Restorying ‘our school’: mapping a school improvement counternarrative through space, place, and the light of local knowledge

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Finding narrative as a methodology has been a gift that I will carry with me. It has given me the confidence to find and develop my own voice and to make visible the voices of others who I care so deeply for. I owe a great deal to the narrative network of scholars whose work will continue to be an inspiration to me.

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‘Light’ is a metaphor that runs through this work - my three children, Lily, Max and Sam, have been, and always will be, the lights of my life guiding me forever forward.

Abstract

This research focuses on exploring school change as experienced by students and teachers in an English, coastal secondary school. Following a series of external inspections, the school was deemed to be 'failing' and under government legislation was required to move out of Local Education Authority control to become part of a multi-academy trust. The study takes place over a two-year period during which the school was navigating this transition.

The current articulation that government intervention is freeing up schools to act as autonomous sites of self-improvement, is placed within broader debates surrounding how change is mandated, enacted and monitored. It is argued that through policy and the relentless standards agenda, a 'one-size-fits-all' approach has resulted in a paucity of context for those living and working in schools. Education and schooling are thus becoming ever more de-contextualised and de-historicised.

Through narrative inquiry, this study creates a three-dimensional inquiry space which listens to and explores the stories told and lived of education. The teacher and student narratives recognise and place value on schooling as an experience grounded in conceptualisations of space and place as interrelational and plural. Attending to 'local ways of knowing' creates a multi-contextual approach which re-casts the change agenda and maps a school improvement counter-narrative which mobilises local agency.

The thesis concludes with a critical engagement in debates linked to the possibilities for schools. Restorying educational change as a craft of *place as meeting place*, working by the light of local knowledge (Geertz, 1983), gives us hope for a re-imagined future.

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Chapter 1

'The task of an idea is exactly this: to mobilise the creative imagination for a new purpose. Once this is achieved, the details can be worked out through common experience. And for this common experience we have not to wait……we have to start here and now.'

Karl Mannheim, 1950: 53

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

I came late to 'research'. I was in my forties when I entered academia as a mature student on a Foundation Degree, which supported my work as a Teaching Assistant in an English primary school. This had been a career change for me following a period of intense grief. Whilst coming to it 'late' has often been a regret, I console myself with the fact that with age has come the ability to ask the questions that in my youth I would have been too anxious or too reticent to ask. On entering higher education, I was encouraged to immediately think like a 'researcher'. My instinct to wonder and to think 'how come?' was there before I started to study. However, through the years, as I have been supported by teachers and colleagues at university, it has fuelled my interest in, and commitment to, research as both an exploration and a collaboration.

I recently attended a symposium in London which was held to celebrate the eightieth birthday of Cathy Riessman. Cathy is a narrative scholar. Her work over decades has been influenced by her life and the relationships that have sustained her. Gathered in one room were scholars who had known Cathy, been inspired by her, made friendships with her. I went with my daughter, who is studying and embarking on her third-year dissertation research at university in London. What struck me forcefully on this day was the powerful connections that can be made through a shared passion for finding out 'how come?'. The room was filled with women primarily, whose lives had been touched by Cathy and her work. Through their professional and personal relationship with her they shared that they had not only become better researchers and writers, but better people. To be a part of that day, and to share it with

my own daughter, was a special experience and made me grateful that I have been in a position to carry out the research that has resulted in this thesis and facilitated connections for me that are life changing.

The idea

My own experience of working in a school and my previous research experience had made me aware of the relentless pace of change which has affected English schools in recent decades. I wanted to get close to those who make up a school community. I wanted to find a school which was experiencing rapid change and I wanted to understand not only how the changes came about, but also the impact they had on the lived experience of those who make up the school community. My search for a partner school turned out to be much easier than I anticipated and led me to a small town on the English coast and Longton Academy Seachurch*, which had, until the year before my research began, been known as Seachurch School*. Chapter 5 of this thesis discusses how I came to work with the school and the events that led up to not only the change in name, but an associated avalanche of changes as the school moved out of Local Education Authority control to become part of a multi-academy trust (MAT).

From the outset of this study, I held out some hope that by working closely with both teachers and students, we might seek out ways to inform thinking about why and how change in schools is decided and enacted. Might this also allow us to re-imagine the school improvement agenda, shifting it closer to the people and the place affected by the changes? My instinct was that in order to do this, there was merit in paying close attention to the relationship between student and teacher. There seemed to me an unexplored space where the life of the teacher and the life of the student bumped into each other and at this intersection I wondered how much of their experience and thoughts about change would be shared. If this study could tap into their 'local knowledges' and understand how they connect to each other and their situation, might this lead to a way of re-thinking and re-working the notion of 'improvement'. Might a recognition of the centrality of relationships to people and to places be an integral part of mapping a successful counternarrative to the dominant model of change which is centrally mandated and hence decontextualised and dehistoricised?

I realised that what I was doing was a great deal of *wondering*. Whilst I knew that this study would be qualitative in nature and grounded in the interpretive paradigm, I was searching for

a methodology which would give students and teachers their own platform and enable me to enter the study not just as observer, clinically and potentially cynically collecting data, but as an active part of this project, joining them in this in-between space and place at a moment in time.

As I searched, I found the writings of Jean Clandinin. My first encounter with her work was *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* (2000), which she wrote with her long-time collaborator Michael Connelly. I became absorbed by their description of narrative in their work and their view that rather than a research problem or a research question, narrative inquiries are 'composed around a particular wonder' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000: 124). Their words resonated with my own *wonderings.* I wondered how teachers navigate a way through the business of adhering to strict accountability measures, yet find ways in which they can enact their own beliefs and values; I wondered where the space is to do it and what stories they might tell about the conflicts they encounter and decisions they must make; I wondered about the extent to which students and teachers come alongside one another and share experience; I wondered if they wanted their school to change and how their shared histories of living in this small, coastal town would shape their thoughts; I wondered if they enframed their experience within an awareness of the wider socio-political forces which surround them; I wondered if they shape change either by resisting it or adapting it?

Finding narrative inquiry, as advocated by Jean Clandinin, felt like a key which could give a way in to exploring these *wonderings*. As explored more fully in Chapter 4, such wonderings are drawn together to act as the guiding research questions. Whilst the terminology of *wonderings* and *puzzles* takes some getting used to, they are important in the successful framing of a narrative inquiry. I argue that they are a central way of setting up the research process as one of collaboration between researcher and participant. Participants can immediately relate to the idea that together we are tuning in to our shared *wonderings* and as the project develops we are together working through a series of *puzzles*. The accessibility of the language is the first step to bringing us together in a shared endeavour.

It became increasingly clear that it would allow the study to be anchored in an interpretation that 'does not mean absolute freedom for speculation and intuition, rather the use of intuitive processes recruited in the service of comprehension' (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber,

1998: 10). People are natural story tellers and our ability and inclination to tell stories can give a coherence to our lived experience.

In addition, one of the pillars of narrative inquiry is rooted in the Deweyan belief that there is merit in being attentive to the real experience of *ordinary* lives. This study aligns itself with the view that narrative inquiry is a 'quintessentially pragmatic methodology' (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007: 42). Given the lack of automatic starting and finishing points, it seeks to locate itself, beginning and ending with a respect for ordinary lived experience. As Clandinin herself explains, the focus of narrative inquiry is:

> 'not only valorising individuals' experience but is also an exploration of the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences were, and are, constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted. Understood this way, narrative inquiries begin and end in the storied lives of the people involved. Narrative inquirers study the individual's experience in the world, an experience that is storied both in the living and telling and that can be studied by listening, observing, living alongside an 'other', and writing and interpreting texts. Through the inquiry, we seek ways of enriching that experience for themselves and others' (Clandinin, 2013: 18).

'Storytelling happens relationally and collaboratively between speaker and listener in a cultural context' (Riessman, 2008: 154). In this sense at least some of the meanings are shared. As the study unfolded and progressed, it became increasingly clear that the methodology was creating space for both the researcher and the participants. The blurring of boundaries between us at first created some anxiety for me. Having been used to, in previous work, attempting to create a sense of phenomenological distance, bracketing my own experience and influences from that of the research participants, it felt strange to be so closely working alongside an 'other' in the field. This thesis charts the narrative journey I made with the participants of this study and how my role shifted from outsider to not quite insider but to collaborator and, at times, facilitator.

Throughout the study, I returned to Clandinin's work, including her writing on her anxieties in her own doctoral research (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), to get some comfort that my experiences were not isolated and that the way in which the study was developing would not undermine its validity. If a study grounded in narrative advocates pluralism, relativism and subjectivity then mindfulness of boundaries and of striving for a faithful and honest

representation seems of paramount importance. At its core this study sought out a narrative method as a real-world measure appropriate to investigate a real-life problem (Bickman and Rog, 1998).

The real-world problem identified here, is that the current trajectory of 'school improvement' - of what change is required for a school to 'improve' and the shock tactics used to impose such changes - views schools and those within them as passive recipients of 'change medicine' which can cure the school of its ills and bring into line with centrally mandated expectations and judgements of 'excellence'. This raises questions about the capacity to conceive of, let alone enact, school improvement differently. I approach these questions by putting the institutional narrative of Longton Academy Seachurch in conversation with the narratives of the teachers and students who participated in this study.

By necessity this thesis tells only some of the many stories which came out of our shared research. My hand in the selecting of them and the telling of them I hope has been guided as much by the participants as by me. The texts created however need to be interpreted and, in a sense, are always a matter of negotiation, whether this be between researcher and participant or author and reader. By listening to, and reflecting on, the narratives of the participants however, this thesis has emerged as a work which counters a cynicism that there can be alternative ways of changing our schools. As Eric Olin Wright (2010: 8) suggests, the world we live in has a tendency to mock radical visions rather than take them seriously. Whilst it is certainly too grand to describe what emerges from the empirical work here as 'radical', I would contend that it gives valuable insights into life at school and renews a belief in the human capacity to embrace multiple narratives and find creative ways to envisage and realise the 'conflictual new' (Massey, 2005: 162).

The thesis is divided into seven chapters:

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 embeds the notion of school improvement within a broader framework which examines the overlapping narratives of control. It seeks to situate English schools within a complex and contested landscape of policy and policy agendas. It will view policies as both 'systems of values and ways of accounting for and legitimating political decisions' (Ball, 2013: 17). It will explore policy as an ontological force and examine how it can work in practical and material ways, through policy devices or

'technologies', such as competition and performance management, to affect and control relationships and practices (ibid).

Informed by policy sociology (see Ozga, 1987), any examination of policy will make the case for a level of theoretical engagement as a commitment to interrogate the complexity of education policy in both its formation and enactment. Education is not a neutral concept and as such must be situated not merely by a linear description of policy developments, but by both an awareness and examination of the different ideologies, values and beliefs which influence it.

As Chapter 2 develops, it identifies global trends which continue to impact national policy, seeing nation states as both 'policy borrowers' and 'policy lenders' (Ball, 2017; Garratt & Forrester, 2012; Spring, 2009) and explores how policy is interpreted at the meso-level (see Spring, 2009). The primacy of economics continues to be seen globally in the formation of education policy, and concerns about the effects of a pervasive, neo-liberal agenda will be examined.

It will engage in discussions about what constitutes a 'self-improving system' in relation to school change. There will be analysis of the concept and construction of the notion of 'self-improvement' as part of a wider post-modern shift. There will be exploration of improvement agendas located in the discourse of 'deficit' and an engagement in discussion of the tensions between the growing focus on 'self-improvement' potentially masking deeper, structural failings. To what extent could it be argued that everywhere is the 'dynamic of transformation and the need to seize opportunities, constantly innovate and constantly improve performance' (Ball, 2007:37).

Explored, will be the concept that that at work are a number of regulatory and discursive performative practices for the 'normative production of identities' and these are regarded as 'real and significant' (Flint and Peim, 2012: 180). What it means to be professional, to show professionalism or to pursue professionalism is not universally agreed (Goodson and Hargreaves, 1996). It is open to interpretations which will be examined. Starting with initial teacher training (ITT) teachers are encouraged to focus on competencies. Some would argue that this results in impoverished teaching as technical skills take precedent over the affective and ethical dimensions of teaching (Hegarty, 2000).

Following the exploration of the tensions surrounding education, Chapter 3 turns to theorising how a framework for challenging externally mandated pressures can be developed. It seeks alternative ways of conceptualising how we might find ways to loosen the discursive closure which can be seen binding education, and which pays scant regard to context. I propose, what I have termed, a *conceptual cartography*. Using concepts more usually aligned with cultural geography, I argue that an alternative conceptualisation of change can emerge and act as a counternarrative which sees 'school improvement' taking account of space, place and local knowledge. Significantly informed by the work of Doreen Massey, place is theorised not just 'as is', but as a political project (1997). We deepen our understanding of the spatialities of relations and of the relational politics of place and develop an understanding of how geographies of connectedness can underpin a reimagining and re-enacting of the change agenda. Change which comes about from an active participation of those it affects, fits with the rhythm of their lives.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological approach and analysis adopted in this study. It describes how, from tentative narrative beginnings, research texts were developed. It explores the tensions and anxieties and ethical dilemmas associated with this work. I give my reasons for choosing the particular approach undertaken, including discussion of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the chosen techniques for data production and the crucial agentive elements which emerge. I offer an explanation of how I approached ethical issues involved in my work in the school. Critical to the study and central to the approach selected, is the ability of the researcher to work with the participants in a mutual relationship of trust and respect. This chapter addresses how this process evolved throughout the course of the study. I consider some of the limitations and enabling factors associated with my own position as moving from an 'outsider' to 'partner' to the school community who generously agreed to take part in this study.

Chapters 5 and 6 see the chosen methodology charting the unscripted drama of a life at school. The writing of these chapters requires the reader to adapt to a more lyrical writing style. They also contain extended passages of words from the participants. The decision to include these and this departure from Clandinin's narrative inquiry arose from the collaborative process the participants and I embarked upon. I argue that 'voicing' the

participants directly legitimised their experience. In addition, as we worked together, and as their voices became an integral part of this study, we strengthened our alliance – university based researcher/ academic – school based researcher/ teacher – school based researcher/ student. We deepened our understanding of one another and the study became the 'mutual endeavour' (McBeth, 1993: 147) we had envisaged.

These chapters set out to be a faithful representation of narratives shared. Seemingly connected to the coastal location of the school, the ebb and flow of our lives shifted - coming together and moving apart. This synergy created space where perceptions were changed, and opportunities made visible and these will be explored. We draw the narrative threads together and re-work them to craft new ways of knowing. By unlocking the agentive power of teacher and student participants' collective memories and experiences the 'light of local knowledge' that illuminates this work is captured.

This thesis concludes with Chapter 7, which presents the case for hope. Highlighting the work of John Dewey, Ernst Bloch, Roberto Unger and Eric Olin Wright, I make connections to support the belief in the transformative power of *ordinary* experience. Challenging those who would emphasise that it is the inescapable psychological, organisational and economic imperatives which necessarily 'doom all imaginary alternatives to impracticality' (Unger, 2001: 5), this final chapter looks to the horizons of our understanding and our imagination. Horizons where we can continually 'test and retest the limits of possibility' (Wright, 2010: 372)

> 'We cannot live without a set of formative institutional arrangements and enacted ideals of human association, nor can we ever completely override the contrast between the things that are up for grabs in our ordinary conflicts and activities and the things that are not. But we can disrupt established structures. We can replace them if not all at once, then piece by piece' (Unger, 2001: 5).

We can use the light of local knowledge to guide us.

Chapter 2

The role played by education in all political utopias from ancient time onward shows how natural it seems to start a new world with those who are by birth and nature new. So far as politics is concerned, this involves of course a serious misconception: instead of joining with one's equals in assuming the effort of persuasion and running the risk of failure, there is dictatorial intervention, based upon the absolute superiority of the adult, and the attempt to produce the new as a fait accompli, that is, as though the new already existed

Hannah Arendt, 1961: 176

The rationality of the system of production, in its technical aspects, is accompanied by the irrationality of our system of production in its social aspects

Erich Fromm, 1942: 101

Chapter 2: THE NARRATIVE OF CONTROL

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2.1 Overview

Educational policy makers increasingly state their aim of transforming British education into a 'world-class system' (DfE, 2010; DfE, 2016). Yet even after decades of 'reform', it still appears to be the case that the matter of improving education in the UK is the 'great progressive cause of our times' (ibid). Central to delivering this aim is the repeated call for school 'improvement'. There have been a series of factors that have led to the growing interest in the self-improvement model for schools and schooling. Whilst some see the Education Reform Act of 1988 as setting a course towards schools as self-managing institutions (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988), Hargreaves (2011, 2014) argues that since 2010 there has been a 'seismic shift' in the landscape of schooling in the UK. The emergence of free schools, the rapidly expanding academy programme, teaching schools, amongst other changes, have led to a complexity in the nature of schools and schooling and now, it could be argued, it is the whole schooling system that is expected to be self-managing and self-improving. Despite government claims that schools are to be freed up to act as autonomous sites of self-improvement, central to delivering this aim is the paradox that national measurable standards must be defined, monitored and achieved. Schools and those within them, potentially find themselves encouraged to function as self- improving systems, where change can only be brought about by following narrowly prescribed strategies embedded in a standardised discourse of continual improvement and increased productivity.

It could be argued that the genesis of how education has been viewed by successive recent governments of all persuasions lies in a speech made by James Callaghan[1] on 18 October 1976 at Ruskin College. Although change did not occur immediately after this speech was made, it signalled important and long lasting shifts in how the purpose of education has been viewed in England and how the English schooling system has continued to change from the progressivism and comprehensivism seen post Second World War (Ball, 2017).

Central to this shift has been the direct link made between education and the needs of business and the economy. There is a wide body of literature examining the discourses of

[1] This speech was pivotal in marking a shift towards greater government involvement in education both in terms of the purpose of education and the genesis of the standards agenda so embedded today. For the full speech see: http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/speeches/1976ruskin.html

accountability, value for money, marketisation and school autonomy, under the umbrella of neo-liberalism and new public management. Together, these developments could be described as a 'radical challenge' to progressive practices of schooling (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2015: 105). Yet, the rhetorics of performativity and accountability consistently position themselves as neutral and rational. They appear to be common-sense practices against which it would be irrational to argue and yet, they raise concerns in that they are founded in values explicitly linked to such neo-liberal concepts of competition, marketisation and consumer choice (Apple, 2004).

Recognising schools as situated within such a context, goes some way to explaining how shifts in dynamics of power, through policy, have re-constructed schooling and education in the public sphere. This has implications for schools both philosophically and practically. Education has been publicly framed as a way of securing the prosperity of the economy. Schooling has been framed as a preparation. It is future-directed and over time has been defined as a way of certifying young people as possessing the knowledge and skills for entry into the job market. It could be argued that 'unfettered instrumentalism' has transformed education into a process of production from which 'human commodities emerge' (Garratt and Forrester, 2012: 159). There are deep concerns that this commodification of education is moving it from a public service to *big business* (see Pring, 2004). As Ball cautions:

> 'The social and economic purposes of education have been collapsed into a single, overriding emphasis on policy making for economic competitiveness and an increasing neglect or side-lining (other than in the rhetoric) of the social purpose of education.' (2017: 13)

Education has become exposed to free-market principles. Schools and higher education 'providers' now need to consider 'efficiency' and 'marketability' as parents emerge as 'sovereign consumers' (Garratt and Forrester, 2012:112) as a consequence of a series of policy developments. The notion of 'performativity' has become one of the key tools by which this economic agenda can be delivered and secured. Since the introduction of league tables in 1992, schools have increasingly needed to supply market information to their parent/consumers, so that they can be more easily compared and as a key element of 'choice-making'. This has significant implications for those within schools, as the culture of performativity brings with it associated mechanisms of control, judgement and comparison. It could be argued that such a culture presents a number of paradoxes which conflict with

creating conditions which foster both the desire and the ability to 'improve'. One such paradox is that an organisation, with such reliance on gathering the data, to monitor and present performative information, consumes so much time and energy on it, that there is little left for making any real improvements (Elliot, 1996). Real work and real change are therefore subordinated to the main job of data production and what could aptly be described as 'impression management' (Ball, 2017). This sees the discourse of teacher repositioned as technician, implementing and monitoring initiatives and the 'outputs' of the educational process.

The zealous championing of educational improvement can be seen repeated in the rhetoric of successive UK governments. Policy suggests that there can be 'excellence everywhere' (DfE, 2016) and key to this is '*supported* autonomy to drive up standards for all' (ibid: 8, italics added). The beauty of the standards agenda, and the reason it has taken such a firm hold, is that ideologically it is able to garner support from both the left and the right. For the left it can feed into the 'closing the gap' narrative of creating greater equity of outcomes for poor and minority students. For the right, successive governments, both in the United Kingdom and others such as the United States, have seen it as a way of wrestling power away from teachers and teaching unions towards government whilst simultaneously reinforcing the links between education and business. The relentless focus on improvement and the speed at which policy is introduced, creates complex conditions for schools. Ball (2017: 51) aptly describes the scope and complexity of educational *reform* as 'breath-taking'. Beneath the rhetoric of 'reform' and associated 'autonomy', however, lie a set of practices or technologies which, it could be argued, seek to do the opposite. Far from devolution and deregulation, the grip of performance and profitability leads to false freedoms as schools strive to fulfil the demands of education in this realm of new public management.

We see the language of management and economics replacing the language of education (Coffield and Williamson, 2012). Notions of the 'bottom line', the 'business model', 'more for less', seep into the educational language lexicon. As Coffield and Williamson (2012: 3) caution:

> Junk language is as damaging to our minds as junk food is to our bodies; it corrupts our thinking, but it also dehumanises our relationships.

To fully understand the background to this study, I will offer an examination of the policy 'turns' which have historically and continue to shape the environment in which they operate, as well as the knowledge contexts within which they are positioned and which have a powerful influence over them. Understanding the global discourse which affects policy formation goes some way to assisting this. However, any examination of policy must be done with awareness of the lens of externally imposed ideological constructs which impact schools and those who work within them. As Gunter (2016: 88) urges, we need to be alert to the *knowledges*, *knowings*, *knowers*, and *knowledgeabilities* at play.

