child':

> ...some of the free school meal children were working at the lower end of their class, but they were also on the SEN register, so there was that extra factor, or some have got English as an additional language. So just to put it into context, because you just need to recognize that some children aren't just in one particular vulnerable group... So taking account of that, recognizing that there's not just one factor that might be affecting their learning, there might be a couple. Children are complex aren't they? So it's taking on all of the factors.

The APP system encourages technical-rationality in breaking down complexity into categories, levels, sub-levels recorded in a variety of registers, EAL, SEN and others. Analysing, labelling and categorising children as 'vulnerable' (or not) in particular ways may lead to unequal provision of teacher attention noted by Mark. Especially if children's results are linked to teachers' performance management targets, as has been the case at GLP:

> ...as well as monitoring everybody, our particular focus group is children who receive free school meals, so every class teacher has got a performance management target related to the performance and attainment of children on the free school meal register in their class... And when we had Ofsted and we showed them that was the focus group, they were really pleased with the way that we were doing it, they thought that was very good practice. (Miriam)

This technical-rational approach to assessment linked to teachers' performance targets was praised as 'very good practice' by Ofsted inspectors, despite the possible issues with equality of opportunity which it engenders. As a result, 'good' teaching begins to be associated with accurate assessment, rather than understanding children and their development. A contrasting notion of 'good' teaching was expressed by Sophie thus:

> We have to have a real understanding of children and how they develop and how they learn and you have to have an understanding of what the teaching job is all about. Because teaching is about commitment and passion and you can't be a half-hearted teacher, it's vocational.

When 'understanding children' is replaced with graphs charting their progress through regular assessment exercises, teaching becomes a matter of technique and therefore loses its appeal to 'passion' and the 'heart'. It becomes a practice through which 'we render children into strange and silent objects which require of us only management, manipulation, and objective information and (ac)countability' (Jardine 1998: 7). In an education system which is 'imagined as a series of data flows' (Lawn 2011: 279), paradoxically, children become 'statistics' related to outcomes rather than the recipients of improved education which the system is designed to produce. In this way, the expectation of delivering better education shifts from the system onto the children. As a result, children are no longer viewed as the system's 'users', but as 'data' used to measure the effectiveness of the system.

7.7 The price of high expectations: *'tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous'*

The recent Ofsted inspection targets for Green Lanes Primary are displayed on the wall in Stephen's office next to the poem by Heim Ginott (Figure 7.3):

```
I have come to a frightening conclusion.
I am the decisive element that creates the climate.
It is my personal approach that creates the climate.
It is my daily mood that makes the weather.
As a teacher, I possess tremendous power
To make a child's life miserable or joyous.
I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration.
I can humiliate or humour, hurt or heal.
In all situations, it is my response that decides
Whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated,
And a child humanized or de-humanized.
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Figure 7.3   A copy of the poem by Ginott (1972) displayed on the wall in Stephen's office

Ginott's poem can be interpreted as both of an era and timeless. Written during the 1970s, before the rise of 'expertocracy' and escalation of education reform, it is a timeless reminder of teachers' 'tremendous power' to create or destroy. This power is constructed by Ginott through references to teachers' 'personal approach', 'decision making' and repetition of 'I can... in all situations'. Read in 2013, in the aftermath of reconstructions and transformations discussed in this chapter, the notion of teacher choice seems to be a phenomenon of the past and the title of Ginott's book, *Teacher and Child*, would better reflect the shift of power in education when re-phrased as: *Politician, Teacher and Child*. And yet, paradoxically, in each ordinary everyday encounter with a child, the teacher does have the 'tremendous' and 'frightening' power to choose between the human or the 'de-humanised'. This is because of the 'I' and 'me' dialectic (Mead 1934), with the 'me' arising by taking the attitudes of the others (section 3.2.1, p.51). The teacher's attitude is therefore of crucial importance in the formation of a child's selfhood. Stephen seems to realise this when, on his 'dark days', he feels overwhelmed by the enormous responsibility he has taken on as an educator...

> responsibility for tomorrow's society, because obviously we're shaping young lives, we're such an important part of these children's lives and we often forget that as teachers.

This section discusses the paradoxes in the everyday experience of people working at Abbey and Green Lanes Primary. It focuses on the price of high expectations and explains the contradictions implicit in 'doing your job properly' (Fiona). It discusses

teachers' concerns behind their smiles and explains why Miriam's point that 'it's all about being positive, taking it on board' is, paradoxically, both a symbolic assertion of compliance with government agendas and a point at which an individual choice can be made. According to complex responsive processes theory, the inherently paradoxical nature of the lifeworld is manifested in the simultaneous existence of opposing elements or forces which can never be resolved or eliminated (section 3.2.5, p.56). The paradox of 'enabling constraints' (Stacey 2010) restricts professional discourse to the dominant constructions of educational improvement and at the same time enables teachers to disagree that 'it's all about being positive', in public or 'off stage'. Stacey's (ibid) point about policy-makers being able to choose improvement agendas but being unable to choose the responses of others resonates therefore with Ginott's message that, ultimately, 'it is my response that decides'.

The price of high expectations appears to be paid by all: children, teachers and parents. Since improvement is measured with results in national tests, the demand on teachers to raise them year on year is transferred onto the children they teach. Teachers give a huge amount of time and effort to the children in their care; they also set high expectations for them. For the Abbey and Green Lanes children 'to be the best they can be' was frequently repeated in the context of 'achievement', 'targets' and 'attainment levels'. The schools are thus attended by idealised 'abstract children' who, since the age of four are expected to make continuous progress to achieve their targets, who work hard and are successful, well behaved, inclusive, respectful, polite, friendly, responsible for their actions, honest. Unrealistic expectations undermine some school communities, as pointed out by Sandy:

> I don't really like the fact that it's all recorded in the league tables and the parents and teachers and heads are all like 'oh we're not here, we're down here at the moment, we want to be up here. Yeah we're up here!' ... how do the schools at the bottom feel? And it's not necessarily the school's fault. I mean I'm sorry, but if I've got a Mini out there, I'm not going to be a Formula 1 racing car.

Apart from creating reductionist evaluations of schools as 'bottom' or 'top' in league tables, 'single-minded' expectations fail to benefit some children, as explained by Lynn:

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we're quite single minded in the way we look at education, numeracy, literacy... And a lot of children that we work with, it's not beneficial for **them**. It's great for the high achievers, it's great for those that can listen in lessons, but for those who can't, there doesn't seem to be an alternative, there never really has. I think even when they get to high school there's still not that many choices for them other than to sit in a lesson and listen. Or become naughty and disruptive... The **few** naughty kids that we do get here are disruptive because they can't do the work or they can't listen, and then when they do go to high school it just gets bigger and worse.