Additionally, the drive for continuous improvement is located within a changing landscape for education and schooling. Moves to convert schools into academies and the rise of the 'free school' programme is seeing the reduction of local authority control and a shifting of school structures. Academy schools owe their origins to the programme for City Academies announced by the Secretary of Education in 2000. The first three were opened in 2002. The premise of the programme was that by moving schools out of Local Education Authority (LEA) control and providing funding directly from central government, coupled with greater autonomy for school leaders, standards for schools in inner city locations would be raised. The schools targeted, it was argued, catered for high numbers of pupils from low socio-economic backgrounds who were experiencing deprivation. The programme was set out as a way of breaking the cycle of 'failing' inner city schools. Whilst there are some who claim that outcomes for children attending these early converted schools show some improvement (Eyles and Machin, 2015), others would challenge such evidence and assert that, even at this early stage, the indicators which were used to claim the success of the initiative lacked rigour (see Gorard, 2005, 2009). Subsequently, these claims have been used as the basis of justifying the rapid roll-out of the programme, leading to further concern that the 'wrong' schools are converting to Academy status, with little concrete evidence to suggest that this confers any advantage to pupils from those in LEA controlled schools (ibid). This notion of 'breaking the cycle' feeds into a discourse of 'decline' which has been appropriated by both the political Right and many of those associated with the Third Way under Tony Blair. In each case, reforming education was positioned as a way of halting the decline and making Britain fit to compete in a global world.

As part of New Labour's educational strategy, the academy programme saw the establishment of 203 schools by the time a coalition government was elected in May 2010.

The most recent published figures show that at January 2018, 6,996 maintained schools had converted to academies and there were 476 free schools also with academy status. The cost of conversion in one year 2016-17, paid by the Department for Education, was £81 million (NAO, 2018).

The characteristics set out for the original academy schools have changed over time. This raises serious questions about how far the academy programme has moved from its original justification to improve outcomes for the most economically disadvantaged pupils and claims that academy status would be a route to equity. The Academies Act 2010 altered the definition of academy status. All maintained schools were now able to apply for academy status, with those rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted[2] being 'pre-approved', perhaps, it could be suggested, mitigating against further critique that academy schools were not performing well enough? It also gave greater powers to the Secretary of State for Education who, following the Act, was now able issue an academy order requiring the local authority to cease to maintain a school.

Although in 2016, the Conservative government pulled back from the stark announcement that all schools would become academies by 2022 (see Ladd and Fiske, 2016), the introduction of the Education and Adoption Act in 2016, put further pressure on schools who must now take this route. Feeding into the improvement agenda, for the first time it is not only 'failing' schools which will be subject to intervention powers, but a new category is being established. This means that schools judged to be 'coasting' are also eligible for intervention and in some cases 'transformative structural change' (DfE, 2015:12) in the form of an academy order. The consultation documents, cover, at some length, the proposed measures which will be used to assess if schools are 'coasting'. The document suggests rejecting Ofsted inspections as being too broad a definition of school effectiveness, instead advocating the sole use of published performance data as the benchmark to define 'coasting'.

It could be argued that both the conception of the academy as a new model of school and the trajectory it has taken through New Labour, the coalition government elected in May 2010, and the Conservative governments elected in May 2015 and May 2017, has been a key

[2] Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, the English schools' inspectorate – see later in this chapter for further discussion of the formation of Ofsted and its implications

development in the history of English education. Eyles and Machin (2015) take the view that the changes in school 'type' and the scale of the academies programme have rarely been seen in any education system across the world. Whilst comparisons can be made with the American charter school programme (see Chapter 6), a significant difference is that the majority of charter schools are new schools, set up as such, as opposed to academies which are conversions of existing schools.

If the view is taken that the sole judgement of success can be based on performance data and that even Ofsted judgements are too broad and too contextual, this raises serious questions about what levers are being used to drive school improvement and consequently what behaviours result. If, as Ozga (2008: 261) cautions, we are being 'governed by numbers' then the dangers of using the 'wrong drivers' (Fullan, 2011a: 4; 2011b) with which to steer improvement become ever more likely. It would seem logical to speculate that the wrong drivers might result in the wrong behaviours. This research seeks to understand these drivers from the perspective of those who work in an academy school. A central tenet of the academy programme is that schools choosing to convert will gain greater autonomy both in terms of funding and in other areas such as curriculum development. For those who are the subject of an enforced academy order (a sponsored academy), arrangements are made for established academy chains to tender for a takeover of the 'failing' school. How autonomy actually works in this situation is under-researched (see Salokangas and Ainscow, 2018, for the most recent work in this area).

Increasingly, we also see that schools are being encouraged to work in groups, networks, often presented as 'families of schools'. This is an arrangement where, it is suggested, schools can collectively better meet all students' and teachers' needs. Whilst this metaphor conjures up images of a relationship based on closeness and trust, it could be argued that the increased competition between schools which has been fostered by cultures of comparison and market imperatives, has a damaging effect on the conditions which may support the formation of positive relationships.

Gaining ground as the dominant model is a process whereby schools link together in chains or multi-academy trusts (MATs). There are obvious tensions which may arise from such alliances, which are predicated on the notion of advancing 'school improvement' (see Greany, 2014). The concept raises questions relating to the individual, cultural and structural

dimensions of how schools operate. Mansell (2016:22) discusses school takeovers as a 'particularly controversial new feature of England's educational landscape' in recent years. The notion of the 'hostile takeover' a concept which is more associated with the corporate world has, Mansell points out, has been used by campaigners to describe cases where the Department for Education (DfE) has forced a non-academy school into academy status despite community opposition. In addition, there are cases where schools have been transferred from one academy chain to another. Mansell argues that take-overs, whether hostile or not, seem likely to become increasingly prevalent in the English education system. Furthermore, there is little transparency when schools change hands in this way.

That 'the market' has firmly entered the realm of the school is apparent in the increasing numbers of CEOs who run multi-academy trusts sitting above head teachers. The commercial language of 'acquisition' and 'merger', of presenting school exam results as if they were 'a commercial bottom line' (Mansell, 2016: 24) has become commonplace. The lack of transparency seen in takeovers and in the leadership and management of academy schools extends to their governance. In a local authority framework schools were subject to influence through locally elected councillors. In the new system, the appointment of members who can then control the appointment of trustees is often unclear. Indeed, in addition to who is appointed and how there are further concerns about the abilities of members to carry out the complex work of running a potentially multi-million-pound operation and complying with the legal and ethical frameworks required (Martin, 2018).

Critics of the academy system argue that there has been a consistent campaign against the comprehensive school system, with many of the criticisms exaggerating comprehensive schools 'failings' in a bid to justify academies and the march of the academy programme has eroded both local democracy and raises concerns about their ability to offer genuinely inclusive education (see Benn, 2011). This fuels the concern that the academy programme has always been ideologically rather than pedagogically driven is still relevant. Questions still remain as to whether the New Labour policy that instigated the proliferation of the academy model was more about giving schools a 'makeover' as compensation for, rather than a way of successfully tackling, economic and social inequality.

Fielding and Moss (2011: 21) contend that the 'political and the ethical have been drained out of public discourse on education and schools'. But that 'the draining of politics *is* political'

(ibid, italics in the original). We are left with an impoverished public discourse in which children, teachers and schools are evaluated by their conformity to standardised norms.

> Education and the school have become a machine for ever more effective governing – of children, of teachers, and of parents – in the interests of producing a flexible, self-managing workforce for an increasingly competitive and increasingly consuming global economy. They have become enclosures for deploying technical practices, underpinned by an extremely instrumental rationality, in a project reduced to identifying the means to achieve predetermined ends – 'what works' is the slogan' (Fielding and Moss, 2011: 18)

The phenomenon of the culture of performativity has wide implications for teachers and students and their ways of working. Taken at face value performativity may be seen as a reasonable expectation that teachers will 'perform', but this belies the associated pressure that they are under to perform in certain ways and in ways which are defined and measured by external actors (Shore and Wright, 2000). These requirements extend to expectations of students, as Apple (2001:413) suggests, schools have been subject to 'a subtle shift in emphasis…from student needs to student performance, from what the school does for the student to what the student does for the school'. This has significant implications for both teacher and student agency. For the teacher, it can position them as deliverer of curriculum and producer of performance statistics as opposed to 'curriculum developer, a responsible professional and an agent of change' (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2015:107). As a result, performativity calls into question teacher professionalism. There are apparent contradictions as, on the one hand, teachers are seen to have been demeaned as facilitators, whilst on the other, the rhetoric of professionalism in recent shifts in policy, have positioned practitioners as critical to the enactment of policy, as autonomous, responsible actors. Teachers have been encouraged, for example, to add their input into the curriculum, seen as a development from the original, prescriptive 1988 National Curriculum. This change appears to give teachers greater control over curriculum content thus engendering higher levels of teacher engagement and giving explicit permission to exercise a degree of professional agency. Yet the power of performativity is still exerted as the strength of output regulation or as Biesta (2004) describes it 'outcomes steering', has arguably eroded teacher autonomy in a more effective way than might have been achieved by controlled input regulation from a tightly formulated National Curriculum. As one head teacher I spoke to put it bluntly, 'the carrot is too small, and the stick is too big'.

A Taylorist approach attempts to increase efficiency by breaking down processes and people into distinct parts, as if education can be run like a factory. Individual actors are reduced to what would be seen in a business sense as 'deliverables' as opposed to individuals with beliefs, values and knowledge which can build and frame the agentive qualities for change and 'improvement'. Any reconceptualisation of the teacher follows years of policies which have regulated teaching and eroded both teacher autonomy and teacher professionalism (Biesta, 2004). These have taken the form of *input regulation* with prescriptive control of curriculum content and *output regulation* from high levels of inspection and the use of data to evaluate and compare the performance of schools, teachers and students (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2015). The discourse of school effectiveness and school improvement have focused on the *capacity* of the teacher, to a great extent ignoring the conditions, contexts and environment in which they practise.

Surrounded by such forces, questions of how schools can foster a climate which encourages positive, intellectually demanding pedagogies emerge (Lingard et al., 2001). Can space be found, to resist the pressures put upon them from external sources and to consider their role and the agency of those within their communities? Is there a realisation that there are multiple dynamics underpinning such pressures? Are schools aware that they have a crucial role to play in raising critical questions and challenging hegemonic realities (Anyon, 2014)? There is support for the notion that schools operate most effectively when they create the conditions relating to communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), as places where there is a climate of mutual trust and space to engage in conversations about pedagogy and critically engage with research. This advances the argument that 'real work and real change' is more likely to happen when there is a shift away from tightening controls, to what Fullan (2007) describes as 'capacity building'. Yet there are questions surrounding how current frameworks can be balanced with a collective commitment to improvement and with teachers' and students' self-belief of their own agency.

There is the view that one way in which schools can take a degree of ownership of self-improvement, is by a re-engagement with research (see BERA-ISA, 2014). Schools can aim to become 'research-rich' environments with a more coherent strategy of how research is both generated and used, a status which, it is suggested, will provide the greatest capacity to self-evaluate and self-improve. Considering aspects of teacher engagement with research,

from initial teacher training (ITE) to the use of research in continuous professional development (CPD) for established teachers, this review highlighted the fragmented nature of how research is used to inform and shape practice. The findings encourage the development of greater 'research literacy' in teachers, allowing them to engage and critically examine current research, which relates to their field. In addition, calls were made for teachers to generate their own research to improve their practice. Less clear was where the 'space' to critically engage with research would come from. To those on the front line, both teachers and students, this may seem a utopian vision as they attempt, on a daily basis, to navigate the increasing levels of scrutiny of their work and the relentless culture of performativity. Understandably, teachers and students may well be wary of being encouraged to do anything that can be seen to be taking them away from an ever-narrowing remit of raising test scores, to comply with rigid accountability measures. Often operating in a low-trust culture (Troman, 2000), there is concern that engagement beyond anything, other than the prescribed disciplines of performance, is too risky to contemplate. Safer, is keeping 'off the radar', working as Sergiovanni (2001) suggests, 'under canvas'.

It is within such a complex educational landscape that this study is located. Conducting a narrative inquiry in a single secondary school in a coastal English town, this study contributes valuable insights into how change is envisioned and enacted. It follows a school as it moves from being deemed to be 'failing' and hence in receipt of a forced academy order, and through the experience of being taken over by a multi-academy trust (MAT). The experience of living and working through such change is under-researched. This is in part due to the fact that it is difficult for researchers to get access to schools - the sense of keeping 'under the radar' extending to a nervousness about having practices scrutinised. It is also the case that despite the startling pace and scale of the academy programme, it is still a relatively recent phenomenon and hence in need of a critical investigation.

There are emerging studies which have been running parallel to this one. Christy Kulz's (2013; 2017) ethnographic study explores how raced, classed and gendered practices can be reproduced in what is widely lauded as an exemplar of an academy school in a deprived urban area. Kulz's position as a member of staff for the duration of her study gave her privileged access to Dreamfields Academy*[3] and she offers a detailed and at times sinister

[3] All names with * denotes pseudonyms throughout the thesis

account of regimes of power which she argues perpetuate inequality. As they are promised the unattainable students are controlled, encouraged to be docile bodies who enter, what Kulz metaphorically describes as, a 'conveyer belt' of a school system which demands compliance in exchange for success.

In a different study, Maija Salokangas and Mel Ainscow (2018) carried out a longitudinal study of an academy based in an urban district of England. The focus of their work has been about a 'failing' school Oak Drive High* and how this school became Parkside Academy*. Over a period of ten years Salokangas and Ainscow worked on a number of research projects with the school and were able to collect data about the school and developments there as part of these. Their particular focus is the extent to which the school developed, or did not develop, *autonomy*.

Both these recent studies add to a slowly growing body of research detailing the inner workings of academy schools. Yet, as previously highlighted, this area remains under-researched. This is in part due to difficulties and tensions in gaining the intimate access to schools to generate data. The ethical dilemmas raised by both these studies are worth exploring to demonstrate the fine line that any researcher must tread in search of gaining access to find things out which lie below the surface of the often carefully presented institutional narrative.

In Kulz's case she was a former member of staff at the school and as staff member turned researcher there are moments in both her thesis (2013) and her following book (2017) when there is a palpable tension between which role the participants are viewing her in. It is interesting that the Principal of the school agreed that he could be named and so could the school in Kulz's work, thus vetoing the normal anonymity afforded in such projects. The impression is that he was so confident that what would emerge would be a positive picture of Dreamfields Academy* (the original pseudonym used) and that he and his school had nothing to hide. What emerges from the study one suspects is very different to what he had envisaged when he agreed to the project.

For Mel Ainscow, his role as advisor and, as he describes it, 'critical friend' to the school at the centre of his study, in particular to the Principal, cause him to reflect on the ethical challenges of where he found himself. These ethical dilemmas tell us something of the

difficulties in getting into schools. They also alert us to the fact that even though some sort of previous relationship with the school can assist the researcher getting in, what to do with such access and how to represent what is found is ethically complex and intellectually challenging work. I would add here that any researcher, whilst not shying away from 'truth' searching, must be mindful of being transparent about their role and aware of their responsibilities both to their current project but also to how future researchers who have connections to institutions will be viewed.

Both these studies give us genuine and valuable insights into school life. However, more research is still needed to explore different aspects of how the rapidly expanding academy programme and associated policy in England is affecting schools and those within them. This study sets itself apart in its intent to be a collaboration between researcher, teacher and student. As explored in detail in Chapter 4, I make the choice of narrative inquiry specifically to create a three-dimensional inquiry space which affords the researcher, the student and the teacher an agentive capability. Through the duration of the study we were 'in the midst' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:63) of our own lives and each other's and we were aware that, in addition to finding out more about how things are, we were also working towards how they might be.

Through the narratives of the participants this thesis presents a nuanced examination of school life (see Chapters 5 and 6). However, in this study, teachers and students, in contrast to Kulz's study (2013), carve out ways of subtly influencing school policies and regimes. We worked together to map out a theoretical framework – a conceptual cartography, which illuminates the tentative pathways towards change, which we argue should be embedded in the 'local' when conceived of as in relation to as opposed to the global (see Massey, 2005 and further discussions in Chapter 3). Our conceptual thinking tools are more often associated with cultural geography than education, but they have afforded us a way of generating a context for educational change and practice which, in contrast to the dominant mode of education policy, takes notice of space, place, the relational and the temporal and the importance of local/indigenous knowledges. Such a mapping will be made more forcefully in Chapter 3. But the argument threaded throughout this thesis is that it can act to develop, not an immediate solution, but the beginnings of a counter-narrative to challenge how things are now and see new ways forward. It is to the 'now' however that we turn to consider in more

detail the intellectual histories (Gunter, 2016) and policy developments which have shaped where schools currently find themselves.

2.2 Exploring the current educational change trajectory

The argument being made here is that the rhetoric of autonomy and devolution is, in practice, somewhat of a smoke and mirrors exercise. Beyond this rhetoric a different picture emerges, perhaps usefully conceived of as *controlled decontrol* (du Gay, 1996, cited in Ball, 2017). Whilst the increasingly fragmented educational landscape has moved schools away from local educational authority control (discussed earlier in this chapter), the idea that this has increased autonomy is contested. We will, in this section of Chapter 2, take a step back to examine what has influenced the educational change trajectory. The argument then moves forward to the central tenet of this thesis, which is that what we see is education and schools bounded by policy and interventions which are, in reality, increasingly centralised. The dangerous by-product of this is that as power moves back to the centre it takes a one-size-fits-all approach and hence becomes de-located from the school and its place and de-historicised from local knowledges. In effect, the locatedness of the school and the importance of this to sustainable, meaningful change, becomes erased.

Trends in educational reform

Helen Gunter (2016: 99) identifies four powerful 'meta- structures' which generate narratives which can be distinctive but also, 'allow for accommodations and alliances'. These are identified as *Civic Welfarism, Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism* and *Elitism*. It is relevant here to look at each one of these in turn and to examine how they have shaped thinking of how education and schools should change.

Civic Welfarism

The Beveridge Report, published in 1942, was instrumental in establishing the underlying principle of civic welfarism as an ideological as well as politically pragmatic project. The principle is that there should be social security which is based on contribution rather than means testing or personal wealth. The 'welfare state' becomes the way that this aim can be enacted. Importantly, it signals a shift away from seeing the poor in society as a problem towards a sense of mutuality and solidarity.

It also has implications for schools and schooling as local schools can be viewed as sites of integration. This fits with the Deweyan belief that schools have a pivotal role to play in the flourishing of democracy (MW9). The school and the surrounding community can act as a site for democratic learning with regard to values, practices and conduct. The connection Dewey makes with society and school will be explored in more detail in Chapter 7. It is of relevance to make the connection explicit here to highlight how schooling can be conceived of as not only a site for pedagogy but also of ethics:

> There cannot be two sets of ethical principles, one for life in the school, and the other for life outside the school. As conduct is one, so also the principles of conduct are one. The tendency to discuss the morals of the school as if the school were an institution by itself is highly unfortunate. The moral responsibility of the school, and of those who conduct it, is to society. The school is fundamentally an institution erected by society to do a certain specific work, - to exercise a certain specific function in maintaining the life and advancing the welfare of society (Dewey, MW4: 269).

Since the 1970s, the New Right, Reaganomics in the United States and Thatcherism in the United Kingdom, have attacked welfarism and challenged the power of professional groups and the trade unions as a threat to the surge of reforms which privileged the economy and a programme of privatisation of public services. Over time this ideology has taken such a hold that even the traditional political party lines in British politics have become blurred and the erosion of the welfare state almost seen inevitable by some, even desirable by others.

Neoliberalism

David Harvey argues that neoliberalism has become 'hegemonic as a mode of discourse' as such it has 'pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world' (2005: 3). Neoliberalism has its origins in the writing of Hayek (1944) and Friedman (1962). Unfettered capitalism leads to what Harvey (2005) describes as two main features of the neoliberal project.

The first of these is *capital accumulation*. Here, Harvey engages with Marx's theory of 'primitive' accumulation where competitive markets are underpinned by state security for money, property and contracts (Gunter, 2016). Entrepreneurialism is heralded as 'creative'

and open to all those who are energetic and resilient' (ibid: 91). The neoliberal project also demands that its workers are flexible. The notion of flexibility has been a key one in neoliberal discourse. The rapidity of changing markets and the desire for minimum labour costs has led to more and more to be demanded from each employee. Paradoxically, the necessity for individuals, at all levels and in all workplaces to be flexible has become an inflexible requirement! (Swan and Fox, 2009: 149 cited in Gillies, 2011: 212). Gillies (2011) suggests that the notion of the 'agile' worker can be viewed as a further mutation of the concept of flexibility. It is attractive in its association with agency whilst moving away from ideas of malleability and passivity that might be associated with being flexible. The new agile worker will be 'active as well as flexible' (ibid: 213).

The second feature Harvey (2003 and 2005) calls *accumulation by dispossession.* This explains the programme of privatisation as capital found new territories through the capture of public assets and services such as housing, water, land, health and education. As privatisation and liberalisation were the mantra of the neo-liberal movement, assets held by the state were released into the market where overaccumulating capital could invest in them, upgrade them and speculate in them (Harvey, 2003: 158). The Thatcher government sell-off of social housing in the early 1980s was one of the first sets of assets to be privatised. Whilst the rhetoric was that this would benefit the working class, by affording them the chance to move from renting to home ownership and control of a valuable asset, the reality was that once the transfer of ownership was completed housing speculation, particularly in the major cities such as London, resulted. What followed was a gentrification of once state-owned housing estates with poorer families forced to move to the periphery of the city. The loss of affordable housing has also aggravated homelessness. Harvey describes how the selling off of any publicly owned company, and indeed the shaping of many other public institutions such as universities and schools according to an 'entrepreneurial logic', creates a dominant pattern of social relations and a redistribution of assets that increasingly favour the upper rather that the lower classes (2003: 159).

Will Davies (2014) argues that the common thread which weaves through the neoliberal project is that it seeks to replace political judgement with economic evaluation. For Davies, 'neoliberalism is the *pursuit of the disenchantment of politics by economics*' (ibid: 37 italics in original). From a neoliberal perspective, complex and uncertain situations can be reduced to a single number. It could be that this is seen merely as a 'side-effect of modernity or

advanced capitalism or plain greed' (ibid: 39), however Davies usefully argues that neoliberalism should be examined as more than this. If conceived of as a project of rationalisation the 'disenchantment of politics by economics involves a deconstruction of the language of 'the common good', or the 'public', which is accused of potentially dangerous mysticism'(ibid). Such a sense of closure, for Davies the deconstruction of the language of 'the public', resonates with Henry Giroux (2004) who develops the argument that neoliberalism has moved beyond an economic theory and should be viewed as a form of alternative, dangerous public pedagogy where the aim is to 'produce competitive and self-interested individuals vying for their own material and ideological gain' (2004: 106). In its aim of producing economically calculating subjects, neoliberalism seeks to establish a pedagogic role through the closing of common public spaces in the media and in education.

In relation to education, Gunter (2016: 92) highlights four neoliberal trends that have had a direct impact on schools. First, is the exit of wealthy elites from public systems and their use of significant purchasing power to transcend national boundaries to confer advantage for their children (see Spring, 2012; Wedel, 2009). Second, is the idea that private education for poor families is gaining momentum (see Ball, 2012 and 2017). Third, is the idea that schools should be separated from local democratic processes, as seen in the charter schools in the United States (see Chapter 6 for a detailed discussion) and the academy and free school programme in England. Fourth, is a type of privatisation which sees public institutions such as schools take on and absorb business discourses and practices and start to function as businesses. These will be explored in more detail in later chapters, however the blurring of lines between private and public should remain at the forefront of our minds. It has a central role to play in examining governance, not only in education but in all areas of government.

The changing landscape which sees government outsourcing to private corporations under the guise of efficiency has implications which are real and significant. In her work examining the functioning of the U.S. government, Janine Wedel (2009) traces a number of changes which include an upsurge in contracting work; the rise of awarding contracts without competition; a rise in the number of contractors who are subject to more lax, conflict of interest regulations than government officials with proportionately fewer civil servants to monitor them; the proliferation of quasi-government organisations and advisory boards; the fortification of executive power; newly convoluted or non-existent chains of command. In addition, but perhaps more difficult to pin down, is the sense that there is a focus on 'performing for the

public' as opposed to a focus on what is being done, why and by whom. A series of 'success stories' are paraded as 'show and tells'. Adept at performing and with ambiguity about their roles, new forms of power and influence emerge whilst 'slipping through the accountability cracks' (ibid: 76). All of which leads Wedel to describe what is a growing trend as 'Swiss cheese bureaucracy: full of holes' (ibid: 74).

A particularly disturbing feature of the neoliberal project is described by Harvey (2005: 3) who terms the change that is required as 'creative destruction'. This is also echoed in the writing of Naomi Klein (2007). It sees structures, cultures and professions rendered as 'in crisis' or 'not fit for purpose', creating:

> Divisions of labour, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought, reproductive activities, attachment to land and habits of the heart
> (Harvey, 2005: 3)

Capitalising on a pervading sense of uncertainty, as a tool of control, is a 'game' which ironically feels utterly permanent (Davies, 2014). It is a game which imposes precarity and stress and reinforces the discourse that we should become ever more resilient to better deal with the uncontrollability of the present and the future (ibid).

This allows for the systematic annihilation of the current ways of doing things. What emerges is the 'provider capture' which sees the 'saviour' imbued with self-reverential zeal, which legitimises the dispossession of the structure, such as the school, away from children, teachers and communities. It is a theme we will return to in later chapters to explore the 'life-world' of the school which is the site of this study, now Longton Academy*, Seachurch* formerly Seachurch School* (see in particular Chapter 6).

Neoconservatism

Neoconservatism has its roots in the United States. From the 1960s the term described an anti-communist and anti-social liberalism viewpoint. From the 1980s, neoconservatism started to impact on policy. This continued over the following twenty years and was particularly evident in the foreign policy strategy adopted with the Iraq war and interventions to support pro-American governments. Democracy, envisaged through the neoliberal lens of

a limited state, becomes promoted based on notions of freedom made possible through the liberation from autocratic theocracies and political oligarchies.

For education, neoconservatism has led to a number of strands which we can unpick and can see mirrored in political rhetoric and policy developments. The first of these is the notion that we should take education and schooling back to a 'romantic past, where 'real knowledge', morality, and supposedly stable social order existed' (Apple at al. 2009: 10). The idea that 'things were better then' is a recurring one in the neoconservative belief system.

> In our schools we did away with traditional subjects – grammar, spelling, tables – and also with the old ways of teaching them. Fashionable, but wrong. Some said family was out of date, far better rely on the council and social workers rather than family and friends. I passionately believe that was wrong. Others told us that every criminal needed treatment, not punishment. Criminal behaviour was society's fault, not the individual's - fashionable, but wrong, wrong, wrong…….And now, we must have the courage to stand up and say so and I believe that millions and millions of people are longing to hear it. Do you know the truth is, much as things have changed on the surface, underneath we're still the same people
>
> John Major in his 'Back to Basics' speech, Conservative party conference (Major, 1993, unpaged)

In addition, neoconservatives are concerned with the 'order of things'. This is somewhat of a divergence from the neoliberal project in that it raises concerns that if the result of neoliberalism is that there is no such thing as society, only individuals, then the chaos of individual interests may upset order. In other words, the 'anarchy of the market' (Harvey, 2005: 82) may generate unbridled individualism with the associated 'individual hopes, desires, anxieties and fears; choices of lifestyle and of sexual habits and orientation; modes of self-expression and behaviours towards others' (ibid) all of which threaten to become ungovernable and destabilise society. The remedies for dealing with the threat require some degree of coercion. Such coercion is underpinned by an increasingly authoritarian approach. This sees the highlighting of threats, either real or imagined. Stoking such fears legitimises an increase in militarisation. It feeds the narrative of the 'other' and makes a justification for increased surveillance.

Running in parallel with this approach are tactics used to ensure the moral values of the nation are upheld. This begs the question which moral values should these be? David Harvey (2005) suggests that the values which have become central to neoconservatives arose from a coalition built in the 1970s in the United States between elite class and business interests and an electoral base of the disaffected, white working class – the 'moral majority'. The moral values centred on cultural nationalism, moral righteousness, Evangelical Christianity, family values, right-to-life issues and a hostility to new social movements such as feminism, gay rights, affirmative action and environmentalism (2005:84).

The discourse of neoconservatism reduces complexity to binaries; us or them; right or wrong; winner or loser. In a sense it plays into the tribal and legitimises behaviours which protect and guard and control rather than those which reach out and understand. For education it has led to an increased focus on behaviour management with increasingly draconian punishments for those who cannot conform to tighter regimes of discipline (see Chapter 6).

Elitism

Elitism is concerned with the preservation of structural advantage through the control of key political, economic, cultural and social institutions. The consequence of this is that alliances are enabled between neoliberals and neoconservatives through a shared 'elite project' (Gunter, 2016: 96). Interests are protected through financial, faith, military and traditional institutions such as the monarchy. Whilst we see in the rhetoric the familiar narrative of how economic and social mobility is about aspiration, hard work and providing opportunities for all, it is still the case that gaining entry to the privileged sphere of the few is challenging. Not least because it is a fiercely guarded space. Gunter argues that at best the majority may be given access to 'mimicry' as a colonising process, where the elite 'regulate and control aspirations about life, family, work and income' (ibid) thus allowing the majority to gaze at but not touch the elite realm.

The work of Pierre Bourdieu illuminates some of the subtle ways in which power is maintained. The influence of his thinking is now widespread in the areas of both education and sociology. His concept of *cultural capital* illustrates the barriers to social mobility and draws a distinction between wealth and status attainment. Challenging the prevailing thought that in a post-industrial society education was providing a key to upward social mobility, Bourdieu started by carrying out a number of empirical studies (see Bourdieu & Passerson,

1977/1990), which demonstrated the power of class backgrounds (using their father's occupation as a marker) in French children's educational outcomes and then their subsequent occupations. Despite a dramatic increase in the provision of higher education in France, Bourdieu went on to show that youths from upper-middle class backgrounds were significantly over-represented in France's top universities (Bourdieu, 1989). Using the sociological tools such as labelling, speech codes and gate keeping, he built up a picture of such class patterns and the hierarchies they supported and the power they conferred. Thick social boundaries still existed. He saw the expanding higher education system and post-industrial work order not as any type of transformation but as an updated form of social reproduction.

Where elitism overlaps with neoliberalism we see 'success' as those who are at the top of the greasy pole; the deliverers and the brokers. This feeds into the discourse of dismantling bureaucracy, effectively bureaucracy equals bad. Encouraged to function along the lines of a business model the state should be rolled back in favor of 'lean' processes with an entrepreneurial edge. As bureaucrats are made redundant and those left re-professionalised as managers, both, in their own ways, end up bringing the private sector into the public realm. The former often join or set up 'consultancy' functions or businesses and the latter take on private sector identities and practices (Gunter and Mills, 2016). Whatever is left which does not fit into such a model or, as Gunter puts it 'where the market does not penetrate' (2016: 97), is left to the communities or to charities to pick up the slack. Local libraries, for example, are expected to be run by local volunteers in the face of cuts.

2.2.1 Policy as containment

Drawing on Stephen Ball, 'policy sociology' can give us tools to examine how policy works and whose interests it serves. Policy can be viewed as 'public policy' which is constructed within government, however as Ball suggests, policy is made and remade in many sites and policy can be reproduced and reworked (Ball, 2017). As it moves from the macro, to the meso, to the micro, it is interpreted and enacted differently. Hence policy 'cannot be treated as an object, a product or an outcome but, rather, it is a process, something ongoing, interactional and unstable' (ibid: 10).

Such instability and even, at times, messiness, does not mask the power of policy to control. The rhetoric and discourse of policy create their own 'truths' which, in turn' bring associated

practices in to play. They privilege certain knowledges over others, and these become accepted as taken for granted assumptions. Unless we are alert to it *policy technologies* (see again Ball, 2017) can work to reconstitute not only how we work but how we think and act and our relationships and sense of self. Within education, the language and mechanisms of business are continuing to change the way we think about the purpose of education, how we do it and what we value.

Narrowing education shapes educational 'reform' into standard, and therefore, it is argued, replicable sets of practices, organisation and procedures. As a ship being loaded with identical containers, 'no-excuses' behaviour policies are stacked upon standard league tables, on top of scripted lessons, next to tracking data, behind inspection regimes and then expected to sail off to an 'outstanding' horizon. The pressures of performativity close down space for teacher and student autonomy with significant consequences (see Chapter 6). In addition, it acts to silence critique and to limit imagination and dialogue of how change can be conceived of and carried out differently. A prevalent discourse of containment – of what can be said by whom – produces a culture of containment (Popen, 2002).

2.2.2 The politics of control

Associated with containment is the extent to which control is exerted and experienced. Of use to us here is Foucault's concept of governmentality. For Foucault, government can not only be exercised by those in power on others but can also be exercised on the 'self'. His interest was the 'different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects' (1982: 208; 2000: 224). Whilst his notion of 'docile bodies' (see Chapter 6) can be linked to the subjectification associated with industrial Taylorism, Foucault's work also pays attention to the mode of power which results in a governing 'techniques of the self' (2000: 225) which has relevance to neoliberal governance. Such 'self-regulation' is hard to clarify. It is more than an institutional arrangement – it is a regulatory ideology mobilised to legitimise any number of particular institutional arrangements.

As we have examined, the reach of corporate principles has extended into realms hitherto based on alternative sets of values, education being one of them. From the Foucauldian perspective, the individual becomes the embodiment of such corporate principles. The 'agile-self appropriates, as its own, corporate desires' (Gillies, 2011: 215). Thus, modern

governmentality works ‘through infiltrating regulation into the very interior of the experience of subjects’ (Edwards, 2008: 26).

Control is thus exerted through this development of neoliberal governance. As Gillies (2011) suggests, instead of ‘docile bodies’ subjected to surveillance and discipline as a direct form of government, what we experience is a more insidious form of internal governance. The aims of the state or the institution become an ontological force (Ball, 2017; Simons and Masschelein, 2006). The insidiousness does not merely lie in such internalisation but, in addition, to the implicit expectation that this is an ongoing project. The desire for simply *being* is eroded by the fact that we should endlessly be *becoming* (see Martin, 1994). This continual striving reinforces the sense of precarity, which we touched on earlier in the chapter. We become increasingly detached and divided from attachment.

2.2.2.1 Regulating and colonising

I draw here from Michael Moran who in *The British Regulatory State* (2003) sets out a detailed and illuminating exploration of the contrast between the first two thirds of the twentieth century, what he terms a phase of governmental stagnation, and developments from the 1970s which he terms a phase of hyper-innovation. The scope of his detailed argument is too great to fully do justice to here. It is, however, of use to consider the major domains he examines and then to highlight two regulatory examples; the first sport and the second, education.

What Moran argues is that prior to the 1970s the British system of self-regulation was unique among leading capitalist nations in the extent to which it was run by private institutions which were beyond the reach of the state or the law (ibid: 3). Institutional patterns which originated in the nineteenth century had largely been untouched and resulted in a stability in cultures and institutional patterns. Under changes often referred to as New Public Management (NPM), liberalisation, privatisation and the reconstruction of public sector management created an upheaval which dramatically changed the hitherto uniqueness of British self-regulation. The previous private character was replaced by tighter state controls.

Regulating the public sphere has involved the reorganisation of four major domains. The first of these is the reorganisation of the central machinery of the state, the world of the metropolitan administrative elite. The second, is the reorganisation of institutions of

inspections. The third, extends deeper into civil society and covers the world of quasi-government. Where the state intersects with the world of the quango it reinforces lack of transparency, insulation of interests and complex, hard to understand lines of accountability. As Moran (2003: 125) succinctly puts it, it has 'allowed powerful interests to feed off the formally democratic state while minimising democratic accountability'. Lastly, a fourth domain brings the colonisation by the state of new worlds of regulation.

Please forgive the brief digression from education into sport, but the following illustration given by Moran encapsulates a compelling argument and resonates with the sphere of education to which we next turn.

The role of the state in sport had not changed since the late nineteenth century. In 1997 Sport England was established to replace the Great Britain Sports Council. Sport England has the aim of implementing a national strategy for sport. It is accountable to Parliament through the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and is funded through a mixture of Exchequer Grant and Lottery funding. It is primarily concerned with enhancing performance in elite sports. One of the key instruments in achieving this is the distribution of funds to over 40 sports. This is done in return for a commitment by individual sporting bodies to achieve agreed performance targets.

Behind this strategy, Moran outlines that there are three connected forces at work. The first is the increasing colonisation of sport by the market. The contract set up with sports by satellite broadcasters have shaped both the identity and organisation of sports teams and clubs and indeed even the rules of the games played. Secondly, has been the increasing intervention by the state to raise British sporting achievement at an elite level. Moran suggests that the first public sign of this dates back to the 1990s with the publication of *Sport: Raising the Game* in 1995. This foregrounded the establishment of Sports England and was a response to what was perceived as a poor British performance in key international events such as the Olympics. Elite sporting success thus became more than excellence in a particular sport, by a particular individual, it became an 'index of national and state achievement' (Moran, 2003: 89). This in turn led to a micro-management of service delivery which we will go on to explore in relation to education. Of note here, however, is that in *Raising the Game* the physical education curriculum was changed to place a greater emphasis on participation in competitive team sports.

When a new Labour government was elected in 1997, these two forces were already 'instrumentalising the 'pointless' activity of sport' (Moran, 2003: 89). In addition to the colonisation of the market and the colonisation of using sporting success for national prestige, the new government added the role of sport in promoting public health and in widening participation with the strategic plan *A Sporting Future for All* in 2000.

What can be seen clearly here, and the key point Moran is making, is that the institutional changes in structure which have happened since the 1990s, can only be accounted for by the colonisation of the 'self-referential world' of 'pointless sport' by external values of systems most notably those of the state. The power of the state to intervene further manifests itself in the way it organises and regulates the governing 'machine' itself. The colonisation by the state of numerous institutional domains has been possible through the regulation of the constitutional conventions it observes and the standards which it needs to observe (Moran, 2003: 125). The domain of education faced upheaval following the Education Reform Act (1988) and the Education (Schools) Act (1992). They resulted in the formation of Ofsted. Replacing a relatively small regulatory community that drew primarily on teacher experience and autonomy, Ofsted joined an increasing number of regulatory bodies which included Local Authorities; a Funding Agency for Schools; a Schools' Curriculum and Assessments Authority; the Audit Commission and the National Audit Office. In addition, the appointment of a new Chief Inspector of Ofsted in 1995 led to a more adversarial and judgemental system which was associated with a move to quantitative regulatory measures in the form of tests and targets (Pring, 2001). The intensity of scrutiny of schools led by the ideology that education was fostering human capital integral to our international competitiveness continued to increase and shows no sign of slowing. From the late 1990s through the following decades education, as many other domains, has been exposed to the mechanism of control, regulation and micro-management through audit culture (see Power, 1997). As Moran (2003: 153/4) cautions the regulatory state has led (and continues to lead) to an:

> Incessant drive towards synoptic legibility: installing systems of comprehensive reporting and surveillance over numerous social spheres; the consequential pressure to standardise and to codify, which is to make explicit what had hitherto been tacit; and the creation of new institutions (mainly the specialised regulatory agency) to help enforce all this

2.2.2.2 Surveillance

Surveillance is a dominant organising logic of modern institutions, shaping all their operations (Lyon, 2007). Watching, monitoring, tracking, data analysing for the purposes of control, surveillance as a form of knowledge production draws upon, and therefore reifies, normative categories of appearance and behaviour (Monahan and Torres, 2010). Surveillance then becomes an operation of power. Drawing on Foucault (1980), power is not just one person's ability to control another it can be a complex structure - a web of overlapping regimes. Foucault describes three: the sovereign, the disciplinary, and the biopolitical. The sovereign could arbitrarily take life and inflict punishments whereas the disciplinary regimes were marked by rational and efficient organisations that disciplined the soul.

Monahan and Torres (2010) describe the panopticon, the all-seeing prison, as still standing as a hegemonic metaphor of such organised discipline. Reproduced in the modern organisation, the school or the factory subjects are transformed into self-disciplining 'docile bodies' (Foucault, 1977). Yet, they suggest that many scholars have become captivated by the allure of such a metaphor at the risk of neglecting analysis of Foucault's third articulation of power the biopolitical. Biopolitical power functions on the level of population. Through mechanisms for categorising and controlling people in aggregate whether through public health programmes, migration, the census, or standardised testing, biopolitical power regulates populations in conjunction with disciplinary power.

> The setting up, in the course of the classical age, of this great bipolar technology - anatomic and biological, individualising and specifying, directed toward the performances of the body, with attention to the processes of life - characterised a power whose highest function was perhaps no longer to kill, but to invest life through and through. The old power of death that symbolised sovereign power was now carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life (Foucault, 1978: 140).

> 'Mrs Hill is a middle school teacher in rural Ohio. She is a big fan of the War of 1812, which she uses to teach geography, state history, international relations, history and social studies.

> Until a few years ago, she would typically devote several days to covering the war in great detail with student reports, art projects and maps. Now, if it gets anything at all, it gets a quick forty-five minutes. Why? School surveillance' (Gilliom, 2010: 194)

John Gilliom (ibid) argues that this small story is an illustration of how a law mandated by the U.S. federal government in 2002 known as No Child left Behind (NCLB) has impacted the lives of teachers and students. The NCLB did not seek to eliminate the War of 1812 from middle school education in Ohio. What brought about the elimination of the War of 1812, Mrs Hill explains, is that the NCLB assessment test used in Ohio does not use the War of 1812 as an 'indicator'; the war is not a specifically assessed and measured item on the required tests. As a consequence of this, Mrs Hill must cut short her teaching of the War of 1812 and other moments or issues that do not have the good fortune or political esteem to become 'indicators'.

The story holds a mirror up to the ongoing battles over surveillance, power and the law in America's public school system. Through it, Gilliom (2010) suggests, we can see the reshaping of course content to match the test. We can see an associated standardisation of the curriculum with topics that have been sanctioned by state officials, with the result that teachers' autonomy and control over both the classroom and curriculum have been greatly reduced. None of these policy outcomes was directly mandated by either Congress or the state of Ohio, but they have nevertheless been accomplished through the impact of the assessment mechanisms put in place under NCLB. The power that shapes such outcomes, what Hess (2003) terms 'coercive accountability', comes not from the way NCLB directly mandated educational policy changes, but by the way systems of surveillance and assessment forces people to meet its measures. Thus, each purportedly neutral act of assessment actually implements political change.

It could be argued that risk and surveillance are inextricably linked (Hope, 2010). In recent years, schools have become increasingly perceived as 'risk environments'. Fears about safety in schools has led to the rapid growth of various methods of control including surveillance technologies. Safety in schools continues to be a 'big issue' as the 'comprehensive range of cameras, swipe cards and other security measures that are now routine make many schools look like minimum security prisons' (Furedi,1997:3).

2.2.2.3 The erosion of teacher professionalism: teaching, a *semi-profession*

The nature of professionalism was initially explored by Western sociologists in the 1950s. The aim was to establish which features an occupation should have to be termed a 'profession'. Established professions such as law and medicine were seen to reflect the key criteria which might be described as: the use of skills based on theoretical knowledge; education and training in these skills certified by examination; a code of professional conduct orientated towards the 'public good'; a powerful professional organisation (see Millerson, 1964). Occupations that were deemed to not entirely meet the criteria were given the title 'quasi' or 'semi-professions' (Etzioni, 1969). In this category the aim was to move towards full professional status, and this applied to teachers in both England and many other countries.

In this section we will address why it is that teaching has struggled to professionalise its practice. This is an important factor in understanding the current educational landscape and how change agendas have become centralised and control further eroded.

The commodification of education is symptomatic of a shift in the balance of power in the relationship between consumers and professionals. Competition and comparison amongst providers, whether in education or other fields such as law or medicine, has created a push for increasing the amount of publicly accessible data to fuel 'consumer' demand. Jal Mehta (2013) argues that whether the ethos is left, that is, it advocates increased government regulation, or right, that is, it demands more individual choice through market mechanisms, it is always fundamentally populist in its orientation (2013: 121). Thus, the claims of professionals to expertise are eroded as 'consumer logic' challenges 'professional logic' (ibid).

In addition, there has been a critique that the professions have become more interested in protecting their position and influence than in developing their expertise and harnessing it in the service of solving public problems. For professionals working in the state sector this was coupled with criticisms that state control was resulting in inefficiency and complacency. As a response to this, professionals have increasingly emphasised their 'expert professionalism' in place of 'social trustee professionalism' (see Brint, 1994). Mehta (2013) argues that such a shift has further weakened the teaching profession since education has had difficulty defining a body of knowledge which is essential to becoming a teacher. Much of the relevant

knowledge is seen to belong to other disciplines such as psychology. The status of educational research and practice has been low. Teachers' authority, more than many other professions, thus depends heavily on a perceived commitment to supporting and developing their students which is damaged by the diminishing regard for the ethical commitments of professional status.