Where high expectations are unrealistic, they may be destructive, they may 'humiliate', 'hurt' and 'make a child's life miserable', as Sylvia pointed out:

they've got to reach this goal, and those that don't, I feel that sometimes with their peers 'oh I've got grade 3, grade 4, grade 5', 'I got a grade 2,' and I think it can make the child that doesn't achieve as well not feel as good about themselves and as capable as those that are getting grade 5, grade 6.

Children are thus 'objectified as talented, borderline, underachieving, irredeemable, etc.' (Ball et al 2012: 78), in fact the system encourages them to look at themselves as the 'me' graded on the scale from 2 to 5. Short of being 'positive', the cult of positivity and 'can-do culture' promoted by policy-makers may destroy what it claims to create: 'better life chances for all children' (DfEE 1998).

Lastly, the dominant notion of expectation linked to exam success encourages a mechanistic approach to educating children. This approach was expressed through the 'sausage factory' metaphor:

…it's recognised that they can't all get to level 5 for English, so it's important that they can go as far as then can do on that path, in readiness for high school. Makes it sound a bit like a 'sausage factory', doesn't it, in at one end, go out at the other, but that is our job at the end of the day. The children are very individual obviously, but with such a large school there has to be an overriding idea that a lot of stuff is homogenised, I suppose. You know, one size fits all with the majority of the children. (Eve)

We are a bit of a sausage machine regarding taking exams, life is a bit more rounded than that… (Jeanne)

The priority of 'producing' expected outcomes constrains schools from taking a 'more rounded' perspective on educating children. The 'factory' approach enables a synoptic, partial view of the 'production line', constraining broader considerations of children's educational experience beyond their primary school years. When talking about Abbey Year 6 children's emotional farewells before moving on to secondary schools, Fiona pointed out...

> ...you see the real emotion and it's really lovely, because they say: 'Oh, we've just had the best time here'. Then you know that you've done your job properly.

Fiona's understanding of doing the 'job properly' could be read as simultaneously an expression of the dominant 'production line' approach and its defiance. Her focus on emotions, trust, on 'being like a second mum' to the children she teaches, expressed at several points in the interview, and her belief that what matters is children having 'the best time here' could create a 'climate' enabling children to flourish, despite the constraints imposed by the system.

The few participants who expressed their concerns about children's further educational experience beyond primary school represent the older generation. Sophie and Stephen are aware of the difficult task of preparing children for life 'in a very different world. And we can't even anticipate what kind of employment they are going to have' (Sophie). Concerns which transcended the focus on the immediate included the question about 'what's going to happen to all those children nobody wants', the children who fail to meet expectations (Eve), and schools in deprived areas, which no Headteacher wants to lead, because: 'Why would you choose to go and be a Head in a school when you're already at a disadvantage? (Jenny). As Sandy concluded, by putting too much pressure on schools, 'the government are shooting themselves in the foot', because the reform agenda has driven out 'many very good teachers' and, paradoxically, has resulted in 'one of the lowest reading ages' in international comparisons. Sandy's argument resonates with Stacey's (2010) indictment of performativity. Where the 'cult of performance' presents professionals with a 'hopelessly idealised future and heavy demands for conformity', the result is

education in which 'appearance and presentation replace substance' and 'authentic quality' becomes 'counterfeit quality on the surface' (Stacey 2010: 208).

Over time, however, the cult of positivity has the power to transform 'the soul' (Ball 2003). High expectations have materialised in structures and forms of everyday organisation which habitualise target setting and competitiveness in both schools. Behaviour and other achievement charts displayed in most classrooms at AP present individual 'winners' and 'losers' in terms of behaviour and best house teams (Figure 7.4).

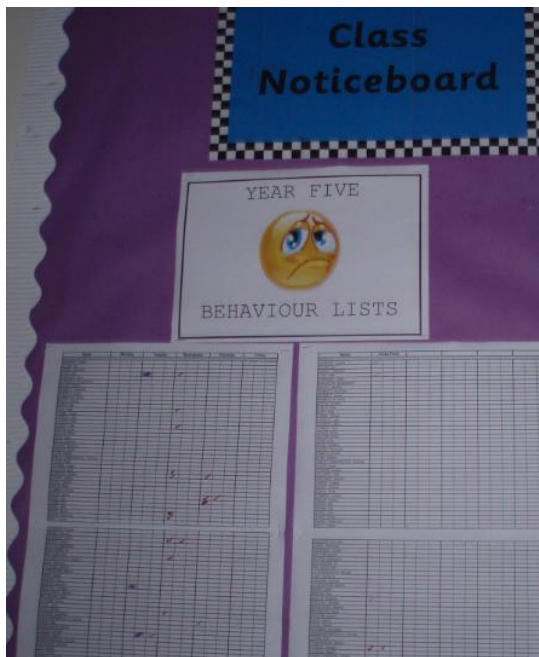**Figure 7.4**   Class notice board at AP displaying poor behaviour of individual children

By recommendation of the 'local' literacy and numeracy policies at Abbey, 'targets are displayed clearly' in children's exercise books, classroom displays and Interactive Whiteboard presentations for lessons. The school also involves parents in target setting, through the *Home-School Liaison Book* (Figure 7.5).

| Week beginning: _____ |
| Things to remember: _____ |
Day	Work set
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Comments	

My targets this week are:

1. _____

2. _____

Target	How well I feel I have achieved my target	My comments

😊   😐   🙁

Target Achieved   Target partly Achieved   ? Target still needs work

This week I have learnt and enjoyed:

1._____

2._____

3._____

Parent's/Carer's Comments

Figure 7.5 A page in *Home-School Liaison Book* at AP

A message conveyed here through the page layout is that of the distinction between 'the achievement of targets' and 'learning' and the priority of targets over 'learning' and 'enjoyment'. The phrase 'my targets' resonates with the *National Strategy* prescription for the children to 'own their targets' (DfES 2003) discussed in Chapter 2 (p.39). A similar work on the institutionalisation of target setting has been taking place at GLP:

> So the children have their targets, and they'll say 'these are the level 3 targets,' so they'll be able to see how they're getting on towards those... say for example one of our year 5 classes, they'll have their targets and they'll know they need to look out for where they've done that in their work, because their teacher will be saying, 'How have you met this target? Show me in your work that you're using commas to demarcate your clauses.' (Miriam)

Target setting is reconstructing the curriculum as a 'collection of targets' (Pring 2013: 65) and learning as 'targets talk', with children expected to 'show' how they have met specific targets. Learning is thus externalised and children's learning experience is reduced to 'getting' targets and achieving them in order to move 'onto the next one':

> So if they've learnt how to use connectors appropriately then they're onto the next one rather than having to wait until the next assessment which might be half a term away before they get their next target. (Miriam)

This transformation of learning into a target setting cycle would not be possible without the hard work of teachers in both schools. The commitment, passion for teaching and caring for children was expressed by most participants and is 'visible' in the colourful, stimulating learning environment created in the classrooms, hallways and outdoor spaces in both schools. However, the gradual colonisation of the lifeworld of GLP and AP by technical-rational approaches to education is enabled by teachers when they take up the dominant patterns of conversation as their own, without contestation. The reasons why professionals appear to cede their own expertise, understanding and values are complex and many. The cult of positivity, the 'ethos of saying 'Yes'' (Sophie) could be one of them, as could a feeling of powerlessness in the face of power, expressed by Lynn as 'Let the power that be to decide'. The willingness to 'do' improvement without a deeper engagement with its complex purposes and consequences is another reason. Fiona's and Miriam's statements below suggest a lack of reflexivity (Ball et al 2012) in drawing on taken-for-granted assumptions to justify both their hard work and compliance with the dominant notions of improvement:

> If it's good for the children, if it really is, then, you know, then we'll do it. (Fiona)

> I think that's the bit about it [teaching] being a vocation rather than just a job, isn't it? It is the children at the heart of it, and if you don't say 'Yes' it is the children who won't benefit. (Miriam)

Another reason for the lack of contestation of the dominant discourse could be a reluctance to engage in political debates. Of 27 participants, just four referred to political issues in education (Angelika, Pete, Stephen and Sophie) and only Sophie

and Stephen contested what they perceived as the political origins of education reform. Stephen pointed to the link between government funding and the recognition of the value of education:

> And however cynical you are about politics, you cannot, you cannot lose sight of the fact that much more money was spent on education throughout those years [under New Labour] than had been the case before. I'm not a political animal particularly, but it was... there was a real recognition there that more money needed to be spent. I mean the state of state schools in the late 90s was a national disgrace, so programmes like, you know, Building Schools for the Future... send out a message that education is valued by the society...