A further challenge has seen professional control eroded as capital control and state control have increased. This is in part due to the growing size of organisations. Mehta (2013: 122) suggests that the size and complexity of organisational structures has led to increased monitoring and accountability measures. In effect, the shifts that were explored earlier in this chapter where education becomes framed as big business see the professional and their level of control become increasingly embattled.

2.3 The narrative of division: 'almost the same *but not quite*' (Bhabha, 1994: 86)

David Sibley (1995) argues that familiarity and predictability are important for many people and there is a common desire to live in a place which is stable and orderly. The desire for order reflects an anxiety about not being understood and a fear of unpredictable encounters and, more generally, concerns about changes to the local environment. The drive to attain stability and predictability, 'fuels the engine of accumulation' (ibid: 117) and hence becomes and 'ideal' promoted by financial institutions and property developers. The ordered community and the responsible citizen are also notions that sustain political capital.

As we move into the twenty-first century, we can increasingly see the polarisation and social exclusion of sections of the population who are framed as a threat to both social order and financial security. We have seen the rise of the politics of division and the demonisation of the 'other'. The narrative of division sees 'other' as abject (see Kristeva, 1980). There becomes the 'good' and the 'bad' and these construct difference, with groups becoming defined as a 'problem'.

There are processes at work which enable and seek to validate this division. In the mid-1960s, the sociologist Stanley Cohen developed the notion of a 'moral panic' to explain the public outcry over clashes between 'mods' and 'rockers' which took place in England. We can draw on this concept to help us understand how it is that certain groups become

marginalised and certain behaviours viewed as 'deviant'. Cohen (1972: 9) defines a moral panic as:

> A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media, the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible.

A pivotal role is played by the media who often sensationalise the event or behaviour of a certain group and therefore present a distorted picture of what has occurred. Certain details are hence given symbolic meaning. The media then becomes a forum for the reaction to what has taken place. This leads to the public becoming more aware and sensitive to similar 'deviations' which may have formerly been unnoticed. What develops is a spiral of anxiety and often associated calls for punitive action to be taken. Moral panics harness fear. Such fear can encourage people to turn away from complex social problems. Furthermore, it can be used a tool to orchestrate consent for 'something to be done' by the dominant social order (McRobbie, 1994). Either way, moral panics are related to discourses of power.

2.3.1. Spatial inequalities

There is a complex relationship between education, disadvantage and place (Kerr et al., 2014). Schools are simultaneously local and national institutions (ibid: 38). As we have examined earlier in this chapter, regardless of where they are located, schools are tasked by government and through regulatory mechanisms with achieving nationally determined outcomes through mandatory testing, delivering certain knowledge through the national curriculum[4] and face adopting certain practices.

It could be argued that the development of parental choice as to where their child attends school, has demonstrated a determined effort on the part of policy makers to weaken the link between particular schools and particular places (Kerr et al., 2014: 38). Parents ostensibly

[4] Although free schools, academies and fee-paying schools currently have a 'choice' whether to follow the national curriculum, in reality, they are confined by the rigid testing regime and largely demonstrate little flexibility in their curriculum content (see Mansell, 2016).

have ‘the capacity to refashion themselves as educational entrepreneurs’ (Gulson and Fataar, 2016: 415) as they trawl meticulously through the market for schools.

The relationship between school and place is further complicated by the fact that housing near schools judged to be ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted, can command higher prices. The most recent government research published in 2017 found that house prices[5] near the best schools are higher than in the surrounding areas for both primary and secondary schools. The value of houses near the poorest- performing schools are also lower than in the surrounding areas. House prices near the 10% best-performing primary schools are 8.0% higher than in the surrounding area. Near the 10% best-performing non-selective secondary schools, house prices are 6.8% higher. Hence schools have the potential to change the composition of local populations.

As parental choice operates locally, different schools can attract different pupils. Middle-class families demonstrate skill in playing the market system, through their ability to research schools and their ability to purchase houses close to their chosen school. There is also evidence to suggest that there are schools who collude in manipulating their intake. Witness statements submitted to the Academies Commission suggest that some academies asked parents to complete complex admissions forms to subvert the requirement for non-selective admissions. Thus, it enabled ‘schools to select pupils from more privileged families whose parents have the requisite cultural capital to complete [these] in ways that will increase their child’s chances’ and were ‘resulting in schools with skewed intakes that do not reflect their neighbourhoods’ (Academies Commission, 2013: 65-66).

Whilst there is also evidence that not all academies engage in such ‘dark arts’, it is yet another reminder, if one were needed, of the pressure of perfomativity and how the effects of it are real. This does little to help schools who find themselves serving disadvantaged communities. Pupils from poorer backgrounds have substantially lower attainment at school and they make negative progress compared with other students while at school, meaning that the poverty gap widens (Department for Education [DfE], 2017; Rutkowski, Rutkowski,

[5] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/600623/House_prices_and_schools.pdf

Wild, & Burroughs, 2018). Gorard and Siddiqui (2019) argue that schools can make such inequality worse through their method of allocating pupil places. They identify a key issue as the clustering of poverty within particular schools. Such is the prevalence of this that in England, if the current social segregation which exists were to be eliminated, around 30% of students would have to exchange their schools (ibid).

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that whilst the rhetoric of educational change and reform is of increasing school autonomy, the reality is that the power and reach of the neoliberal project continues to grow and intensify. It brings with it a variety of tools and metrics of containment and control. The commodification of education sees it reduced and impoverished.

In the quest for certainty (Dewey, LW4), education continues to be driven by output regulation in the form of how schools perform in relation to public examination targets. Educational change is couched in the language of 'school improvement' with a narrowing definition of what 'improvement' actually means. Schools are monitored and judged by the same output measure and change can be brought about by following standardised, component strategies. It locates school improvement as a Sisyphean task. We are individually and collectively sites of deficit continually navigating the perilous neoliberal terrain that is perpetually and cynically shifting. We are on high alert – to be settled is to be complacent. There is no space to develop any attachments and no place for 'habits of the heart' (Harvey, 2005: 3).

What emerges from this lack of attention to, and understanding of, context, is the closing down of space and the creation of divisions. This unsettles the argument that our current 'school improvement' trajectory is working. There is no doubt that the narrative of control is powerful, pervasive and effective and has a web of technologies which reinforce it. The continued success of neoliberalism is that it has successfully constituted itself as 'a common sense of the times' (Larner et al. 2007; Peck and Tickell, 2002). There are risks associated with reifying the neoliberal project and accepting such a claim (see Gibson-Graham, 2002; Leitner et al., 2007; Massey, 2007). The issue, I assert, cannot just be one of protecting against it - it must be one of building an effective counter-narrative which can be harnessed in pursuit of a new educational imaginary. The result of such possibilities must mobilise and energise alternative ways of making educational change practices.

The following chapter seeks to map out what I term a conceptual cartography, which can find a way to go beyond the limits of the confining spatialities of centrally mandated change. It locates an alternative conception of change as emerging through geographies of connectedness.

Chapter 3

Thinking the spatial in a particular way can shake up the manner in which certain political questions are formulated, can contribute to political arguments already underway, and – more deeply – can be an essential element in the imaginative structure which enables in the first place an opening up to the very sphere of the political

Doreen Massey, 2005: 9

Chapter 3: MAPPING A COUNTER-NARRATIVE

3.1 Overview

3.2 Mapping a counter-narrative: temporal, spatial, situational and relational

3.2.1 Boundaries, globalisation and time-space compression

3.2.2 Sites, scales and contexts

3.2.3 Conceptualisation of time

3.2.4 Conceptualisation of space

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3.2.6.1 Place and ‘placelessness’

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3.2.7 Local ways of knowing and being

3.2.7.1 Community

3.3 Conclusion

3.1 Overview

A conceptual cartography

In the previous chapter, I argued that education and schooling is becoming ever more de-contextualised and de-historicised. Through policy and the relentless standards agenda, a 'one-size-fits-all' approach has resulted in a paucity of context for those living and working in schools. As we explored, this has serious implications for both teachers and students. At the heart of the study, from its inception, has been the desire to create the conditions where we can begin to imagine new possibilities. As the participants and I entered into this inquiry we developed a research partnership, searching and then re-searching for the meanings that emerged from experience. We entered into a three-dimensional inquiry space (see Chapter 4), and we became closely attuned to each other and to the rhythms both of life at school and of life in the small English coastal town of Seachurch* where the school is located.

We will go on to hear and explore the narratives that emerged from this study in later chapters, but as we lived and worked together part of our search was also to find an assemblage of theoretical concepts that would form an integrated conceptual framework or, as I have phrased it, a *conceptual cartography*, which would illuminate this study. As our work progressed, we found it fruitful to borrow from Geertz (1983: 167) and think of education as he describes sailing, gardening, politics, and poetry, conceived of as 'crafts of place' which 'work by the light of local knowledge'. If we liken education to Geertz's lyrical description and we take a moment to reflect on the key messages that lie within it, we can begin to think of education differently. Education as a 'craft of place' which 'works by the light of local knowledge' is a powerful image and one which came at first to reflect and then, over time, deepen our shared experience and understanding.

If it is context which is lacking, then it is context we must search for.

Chapter 3, therefore, maps out the concepts that are useful to us. In examining them in some depth, we begin to see the threads which connect them and the extent to which they illuminate our shared search for a way to shift the current educational change trajectory. The use of the term 'mapping' is a considered one. The metaphor of mapping functions on a number of levels. I use it here to draw attention to the themes of place and identity in time and space and how these emerge during this study and do so in relation to constructions of

the school as a site of hegemonic discourses. In particular, the writings of Doreen Massey are informative and I will be drawing on her thinking extensively. Her work on 'place' and on 'time-space' give us conceptual tools to be able to understand the importance of the relational; what kinds of interrelations can construct an alternative. This adds a political and antagonistic dimension. In relation to the importance of place, which I argue is intrinsic to the successful evolution of school change, Massey's contribution allows us to construct place not just as place-as-is, but as the potential to be a political project.

There are spatial imaginaries at play which we must grapple with if we are to understand the agentive capabilities of place. A relational politics of place involves the inevitability of the unexpected which can disrupt time-spaces however much we try to close them. This opens them to the future, making them 'ongoing constructions which are our continuing responsibility, the ongoing event of place which has to be addressed' (Massey, 2005: 180). This involves the negotiations presented by the '*throwntogetherness*' which arises, out of which new narratives are generated and become political in terms of openness and closure. Yet, there is a further important dimension, which is how to conceive of, and reconcile, the *local* and the *global* not in binary opposition but in relation to each other. This addresses wider spatialities of relations and their construction and raises the question of a politics of connectivity (ibid).

3.2 Mapping a counter-narrative: temporal, spatial, situational and relational

3.2.1 Boundaries, globalisation and time-space compression

Although originally used as a means of exerting colonial power and inscription, it could be argued that the process of bounding has developed into a dynamic phenomenon with the boundary line simply as the 'tangible and visible feature that represents the course and intensity of the bounding process at any particular time and space' (Newman, 2003: 134).

To deepen our understanding of boundaries requires an exploration of the boundary not only as geographical, but as socially and culturally constructed. Whilst early boundary studies focused on territory and the state (Hartshorne, 1939; Minghi, 1963) more recently the focus has shifted to the notion of 'boundary' as a line which may separate, enclose and potentially exclude at a number of spatial and social scales (Newman, 2003). The traditional concepts such as demarcation, permeability, frontiers and border landscapes have not been lost, instead they have relevance for developing notions of boundary.

Studies emerging in the late 1990s saw a renewed interest in the territorial lines which separate state territories and how these are constantly being redrawn and re-demarcated (Newman, 1999). What was also developing was an interest in the nature of 'bounding', and the way in which people and groups can be enclosed within a variety of social and spatial compartments (see Prescott, 1987). Examining the bounding process requires an integration of the types and scales of boundaries re-conceptualised as a single process. Whilst the study of boundaries is located within separate realms; political, social, geographical, it becomes problematic to understand the phenomenon. What is needed is a way of understanding the processes of 'bounding' and 'bordering' rather than merely seeing the outcome of the various compartmentalised processes.

There is, in addition, the notion of 'borderless'. Thus, we can conceive of a borderless world fuelled by the impact of globalisation. The fact that boundaries have become increasingly permeable in terms of the movement of goods, people and ideas has led some to argue that we have seen the end of absolute territorial integrity and the sovereignty of the state (see Albert, 1998; Dittgen, 2000; Kohen, 2000). Political power has moved away from the state towards global and virtual entities. These can take the form of corporate organisations as well as global political associations. Following this argument, policies adopted by such organisations can infringe upon the sovereignty of individual states.

With the breaking down of borders in an ever more connected, globalised world comes a temporal dimension. There is an increase in the speed of social life; a life of perpetual presents. David Harvey (1989) proposed the term 'time-space compression' to illustrate the volatility of accelerating time associated with capital accumulation. This speeding up of life leads to an experiential dimension in that social life becomes precarious and implicated in a crisis of representation (how we represent the world to ourselves). There is the suggestion that time-space compression is changing our experience of time and space. Time-space convergence is continuing to quicken. Concepts such as the 'collapse of time-space', and 'shrinking world', have been developed and continue to be used to capture different aspects of such a process.

The idea that space and time are intimately linked has been part of the philosophical and scientific debate over time and space (Dodgshon, 1999). For some, time is downplayed, for

others, it is space. It could be argued, however, that the debate over time-space compression has not treated time and space equally. Massey (1993) argues that Harvey (1989) over emphasises capitalism in his concept of time-space compression to the extent that it becomes collapsed into 'economism'. Some writers have taken the view that time-space compression has brought about the *spatialisation* of social theory (see Featherstone and Lash, 1995; Massey 1993; Soja 1996). This sees the need for understanding how space matters to our understanding of society in a world of rapid time.

In developing the concept of power-geometry, Massey extends this critique whilst also attempting to alter the conception of place as bounded and static. 'Cultures', 'societies', and 'nations', were imagined to possess their own internal coherence, and were separated and differentiated from each other. 'Places' were also bounded and defined by their difference to other places. Such a way of imagining space is a geographical imagination which has become a project for organising global space. Space, imagined as divided and regionalised, was a way of legitimising the generalisation of the nation state. Massey argues that even when we have discussions of the 'opening of borders' or of 'the space of flows' these sit alongside an assumption that 'once (once upon a time) those boundaries were *im*permeable' (2005: 65). This is a nostalgic response to globalisation; a response to something which never existed. It is an imagination that having once been used to legitimate the territorialisation of society and space, is now used to frame the legitimation of its undoing by moving back to nationalisms, parochialisms and localisms. It is a response which is a way of 'taming the spatial' (ibid). Thus, it is a way of ordering and representing space which 'refuses to acknowledge its multiplicities, its fractures and its dynamism' (ibid).

For both space and time, the conception of space as a product of interrelations, connections and disconnections, dispels the notion of places having any 'timeless authenticity' (Massey, 2005: 67). Furthermore, it is not only space that is conceived of as bounded and divided. Spatial difference has been assembled into temporal sequence. Massey argues that the temporal convening of space reworks and exacerbates *difference*. Different places are interpreted to be at different stages. This can apply to parts of the world. Western Europe, for example, is described as 'advanced' whilst other parts of the world might be 'some way behind', yet others 'backward' (ibid:68). This extends to interpretations of places within nations and resonates with later chapters where we explore in more detail the site of this study and both the conceptions and misconceptions of the place.

This ‘turning of the world’s geography into the world’s (single) history’ (Massey, 2005: 68) is described by Massey as manoeuvre with clear implications. The implications are central to the assemblage of concepts we are drawing on here. In such conceptions of singular progress, temporality itself is not really open:

> The future is already foretold; inscribed into the story. This is therefore a temporality which anyway has none of the characteristics of an event, or of novelty. Nor does it live up to the requirement that space be always and ever open, constantly in a process of being made (ibid)

Thus, the temporal convening of space reworks the nature of difference.

As this chapter develops, we will explore in more detail Massey’s articulation of ‘place’ and as the thesis develops, we will return to her concerns that to conceive of place as ‘containers, building blocks or objects’ (2005: 68) is to preclude the possibility of a spatial politics.

3.2.2 Sites, scales and contexts

Geographic scales and networks can be viewed as either: actual things that exist in the real world or concepts (analytic lenses) that can be used to study phenomena. As Jones, Marston and Woodward (2011: 404) explain ‘the distinction between ‘thingified’ or ‘conceptual’ approaches to scales and networks pivots on whether one understands them to have an ontological status’.

People organise themselves and their activities around territorial structures that can potentially assume quasi-fixed spatial forms (Jonas, 2011: 387). Examples of these structures can include towns, schools, school catchment areas, rooms, communication networks, nation states for example. Such structures appear to form territorial hierarchies which can be different in size and in spatial extents. Such hierarchies are referred to as *scales*. Familiar scales are the ‘global’, ‘national’, ‘regional’, ‘urban’, ‘local’, ‘neighbourhood’ and ‘body’ (Herod and Wright, 2002).

Jonas (2011) suggests that it has become a matter of some debate in the discipline of human geography as to whether or not ‘scale’ can mean one or other of two contrasting ideas. Scale

occupies an important place in the wider chronological development of socio-spatial thought (see Jessop, Brenner and Jones, 2008). There is a need to explain what the concept of 'scale' actually means. This is important for a number of reasons, not least to avoid the temptation of conflating tensions between economic and cultural discourses with the simplified global-local scale binary. To do so obscures important dimensions that an alternative approach to scale may bring (Howitt, 2003). An interesting issue for critical human geography is considering how changing perceptions of scale have intensified our experiences of time and space and, in doing so, altered the sense of place (Jonas, 2011: 398). The 'local' then becomes more than just a material scale or social construct. It becomes something that can be experienced in relation to forces which can unsettle our sense of time and space (see Jonas, 2011). In such an instance the local may be able to afford a degree of *ontological security* against events that could feel beyond our control or out of scale (Cox and Mair, 1988). Relevant here is the work of Benedict Anderson (1991) and the use of metaphors of scale. In creating *imagined communities* imagined scales are formed out of networks of solidarity rather than the sharing of a particular territory.

3.2.3 Conceptualisation of time

In the late eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant argued that both time and space are distinct and a priori notions. This led to the creation of separate academic disciplines which addressed the spatial and the temporal. During the twentieth century the cogency of this distinction was called into question. The notion of 'time-geography' was developed by the work of Torsten Hägerstrand (1982). It makes connections between continuous trajectories of individual entities. Concepts such as *paths, stations, projects, prisms*, *time-space bundles* and *time-space domains* arose from this work. Essentially, it presented the view that everybody is subject to confinement in time-space. Whilst many of the terms and concepts have remained an important part of human geography, time geography has come under an increasing critique. Gillian Rose (1993) has argued that time geography conceives of the person as a basic elementary particle, thus erasing all social and cultural identities such as race, gender and sexuality.

Time conceived of as rhythmic is important in the work of Henri Lefebvre and develops the conception of time. His skill as a classical pianist impacted on his practice and thinking. 'What we live are rhythms – rhythms experienced subjectively' (Lefebvre, 1991: 206)

Lefebvre argued that we can learn a great deal by listening to the rhythms of a house, a street or a school.

> Rhythms are multiple and interfere with one another qualitatively: heartbeats, breathing, being awake and being asleep by turns, being hungry, being thirsty and so on. The rhythms in question are only the most easily observable – some diurnal, others monthly, and so on. Although they are repetitive, rhythms and cycles always have the appearance of novelty: the dawn always seems to be the first one (Lefebvre, 2005: 129)

Such rhythms, however, can seep into regulatory practices as time is defined and packaged. Adam (2003: 69) describes time control as the transformation of rhythmicity into a 'rationalized beat'. In a school, we see the timetable and the school bell, deadlines and standards which cause 'interference between rhythmical vital processes' in the demand for 'linear operations' (Lefebvre 2005: 129). Thus, the study of rhythmanalysis would focus on:

> All cyclical rhythms starting from their origin or foundation – nature – but taking account of their alterations through interference with linear processes. The important thing here is the progressive crushing of rhythms and cycles by linear repetition. It must be emphasised that only the linear is amenable to being fully quantified and homogenised (2005: 130).

Lefebvre describes how when seasonal and cultural cycles 'unite with one another in a state of health, in normal everydayness' (2004:16) we see *eurhythmia.* Yet when rhythms cease to synchronise when they are 'discordant, there is suffering, a pathological state' (ibid). We then experience *arrhythmia*.

The rhythms associated with the commodification of education are linear, measurable and relentless (see Chapter 6). Time is broken down into the smallest of units incrementally. As the first school bell sounds, lessons begin and are structured into component parts; breaks and lunchtimes are structured and monitored; 'corrections' and 'isolation' given to students as a punishment for poor behaviour are tracked and timed and students' 'own' time curtailed as a disciplinary tool. Such structured timetables establish their own rhythms which as Foucault argues impose particular occupations and regulate cycles of repetition (1977: 149). Through effective time use and structured time frames, bodies are disciplined.

3.2.4 Conceptualisation of space

The production of geographical knowledge has always involved *knowing* space in particular ways. Historically, importance was placed in technologies which could fix the locations of things in space; locations of places, people and phenomena on the surface of the earth and to represent these on maps. However, what developed was a recognition that there was an association between power, knowledge and geography. Allen (2003) describes 'spatial vocabularies of power' which trace the effects of power *over* space and 'lost geographies of power' which show how power is produced and performed *through* space.

The move towards a conception of space through social practices shifted the question from 'what is space?' to 'how is it that different human practices create and make use of distinctive conceptualisations of space' (Harvey, 1973: 14). Space, in this sense, is no longer 'a category of fixed and given ontological attributes, but a becoming, an emerging property of social relationships' (Jiménez, 2003: 140). This added a relational dimension which moves space to spatiality.