Sophie was critical of policy change 'for the sake of change', based on political party ideology:

> I get very frustrated that every time you get a new government things have to be changed, regardless of whether they are working or not… I know that education has to be a political consideration, but there needs to be somewhere where things can be evaluated according their true worth, rather than with: 'do they fit with the policies of this that or the other government.' I've got no political affiliation, I've got not much time for this to be honest, so when   I talk about the government, I'm talking about it in the widest sense, but it just seems to me that every time we have a change of government we have to have things changed for the sake of it, because if it was the other lot's idea then can't be any good.

Sophie's scepticism of change 'for the sake of it' suggests that viewing education reform as a political practice (Stacey in Mowles 2011) could be crucial in enabling teachers to reclaim their expertise and make a stand for their own values. For example, understanding how politicians invest in their roles and build their power as 'characters' of new capitalism (Fairclough 2003) could help teachers to distance themselves in their response to education policy, as Stephen and Sophie do. It could also help them re-evaluate their own knowledge and contribution to educating children as superior to that of the politician's, Ofsted inspector's or any other expert's who uses official power to claim a more privileged vantage point than that of a practitioner.

To conclude, both primary schools present themselves as 'positive', as places where 'you come in and go out of that door with a smile on your face' (Jeanne) and where

teachers are ready to cope with whatever is 'thrown at them' (Jenny). Within the enabling constraints of education reform, they work very hard to do what is expected of them: 'to reach unattainable goals with inadequate tools' (Ginott 1972: 15). Ginott (ibid) points to the 'miracle' of teachers sometimes accomplishing 'this impossible task'. Paradoxically, however, another consequence of the superficial, dominant approaches to educational improvement designed by politicians and enacted by teachers could be that...

> teaching is no longer an act of kindness" and generosity bespeaking a deeper connectedness with children. In the name of clarity, repeatability, accountability, such connections become severed in favour of pristine, "objective" surface articulations. And "reconnecting" with children must proceed under the auspices of such clarity – "smiling", for example becomes a technique to be applied because research has demonstrated its effectiveness. (Jardine 1998: 7)

7.8   Children and renewal: *'as long as they're having fun and I'm having fun, we're both learning at the same time, hopefully'*

The theme of children and renewal requires a reversal of the logic applied to analysing and reporting the case studies so far, by focusing on what children bring into adults' lives, rather than on what adults 'are doing to children' (Jeanne). The theme emerged from some of the stories told and visual images displayed at Abbey and Green Lanes Primary. Excluding stories and pictures from this report would be a serious omission, because the everyday experience of both primary schools is richly textured with storytelling, poetry, songs, pictures and colour. Two stories stand out as particularly memorable of my research visits to Abbey and Green Lanes. They are of significance both to this research study and to making sense of my experience as a former primary practitioner. It is only now, a few years after leaving the primary classroom that I am beginning to understand and conceptualise what, in my lived experience as a primary teacher, I used to admire in young children. I referred to it as 'bouncing back, beginning every new day as if it were the first day'. Hannah Arendt (1998) explains this as 'natality', the novelty and freedom that each new birth brings into the world.

Christmas Play 2011 at Abbey Primary was a story of a stable boy who dreamt of being a fisherman. The chorus in the main song repeated the phrase: 'your dreams will come true'. The theme of having dreams and dreams coming true is reflected in the photo gallery in the hallway at Abbey. It displays images of famous people, such as Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King and Bob Marley, interspersed with 'positive' messages, such as: 'Success: It's not the position you stand but the direction you look' and 'Challenge: Always set the trail, never follow the path'. There is a poster with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Ten Commandments of the American Indians. There are also other posters, including posters created by Abbey children.

As I recall looking at the photo gallery and joining in with children singing 'your dreams will come true' song, I begin to acknowledge the complexity of the lifeworld at Abbey and Green Lanes which, as a social constructionist researcher and educator, I have tried to connect with. Operating within the enabling constraints of 'adult logic', I make choices within the limits of a space-time labelled by some as 'high modernity' (Giddens 1991) and by others as post-modern, 'liquid times' (Bauman 2007) . I read what I have written so far in this chapter, recall Ginott's poem and evaluate the photo gallery at Abbey as 'an instrument of inspiration' rather than a 'tool of torture'. I have already assigned target setting to this latter category, but, in order to be logical, I may need to re-think my emergent conclusions. Aware of the enabling constraints of my 'adult' way of making sense of the world, I am also thinking about a different kind of logic, the logic of a young child who seems to be free to begin every day anew. What is it, that, as adults, can we learn from children's logic?

The story of Aziz, the weaver, told in an assembly at Green Lanes Primary, is an account of a transformation of a stubborn old man who would only weave white cloth. Because Aziz was the only weaver in the village, all villagers had to necessarily wear white garments. The slow transformation of Aziz began with the arrival of a young girl, dressed in most colourful clothes, who gradually changed Aziz's mind. Unexpectedly to himself and the villagers, a miracle happened, Azis started acting differently, he began weaving colourful cloth. This simple, highly

symbolic story is one of the many SEAL resources (DfES 2005b) used in assemblies at GLP. Read by Stephen in one of the last assemblies of the school year, it was aimed in particular at encouraging Year 6 children to think and talk about change and a whole range of thoughts and emotions they experience as they prepare to leave the familiar world of their primary school. At another level of interpretation, however, this is a story about 'natality', the renewal and freedom which children bring into the adults' world (Arendt 1998).