> Conceiving of space as a static slice through time, as representation, as a closed system and so forth are all ways of taming it…If it is to be open to a future of the new then space cannot be equated with the closures and horizontalities of representation. More generally, if time is to be open then space must be open too. Conceptualising space as open, multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming, is a prerequisite for history to be open and this a prerequisite, too, for the possibility of politics (Massey, 2005: 59)

Doreen Massey describes her concern not only with the notion that the term 'space' is adopted with a multiplicity of meanings which are often unexplained. Many authors rely on the terms space or spatial whilst assuming that their meaning is clear and uncontested (1994). Yet her concern extends beyond this to a deeper anxiety that of the many conflicting definitions of space effectively 'de-politicise the realm of the spatial' (ibid: 250) and for Massey, who argues for a dynamic and politically progressive way of conceptualising space, this is particularly problematic. Whether space is viewed as 'stasis' (see Laclau, *New reflections on the revolution of our time,* 1990), or as chaotic depthlessness (see Jameson, *Postmodernism,* 1990), such opposing views share the effect of depriving the spatial of any meaningful politics.

It is clear that the conceptualisations of time and space are connected. As Massey (2005: 47) urges, 'imagining one in a particular way should at least, logically, imply a particular way of thinking about the other'. This is not to suggest that they are the same but to argue that they are integral to each other. To stress, 'for time to be open, space must be in some sense open too' (ibid: 48).

3.2.5 Landscape

Landscape is a key term of human geography. The constancy of landscape lies in its ability to be a central object of investigation, an organising principle and an interpretive lens. 'Landscape' can be viewed as a site of study in itself, but also as a way of understanding interactions between human cultures and natural environments. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, writing on landscape took a cultural turn. The work of Denis Cosgrove (1984) and Stephen Daniels (Daniels and Cosgrove, 1988) advanced a definition of landscape as a *way of seeing* and representing the world. They argued that landscapes worked to reflect and reproduce the values and norms of socio-economic elites. This was developed by Duncan and Duncan (1988) who saw landscape as a signifying system for the production and transmissions of cultural meanings.

Applying psychoanalytic principles to the interpretation of landscape, Gillian Rose (1993) argued that the landscape way of seeing was through a masculinist gaze. This added the forms of patriarchy to systems of cultural and political power. Landscape has developed with work which focuses on the phenomenological, corporeal and performative aspects.

The natural landscape is a classic foundation for the appreciation of place (Massey, 2005: 137). Grounding in the landscape however confers the natural world with a fixity that is challenged. The natural world is continually moving whether this be through erosion or the melting of polar ice. Massey asks, if everything is moving, where is here? (2005: 138). 'Here', she argues, is where 'spatial narratives meet up or form configurations, conjunctures of trajectories which have their own temporalities' (ibid: 139). She adds that *returns*, whether of people to the same places or the swifts' annual appearance, lend continuity but the returns are always to a place that has moved on. Seeing landscape as trajectory, encourages thinking of the totality of the landscape at any particular moment as the 'simultaneity of stories-so-far' (ibid: 12).

Even an imagined landscape is 'a landscape not of being but of becoming: a composition not of objects and surfaces but of movements and stillness, not there to be surveyed but cast in the current of time' (Ingold, 2016: 51). It is, in this regard, closer to music than to painting (ibid; see also Deleuze and Guattari, 1987[6]). For Ingold, human beings have their stories but so do animals, trees, mountains, mud and water and hence life is lived in correspondence (Ingold, 2010: 243-44); to imagine landscape, is to enter into correspondence with it.

3.2.6 The importance of place

> Space is more abstract than 'place'. What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value…From the security and stability of place we are aware of openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, it we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place (Tuan, 1977: 6)

> Place is paramount in human experience. It is remarkable how often memories are of being in a place (Casey, 1993: 34)

Edward Casey (1993) argues that in many ways place is 'the first of things'. It is what things themselves need to exist. Place is a matter of containment. The Greek word for container is *periechon*, a having a hold around, to encircle. To be 'in place' is to be embraced within a containing boundary; it is to be held there. This is why being in place is a matter of enclosure, of in-gathering. Images such as the vessel or the river capture what is most crucial in the notion of place regarded as the 'innermost motionless boundary of what contains' (ibid: 304). Time, in vivid contrast, is dis-closing rather than en-closing – opening up or out rather than closing down. Place holds in while time breaks out. Place conserves where time destroys - lays waste by always standing away from whatever has been accomplished or experienced in the now, which exists only (like positions in space) to be surpassed. Place 'proves primary to time, in regard to the latter's own internal horizons of before and after' (ibid) Place, by its very nature, protects against the disarray of time.

The ongoing importance of place reflects how fundamental it is to human existence, even existence itself (see Casey, 1997). Acknowledging the importance of place does not shield it

[6] Their notion of 'melodic landscapes'

from the accusation that it can be seen as a 'fuzzy concept' (Cresswell, 2013: 235). The case I make for its centrality to this thesis, demands that we understand the concept of place more clearly, dispelling some of the fuzziness. 'Place' as a concept suffers from a number of difficulties. It can often be used alongside, or instead of, a number of other concepts such as location, locale, region, space, territory and landscape. In addition, it can be used as a more taken-for-granted concept as opposed to a considered one (Cresswell, 2013, 2015).

In many contemporary accounts space and place are 'radically separated from one another' (Agnew, 2005: 92). Agnew suggests that such separation can either be through a 'strategy of fusion' where the concepts are folded into each other or one of exclusion where the concepts denigrate or devalue the other. Such polarising of the terms he suggests is 'intellectually and politically untenable' (ibid). It is an important conceptual step to recognise and develop the inherent relationship of space to place. Agnew (1987) offers a definition of place which sees it comprising of three strands: location, locale and sense of place.

If places are taken and made by intersections of culture and context then traces can be seen as 'marks, residues, or remnants left in place by cultural life' (Anderson, 2015: 32). Traces can be material and can include physical additions to our surroundings such as buildings, but they can also be non-material such as performances or emotions. We can see visible traces in places, but we can also sense them in other ways. In both forms they can function as connections. Anderson argues that traces tie cultures and geographies together and therefore places should be understood as 'ongoing compositions of traces' (ibid: 33). The trace-chains of things can come together with spatial contexts to constitute particular places in time. By understanding place as an ongoing composition of traces, Anderson argues that we can interrogate the ideas motivating traces and we can come to critically examine and understand approaches to place.

Doreen Massey suggests that very often when we think of what we mean by 'a place' we picture a 'settled community, a locality with a distinct character – physical, economic and cultural' (1995: 46). When we reflect on phrases such as 'a sense of place' or 'there is no place like home' or perhaps most revealingly the phrase 'out of place', we begin to see the power of our conceptualisations of place. Yet for Massey, and central to our conceptual cartography here, is the positioning space and place with relationality which can help us recognise and harness agentive possibilities. If places may be thought of as 'open

articulations of connections' then 'identities of subjects and identities of places constructed through interrelations not only challenge notions of past authenticities but also open the possibility of change in the future' (Massey, 1999a: 288). The emphasis on places as sites in the flow of social relations conceives of place as open and unbounded. As Massey suggests, instead of:

> thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings, are constructed on a far larger scale than we happen to define for that moment as place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent. And this in turn allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local (1994: 154).

Massey's developing thinking that there is a global sense of place sees her conceiving of place as open and porous. They are meeting places where the trajectories of people and ideas collide. One of the effects of modernity has been the establishment of power/ knowledge relations. The colonial power and the colonised spaces, for example, see a geography of power and a power-geometry of intersecting trajectories (2005: 64). Place can be understood as 'woven together out of ongoing stories, as a moment within power-geometrics, as a particular constellation within wider topographies of space' (2005: 131).

3.2.6.1 Place and 'placelessness'

With 'place' becomes thoughts of 'placelessness'. Casey (1993) ask us if we can imagine what it would be like if there were no places in the world? Our lives are so place-orientated and place-saturated that we cannot begin to comprehend, much less face up to, what sheer placelessness would be like. He suggests that even when we are displaced, we continue to count upon some reliable place. This may be a place-to-come or a place-that-was. To have an image of no place at all encourages a deep anxiety. If we are out of place, we enter into a special form of panic: place-panic. Here we confront the imminent possibility that there is no place to be or to go so that we are not so much displaced but rather without place.

The emotional symptoms of placelessness such as homesickness, disorientation, depression, desolation all involve a sense of unbearable emptiness. As Casey (1993) elucidates, unlike

plants, a tree for example, which has a life in one place and as such a life without anxiety animal life refuse such immobility. Appetite with memory and desire calls for a continual change of place. It is only by foraging in *another* place that the insufficiencies of the present place can be overcome. Casey describes human beings as 'beings of the between' (ibid: xii). But with the freedom to move and change places comes the danger of getting lost. Not only is there the possibility of disorientation; of not knowing the way between places, but more threatening is the experience of being *unplaced*. In such a state the former place may be lost and still a new place to settle not found. The 'incessant motion of postmodern life in a late-capitalist society' exacerbates the fear that we have no place to go. As Casey cautions, 'rushing from place to place, we rarely linger long enough in one particular place to savour its unique qualities and its local history' (ibid: xiii).

In a Heideggerian sense, 'being-in the world' carries with it a sense of abstractness which can be mitigated and made more concrete by raising the consciousness of 'place' so that it can compete with 'Time' and 'Space'. To be in the world can be made concrete by being-in-place. In *Getting Back into Place* (1993) Casey sees place as a forgotten yet essential component of our lived experience. He sees the discourses of Space and Time as dominating philosophical thought and suffocating the concept of place.

> I shall accord to place a position of renewed respect by specifying its power to direct and stabilize us, to memorialise and identify us, to tell us who and what we are in terms of *where we are* (as well as where we are *not*) (Casey, 1993:xv).

Casey talks of 'unplacement' and 'implacement'. Moving from the predicament of unplacement – of not knowing one's whereabouts at sea (1993:34) to situations of secure 'implacement' with the description of the discovery of navigation as a way to become in place. Yet, 'displacement threatens implacement at every turn' (ibid). One concrete case of displacement serves as a sober reminder of the immense value of human implacement precisely in view of the equally immense fragility of human 'being-in-place'.

The Diné̓h better known as the Navajo have been subjected to literal displacement as a result of the Navajo-Hopi Land Settlement Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-531). This resulted in the forced relocation of thousands of Navajos. A barbed wire fence was erected to separate them from the Hopi with whom they had coexisted in a peaceful way for over a century. The Land

Settlement Act was passed by what Lassiter describes as an 'uninformed' Congress in order to end an alleged 'land dispute' between the Diné and the Hopi over approximately 1.8 million acres of land. For hundreds of years, however, the land with its sacred shrines had been shared by the peoples of both the Diné and the Hopi and regarded by both as their ancestral home. Even the U.S. government recognised the land as a Joint Use Area (JUA). Although the land in the Diné way could not be 'owned' at all. Though they acknowledge minor differences, they have come to believe that the real explanation for their removal is related to the wealth that lay hidden beneath their earth. The relocation began to pave the way for white business interests to exploit the region's multi-billion-dollar mineral and coal reserves (Lassiter, 1987).

In exploring the human impact of the land dispute Schoepfle et al. (1979) describe the deterioration in mental health and the belief that only a return to their existing way of life would alleviate this. Lassiter (1987) argues that the suffering of the Diné is rooted in their spiritual experience of life. Their illnesses cannot be understood or 'treated' without taking this experience into account. Diné psychology must be understood in terms of a 'pre-modern, primal self: a self-identity with needs that are distinctly different from those the modern self has recognised and produced' (1987: 226). He suggests that the most significant need of the pre-modern self is a sense of place. The modern self is expected and encouraged to be mobile, independent and able to adapt to constant social and environmental change (notion of mobile bodies see Sheller and Urry, 2006; Cresswell and Merriman, 2016). For the modern self all places are essentially the same and interchangeable; defined by objective measures.

The Diné's identity, is inextricably tied to its particular place on earth. Their self-awareness and individuality are grounded in the earth, the tribe, the community, the family, and the ecosystem – The Great Self. Without such connections, the primal self begins to lose its bearings. Its very identity depends upon the continuation of a devotional connectedness to earth, ground, community, and ancestral place. If these connections are broken the 'self' can disintegrate and hence relocation *can* cause the death of the spirit (1987: 226 - italics in the original text).

The Diné see the land as the land of their ancestors, their ancestral dwelling place which is the point of reference for everything which takes place. Their land is protected by four sacred

mountains. One mountain lies in each of the four directions and shields their people from the outside world. Each Diné family has its own sacred location within a larger area where all the family prayers are made. Each family has a medicine bundle containing dirt from each of the four sacred mountains and sacred stones from the land. These are used as offerings during prayers in which an individual is instructed through mythology and family legend. Such instruction supports good thought which in turn is evidenced in healthy children and livestock. Talismans are a reminder of this good thought and are placed in the bundle and together they make up the record of a sacred family history in which the people and the land are one. Diné epistemology and psychology are based, from childhood to old age, on this complex system of prayers, mythology and offerings, all of which are deeply rooted in place. Closeness to the land and their place on the land is their way of being grounded in tradition. Their sense of history, even of time itself, are dependent on this closeness to their land. Leaving the land means abandoning their ancestors and their gods; it means 'loss of orientation, and ultimately loss of group identity, loss of self' (Lassiter, 1987:228). For the Diné there cannot be a whole, healthy self apart from a larger ecological community – the Great Self. To disrupt the balance of any part of the community is to hurt oneself.

Lassiter cautions that the plight of the Diné and of all other indigenous groups struggling to survive in the modern world should be a warning to us all. We too are finding ourselves increasingly vulnerable to the kind of 'psychopathology' experienced by the Diné relocatees such as homelessness, disorientation, rootlessness, alienation, loneliness, depression and despair. As the modern self increasingly sees the external world as existing primarily to be exploited and in a society which is driven by the pursuit of material gain often at the expense of home, rootedness and membership of the biotic community, these forms of suffering, he suggests, are probably inevitable.

The current trajectory of our modern selves sees our own destinies entwined with those of the Diné. What can we learn from their culture to move us to 'a radically different way of living, being and being well' (ibid:229). Not to learn from their experience, not to use their ancestral knowledge of cooperation and dialogue, respect for and grounding in the Great Self risks missing a way of healing. Lassiter ends his chapter with words spoken to him by a young Diné leader:

> ‘The government and the energy companies may wipe us out in the end. We may not have the strength to fight any more after a while. But the struggle is not useless; because, even if we lose our land and disappear, the social, political, and environmental issues, over which we are also in conflict, will still be there, and it will be up to whomever is left to carry on the struggle’ (Nabahe Keediinihii)

‘Displaced’ has two dimensions for the Diné. First, it represents the loss of particular places in which their lives were formerly at home. Second, beyond the relinquishment of particular places, there is the greater loss of an entire land, a region. The Navajo call this land ‘the Great Self”. It includes plots of land, specific landscapes, landmarks, the tribe, the family, the ecosystem, and ancestors. Each of these constitutes a discrete place or set of places in the encompassing region of the Great Self. The very identity of the great Self ‘depends upon the continuation of a devotional connectedness to earth, ground, community and ancestral place’ (Lassiter, 1987:228).

The Great Self has two distinct but interrelated aspects one of which is situated outside and around the individual self, whilst the other is internal to this self. Externally the land is characterised by certain actual features, such as the four sacred mountains. As aspects of the landscape such as earth taken from the mountains were used as a central part of both prayer and ceremony, so the land was internalised becoming essential to their self-identities.

> ‘Individual and tribal identity are built up in connection with widely separated places and the paths connecting them. Different places are successfully assimilated or internalised. They become distinct, though unconscious elements of the self, enhanced by mythology and ceremony, generating a network of deep emotional attachments that cements the personality. Throughout life those places have a role in the evocation of the self and group consciousness’ (Shepard, 1982:24).

3.2.6.2 Place and identity

Nature and the natural landscape can be seen as foundations for our conception of place and our appreciation of it. We are often drawn to natural spaces, the sea, the cliffs, the forest and feel that we are connecting with something deeper and more permanent. We find ourselves in uncertain times and at such times of uncertainty and associated anxiety, we are perhaps increasingly turning to local places and the perceived continuity they bring to anchor and

reassure us. Gillian Rose argues that ‘places are significant because they are the focus of personal feelings’ (1995: 88).

The story of the Diné h and their ontological connection to place reflects the experience of many indigenous peoples for whom place constitutes life in the highest ontological sense. The land and nature lie at the heart of identity and culture and shape the view of the world. Human life is seen to mirror nature’s flowing cycles, circular rather than linear time (see Zapf, 2005). Even our own understandings and experience of place, which we can often refer to as a way of grounding ourselves, may seem at odds with the temporalities of place examined earlier in this chapter. In an attempt to hold these perspectives concurrently, it is useful to imagine the natural world as also in movement. The ‘throwntogetherness’ that Massey (2005) sees as integral to place can be seen in our relationship with the natural world, so that we are constantly in negotiation with places as they change perhaps some imperceptibly slowly such as the sea level on the coast, others more immediately like the ebb and flow of the tide, yet all what might be described as an ‘event of place’ (2005: 140).

Identifying and identity building with the natural world is less problematic than how we might use the idea of place to develop national identities. Hall (1997: 181) argues that place is ‘one of the key discourses in the systems of meaning we call culture, and it functions to help stabilise cultural patterns and fix cultural identities ‘beyond the play of history’. When we imagine cultural identity, we ‘see’ it in a place, and we frame it in order to make sense of it. Such a framing creates stereotyped representations of national identities. All cultural identities have what Edward Said calls their ‘landscapes of the mind’ or their ‘imaginary geographies’ (Said: 1990, see also 1978). For Daniels (1992:5) ‘national identities are coordinated, often largely defined, by ‘legends and landscapes’; by stories of golden ages, enduring traditions, heroic deeds and dramatic destinies located in ancient or promised home-lands with hallowed sites and scenery’. In one sense place allows us to picture the nation.

Catherine Nash (2008: 10) argues that ideas of ancestry and origins have an important role and a complex relationship to ideas of national identity, ethnic diversity, cultural purity and indigeneity and routes of travel have created a shift towards the ideas of mobility, cultural hybridity and fluid identities as alternatives to those of cultural origins, cultural purity and rootedness. The ‘association of home and rootedness with political conservatism and the

equation of mobility with cultural dynamism' and the accompanying counterposing of 'stasis and movement' (2008:11) are being questioned.

Tim Ingold's 'genealogical' model (2000) offers an alternative relational model which suggests that from a relational perspective people are not the products of inheritance but are continuously in a process of change and development. They are not 'pre-constituted-or procreated- entities, but rather as loci of growth, of the progenerative unfolding of the entire field of relationships within which each comes into being. The source of their identification is to be found in this unfolding' (ibid: 149). Memory, knowledge and tradition are created through lived experience as opposed to being handed down through the generations. Hence it is their lifeworld which shapes them. This helps us reconceive the 'problematical geographical imagination' (Massey, 2005: 184) of space/place. This is central to the argument I develop. Recognising the relations of space beyond place, also moves it beyond the imposed essentialism of the inseparability of life and land.

Massey helps here when she argues that there is no need to press the claim to a universal position (2005). Thus, the couplets local/ global and place/space do not map on to that of concrete/abstract. Thinking of space relationally, sees it as a sum of our relations and interconnections. Thus, it is 'utterly concrete' (ibid). She warns against romanticising the 'local' which can, in turn, instate the global as abstraction. If we think of space relationally then it is the sum of our connections. The crux of the argument is 'not that place is not concrete, grounded, real and lived…...., it is that space is too' (Massey, 2005: 185).

Mobilising Massey's understanding of the world in terms of relationality, where the local and the global are 'mutually constituted', moves us beyond binary categories and allows us to make connections and create a relational politics. This in contrast to a politics which counterposes the perceived security of the 'local' with an abstracted 'global' – out there and dangerous. This is reinforced by imaginations of place (or the local) as victims of global space - place, the local, and vulnerability on the one hand, and space, capital and agency on the other (Escobar, 2001 cited in Massey, 2005: 185).

3.2.7 Local ways of knowing and being

3.2.7.1 Community

It could be argued that there is often an underlying ambiguity in the language of community. This can at times be confusing when also thinking about the idea of 'place'. Although the importance of place is significant in notions of community it is useful to think about both in a distinct way. Thus, both 'place' and 'community' can be explored, with connections made visible and this is important for the work we are doing here.

The language of community has an 'old heritage' (Agnew, 1987: 62). During the significant social changes of the 19th century however, specific connotations of community developed which we continue to see in the present day. These see community as both a physical setting for social relations yet also as a framework for valuing a moral way of life. Central is the experiential quality of community (Nisbet, 1966 cited in Agnew, 1987). Conceiving of community as relationships which are characterised by moral commitment, social cohesion and continuity draws on a long historical tradition.

The concept of 'community' has a complex history within the social sciences. It has been defined and theorised over time in multiple ways. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a group of sociologists from Chicago developed a theory of how communities developed in cities. They drew on the work of plant ecologists and became to be known as the Chicago School of Human Ecology (CSHE) for this reason. They used an analogy with plant communities to interpret the patterns of human settlement and developed the theory of 'natural communities'. This was underpinned by three main concepts.

The first of these was *competition*. Humans like plants, they argued, have the urge to survive. This results in a level of competition to find the best places to live. Thus, competition sets land prices and thus determines where people live. People are segregated into different areas depending on their ability to pay for property or rent. Secondly, is *ecological dominance.* As in different types of plant species, one species will often have a dominant influence. This is reflected in neighbourhoods where wealth and high-status can result in a domination of the space effectively blocking those on lower incomes from moving in. Thirdly, *invasion* and *succession* - plants are able to change the micro-environments of where they grow, and this can affect other plants' abilities to flourish there. Similarly, this can occur in human communities as, for example, lower income areas may be invaded by wealthier middle-class

groups or second homeowners and make changes which affects house prices and begins to exclude certain groups.

Although the work of the CSHE has been criticised both empirically and theoretically (see Valentine, 2001), with commentary that it fails to address subjectivity and legitimate capitalist processes, Valentine (ibid) suggests that it has continued to be an important influence on geography, sociology and urban studies.

Much of the discourse around 'community' sees it as a utopian state of kinship. Government and media rhetoric promote a narrative where community is seen lost and leaves us in search of meaningful alternatives of civic associations. Yet 'community' continues to be an elusive concept. Wilmott (1986) describes three categories of community. He terms these, 'territorial' or 'place communities', 'communities of interest' and 'communities of attachment'. Wilmott (1986) argues that the central notion of 'community' is that people have something in common. Most generally it is thought of a shared residence in a given area, territory or place. In a second sense, it can refer to people having something in common other than place. As such a 'community of interest' may see a description such as the scientific community. It is accepted that such a group will share an 'interest' which can be broadly interpreted to cover shared characteristics as diverse as ethnic origin, religion, politics, occupation, leisure pursuit and sexual propensity. It may also be that such a group share a common condition or problem. He sees such communities as examples of social networks as members are linked not to everybody but solely to those who share the same interest or characteristic.