According to Arendt (ibid) each birth is a miracle, a new beginning which introduces novelty and freedom in the world. Freedom means the capacity to begin, to do the unexpected, to start something anew. Such freedom cannot be given to or taken away from someone by someone else; human beings are endowed with it by virtue of being born. Natality and freedom are closely related to acting:

> the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting. (1998: 9)

By virtue of being born, man is thus free and capable of action, which means 'that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable' (1998: 178).

For Aziz, the weaver in the SEAL story, the unexpected transformation was made possible by the young girl bringing something new into his life, colour. The moral of the story highlights the importance of being able to start anew and is as pertinent for adults, teachers and policy-makers, as it is for the children for whom the story was written. Sandy seems to understand the significance of children in adults' lives (Van Manen 1990). She expresses it as a learning opportunity which 'being with the kids' provides for adults:

> I love being with the kids... And as long as they're having fun and I'm having fun, we're both learning at the same time, hopefully.

It would seem to take very little for a teacher or a politician to transform the educational experience of children, by simply being open to beginning anew.

Paradoxically, however, this transformation requires also an enormous shift in perception and a reconstruction of the past and present agendas which come with the role, office, personal belief, political considerations and career trajectory. Followed by thoughtful action and recognition of the importance of diversity. Or, as Hannah Arendt would argue, it takes...

> the courage to interrupt their routine activities, to step forward from their private lives in order to create a public space where freedom could appear, and to act in such a way that the memory of their deeds could become a source of inspiration for the future. (d'Entreves 2006)

7.9 Conclusion

This chapter focused on research question 3 and the profound changes to educational practice, conveyed explicitly and implicit in the public and private transcripts of Abbey and Green Lanes Primary. The 'policy epidemic' has transformed the systems, forms of organisation and patterns of conversation in both schools in a number of complex ways. The policy-makers' view asserts the superiority of rational planning and control at the top management level over enacting organisational improvement at the grass roots of change. Power inequalities between policy-makers and policy implementers lead to the disconnection between planners and implementers, between abstract blueprints and the 'gritty' reality of change. Improvement strategies have led to the objectification of children and seeing education in terms of statistical data. The price of the relentless focus on standards and targets is an impoverished educational practice, which constrains educators in seeing the 'whole child' and limits the time they have to connect to pedagogically important questions about the meaning of teaching and the significance of children in our lives.

Despite this legacy, the schools seem to provide 'a good enough service' (Stacey 2010: 208), as pointed out by Angelika:

> I think that teachers are the sort of people who will just make sure that the children get a good education regardless of maybe certain things that are going on.

'Good education regardless' the 'policy epidemic' is enabled by professionals who teach because it is their 'vocation', who are committed and determined to hold on to their values of care, concern and love. Paradoxically, 'good enough education' may also be possible because of the inherent gift of renewal which children are in the world of adults.

Chapter 8   Conclusions

8.1   A 'transformation'?

This thesis has explored accounts of changes at two local primary schools following the introduction of the *National Strategies* in 1998. The overarching aim of these strategies and other government policies has been formulated as a 'transformation' of UK education into a 'world-class system' (Barber and Mourshed 2007; DfE 2010a). Underpinning education reform is an imperative to compete more effectively in the global economy, because what 'really matters' is 'how we're doing compared with our international competitors' (DfE 2010a: 3). The policy-makers' discourse defines transformation as quantitative improvements in pupil test scores and could, therefore, be considered as superficial and rhetorical. However, in combination with the auditing regime used by successive governments, it appears to have profoundly changed the everyday practice in the two case study schools. This chapter begins with a summary of the key findings in answer to research questions 2 and 3 (p.21). These questions focused on the impact of government's *National Strategies* (DfEE 1998, 1999; DfES 2003, 2004) on the everyday practice at Abbey Primary and Green Lanes Primary. The discussion then proceeds to relate the findings within the broader context of the transformations of 'new capitalism' (Fairclough 2003). I then discuss the paradox of continuity and change and revisit my claims to originality. In my final reflections on the research process, from the complex *respons*ive processes perspective, I argue for a more *respons*ible approach to education reform.

8.2   Summary of key findings

The key case study findings presented in Chapter 6 suggest that, short of engaging in a dialogue with teachers, the command and control approach to disseminating the *National Strategies* positions teachers and school leaders as 'policy-takers' (Gunter and Forrester 2009). Despite the inconsistency, workload escalation and waste brought about by the 'policy epidemic', practitioners appear to be 'ready for whatever is thrown at them' (Jenny).

Accordingly, the case study data reveal patterns of conversation in both schools suggestive of significant convergence with government conceptualisations of

improvement (Chapter 7). Professionals' perceptions of 'outstanding' practice appear to be dominated by the standards and targets agenda. Both Abbey Primary and Green Lanes Primary aspire to the 'outstanding' Ofsted category. Both schools transfer the expectations of continuously improving test results onto the children they teach. The dominant approach to education reform labelled by Lawn (2011) as 'governing through data' is being institutionalised in the two schools through assessment practices which reveal practitioners' growing 'fascination with numbers'. Using sophisticated tracking systems to plot children's progress through regular assessment exercises entails grouping children according to ability, socio-economic and other categories which are then matched to their attainment levels. The danger here is that the focus on arbitrary abstract categories may sever the connection with the real, 'embodied' child, replacing it with 'looking at' a line graph plotting his/her progress. 'Targets' appear to be another theme dominating patterns of communication both in class and between home and school, gradually reconstructing teaching and learning as a technical-rational cycle of delivering the prescribed curriculum, target setting and assessment.

Alternative views of educational improvement, articulated mainly as hidden transcripts, seemed to be ridden with tensions and underpinned by a sense of powerlessness and lack of control (sections 7.3, p.128 and 7.4, p.135). This could be because alternative conceptualisations included such 'difficult to measure' values as 'happiness', 'feeling secure', 'confidence', 'citizenship' and 'a more rounded education' (section 5.5, p.94). The cult of organisational 'excellence' begun by Peters and Waterman in 1982, has found its way into the educational arena and is affecting the way in which children are socialised into individuals who, in pursuit of excellence, disconnect from and compete with others:

> With it comes the 'loneliness we are now facing and are solemnly passing on to our children under the guise of education and the individual, manic pursuit of excellence-as-self-absorption – and with this, all the little built-in panics and terrors that come with the blind rush to be up-to-date, ahead of the game… the potent desire to end up "on top"' (Jardine 1998: 88)

Profound changes are thus taking place in both schools, transforming children's experience of education and potentially changing 'the kind of person they're going to

turn out to be' (Sophie). Whilst both schools have been 'successful' in raising standards and achieving higher test results, such success may have 'little to do with education' which would focus on what it means to be human and what is essential for living in a democratic society (Pring 2013: 64). The changes instigated by the public transcript of reform perpetuate government 'tinkering' (Jenny) and teachers playing 'the waiting game' (Annabel). This precludes a different kind of improvement which could emerge from a dialogic process involving teachers in policy-making and which would seek to avoid diverse voices merging into a single dominant discourse.

8.3 Transformations of 'new capitalism'

The lack of mutuality in the communication between the policy-makers and schools can also be interpreted as a sign of another agenda underpinning education reform. Viewed in the political context, educational change is affected by the transformations of 'new capitalism' (Fairclough 2003) discussed in Chapter 3. The economic logic of the market and its underpinning neoliberal agenda provided a rationale for New Labour's 'modernisation' of education and resulted in the spread of managerialism and private sector relations in schools across the country (Gunter 2012). This process has been accelerated by the Coalition government, who use the rhetoric of business efficiency to dismantle public services (Pring 2013). Education is thus a site of struggle for power and profit.

As the Coalition is urgently legislating 'new' solutions to enduring problems, a question arises as to whether what is deemed a quick solution today, may be a source of tomorrow's problems (Bates 2012). Transformation premised on economic imperatives and defined as raising standards, offers a narrow view of human behaviour driven primarily by self-interest in order to maximise material well-being. By constructing all social relations as transactions of exchange, the economic discourse promotes self-interest, eroding social bonds and democratic values. The data discussed in section 6.5 (p.113) reveal that practitioners in both schools are concerned about the moral ambiguity of league tables competition and the inequalities which can arise from the conversion to Academy status. On the other hand, however, the case study data suggest a significant lack of political interest

amongst research participants. This seems to lead to an absence of contestation of the dominant reform agendas and reluctance to challenge authority, especially amongst the younger generation of teachers and leaders. On the contrary, the commitment, hard work and ambition of 'doing your job properly' (Fiona) seems to be based on assumptions that 'standards have risen' and that target-based education reform is the only way of improving schools. As the cult of targets gets 'inside our heads and our souls', schools educate the workforce for the marketplace, encouraging 'both an active docility and depthless productivity' (Ball 2012: 31). By repeating the public transcript of school improvement, teaching professionals sustain its power.

Power depends on consent or acquiescence rather than the use of force and this makes language a crucial instrument of power (Fairclough 2003). In acquiescing with the dominant discourse schools cede their own power and claims to professional expertise. In consistency with the complex responsive processes theory, it is impossible to predict the long-term consequences of compliance with the dominant discourse. Of immediate concern, however, is that what we communicate to children creates particular versions of the universe for them to inhabit. As Bauman (2005: 1092) emphasises, in agreement with complex responsive processes theorists and social constructionists:

> One needs to live, to visit, to know intimately more than one such universe to spy out human invention behind any universe's imposing and apparently indomitable structure...

The 'imposing', 'indomitable structure' of the neoliberal world becoming 'the only reality there is' (ibid) needs to be contested if education is to safeguard solidarity, community and democracy, rather than promoting neoliberal self-interest. A critical awareness of the political and ideological agendas at play in education could bring more discursive diversity to the patterns of communication occurring in schools. For example, understanding how the 'characters' of 'new capitalism' stake their claims to knowledge and power, through hortatory reporting and use of nominalisation to promote their political agendas, manage impressions and avoid responsibility (Fairclough 2003), could shine a different light on the 'politician', the 'management

guru' and the 'auditor'. It could help teachers to reclaim their own professional knowledge and expertise.

8.4 The paradox of continuity and change

One of the paradoxes highlighted by complex responsive processes theory is that, despite delineating the timeframes for change, we are always in the midst of the process of continuity and change (Shaw 2002). The timeframe for my research focus beginning with the introduction of the *National Literacy Strategy* in 1998 is a manifestation of this paradox; I needed to begin at some point in time and, for the reasons discussed in Chapter 1, this seemed to be a logical starting point. Even though the introduction of the *Literacy Strategy* can be considered a beginning of a 'Strategies era' in education reform, it has been at the same time a continuation of processes started before. The 'Strategies era' could be viewed for example within the timeframe of the emergence of strategic management models (Stacey 2007), in the context of neo-liberalisation of social relations (Harvey 2007), or as one of the transformations of 'new capitalism' (Fairclough 2003). Because time is a social construct, timeframes for change are also arbitrary and our 'modern times' are characterised by an impatience to get results 'fast', for example within the five to six years of the electoral cycle.

The tendency to refer to our own time-span as a frame of reference has two implications, as argued by Elias (1991). Firstly, we can 'hardly understand ourselves' (ibid: 30) and secondly, we are unable to comprehend the subtle interplay between structural innovation and processual continuity. This results in notions of transformation which privilege 'spectacular' visions of the future over the seemingly insignificant ordinary everyday changes to practice. Strategic management is constructed around such idealised visions. Viewed within their life span of 1998-2010, the *National Strategies* have been evaluated by most research participants as a 'double-edged sword' (Stephen). Although they enabled 'raising standards' (Angelika), they also constrained teachers to delivering a curriculum which often failed to meet the needs or interests of their children. More importantly, the *National Strategies* and the 'policy epidemic' have been changing the way teachers talk about their work. A notable omission in the patterns of conversation, especially amongst

the younger generation, were references to professionalism. The emergence of 'expertocracy' (Bauman 2005), discussed in section 7.6 (p.143), seems to have had two negative consequences for the 'educational professional'. Firstly, because modernity privileges the '*techne*' of the 'sciences of certainty', the increasing technological sophistication, especially in the area of assessment, has led to 'teaching by data'. Encouraged by 'outside experts' such as Ofsted inspectors, the focus on data as the most valid measure of learning severs a more caring connection to the child as a person. Secondly, the 'policy epidemic' appears to have institutionalised a new 'hierarchy of expertise' in matters of school improvement, which privileges the knowledge of the outside observer, such as the policy-maker and Ofsted inspector, over the knowledge and understanding of the teacher or school leader. It also claims the superiority of the private sector forms of organising over those of the public sector. The expertise of the 'new professionals' enhances an instrumental approach to others. As Patricia Shaw (2002: 4-5) argues in the context of the corporate world...

> Decades of a certain kind of business education and writing; the rise and rise of expensive management consulting focused on packaging 'best practice' and promising to provide expertise that will 'deliver' desired future success; the professionalization of all kinds of human communication into codified behavioural notions of 'coaching', 'counselling', 'teamwork' or 'leading' - all these have given us a curiously rational, instrumental approach to ourselves.