The two concepts of place community and interest community are not mutually exclusive. They can overlap where an interest community can exist in a small geographical area and as such also be a community of place. In common usage the term 'community' is often imbued with more elusive notions associated with rhetorical or moral overtones. Such a third meaning is concerned with people's feelings and with patterns of relationships that reflect, sustain and encourage those feelings. Terms such as 'sense of community' and 'spirit of community' suggest that this third meaning contain elements not only of social relationships but with perceptions which may manifest themselves as how people feel a sense of identity with the place and of solidarity with the other people. Wilmott (1986) settles on the term

'community of attachment' to suggest that it combines both meanings; an attachment to people through relationships with them, and a shared attachment to place.

Although there is some challenge to the idea of community as an ideal. Sennett, for example, explores the repressive and claustrophobic nature of many small communities. Widely seen is the portrayal of community as the perfect model of neighbourly relations (Evans, 2004) where the community comes together to shape and positively influence their shared environment. Such an idealised view of community brings with it an associated view that communities who in some way 'fail' to meet these standards require some sort of intervention and can lead to multiple exclusions. The concept of *social exclusion* can often be used uncritically in academic and political contexts (Holt-Jenson, 2000). A deeper understanding sees social exclusion understood in its economic, political and cultural connotations (Madanipour, 1998). In a sense economic exclusion sees a growing underclass who are excluded from the structural changes occurring in the labour market (see the work of Lipietz). Political exclusion results from non-participation in decision making and cultural exclusion is the outcome of individuals being excluded from mainstream values whilst their own rituals and values are marginalised. Such layers of exclusion leading to multi-dimensional disadvantage (Room, 1995) in which different processes of exclusion reinforce one another (Holt-Jenson, 2000) sees certain communities marginalised.

What can be seen in common discourse are themes which relate to the belief in Western societies facing a sense of 'crisis'. In part this is linked to the view that increasing reliance on intelligence-led production and the service economy rather than the manufacturing of goods has in some way altered our collective mind-set (Evans, 2004). Such an adjustment to this post-industrial landscape of employment has fractured traditional social relationships and led to new ways of living which elevate the individual over extended kinship groups and neighbourhood. The development of technology, it could be argued, has fuelled this development and contributed to the privatisation of family life increasing separateness.

Interventions into 'problem communities' often take the form of 'top-down' professional sector solutions with the inherent dangers that those who inhabit such communities are recast as passive receivers of services. Madanipour (1998) argues that crucial to combatting such passivity is engendering a sense of empowerment and involvement in local improvements. For the individuals who make up the community the sense of being grounded in a place,

having roots in a place in 'home' sees place as being connected to forms of social capital. Evans (2004) argues that for those living in social exclusion, both neighbours and intimates share the same social and residential spaces which leads to a pride in a shared commitment to place. In addition, what results is a tendency to invest a great deal of trust in those who share a similar experience and hence mistrust those people and organisations which do not: 'in matters of minor need, people turn to neighbours, and in matters of great need they turn to intimates, wherever those people lived' (Fischer, 1982: 176, cited in Evans, 2004: 58).

Sennett describes 'community' as a deceptive social term. Whilst people talk of a community of interest – a shared endeavour or a group who depend on each other to make money there are also communities of affection such as churches or ethnic groups who may feel emotional ties to one another. Sennett suggests the bond of community is one of sensing a common identity, 'a pleasure in recognising 'us' and 'who we are'' (1970:34).

3.3 Conclusion

The 'space', 'place' and 'local knowledge' that become so central to this narrative inquiry are complex concepts to grapple with. However, the narrative of control examined in Chapter 2 is a powerful one and brings with it division. It strips education and schooling of context as change is imposed. To map out a coherent counter-narrative, therefore, it is evident that we must piece together a conceptual cartography that can act as a guide to shift the change agenda. By locating school improvement as a craft of place informed by local knowledges, I argue it can be rebuilt. Thus, it moves from a continual anxiety of deficit, to a relational and plural understanding of the particular school, in its particular place, at a particular time. Change then becomes more nuanced and appropriate as it becomes located in the multiple physical and storied landscapes of the school, the teachers, the students, the community, the town.

One of the key tasks of this inquiry was not only to shed light on what is currently happening in schools but also to add an agentive dimension which would piece together how context could be built into the narrative of educational change. For Nash (2008) context can be seen as healing and as we will go on in the chapters that follow to join in the conversation of this inquiry, we will search out shared experience and meanings in common which will bridge the divide. Privileging local knowledges, deepening our understanding of the importance of

space, place and the relational, complicates the narrative of division and control and brings new possibilities.

Chapter 4

'Our stories are the masks through which we can be seen, and with every telling we stop the flood and swirl of thought so someone can get a glimpse of us, and maybe catch us if they can'

Madeleine R. Grumet, 1987: 322

Chapter 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: A THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

4.1 Overview

4.2 Narrative inquiry as methodology and phenomenon

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4.4.4 From field texts to interim research texts

4.4.5 From interim research texts to research texts

4.1 Overview

The preceding two chapters have sought, through excavation and interrogation, to set schools and schooling in some context and to map out an integrated conceptual framework to challenge the current 'school improvement' agenda. Chapter 2 has been mindful not only of education policy and response to policy, but of much broader, structural influences on educational practices. Whilst we are encouraged to see what could be described as a move back to schools championing autonomy and collaboration as the way forward for school improvement, we must remain attentive to the fact that such appeals are being made in a continued climate of audit, evaluation and accountability. At the micro level, the 'self-managing school' which positions itself as in control of school change and with devolved governance, continues to be embedded in 'swirling discourses' (Barnett, 2008: 205) resulting in complex and potentially contradictory conditions.

> 'Advanced liberal practices of rule are practices of liberty in the sense that they continually associate and disassociate subjection and subjectification, domination and fabrication of subjectivities. On the one hand they contract, consult, negotiate, create partnerships, even empower and activate forms of agency, liberty and the choice of individuals, consumers and professionals, households, neighbourhoods and communities. On the other, they set norms, standards, benchmarks, performance indicators, quality control and best practice standards to monitor, measure and render calculable the performance of these various agencies' (Dean, 1999:165).

The seemingly limitless scope and expectation of 'improvement' hands it a seductive power. Finding ways that such power can be challenged by imagining new possibilities is central to this study. Moreover, as I have argued, there is scant attention paid to the axes of the temporal, spatial, situational and relational contexts in framing our thinking of what we are

asking schools to do and to change. At the core of this research was the desire to juxtapose conceptual argument with local realities. The crafting of a framework, which can act as a counter-narrative to the de-located and de-historicised approach to school change, starts with a willingness to discover, listen to and privilege local knowledges. The search was to find a methodology which would do just that.

In this chapter of the thesis, I outline and justify the methodological approach taken. I give my reasons for adopting it. I include a discussion of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the chosen methods employed and my own place in the unfolding story of this project. The study itself has travelled through a number of iterations as it moved from a preliminary pilot project, which sought advice from teachers and head teachers who know schools and how they work, through to the main body of the study which saw me living alongside the participant secondary school for nearly two years.

4.2 Narrative inquiry as methodology and phenomenon

The use of narrative in social research has grown in recent years. The term 'narrative' however can often be disputed, and there are no self-evident categories on which to focus in contrast to content-based thematic approaches or with analyses of specific elements of language (Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou, 2008). In addition, 'narrative' is also widely used in popular discourse and hence there are striking differences in the way it is understood. Even within social research the term refers to a diversity of areas of study, methods of investigation and analysis and theoretical orientations (ibid).

Considering narrative inquiry in the field of qualitative research is useful in marking out its territory. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) encourage a start point of exploration distinguishing between the two research paradigms of quantitative and qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) open their *Handbook of Qualitative Research* as follows:

> Qualitative research is a multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive naturalistic approach to its subject matter…qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use of and collection of a variety of empirical materials, that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives (1994:2).

They draw attention to the fact that the distinction between the two paradigms rests not on the decision to use numbers or not, but rests on a series of assumptions. Quantitative research lies exclusively in positivistic and post-positivistic assumptions whereas qualitative research forms around assumptions about interpretation and human action. Thus, qualitative researchers are not interested in predication and control but in understanding. There have been critiques of Denzin and Lincoln's history of qualitative inquiry, ranging from the criticism that it presents a reductive split between positivist and post-positivist approaches (Morrow, 2000) to the suggestion that their attempts to 'tidy up' the field of qualitative research is problematic (see Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont, 1999). Nonetheless, Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) argue that Denzin and Lincoln regularly include caveats acknowledging that they have offered a somewhat 'smoothed out' history for heuristic purposes and that 'the history of qualitative research is defined more by breaks and ruptures than by a clear, evolutionary, progressive movement from one stage to the next' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 1047 cited in Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005:9). In addition, and they suggest, more importantly, the work of Denzin and Lincoln has been hugely influential in establishing qualitative research as a field of inquiry in its own right (ibid).

There has been a 'legitimation of qualitative inquiry as a distinct and important field' (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005:9). Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) offer a useful way of conceiving of the theoretical horizons of qualitative inquiry. Although interpretive scholars have described these horizons in slightly different ways, Kamberelis and Dimitriadis suggest that most see inquiry as involving 'at least four dimensions or analytic strata' (ibid:13). Following Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (ibid), it is helpful to briefly examine these four, *epistemologies, theories, approaches* and *strategies* in turn, as a further way of locating narrative inquiry in the broader qualitative landscape.

Epistemologies

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge. It is concerned with the nature of knowledge; understanding what knowledge is. It is also concerned with the extent of knowledge; how do we know and how much do we know. Objectivism and constructionism are examples of epistemologies and are described by Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005: 14) as the two 'grand epistemologies' which make up the philosophical foundations of social science inquiry.

Objectivism asserts that the world is *out there*, and the objective world is inherently meaningful. When human beings ascribe meanings to objects (a table) or processes (love) an objectivist viewpoint would be that they have uncovered meaning that was already present. Such a view contends therefore that there are laws and truths which can be identified with certainty.

Constructionism, on the other hand, puts forward a different perspective. From a constructionist viewpoint, although it is agreed that there is an objective world which is independent of our experience of it, the argument is that meaning is a function of our engagement with the world. Meaning is not discovered as inherent in an object or process but is constituted or constructed. Following Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005:14) the meaning of reality is therefore likely to be 'constructed differently as a function of the position or perspective taken by a culture, a social formation, or an individual person'. There is therefore the possibility that there are multiple meanings which can be viewed as valid.

We will return to these concepts as this chapter develops to explore the turn to narrative and narrative inquiry more closely. Of relevance here, is the extent to which objectivism and its theoretical counterpart, positivism, called into question the legitimacy of qualitative research carried out in the constructionist paradigm with associated interpretivist theories. Explored later, in more depth, will be the development of the turns towards narrative in particular. However, qualitative approaches in general have felt a pressure to justify their research as equally objective and rigorous as study carried out with a positivist orientation. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) suggest that it is only in the past couple of decades that qualitative approaches have gained the desired legitimacy. It is clear that there continues to be a tension between the two paradigms and how the 'family tree' of theories, approaches, and strategies develop beneath them.

Theories

Theories can be viewed as practices in two senses. Following Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, they are firstly 'quasi-formal conceptual tools-in-action' and secondly, they are 'processes of trying out ways of making sense of phenomena of interest' (2005: 15). They can occur at different levels of abstraction with *positivism* and *interpretivism* being two highly abstract social theories. As we see in the tracing of the narrative turns which follow, narrative inquiry

is positioned within a constructionist epistemology and an interpretivist theoretical perspective.

Approaches

Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005: 17) use the term 'approaches' intentionally to signal the 'practice dimension of engaging in research'. They cite ethnography, life history research and grounded theory research as examples of approaches used in social science research, what might by others be termed methodology (see Crotty, 1998). They see approaches as a way of moving along our understanding of any given phenomena.

Strategies

Finally, research 'strategies' more widely termed 'methods' are the practices which researchers employ. There are multiple strategies for both collecting data and multiple strategies for analysing the data collected. Collection strategies can include a combination of interview, observational and archival for example. Explored in detail in Chapter 5, will be the strategies used in this study. Suffice it to say here, that any analysis should illuminate and make sense of the data which has been collected.

Unpacking the four dimensions or analytic strata of qualitative inquiry helps to locate narrative. An examination of the movement towards a narrative approach arguably sees narrative traverse the dimensions outlined here.

Within such a field, qualitative researchers often construct stories about those they are studying however there are 'territorial markings' (Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou, 2008: 4) that distinguish narrative researchers. Narrative inquiry begins in experience as expressed in lived and told stories. It is built on the central premise that experience is meaningful, and this meaningfulness generates and informs human behaviour (Polkinghorne, 1988). It could be argued that narrative is the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful and that 'narrative meaning is a cognitive process that orders and organises human experiences into temporally meaningful episodes' (Polkinghorne, 1988: 90). Yet, there are inherent difficulties in investigating human consciousness. Following Polkinghorne (1988), the realm of meaning is an activity not a thing and therefore cannot be held and measured. He cites Robert Romanyshyn who suggests that it is like 'a reflection in a mirror' as it presents itself in our consciousness as a 'fleeting trace', it appears 'as a wisp' (ibid: 7). The activity of

making meaning is ephemeral. Each one of us only has access to one arena of meaning which is our own. Meaning making must be approached through 'self-reflective recall or introspection' (ibid: 7). The activity of producing and recollecting meaning, however, normally operates outside of awareness and hence what is available is only the outcomes of the meaning-making processes, not the processes themselves. Language could be studied if it follows that language is commensurate with meaning, yet the analysis of linguistic statements loses information as it does not take account of the fact that linguistic statements are context driven and cannot therefore be treated in isolation. Meaning is an 'integrated ensemble' of connections that appear as perception, remembrance and imagination, the complexity of which make meaning difficult to investigate. The theoretical defence of narrative knowing is that it gives us a scheme, by means of which human beings give meaning to their experience, providing a temporal framework for understanding past events and how these inform the present and our future actions.

Accepting the relational aspects of research, the use of story and an attentiveness to 'the particular', are what Pinnegar and Daynes (2007: 25) describe as 'hallmarks of knowing' in narrative inquiry. Narrative inquirers, they argue, recognise the 'tentative and variable nature of knowledge' (ibid). The sense of 'wondering' allows for multiple possible views to co-exist as part of the research. They identify four themes that are clear indicators of movement toward narrative inquiry. They describe each as a 'turn' towards narrative and exploring these give useful insights into how narrative has emerged and developed. They use the term *turn* strategically in order to emphasise the movement from one way of thinking to another and the variation in speed that some or other change has occurred. I have replicated the title of each 'turn' as they give a useful road map by which to navigate narrative as a research paradigm.

4.2.1 Narrative Turn 1: relationship of researcher and researched

Seen as a pivotal change, this first narrative *turn* sees the shift away from a position of objectivity defined from the positivistic, realist perspective towards a research perspective which focuses on interpretation and understanding of meaning. The narrative inquirer accepts that both the researcher and the researched are in relationship to one another and that both will learn and be changed by the encounter.

In the late 19th century an important movement sought a rationalist approach to the study of social science. Early positivist philosophers such as Comte, Mill, Durkheim and others

argued that they could use the methodology of physical sciences to study human learning and interaction (Smith, 1983). Their assertion of the realist perspective allowed researchers to treat social facts as 'things'. This had important implications for the way research was conceived and enacted. Social scientists following such a perspective could 'stand apart from their subjects' (Smith, 1983:7). They argued that they were doing objective research and hence what followed were 'results' that were objective and could therefore be generalisable. From such a perspective, researchers' work was bounded, atemporal and static. Research into the social world could be considered a neutral activity. Implicit in such a view, is the maintenance of distance between the researcher and the researched. Within this perspective, researchers work on the premise that the context can be controlled and hence replicated and applied to a setting with differing characteristics.

The move towards a more relational conception of the researcher-researched relationship involves a reconceptualisation of the status of the researched in the relationship. Researchers accept that humans and the human interaction that they study, exist in a context and that this context will influence the interactions of all those involved. They recognise that the researched phenomena exist in time and that time is itself a socially constructed concept (Slife, 1993). If context matters then people, cultures and events have histories that affect the present and therefore findings cannot be effectively decontextualised.

The twenty years from the 1960s to the 1980s saw a shift, as the generalisable findings emanating from social science research started to be seen as unhelpful. Increasingly, studies which employed local knowledge and those which were more responsive to those taking part, seemed to be more productive (see Polkinghorne, 1988). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) talk of their dissatisfaction and personal experiences and became part of a move to look beyond 'behaviour' to account for what was occurring. When she carried out her Masters study, Jean Clandinin was working in a primary school supporting children who were experiencing reading difficulties. She chose to study the experiences of these children as a way of fitting her research with her life at school and theirs. What became apparent was that in order to make the children's experiences researchable, they were reduced to tests and statistical devices which would make them measurable. For many of the children the use of an intelligence test and a reading inventory did indeed show a relationship and a way of predicting those who would have a high probability of experiencing reading difficulties and yet, Jean knew these children and their families. She had, over time, listened to their

description of their lives filled with complexities and hopes and dreams. Whilst the research community focused on the statistical correlations, Jean thought about the children's lives. Jean's story was one of many others which resonated in the area of social science research.

What was emerging was a greater awareness of the relationship between the researcher and the research 'subject'. Part of the shift in this relationship can be captured by Bruner's (1986) description of two paradigms of knowing, one narrative and the other logico-scientific. The logico-scientific or paradigmatic mode uses a system of categorisation in an attempt to fulfil the ideal of a formal, mathematical system of description and explanation. Its 'language is regulated by requirements of consistency and non-contradiction' (ibid: 13) and it is driven by principled hypotheses. In contrast, the 'imagination of the narrative mode deals in human or human like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course' (ibid:13). Its aim is to locate experience in time and place. Narrative is built upon a concern for the human condition (see Ricoeur, 1984, 1991, 1992) as opposed to theoretical arguments which are simply conclusive or inconclusive.

Central to narrative inquiry, is that the researcher understands that there is a relationship between everyone involved in the inquiry. The researcher and the researched exist in time in a particular space and in a context. Each brings with them their own personal history and the ability to form new and shared histories. Through the inquiry grows an awareness that the process is dynamic and that growth and learning and change form part of the research process. Embracing such a relational understanding of the roles and interactions of the researcher and the researched presents itself as the first *turn* towards becoming a narrative inquirer.

4.2.2 Narrative Turn 2: from numbers to words as data

The second such turn sees the move from number to word data. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007: 17) argue that this occurs 'not as a rejection of numbers but a recognition that capturing the subtleties and nuances of human experience is made more difficult by translating them into numeric codes'. They also suggest that narrative inquirers may turn away from numbers because they question their validity when de-contextualised from narrative. There is a concern that numbers are limiting and bounded.

4.2.3 Narrative Turn 3: from the general to the particular

One of the attractions that quantitative research offers is the potential for generalisability. Thinking of generalisability as the 'capturing of the universal' can account for its seductiveness. The notion of constructing grand narratives from which laws can be determined and then universally applied has occupied many areas of the social sciences.

Questioning the relationship between fact and law (see Geertz, 1983) has created an unease in researchers. The move from the general to the particular sees the value of narrative which can bring a richness to research which can pay attention to the 'small' stories. Story telling can not only result in textured accounts, but a focus on the particular, coupled with an acceptance of the relational quality of such studies, moves narrative inquiry into the realms of powerful understanding with transformative possibilities. It could be argued that when researchers make the turn towards a focus on the particular, it signals their 'understanding of the value of a particular experience, in a particular setting, involving particular people' (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007:21).

4.2.4 Narrative Turn 4: blurring knowing

The final turn is the move away from one way of knowing the world to an understanding that there are multiple ways of knowing and understanding human experience. In some ways such a move leads research away from security towards a recognition of the tentative and variable nature of knowledge. Rather than solely relying on the assumptions of a positivist paradigm, narrative inquirers embrace the fact that adopting a narrative approach can lead to authentic and resonant findings.

Despite rich roots in the disciplines of history, which relied on stories told and passed on; anthropology, with stories shared of travels and local experience and psychology, with case studies of personal experience, it could be argued that with the professionalisation of such disciplines narrative practitioners were side-lined. With 'professional' came the analytical, positivist turn. The resurgence of narrative in the past thirty years can be attributed in part to the challenges made on the certainties which upheld positivistic social science. Challenges to the philosophical basis of positivist knowing have come from different quarters. In a sense whilst their disparate origins can be explored, the result of such challenges has been to make space for narrative inquiry.

One such challenge sees the work of Alasdair MacIntyre cast doubt on elements on the Enlightenment. MacIntyre (2007) argues that people trust things that claim to be rational not because they are truth, but because they trust the institution of the person responsible for those particular things. Pursuing the search for scientific law sees the creation of a type of organisation which can provide credence for decontextualised things and generalisations which are predictive. He sees the social scientist as one of the key roles within such a bureaucracy and asserts that these bureaucracies which include corporations and universities, reinforce the moral claims of enlightenment rationality (see MacIntyre, 2007 Ch.8). Whilst MacIntyre directs his critical gaze on the social scientist, the attention of Richard Rorty focuses on natural scientists. Rorty suggests that in our culture, the notions of 'science', 'rationality', 'objectivity' and 'truth' are bound up with one another (1986:38) Science he suggests is thought of as offering us 'truth'. Humanists such as philosophers, historians and theologians have to worry about whether they are being scientific and whether they can think of their conclusions as worthy of the term 'true'. One result of thinking in this way, he argues, is that any academic discipline which is unable to offer the predictions and the technology provided by the natural sciences must either pretend to imitate science or find a way of obtaining 'cognitive status' without the necessity of discovering facts (ibid). He suggests that following either path is unsatisfactory. Either one is drawn to an affiliation to the 'quasi-priestly order', that sees scientists in a secularised culture as replacing the priest; so, terms like 'behavioural sciences' enter the academic domain. Alternatively, practitioners find something other than 'fact' to be concerned with such as 'value' or 'critical reflection'. Such distinctions between 'hard facts and soft values, truth and pleasure, and objectivity and subjectivity are awkward and clumsy instruments' (ibid: 39).

In addition to positivism and post-positivism, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007: 47) in their exploration of narrative inquiry's 'philosophical neighbours', reflect on the border conditions narrative inquiries share with approaches to social analysis grounded in some form of Marxism. These include the work of Marxist sociologists, critical theorists, critical ethnographers, and post-Marxists. They suggest that narrative inquirers and Marxist scholars often share an interest in examining the capacity of institutions to potentially dehumanise and alienate people who work and live within them. They also perceive a shared interest in how such affects can be resisted by interventions which can help people 'develop a more robust sense of the reality around them and their agency within that reality' (ibid). The difference they suggest is the underlying conception of that reality. Whilst the roots of narrative inquiry

lead back to Dewey's philosophy, the roots of contemporary critical theory can be traced back to Marxist philosophy. Both philosophies, they argue, begin with ontological commitments and treat epistemological commitments as important subsequent considerations. Where they diverge is in the way Marxist scholarship takes the relational aspects of everyday life such as the personal, religious, historical, and cultural narratives as derivative of the macro-social conditions. Often, they suggest, these narratives are also considered to be obstacles that must be overcome to enable a more realistic understanding of human experience. They contrast this with the narrative inquirer who privileges individual lived experience as a source of insights which are useful to the wider field of scholarship as much as to the individual themselves (Clandidin and Rosiek, 2007).

In navigating where narrative inquiring is positioned, it is perhaps post-structuralism that is 'the most trafficked theoretical and methodological borderland' (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007: 64). Post-structuralism has a focus on the linguistic and narrative structure of knowledge. It can trace its roots to the linguistic structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure (1959). Study in humanities and social science through the work of scholars such as anthropologists (e.g. Levi-Straus), psychoanalysts (e.g. Lacan), sociologists (e.g. Foucault, Baudrillard), literary critics (e.g. Barthes, Spivak), philosophers (e.g. Derrida), and feminists (e.g. Kristeva, Butler) has been significantly extended. Post-structuralism provides analytic tools to explore the interdependent relationship between knowledge and power (ibid).

The, often shared, use of linguistic terms for describing human experience can result in scholars drawing from both traditions. At times, however, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007: 64) caution that differences in the underlying ontological assumptions of the two frameworks occasionally surface and produce 'tensions, confusions, as well as new possibilities for analysis'. Whilst narrative inquiry has undoubtedly benefitted from the 'poststructuralist critique of narrowly and naively conceived scientism' (ibid: 52), narrative inquiry cannot be ultimately grounded in poststructuralist theories about knowledge (ibid). In essence, for narrative inquirers social and cultural influences are not only treated as opportunities for critical exposure, they form an integral part of the search for 'tentative and partial ameliorations of experience' (ibid: 54).

Such turns see the philosophical development of narrative inquiry and narrative inquirers and how each turn relates to the other. The plurality of ways of knowing and understanding

narrative in some ways could be seen as a strength in that it allows for multiple views to capture and attend to a wide variety of human experience. Yet, it must be accepted that narrative knowing may never have the dominance that has been granted to positivist paradigm. It can, however, be viewed as a methodological response to it and a way in to understanding complex storied experiences.

As Dewey's influence seeps into contemporary scholars' work, we see a landscape of narrative inquiry shaped by temporality. In narrative thinking we take for granted that locating things in time is the way to think about them. An event or happening has a past, a present and an implied future (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Dewey's notions of situation, continuity, and interaction can frame a narrative inquiry creating what Clandinin and Connelly (ibid) describe as a *three- dimensional narrative inquiry space.* Such a conception gives us temporality along one dimension, the personal and the social along a second dimension and place along a third.

Seeking to explore and develop the use of narrative to create space, understand experience and translate experience into a process of transformation, is echoed in the work of William Pinar and Madeleine Grumet. Their use of autobiography as personal narratives sees their development of *currere.* Pinar describes currere as a way of taking oneself and one's existential experience as a data source (Pinar, 1975). In writing narratives about educational experience, he suggests, the writer can reach a deeper and clearer understanding of the present by outlining the past, present, and future. Developing currere with Madeleine Grumet, Pinar was responding to a frustration that the curriculum was becoming a rationalized and increasingly mechanistic process with an associated devaluation of the individual. By evolving this method both hoped to adopt 'meaning' and 'experience' as the primary epistemological lenses (Smith, 2013). Currere is thus a method of self-reflective autobiographical inquiry; a way of accessing the inner world or 'lebenswelt'. It moves learning from a structured process with planned outcomes to a hermeneutic endeavour (ibid).

Pinar outlines four interrelated orientations: *Regressive* sees a re-entering of the past. The past is entered, lived in, but not necessarily succumbed to. In particular, one takes notice of educational experience, past life in schools, past life with teachers, with school-related artefacts. At this stage it is not a question of interpreting what you observe, as this may interrupt you in your reflections. In writing down these reflections, you are 'bringing the past

to the present by printing it' (Pinar,1975: 9); *Progressive*, is a focus on dwelling in the future. Thinking of tomorrow, next week, next year, attention should be brought to what you are hoping for, an imagined future. Pinar encourages that this should use free association so that the critical/rational aspect (the voice which says this is not possible/reasonable) should not be given space; *Analytical*, here one can trace how the past inhabits the present and the relationship to the future. This stage encourages us to ask: 'how is the future present in the past, the past in the future and the present in both?' (ibid: 12) and finally *Synthetical*, where the researcher makes sense of the self in the present. The body becomes 'integrated in its meaningfulness' … 'I am placed together'. These steps can be used to interrogate the shaping of educational practice and the situation of the 'self' on all who experience it. It echoes the temporal nature of change and in the formation of beliefs. We take from our past, to live and act in our present and imagine and direct our future.

Such a turn towards words as data can see narrative resting on the premise that we are all, natural story tellers, and words can be generated and collected as written autobiography, from oral life stories described in interviews, from literary works, from diaries and conversations. Narrative studies can therefore belong to several disciplines but at their core continue the tradition that they are designed to deepen our understanding of the human condition. In a sense stories imitate life and present an inner reality to the outside world. The story, created, told, adapted and re-told *is* one's identity (Bruner, 1991, 1996; Gergen, 2003; Polkinghorne, 1991).

4.2.5 Ontological and epistemological commitment

Naming their work as narrative inquiry Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly are clear that narrative inquirers study experience. Their argument for the use of narrative inquiry continues to be inspired by a view of human experience in which 'humans, individually and socially lead storied lives' (Clandinin, 2013: 13).

> People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experiences story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as methodology entails a view

> of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of the experience as phenomenon under study (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006: 375).

The way that experience is understood is inspired by the work of John Dewey. In a Deweyan sense, experience is made up of things and events which belong to the world and are transformed by the human context they enter. Such experience simultaneously changes and develops the human actor by such a process of engagement. Dewey's ontology is not transcendental, it is transactional (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007). This has profound epistemological implications, with Clandinin and Rosiek arguing that the regulative ideal for inquiry is not to generate an exclusively faithful representation of a reality independent of the knower, but to generate a new relation between a human being and her environment – her life, her community – which makes possible new ways of dealing with them (ibid).

Working within this ontology gives narrative inquiry a temporality. Inquiries thus become a series of choices. As Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) explain, such choices are inspired by purposes that are shaped by past experience undertaken through time. In the words of Dewey an 'honest empirical method' will trace the consequences of these choices in the individual or community's lived experience. The key element of temporality is a thread which weaves its way through narrative work, making connections (see again Pinar and Grumet, 2015).

4.3 Narrative inquiry: contradictions and divisions (tensions)

While qualitative studies freely use the terms *narrative* and *narrative research* it can be problematic to find a specific definition of these terms. In broad terms, *narrative research* can refer to any study that uses or analyses narrative materials. The data can be collected as a story such as a personal story shared in an interview or perhaps as field notes from an anthropological study or in personal letters or a literary work. The justification for narrative work sees people as storytellers by nature (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998). Verbal accounts and stories presented by individual narrators can be one of the clearest channels for learning about their inner world (ibid). There is the view (see Bruner, 1991, 1990, 1996; McAdams, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1991) that personal narratives *are* people's identities. Following this line of thought, stories imitate life and present an inner reality to the outside world. The story, created, told, revised throughout the teller's life, becomes their identity. We get to know ourselves by the stories we tell, and we reveal ourselves to others by them.

Yet, the field of qualitative research and, with it, narrative research, is 'defined by a series of tensions, contradictions and hesitations' (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:15). At the heart of such tensions are debates about the nature of 'truth', 'knowledge' and 'research'. Within such a contested domain it may be that a middle way should be steered. Such a course does not advocate total relativism, which treats all narratives as texts of fiction, nor the view that narratives should be taken at face value, as complete and accurate representations of reality (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998). A story shared, is a story which has developed and been shaped over time. When a story is recorded and transcribed it gives us a story captured in a moment of time like a 'single, frozen, still photograph' (ibid: 8) of a dynamically changing identity. The 'story' has been reworked and at the time of telling can be influenced by many contextual factors; the nature of the audience, the relationship between the teller and the listener, the mood of the narrator.

Advocates of narrative research would contend that such a methodology, despite the debates which surround it, results in unique and rich data. The study and interpretation of such data can allow the researcher to access insights not only into the teller's identity and systems of meaning but also their cultural and social world (ibid).

4.4 Research strategy

In mapping out the design of this study, I drew on Jean Clandinin's guide for *living out* a narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013).

4.4.1 Research puzzles rather than research questions

There are multiple considerations when planning a narrative inquiry. Each inquiry is composed around a 'particular wonder', as opposed to thinking about framing a precise and bounded research question. Such a wonder carries with it a 'sense of a search, a 're-search', a searching again' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:124). What emerges is a 'research puzzle'. My puzzle centred around school change; it sought to unravel what real and sustainable change for the better looks like and how it can be nurtured and replicated.

From the competing discourses and rhetoric of 'school improvement', I sought to carefully excavate what both teachers and students understood as *important* and *necessary* change, not just change for change's sake, not change imposed for lofty and distant ideological agendas,

nor change introduced to further careers or exercise control, but understanding changes that, if enacted, would be seen to benefit the daily lives of those in the school and develop the relational capacity of teachers and students to each other and to the locality, the place, where they found themselves.

The puzzle initially became more complicated as teachers and students talked about change and their place in it. Together, however, we endeavoured to seek out how the changes could fit in with the ebb and flow of their lives.

4.4.2 Moving into living alongside

Narrative inquirers always enter into research relationships 'in the midst'. In the midst of our own lives, both personal and professional; in the midst of researchers' lives within a particular institution and the institutional narrative; in the midst of social, political and cultural narratives (Clandinin, 2013: 43). Our participants are also in the midst of their lives. When we come together, we enter an inquiry relationship in the midst and their lives and our lives are shaped by the past, present and unfolding narratives.

The design of narrative inquiries sees the need for imagination and sensitivity to place ourselves amid the lives of our participants. We nurture narrative beginnings to better understand how the participants may shape the developing inquiry. Part of our beginning is understanding ourselves, who we are and who we are becoming. Autobiographical narrative is a start point for inquiry.

As participants' and researchers' lives meet in the midst of our experiences, we begin to shape time, places and spaces and negotiate ways of being together. We are mindful that we are in the midst not only of our shared research experience but also that we are in the midst of the nested lives in which each of us live. We also think about the ongoingness of the institutional, social, cultural narratives within which each of us live. Inquiries start and finish still in the midst. For narrative inquirers, however, 'exit is never a final exit as we continue to carry long-term relational responsibilities for participants, for ourselves, and for the work we have done together' (Clandinin, 2013: 44).

4.4.3 From field to field texts

As we design a narrative inquiry, we start to imagine the study. We begin to consider what our area of inquiry will be. We negotiate with the participants an ongoing relational inquiry space which is called the *field.* Being in the field involves 'settling into the temporal unfolding of lives in place or places' (ibid: 45). By living alongside participants as they live and tell their stories we have conversations which create spaces for stories to be told and to be heard. We enter and become situated in places and the relationships which our participants experience. There are multiple ways to gather, compose and create field texts (data). Field texts can emerge from field notes, transcripts of conversations, artefacts such as photographs or documents. Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly chose the term *field texts* as opposed to *data* as a conscious effort to signal that texts composed in narrative inquiry are experiential, intersubjective texts rather than objective texts. It is central to any narrative inquiry to see the field texts as co-compositional and reflective of the experiences of the participants and the researcher.

4.4.4 From field texts to interim research texts

The researcher must move away from the close contact with the participants in the field to working on the field texts. There is a tension in beginning to interpret field texts that can in some ways be relieved with the composition of interim research texts which allow both researcher and participant to continue to co-compose text and negotiate meaning. The dialogue with participants around interim research texts can take the inquirer back to work further with the participant if it is felt that more field texts will add authenticity. As narrative inquirers Downey and Clandinin (2010) urge that we make visible the ways that the participants, and we, struggle for narrative coherence. Carr (1986: 97) suggests that we all strive for coherence in our lives:

> 'Our lives admit of sometimes more, sometimes less coherence; they hang together reasonably well, but they occasionally tend to fall apart. Coherence seems to be a need imposed on us whether we seek it or not. Things need to make sense. We feel the lack of sense when it goes missing. The unity of self, not as an underlying identity but as a life that hangs together, is not a pre-given condition but an achievement. Some of us succeed, it seems, better than others. None of us succeeds totally. We keep at it. What we are doing is telling and retelling, to ourselves and to others, the story of what we are about and what we are'

Our narrative inquiries must be attentive to understanding the struggles that take place for narrative coherence or lack of narrative coherence to emerge in the texts.

4.4.5 From interim research texts to research texts

Clandinin (2013) sees moving from field texts to interim texts and final research texts as a complicated and iterative process full of twists and turns. As the composition of interim and final texts develop, we continue to live within the three-dimensional inquiry space. Field texts are read and re-read as we seek out multiple meanings of experience. Final texts, she admits, are often difficult to write. These are the texts which will become visible to public audiences and take us away from the lived experiences of our participants. Whoever the audience is the research texts need to reflect temporality, sociality and place as it is only through all three dimensions that we can come to understand in deeper and more complex ways the experiences relevant to our research puzzles (Clandinin, 2013:50).

I sought to address the dilemma that Clandinin raises here that this final stage of developing research texts, which by their very nature require the hand of the researcher/ author, can take us away from the participants. In using the words of the participants in sections of the thesis this study takes an important new direction. There was a tension in this for me as I had been so influenced and inspired by Clandinin's work. As the participants and I negotiated how the co-construction of the research would develop, however, it became clear having their own words was a way of legitimising and validating their experience. The tension was linked with a risk, as John Smyth and Robert Hattam (2001: 404) describe in their description of 'voiced' research, 'the 'data' was quite literally being created, rather than collected'. This departure was central to the evolution of the study and became part of the original contribution of this work. In taking the risk a new approach was developed with its roots firmly planted in Jean Clandinin's narrative inquiry but with shoots which felt very much our own.

4.4.6 The importance of the relational

In addition to negotiating relationships and intentions, narrative inquirers also negotiate ways in which they can be helpful to the participants both in and following the research. The narrative inquirer is often called upon to live out professional responsibilities and express practical knowledge (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988). Although we enter into relationships with the participants as researchers, they come to know us as people; people who try hard to negotiate ways in which we can be helpful. We do not turn away from participants' lives and

therefore must stay mindful of both our short-term and long-term relational ethical responsibilities (Clandinin, 2013).

Living within the three-dimensional inquiry space, we acknowledge that the process of inquiry means that neither the participant nor the researcher, walks away unchanged. We must consider both the practical and the social justifications for the study. We acknowledge that the narrative inquiry experience can shift practices and create possibilities where our work and our lives can make a difference (ibid).

> 'As we worked within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, we learned to see ourselves as always *in the midst* – located somewhere along the dimension of time, place, the personal, and the social. But we see ourselves in the midst in another sense as well; that is, we see ourselves in the middle of a nested set of stories – ours and theirs' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:63).

Narrative inquiry, as advocated by Clandinin, urges that the researcher intentionally comes into the world of the participant and enters into a relationship with them. We intentionally put our lives alongside an other's life. We tell our own stories and we listen to the stories of others. As narrative inquirers our lived and told stories are always in relation to, or with, the participants and with their and our own landscapes (Clandinin and Connelly, 1995). We therefore become not *objective* but *relational* inquirers (in contrast with phenomenological bracketing). As such, there must be an attentiveness to the intersubjective, relational embedded spaces in which lives are lived out (Clandinin, 2013).

Central to any design of a narrative inquiry is the need for the narrative inquirer to engage in elements of autobiographical narrative inquiry as the proposal is developed. These initial autobiographical narrative enquiries are termed *narrative beginnings*. This work 'shapes our research puzzles' (Clandinin, 2013: 89). As researchers, as narrative inquirers, we are in the midst of each research puzzle and thus we must tell our stories as we listen to the participants' stories. We enter the storied landscapes of our puzzle and we must acknowledge the part we are playing and the world we and our participants find ourselves. Our self-knowledge, and exploration of our own earlier landscapes, informs not only who we are and who we are becoming but our ability to understand the stories which are told to us. The

nature of stories is that they unfold in relation to each other. Aiden Downey and Jean Clandinin describe how:

> 'in narrative inquiry, we try to understand the stories under or on the edges of stories lived and told, as no story stands on its own but rather in relation to many others – including the story of the narrative inquirer' (Downey and Clandinin, 2010: 387).

This sense that we are trying to understand the stories '*under or on the edges'* echoes the thoughts of Ivor Goodson when he reflects that 'truth resides in the margins' (1992: 15).

There is a clear sense that narrative inquiry is hard work. It requires a deep commitment. There are stories remembered; stories shaped and crafted over time; cover-stories; inner-stories. The stories that will be told appear to bear the quality of truth. In the telling of the story the storyteller may gain some mastery over his or her experience (see Pinar and Grumet, 2015) and yet textual analysis may be imagined as *excavation.* As Palmer suggests:

> '…it takes a great listener to hear what is actually said, a great one to hear what is not said but what comes to light in the speaking. To focus purely on the positivity of what text explicitly says is to do an injustice to the hermeneutic task. It is necessary to go behind the text to find what the text did not and perhaps could not say' (Palmer, 1969, cited in Pinar and Grumet, 2015:174).

As narrative inquirers we begin with inquiring into our own stories and therefore we acknowledge that we are also under study in the inquiry. We recognise that we and others are constantly negotiating our 'stories to live by' and we seek out and attempt to understand the stories told to us and the stories we tell ourselves. Narrative inquiry can thus be viewed as a reflexive and reflective methodology. This inevitably leads to questions about the extent one must understand oneself to understand another and how reflecting on our own stories informs our responses to our research puzzle. From a sociological perspective, narrative is an ideal platform for the teller and the listener to recognise the influence of dominating discourses (Goodson and Gill, 2014). Through the telling and listening we become aware of how our ideas and beliefs are determined by the grander narrative of forces beyond our control, but which nevertheless shapes experiences in a particular way (ibid). From an agentive perspective narrative is seen as reconstructing oneself as a person's 'past experiences feed

into new perspectives of the future, which in turn inform the current course of action' (ibid: 85).

4.4.7 Positioning of narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiries attend to individuals' lives as they are composed over time, thus the knowledge developed is textured by particularity and incompleteness (Clandinin and Murphy, 2007). Its borders are shaped not by searching for common themes or using participants' stories to develop existing conceptual systems, but differences in views of reality, knowledge developed from the inquiry, and the relationship between experience and context.

4.5 Ethical considerations

There are significant implications for the ethical considerations of engaging in such work. The nature of researching in this way cannot help but result in degrees of self-disclosure from the participants and it could be argued that, the greater the trust and rapport built up between researcher and the participant, the more will be revealed and the greater the expectation that the researcher will deal with material with 'trust and compassion' (Josselson, 2007: 539). Whilst ticking boxes at the outset of any research project may seek to provide evidence that informed consent has been gained, I would agree with Ruthellen Josselson when she articulates her concern that there is something 'oxymoronic' about the idea of informed consent in narrative research as much of what will take place is unforeseeable and hence cannot be consented to at the outset (Josselson, 1996; 2007). She suggests that we enter into both an 'explicit' and 'implicit' contract. The 'explicit' is the more straightforward and we seek to explain our role, the purpose of the study, the participant's right to withdraw at any time, how the interviews will be conducted and so on. The nature of the 'implicit' contract is more complex and subtle and relies on the development of the personal relationship between the researcher and the participant. I am mindful that this relational aspect of narrative inquiry must have foundation in the researcher's ability to act in a tolerant, empathetic, emotionally responsive way. Thus respect, trust and compassion are fostered by this implicit contract between the researcher and their participant 'partner'.

The researcher must be, to a point, open to their participants, to ensure, as Phillida Salmon (2008: 79) urges, 'a tolerance of some ambiguity, a willingness to wait for meaning to emerge: this is the kind of generous listening which facilitates a flowering of narrative art'.

Yet all interviews are in some way an intervention. Whilst the articulation of aspects of the participants' lives can be in some ways therapeutic, the interviewer must be acutely aware that there must be some boundaries around the concept of narrative and around the narrative process. The researcher must stay in control of the situation and must ensure that they are able to hear.

> 'Most participants will talk about whatever they think can be heard. We listen people into speech' (Josselson, 2007: 547).

Due to the emergent nature of narrative understanding, most narrative studies are relatively loosely designed at the outset (ibid). Narrative research is thus conducted inductively as emerging data modifies the strategies used. As such, it could be suggested that ethics in narrative research needs to be more reflexive than procedural (McLeod, 1994). It is therefore important for ethical considerations to be at the forefront of the study for the duration of the work and beyond when considering publication. In addition, ethics in narrative inquiry should be grounded in an ethical commitment which sees the researcher determined to remain empathetic, non-judgemental and respectful and to understand and respond to any concerns the participants may envisage.

In this study, my stance was that I would be learning from students and teachers and that must encourage humility on my part. I was conscious that the desire for this study to be in-depth and for relationships to be built up over time, informed the decision to carry out this study in a single secondary school. Whilst care has been taken to anonymise the school and give pseudonyms to the participants, there are serious questions about the extent to which participants will recognise each other and feel about disclosures they may have made about others in the community. Chase (1996) suggests that it is often what participants say about others, as opposed to about themselves, which they find most sensitive in their narratives. It is therefore critical that participants and researcher collaborate to ensure that any material is withdrawn if the participant feels that it may adversely affect them or their relationship with others.