Although 'strategic management' has been introduced to primary education mainly through the *National Strategies* and, as argued in Chapter 2, they are 'strategic' in name rather than content, the syllabus of leadership and management courses such as the NPQH focuses on the dominant notions of 'strategising' and codifying leadership traits and behaviours (Davies 2006; Hill and Matthews 2010). The dominant conceptualisation of 'strategic management' encourages organising our encounters with others around sophisticated planning tools and activities such as 'visioning'. The 'v-word' (Stephen) can be interpreted in different ways and can therefore lead to the emergence of different relationships in a school. The focus of strategy on five-year planning timeframes can exacerbate the 'short-termism', conveyed by research participants as the 'sausage machine' metaphor.

Paradoxically, viewed within the timeframe of humanity, the rise of 'new experts' is not a phenomenon of recent years. It can be traced back to the antiquity, for example to Ovid's account of creation cited in the Introduction to this thesis. Reaffirmed by the 'sciences of certainty', this phenomenon assumes the primacy of a 'spectacular' individual and leads to an objectification of human and other resources. Viewed within this timeframe, the school with its pupils and teachers has become an object to be changed, a territory to be conquered by the 'strategist', the 'policy entrepreneur', the 'auditor'. The authority of such experts is constructed around a synoptic, data-driven view of improvement. Within the 'sciences of certainty', expert knowledge is predicated on 'the tyranny of a subject able to contact anything outside of itself only within the methodological parameters of its own self-presence and self-security' (Jardine 1998: 9). Similarly, the spread of the culture of expertise in teaching and parenting has been transforming 'being a parent into parenting skills, being a teacher into teaching skills' (ibid: 9). The 'sciences of certainty' disconnect us from being human, being ordinary, from life 'as it is actually lived' (ibid: 9).

8.5 Original contribution to knowledge

As stated in Chapter 1, the main findings of this research resonate with findings of the 'minority traditions', represented in the educational arena by researchers such as Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012) and Gunter (2012) and, in the field of business management, by Stacey (2007, 2010) , Griffin (2002), Shaw (2002) and Mowles (2011). This thesis has aimed at making a contribution to knowledge in both contexts. Firstly, it connects educational research on strategy and policy enactment to the sciences of complexity and the rich sociological tradition underpinning complex responsive processes theory, in particular the writing of Mead (1934), Scott (1990, 1998) and Arendt (1998). Secondly, by applying Fairclough's (2003) discourse analysis tools, this thesis has pursued a more detailed analysis of the patterns of conversation about everyday practice in the case study schools.

Fairclough's (ibid) discourse analysis tools enriched the analytical repertoire of complex responsive processes theory applied in this study by revealing the subtleties of meaning arising from particular linguistic choices made by my research

participants. For example, when reflecting on her experience as the Headteacher, Jenny was puzzled by her use of personal pronouns:

> When we started... when I started... that's the other thing I do all the time, say 'we', very, very seldom do I say 'me', always 'we.' If there's something that I've done, it's 'we.' I think that's important.

What Jenny appears to gesture is inclusion, acknowledging the common purpose and achievement. Using the personal pronoun 'we' in place of 'I', however, can also gesture a bracketing of difference, as discussed in Chapter 7 (p.134). Meaning-making is complex and subtle, it depends both on what is explicit and implicit, on what we say, which semantic and syntactic categories we use, on assumptions we make and intentions we have. Attending to the complexities and subtleties of the discursive choices, which we often make implicitly or subconsciously as we talk about everyday practice, can help us to enter into the attitude of others (Mead 1934).

Complex responsive processes theory emphasises that, paradoxically, it is ambiguity and not knowing that can lead to the emergence of the novel. Whilst the school improvement theme in both schools was 'stuck' on standards and targets, the ambiguity implicit in participants' articulations of school improvement at Green Lanes Primary could provide an environment for alternative meanings and understandings to emerge (section 7.3, pp.131-2). The distinctive contribution of complex responsive processes theory to the body of research on education reform is its emphasis on the choices which can be made to disturb 'stuck conversations' (Stacey 2010). Seemingly small and insignificant changes in local patterns of conversation may, over time, allow for new global patterns to emerge. Unlike in the dominant conceptualisations of social change predicated on a pre-designed strategy or blueprint, complex responsive processes theorists highlight the power of the emergent to change the course of events. The emergent is simultaneously a conditioning and a conditioned factor which defies prediction:

> ...the emergent event... the occurrence of something which is more than the processes that have led up to it and which by its change, continuance or disappearance, adds to later passages a content they would not otherwise have possessed. (Mead 1932: 52)

By leading to novel elements, unknowable and undreamed of in advance, emergence 'makes an almost indefinite organization possible' (Mead 1956: 36).

Complex responsive processes theory provides a platform for resisting the dominant discourse of educational transformation and for taking responsibility for the many choices we make when participating in local interactions. The 'sciences of certainty' underpinning dominant approaches to reform are not suitable for understanding or controlling the complex world of humans. Pre-designed improvement strategies are often unable to deliver the expected outcomes and may lead to unforeseen negative consequences in the long term. In contrast, 'intelligent social control' (Mead 1956) accepts uncertainty and aims at improvement in the quality of social relations rather than quantitative increases in performativity, efficiency or value for money. As discussed in Chapter 6 (p.121), such progressive, qualitative change is predicated on democratic relations which make each participant in the social act simultaneously a 'subject' and a 'sovereign' (Mead 1956). Above all, 'intelligent social control' involves a recognition that ethical responsibility is not located in 'the system' or a few 'spectacular' individuals, but in the choices each of us makes whilst engaging in everyday practice (Griffin 2002). Inherent in complex *respons*ive processes is *respons*ibility for how we respond and act.

8.6 Reflecting on the research process

Like Stephen Ball (2012), who writes about his anger about the continuing neoliberal colonisation of education, I also feel angry every time the media report a new decision which gestures a threat to 'education' as a public good. My feelings experienced during this research process have ranged from exhilaration to self-doubt and feeling under pressure... to 'perform'. The overarching feeling, however, has been that of gratitude for my research participants for giving me the gift of their data (Van Manen 1990). Whilst being 'in the field', talking and listening to my research participants, I was often aware of my own assumptions and prejudgements. Although I tried to suspend them, I am aware that this thesis is inevitably shaped by my interpretations of the encounters with the professionals who have agreed to participate in this research. I hope that I have managed to convey at least a glimpse of what it is like to be immersed in the world of the primary school, in its ordinary

'everydayness'. Through my lived experience as a primary practitioner, I tried to stay connected to the 'gritty' reality of working in a primary school, but at times, also felt the tension of being an 'outsider'. In these moments I hoped that the interview space enabled my participants to articulate thoughts and reflections which may not have been expressed otherwise. I also experienced a significant amount of unease about presenting in my analysis anything which might show my research participants in less than favourable light. I am in no position to judge their thinking and their choices. Instead, by focusing on the patterns of conversation which emerged in the data collected in Abbey and Green Lanes Primary, I have tried to depict the interplay between the global and the local, whilst at the same time trying to hold on to the real, whole people.

As Ball et al (2012) remind me, this thesis is inevitably 'incomplete'. Empirical research is always subject to the enabling constraints of time scale, word allowance and our ability to comprehend and represent complexity. As explained in Chapter 4, data collection was enabled by Stephen at Green Lanes Primary and Alice at Abbey Primary, who approached and organised supply cover for colleagues willing to participate in semi-structured interviews. This means that the interview data have also been simultaneously constrained within the choices made by Stephen and Alice. In the light of my original research schedule, which aimed at interviewing a broader range of practitioners in each school, I am aware that interviewing different people could have generated a different data set, possibly leading to a different set of conversational patterns and themes. I therefore acknowledge the 'gaps and omissions' and recognise that I have been able to 'only write (and theorise) about the things [I] have done' (Ball et al 2012: 146). However, a systematic, iterative analysis and triangulation of the interview, documentary and observation data revealed sufficient internal consistency within participants' transcripts and commonalities across the participant sample in each school to warrant a number of 'fuzzy generalisations' (Bassey 1999), as discussed in Chapter 7 (pp. 128-34). The participants' accounts of discord or difference (e.g. pp. 100, 131), have been suggestive of the atmosphere of trust and respect which enabled them to share their 'private transcripts' (Scott 1990) in the course of the interviews.

I am also aware that no account can fully convey the successes and failures, compassion and frustration, laughter and exhaustion, togetherness and division, generosity and calculation - the 'gritty' reality of working in a primary school - written in and between the lines of interview transcripts, children's books and school displays. From the complex responsive processes perspective, this reality needs to be taken seriously, in all its ambiguity, paradox and ordinary 'everydayness'. This is because it is in the countless ordinary everyday interactions that individual and collective identities and power relations are contested and changed or legitimated and institutionalised.

In taking everyday experience seriously, case study research offers opportunities for developing deeper understandings of complex settings and processes. As pointed out by Simons (2009: 170), this makes case study methodology helpful in improving 'the soundness of future policy decisions'. Through their presentation of complex, multiple realities and experience, case studies provide insights into contexts and processes which are significant in other contexts of a similar nature (ibid). The findings of my case study, therefore, may be of relevance to anyone involved in education, be it at the grass roots of change, at the level of policy-making and other networks of educational practice. In line with complex responsive processes theory, the full meaning of this research is not encoded in, nor transmitted through the words on the page, but emergent in the response of the reader. If some of the insights gestured in this thesis resonate with the reader's experience then this may be because of the paradox of the universal in the unique (ibid). Implied in this paradox is that the everyday practice at Abbey Primary and Green Lanes Primary is textured as events, relationships and patterns of conversation which are situated and unique, but at the same time universally recognisable.

One of the most notable findings which emerged from this research has been the theme of renewal which every new birth brings into the world (Arendt 1998), discussed in section 7.8 (p.156). It is a message of hope, gestured by children and ignored by adults who are unwilling or unable to enter into the attitude of the child. When returned to its etymological Latin root *'educare'*, meaning to 'lead out', to

enable, to respect and care for the child, education is therefore both a site of struggle and promise.

However, what is at stake in school improvement is interpreted differently by different actors involved in education reform. For the policy-maker it may be 'training our next generation of outstanding teachers' (DfE 2011), or converting schools into Academies 'to effect educational transformation' (DfE 2010a: 12). For the teachers and leaders who participated in this research school improvement seems to be driving up standards and coping with the 'doom and gloom' (Jenny) of the 'policy epidemic'. As suggested by Mowles (2011), if the idea of targets appears to work in practice, it is because targets are made to work by practitioners. Organisational targets are made to work by professionals through their engagement in activities which are honest and dishonest, compliant and subversive, attentive to and unconcerned about the 'targets game' (ibid). Unrealistic targets encourage tactical moves such as accentuating good results and understating failures. A key consequence of enacting education reform which privileges arbitrary, often unrealistic targets and visions of a spectacularly better future is a disconnection from simply 'being with the kids' (Sandy), in the living present. By creating this disconnection, the activity of strategic visioning can amount to a denial of the current problems and difficulties; it also diminishes our appreciation of, and presence in the here and the now.

Reflecting on my learning from the research process depends on the timeframe (Elias 1991). In a shorter term, my research has made me aware of the need to rethink my practice as an educator. The deeper understanding of leadership and management developed through my doctoral study has already been informing the courses which I teach. For example, an exploration of management as a political practice rather than a science (Stacey in Mowles 2011), encourages students to make sense of their experience in ways which transcend the genericism of management models, techniques and prescriptions (e.g. strategic management tools discussed in Chapter 2, p. 30). The research process has also made me more attentive to reflexivity and it is from a reflexive stance that I have asked myself a number of questions: 'How do I resist an impulse to turn complex responsive processes theory into a 'dominant

discourse' in my lecture theatre?'; 'How do I respond to students who are apprehensive of ambiguity or uncertainty?'; 'What do I do about my own unease about uncertainty?'   In line with complex responsive processes theory, I refrain from devising a blueprint for addressing these questions. Instead, I acknowledge that the meaning of my actions cannot be known or fixed in advance and, consequently, I will only know the answers when they arise in my everyday practice.

Thinking in a longer term, this research has inspired me to contribute to the 'minority voices', to engage in thoughtful action (Arendt 1998) to defend what I believe should be a public good and a site of renewal, not an instrument for training a workforce for the marketplace. Thinking in the 'timeframe of humanity' (Elias 1991) is more difficult to express in words. Gadamer's (1975) words capture the uncertainty of the future, continuing from the past, through the present of high-modernity:

> When science expands into a total technocracy and thus brings on the "cosmic night" of the "forgetfulness of being,"... then may one not gaze at the last fading light of the sun setting in the evening sky, instead of turning around to look for the first shimmer of its return? (Gadamer 1975: xxxiv)

What this insight expresses is as frightful as it is inconceivable, a possibility that it may be too late to reverse the consequences of the 'forgetfulness of being' which permeates the ordinary 'everydayness' of the modern lifeworld. To create the 'cosmic night' for oneself and for others, to deprive future generations of the future is unforgivable, whether done by a policy-maker, parent, teacher or anyone else. In hoping for tomorrow to be a new beginning, in looking forward to the 'first shimmer' of the rising sun, I simultaneously claim responsibility for my role in the educational lifeworld. This responsibility begins with a 'remembrance of being' and only the future can tell what emerges from this beginning.

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Appendix 1   Research ethics

A copy of participant consent

ROEHAMPTON UNIVERSITY ETHICS BOARD

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project:

"In pursuit of transformation: an exploration of strategic leadership models and their enactment in the everyday practice of primary schools"

Brief Description of Research Project:

The purpose of this study is to explore models of school improvement (transformation) with a view to gaining a deeper understanding of the everyday experience of school leaders, teachers and other people enacting educational reform in primary schools. The study is rooted in my professional experience as a former primary practitioner and seeks to improve my current professional practice as a University Lecturer teaching MA Educational Leadership and Management courses.

The research is designed as a case study which aims at gaining a holistic understanding of the complexity of reform in the primary education sector. The focus of the study will be on exploring diverse understandings of leadership and school improvement in case study schools.

Data collection methods will include observation, interviews and documentary review. Semi-structured interviews with Senior Leadership Team (SLT) members, teachers and other adults working in the schools, of an hour's duration, will be audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. Observation notes of assemblies, staff and other meetings, for example SLT meetings, will provide further case study data. Documentary review will include the schools' policy documents and records.

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and can be withdrawn at any point. In order to protect participant anonymity and confidentiality, all interview transcripts and other data will remain anonymous by being coded; the anonymity of the participants being further assured by the use of pseudonyms. The final version and wording of interview transcripts will be negotiated with the participants following the interviews. All data will be stored on my PC, which is password protected. Paper copies of consent forms, letters or any other data collected in the course or research

will be kept to a minimum and stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office at Roehampton University, which is always locked when not occupied.

Findings will be submitted to two research supervisors and the Doctorate of Education examiners. Prior to this, details which might put participants' anonymity at risk will be omitted from the final version of the doctoral thesis. It is also hoped that parts of the study will be submitted for publication in peer reviewed research journals and presented at academic conferences.

Investigator (Researcher) Contact Details:

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Consent Statement:

I agree to take part in this research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings.

Name ………………………………….

Signature ………………………………

Date ……………………………………

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator. However if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Dean of School (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies.)

Appendix 2a Original and revised research schedules

Original research schedule

Schedule submitted and approved as part of the Preparation and Presentation of the Research Proposal (PPRP) module in November 2010. Approved by the University of Roehampton Ethics Committee in December 2011.

Date	Task
From April 2010	Literature review (ongoing)
Sep – Nov 2010	Ethics application, start contacting schools for pilot research
Dec 2010 – Jan 2011	Draft Literature Review chapters
Jan 2011	Pilot research methods – a pilot study in School P
Feb – March 2011	Draft Chapter 4, Research Methodology
April – June 2011	Collect data in School A
July – Aug 2011	Draft chapter Discussion of Findings. Case Study 1: School A
Sept – Nov 2011	Collect data in School B
Dec 2011 – Feb 2012	Draft chapter Discussion of Findings. Case Study 1: School B
March – Aug 2012	Begin to write up and complete thesis. Ready by January 2013

Revised research schedule

Date	Task
From April 2010	Literature review (ongoing)
Sep – Nov 2010	Ethics Application, start contacting schools for pilot research
Dec 2010 – May 2011	Draft Literature Review Chapter/s
From March 2011	Pilot research methods: documentary review of schools' website information and interviews in School A ('Abbey Primary')
May - August 2011	Begin collecting data in School B ('Green Lanes Primary'). Transcribe interviews and conduct a preliminary data analysis
Dec 2011	Finish collecting data in Abbey Primary
Dec 2011 – May 2012	Literature review, draft Research Methodology chapter
July 2012	Finish collecting data in School Green Lanes Primary
June – August 2012	Write second draft of Literature Review, draft Data Analysis / Findings
Oct 2012 – Jan 2013	Write up and complete thesis

Appendix 2c Research instruments

Semi-structured interview themes

Theme 1: 'Potted history'

Theme 2: The school

Theme 3: Leadership

Theme 4: Government strategies for education

Theme 5: Change in government direction for education over time

Theme 6: School improvement in everyday practice

Theme 7: Concerns in everyday life

Appendix 3a: NVivo node coding and word collocations for 'strategy'/'strategic'

concerns
conceptualisations of education/learning/childhood
improvement (dominant discourse)
- government control
- standards and targets

improvement (alternative discourse)
- other conceptualisations (eg quality of children)
- local initiatives

improvement change stories and insights
language compliance/confidence/thinking/humour
language figurative
- growth/development/nurturing
- military
- 'mechanistic' ('pushing'/pressure/stress)   pushing

leadership
- as developing people
- 'styles'/personal attributes
- 'strategic' leadership

leadership other models / conceptualisations
leadership insights
people children /families (dependent, diverse)/community/parents/staff
values

Appendix 3c   Analytic memos: Analysis of participants' articulations of 'school improvement'

Convergence with the dominant discourse

	Convergence with the dominant discourse	**Discursive features and interpretation**
Targets / standards / SATs	Pete: ...some people see it as a drive for standards: 'how can we get our 98% level 4 in Maths...?' Yes, it is, because we want every child to do their absolute best and that's what we're striving for. And giving them every opportunity that we possibly can, because ... so we have to make sure that...	Use of 'some people' brings in dialogicality but not difference. Use of addition, elaboration and exposition to construct an argument which is, however, weakened through mixed modality. Use of inclusive 'we' (removing distance) or to bracket difference? Assumption: a focus on standards = striving to help every child to do their absolute best. Positions himself as an 'implementer', based on someone else's perspective leads to modalised prescription. In the rest of interview 'strategic' in visioning and taking opportunities as they arise, likes the challenge of managing change.
	Eve: Obviously, the overriding improvement has to be the scores on the doors... and it's making those rise. Going forward, I would like that teaching to the test... there's far too much of this... And an improvement here would be more rounded perhaps education... I know that that's what the children come here for... to learn, but perhaps... It seems very harsh... it would be nice... if we could spend some money improving the environment... And other improvement... in the children's behaviour... I think this is nationwide. That's one improvement I would really like to see going forward.	Assertion of obligation - avoids evaluating this, merely elaborates on what it means, alternative presented 'cautiously', once power has been acknowledged to be with the 'powers that be' (elision of agency). Modalized assertions I - we. Explicit in her evaluation: 'I think'. Positions herself as a 'follower' with little power to control events.
...		

Divergence from the dominant discourse

	Divergence from the dominant discourse	**Discursive features and interpretation**
Targets / standards / SATs	Jenny: I don't think it's just about SATs, because you can improve SATs as long as you improve everything else about the school... As I was saying, teacher expectations, if... then.... So school improvement is about everything across the board... It's got to be everything... SATs are a measure and it's good because... But not the only one... *also supporting other schools (measured by SATs too)*	Denies reductionism but asserts the desirability of 'measures'. Explicit about values through exposition. Positions herself as an 'expert'. Evaluation consistent with her values previously spoken about, 'I' makes herself 'accountable'
	Gail: I have to say I'm not really one of the parents that would have ever been really worried about SATs results. I'm more concerned at primary level that they're happy, confident and secure.... that's more important to me...	Obligation to deny the dominant discourse, but from parent, not professional position. Categorical assertion of an alternative
...		