4.5.1 Narrative fragment: reflecting on the ethical position

Throughout this study I have been troubled about an inherent dilemma. The participants have shared so much with me. Their stories of their life and their work have at times been deeply

personal. In coming alongside them I understand that I have been in a privileged place and have, over time, been trusted by them to faithfully represent them. They have asked for no personal gain from this. They have shared with me that in telling their stories they have gained insights into their work and in many respects the exploration of their own feelings and the developing understanding that many of these feelings are shared has led to shifts in their framing of their life at school. That students and teachers had the same doubts about some of the new practices introduced came as a surprise. Their ability to affect and moderate change by working together had been done instinctively but not reflected upon as a way forward to continue to adapt change by developing mechanisms for shared understanding and for recognising the power held in valuing their relationality, their personal histories and their local 'ways of knowing'.

What was bothering me was how would I be able to represent their voices and faithfully re-tell their stories once they needed to bend through the lens of academic theory? Their stories were not just 'data' they were precious and privileged and generously shared. As I was to move these 'stories told' into research texts and then as I was to tease out the strands of these living stories and weave them together with the theoretical threads I had chosen, I recognised that my hand would be visible.

It was me, as author, who would be working and re-working the texts to craft them into this thesis and it was me who had the responsibility to ensure that their narratives were not subsumed by the theory selected, rather that consistently the theory was only there to illuminate their words and thoughts. Acknowledging the hand, making it visible, was part of a commitment of not hiding my place in the work and to use theory to develop and deepen their stories without hijacking them. The strength of each story must stand and be seen clearly in the finished work. The new threads must support it, not compromise, overshadow or obscure it. This work, a re-working, must stay faithful to the original and the threads must not be tied up in academic theory which would stop the teller from recognising their story or feel that it had been appropriated from them. This thesis and any material arising from it must stay true to its root in co-composition.

4.6 Conclusion

In summary, the chosen methodology has been central to the evolution of this study. I have found a way of working with Jean Clandinin's vision of *narrative inquiry* and thank her for

the care and commitment she has shown in developing this methodology from the early beginnings of her academic career. As we go on in Chapter 5 to begin to hear and examine the narratives revealed in this study, we see how taking this approach does indeed create the three-dimensional space for researcher and participant to work together in time, space and place. It creates what Lefebvre (1991) described as the production of space, or as Soja (1999) develops, the making of human geographies.

As the field of narrative studies can be mapped out, we see clearly that it is multi-vocal, cross disciplinary and diverse both theoretically and methodologically. Cathy Riessman (2008) sees narrative analysis as a 'family' of analytic approaches to texts and as in all families there is disagreement from those holding different theoretical perspectives. It is to be hoped, however, that despite such differences, there is also a unity of purpose which sees narrative as a way in to understanding human experience. It gives the researcher a sense of freedom and yet, such freedom comes with the caution that narrative is not 'boundary less'. We must pay close attention to particularity.

As I have been guided to live out my own narrative inquiry, I have reflected upon how the stories lived and told to me by the participants have been shaped by their experiences and their context. The next chapter, Chapter 5, will trace their stories and mine from the hesitant nurturing of narrative beginnings to the unfolding narratives told and observed. It is my commitment to share this research project with them that has driven it through its many iterations. The centrality of the narrative inquiry approach has made space and time, rare commodities in school life, for us to share our stories and through them make connections. The conversational space of the study has triggered new and surprising conversations and blurred existing boundaries. From the development of shared understanding between student, teacher and researcher, we all moved out of these role descriptions and became people with the same hopes and concerns. What emerged was creation of new knowledge and the sense that this may influence our conception of change and show us ways to shape our values and our practices in our now shared lives. The blurring of boundaries has been accompanied by an illumination of thoughts and of experiences. As I have tried to carefully craft this inquiry and understand some of our shared puzzles, I often think about how taking a narrative approach has been like seeing stories through a prism, where the act of 're-search' and 'searching again' has seen the meanings emerge, revealing their multi-coloured, multi-textured and multi-faceted features.

Chapter 5

'Story…is an ancient and altogether human method. The human being alone among the creatures on the earth is a storytelling animal - sees the present rising out of a past, heading into a future; perceives reality in narrative form'

Novak, 1975: 175

Chapter 5: NARRATIVE BEGINNINGS

5.1 Overview

5.2 Nurturing a narrative beginning

5.3 The inquiry and thinking narratively

5.3.1 Multiple landscapes

5.3.1.1 The landscape of Seachurch*

5.3.1.2 The professional knowledge landscape of Longton Academy, Seachurch*

5.4 Why are you a teacher? – The first 'teaching stories'

5.4.1 Louise*

5.4.2 Jess*

5.4.3 Michael*

5.4.4 Oliver**

5.5 The students join in

5.6 Conclusion

5.1 Overview

I have looked forward to writing these next two chapters. I have carried the voices of the participants with me for over two years. After months of transcribing and working on the texts to develop them from field texts to research texts, moving to and fro with care to review

and reflect, working with the participants to search and re-search for meanings, they are as close as they can be to representing the stories we shared.

Reflection 11 October 2018

I have come back to Seachurch to write. It feels strange driving into the town and not visiting the school. I stay at a small guest house where the sea view is just visible on tiptoe from the bathroom window. From the bedroom window I can see the rooftops of Seachurch and, with the windows open, hear the seagulls, the occasional dog bark and the intermittent arrival and departure of trains from the small station. It is an unusually warm October day and much as I am drawn to walk by the sea, I sit to make sense of my piles of notes spread out over every surface of the tiny room and determine to share, as best I can, the narratives so generously shared with me.

Before I begin, I am mindful that a crucial stage of any narrative inquiry is the inquirer's story. I have sat down on many occasions to draft out my own story and have hesitated and procrastinated. Encouraged by Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly's words that as narrative inquirers we should 'meet ourselves in the past, the present and the future' (2000: 60), I begin to reflect on the fragments of my own story which will become interwoven with those of the participants. My anxiety leads me to have even greater admiration for them and their openness. In the telling of our own stories we acknowledge, as Clandinin and Connelly so effectively put it, that we are 'part of the parade' (2000:61). We are in the world that we study. Being in the world our past can expose stories which we might otherwise want hidden but such vulnerability only serves to take us closer to understanding and perhaps, better able to be situated in a place where we can affect not only our own futures, but the futures of others in whose narratives we share.

I dig out my field notes from the first visit I made to Longton Academy, Seachurch, back in 2016. As I rummage through the many coloured notebooks I have collected, I have a memory of my own schooling.

My father was a journalist (he would probably prefer me to say 'is' a journalist, as even in retirement this is central to his identity and he continues to take great pride in it) and so we lived a somewhat nomadic life. It seemed to me that as soon as I was settled at a school it would be time for the family to move on, following my father to his next job with an urgency

that news journalism constantly demands. I was, therefore, always the 'new girl' at school. I found this a tricky role and remember that it took a great deal of thought and effort to learn how to make new friends without destabilising existing friendship groups or upsetting the status quo. This extended to how clever you could appear in lessons, as being too clever risked alienating some, not clever enough, others. I had to be quick to pick up on local dialects as calling black school indoor shoes 'daps' instead of 'pumps' I remember caused much merriment for my peers and much distress for me.

As my studies progressed and my nomadic lifestyle continued, I reached eighteen and the expectation that I would go to university following my A'level examinations. There was no question that the teaching staff expected me to take this route. I remember acting out the role of confident and competent scholar. I applied to the five prescribed universities without any thought. It did not matter if I was offered a place as my secret-self had decided that I would be out of my depth at any of them. Far from feeling emboldened to embark on the new, I remember feeling genuinely afraid and ashamed. It was nearly thirty years later that I took my first steps back into further education.

Perhaps, in part, some of my own story has helped me as a researcher. Fitting into the rhythm of a place and being aware that beneath the surface there may be cover stories and secret stories, is an important part of being a narrative inquirer. Coming alongside the participants in the midst of our own lives and theirs and being mindful not to cause waves but ripples which gently dislodge thoughts and memories, is key to building rewarding and fulfilling narrative relationships.

I also reflect that it might be my own childhood search for belonging which has driven my interest in place and local histories and made this study so powerful for me. The constant 'moving onwards' of my family resulted in transient roots which for me became weaker as the years went on and I learned not to get too attached in order to be better prepared for the next place. 'Routes' became more visible than 'roots' - a way of moving, as opposed to settling.

I am reminded of the thoughts of Molly Andrews (2007) when she reflects on reading The Art of Coming Home (Storti, 2001) and the opening quote taken from Somerset Maugham's The Gentleman in the Parlour: 'When I go back I know I shall be out of it; we fellows who've

spent our lives out here always are'(ibid: xiii) and describes her own experience of moving from the U.S. to England for her doctoral studies and her feeling that she now lives and works between cultural boundaries and hence may forever be destined to be 'out of it'. I feel anxious that I often feel 'out of it' too. The sense of being 'out of it' for Andrews however enables her to see that in her own research she can 'simultaneously occupy the contradictory positions of insider and outsider' (2007: 509). I take heart from this and determine to continue to explore my own narrative identity and how this influences me as a researcher. I think that through force of will I often try to push myself from 'out of it' but often this merely takes me to a place I would describe as 'on the margins', so that I can feel not quite out of it but neither quite in it. Reflecting on this is powerful for me.

As explored in the previous chapter, relationships are key to understanding the work of narrative inquirers. The relational space between researchers and participants is central to understanding how field texts and research texts are composed. Relationships are also an important way of making sense of the temporal and contextual aspects of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). In this project, experience is seen as narrative composition not merely an analytic or representational device (ibid). Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into experience through 'collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in a social interaction with milieus' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000: 20). This chapter seeks to locate that researcher and those participants in a particular place, at a particular time and explore, in more detail, how the project was designed and carried out. It also traces how our narrative beginnings were shaped from their tentative first meetings to the relationship building which became the foundation of the narratives which follow in both this chapter and Chapter 6.

5.2 Nurturing a narrative beginning

We acknowledge that there are tensions in this work. The centrality of the relational throws up constant dilemmas. How fits the role of 'life story giver' with the 'research taker'? (Goodson, 1992: 248). Negotiating getting close enough to the participants to create trusting relationships and relationships that will develop and allow the inquirer to understand the lives explored, whilst being mindful of getting too close that objectivity will be lost. Schon (1991: 356) draws on the community psychiatrist Leonard Duhl who describes collaborative self-study as requiring an 'existential use of the self'. There is the need for the researcher to present themselves as a person seeking to enter their experience. The researcher says to them,

in effect, ‘I join you - I try to put myself in your shoes, I try to experience what you are experiencing?’ (ibid). As the researcher asks the participants to make themselves vulnerable so the researcher must make themselves vulnerable to them.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 81) cite Leon Edel ([1959] 1984: 29) who advises that a biographer should never fall in love with his or her subject. Yet narrative inquirers must become fully involved, must, as Clandinin and Connelly (ibid) acknowledge, ‘fall in love’ with their participants. The resulting tension is that they must also be able to step back to view their own stories, the stories of their participants and the ‘larger landscape on which they all live’ (ibid.). What is demanded of the researcher is that what is shared and experienced must be filtered through the researcher’s critical intelligence. Schon (1991: 356) describes how the researcher ‘must try to make her own understandings problematic to herself’.

The careful construction of field texts allows the inquirer to move in and out of the field. This does not mean that they must fall in and out of love with either the participants or the study, but meticulous observation and composition of field texts allows the researcher space to distance themselves and step out of situations and relationships and give different perspectives which can be examined with an objectivity not always possible in the midst. They allow the researcher to coolly observe and reflect upon events and discussions remembered, yet, allow them to be examined ‘with a loving glow’ (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000: 83).

In this study the composition of field texts was made up from the following sources:

- School documentation which was publicly available. These included a series of Ofsted Reports; Information taken from the school website; Head teacher newsletters; Training material
- Conversations
- Interviews
- Family stories
- Group discussions with students
- Observations
- Personal reflections and memories

Although dividing the ways in which field texts were assembled provides useful detail of how the study was designed, it is important to reflect on the fact that, in reality, all the sources from which they were gathered are in many ways woven together. The neat sub-headings mask what was an iterative process of attempting to capture the essence of the field; the physical landscape and the storied landscape of the participants and the researcher. Central to the creation of field texts is the relationship of researcher to participant (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). It is important therefore that the researcher is mindful to describe and acknowledge the relational circumstances of the situation in which the field text is created. There is an assumption that this central relationship 'embeds meaning in the field text and imposes form on the research text ultimately developed' (ibid: 94). What is told and the way it is told and the meaning of what is told is shaped and influenced by the relationship. Carrying out a narrative inquiry requires 'particular kinds of wakefulness' (Clandinin, Pushor and Orr, 2007:21). This 'wakefulness' led to the inclusion of direct passages of the participants words in addition to the develop of research texts – a departure from Clandinin and Connelly's design. Narrative inquiry by its nature must be open to the imaginative possibilities of how field texts will be composed and the possibility of *voicing* the participants became a central element in the development of this project.

There are several central threads which run through this thesis - themes which whilst they may at times meander, will continuously weave together and strengthen, as a rope might when it thickens, by their engagement with each other. It is hoped that the 'light of local knowledge' will successfully shine into every corner of this work, so that the threads are always visible to the reader. I should trust that this will be the case, but I pause here to reflect that it is perhaps the notion of 'possibilities' which to me is one of the most powerful. As we will hear from the participants' narratives, they and I started out on this project with the hope that we could effect change and that hope sustained us throughout and beyond the space which the project afforded us.

5.2.1 School context

In the Spring of 2016, I set off to visit a school. It is located in a small, coastal town in England. It is the only secondary school in the town, and I try to discover what I can about it before my planned visit. Available online, are a series of Office for Standards in Education

(Ofsted) reports which can be pieced together to give some sense of what has happened to this school and why, a few months before my visit, the school was forced to move out of Local Authority (LA) control and become part of an academy chain. The information sets out the following:

In the two years leading up to September 2015, the school was subject to a high number of school inspections. An initial Ofsted (2013a) inspection, which took place in March 2013, rated the school as 'Inadequate', finding a number of serious weaknesses. This precipitated an increased level of inspection and a list of recommendations. Initially inspectors judged that the school was making reasonable progress towards the removal of the 'serious weakness designation' (Letter to the head teacher dated December 2013, Ofsted, 2013b). By June 2014 however the school was subject to special measures. After this, three further monitoring inspections were carried out. In a letter dated 26 June 2015 (Ofsted, 2015), the head teacher was advised by Her Majesty's Inspector that:

> 'Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that, at this time, the school is not making enough progress towards the removal of special measures. The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.' (Ofsted, 2015:1).

This letter also gave details of how the proposed handover of the school, to an already established academy trust, was to take place. The incoming vice principal would work in the school one day a week and along with the new principal would take up their positions from 1 September 2015. The incoming principal and the Director of the Trust would work on transition arrangements. The letter also detailed that, 'a significant number of staff have left, or will be leaving, the academy at the end of the summer term' (ibid).

As I put together this initial summary of the school's current circumstances, I am already acutely aware that beneath the dry 'report speak' of Ofsted inspection and recommendation, there are a great many personal stories. Many of these I will never get to hear. What would the outgoing head teacher have to say of her tenure at the school? Brought in with the view that she would be able to oversee the required level of progress, at one point at the end of 2013 she was succeeding, but by 2015 it was judged that she would be replaced. Where was she now and what happened to the majority of the staff who left in the summer of 2015?

The details of my first visit are captured in the following field texts made from field notes dated 22 March 2016.

> I arrive early and drive past the school to make sure that I know where it is. It seems wrong to drive all this way, and then down the long winding road, to this small coastal town, without going to see the sea. I smile as I remember childhood seaside visits and wonder what it is about the pull of the sea which is so powerful. As I drive beyond the school to the beach, I feel some anxiety that my request to visit the school is a distraction they could well do without. Conscious as I am of the scale of the change they have already undergone, will they see my presence as a burden, perhaps more of an imposition, an outsider asking questions and generally getting in the way of the job in hand? My wish is that the school might allow me to spend a year alongside them listening to and experiencing the changes they are embarking upon. I am unsure if I will be able to negotiate this and feel that the way I approach this first meeting is key to any future hopes I have of involving the school in the planned project.
>
> I have a contact at the school, the new vice principal, who has worked for many years for the academy chain who have taken the school over this academic year. He is an English teacher and I know that he still carries out some teaching and that this is important to him. I had met him briefly before at a conference and had been struck by his passion for the young people he teaches and his desire to remain first and foremost a teacher, despite his growing leadership profile. I am looking forward to meeting him again, although I am not sure he will remember me. As I am thinking, I stare out to sea, it is a mild Spring day, yet the sea is dark grey. The tide is out, and a few beach goers are walking their dogs. An old couple sit on one of the beach-front benches. I take obligatory gasps of the fresh, salty air, check my watch and then set off back up the hill to the school.
>
> As I wait in the reception area, I look around me. The reception appears to have been recently re-painted and I notice framed posters which carry the branding of the academy chain and make reference to the new school name. Smiling down at me are photographs of the newly elected head boy and head girl, looking smart in their recently acquired blazers, part of the new school uniform, I assume, and below them,

photographs of the current House Captains. I wonder if there have always been students with these roles or if this is part of the newness of the place. Standing in the corner is an art installation, a dressmaker's dummy with a 'ball-gown' made of newspaper. Sitting on one of the armchairs, which still smells new, I glance through a school brochure with a message from the new headmaster. I make notes about all of this and about my feelings of nervousness in meeting the vice-principal and intrigue to see and hear how much has changed in the term since the school has become Longton Academy*.

Alex* arrives in Reception with an energy I remember and after a firm handshake, I am whisked off for a whistle stop tour of the school. We will, Alex explains, take a tour and see some lessons in action. As Alex marches purposefully ahead, I struggle to keep up with him, practically running behind him. My sense, even at this early stage, is that this is part of the plan. Speed, energy, efficiency, a sense of purpose, are the new ways of being here. The new leadership team mean business and even the way they walk the corridors should transmit this to students and teachers. We enter a Year 11 science class. Alex introduces me and asks the teacher to carry on as normal. The students are in the middle of a quiz. The teacher looks nervous and apologetic, as if embarrassed by the level of noise and energy the students are emitting. She explains to Alex that this is only because the class has worked so hard that they deserved a reward, so they have been split into two teams to compete in an online science quiz. We can see this on the interactive white board. There is laughing as one student tries to answer the question before it has been set, recounting multiple science facts that have nothing to do with the quiz. The class joker I wonder! I sense that Alex has the same thought as he too smiles and raises an eyebrow. After a few minutes we say, 'thank you' and 'good-bye'.

Next, a history lesson, where students immediately have to engage in a starter activity, set by the teacher, no time should be wasted settling them down Alex whispers. The students are focused on the activity which is already laid out on the tables. Just as it should be, Alex explains, as we leave and close the door quietly behind us.

We then hurtle off to Religious Education (R.E.). We spend longer here. I have my first experience of the new 'language of learning' that has been introduced. 'Track on me' says the teacher and I work out that this means all the students should look at her. She asks one of the students a question, followed by 'track on James*'. All eyes are then on James and I feel anxious for him, will the pressure of all those eyes impact on his ability to answer the question? I also notice that all the desks have a coloured prism on them that can be turned from green to amber to red. I make a note to ask Alex what these are for.

Finally, we are in English. The teacher looks uncomfortable as we enter, and it becomes clear that she is having problems with a student who she feels is fiddling with his pens rather than focusing on the task. This is called 'off task'. This is his final warning and if he doesn't focus and listen, he will face a 'correction'. The presence of the vice principal is clearly causing the teacher additional anxiety as she aims to control the class. There has obviously been a focus on student behaviour, and I am interested to see what Alex tells me about this.

We are then marching back to Alex's office. As we go back along the corridor Alex asks a student to tuck in his shirt and another to lower his voice, 'yes, Sir' they reply. As we enter Alex's office, I have mixed emotions. I have been struck by what feels almost like a militaristic approach to the structure of the lessons I have seen. The speed of the lessons coupled with my inability to keep pace with Alex, as we moved from lesson to lesson, has left me literally breathless. The strict language I have observed has felt in many ways stifling. I want to understand more about why this approach has been employed and how it has been received by students and teachers. I feel somewhat confused. My impression of Alex as a nurturing teacher with a commitment to both teachers' and students' individuality seems at odds with what I have just witnessed.

Alex tells me, with some pride, that he feels they have made huge strides in changing the school for the better. Last summer he agreed to be part of the leadership team who would turn this school around. Although only on secondment here, he is committed to what he sees as an urgent project. He feels that the school as it was had been letting students down. It was unclear if he had been asked if he wanted to be the head teacher

(principal), but my sense is that he was more comfortable as the deputy. He had been involved in the process of interviewing for the new head who was needed by September 2015 to launch the 'new' school. 'It needed to be someone I could work with' he explains. 'We interviewed a number of people but when Bob* came in I knew he would be the right person. We then got together in a hotel conference room, just near here, over the summer to brainstorm what our strategy would be. We had visited several other academies and we took some ideas from there as to what works for them. Behaviour was absolutely critical - if students don't behave, then they don't learn'.

Alex also talks about how they had coped with a substantial staff turnover, as staff who felt they couldn't support the planned changes left. Some had gone during the summer term, before the school left LA control. Others had found the transition to the new ways of working difficult to accept. Alex recounts the story of the first staff meeting where staff were told that a set of behaviour management strategies would involve the whole school, teachers included, conforming to a series of ways of working. One such change was the way in which the need for silence would be demonstrated. At this staff meeting, the new principal entered and raised his hand in the air. He waited. As Alex explains, staff were unsure what to do and reacted with a mixture of nervousness, some laughing, some chattering, and confusion, looking around the room to see what others were doing. The principal explained that from now on, whenever the teacher wanted the students to be silent, she or he must raise their hand in the air, as he was doing, and request that all the students do the same and simultaneously stop talking. Similarly, in all future staff meetings, teachers must also put their hand in the air and be quiet if instructed to do so by the senior leadership team (SLT). It was explained that this modelling of the behaviours to staff by the SLT would promote staff's awareness of the behaviour policy and help them to embed it into their own practice and ensure that they became whole school behaviours. Alex explains that this initiative was very difficult for some teachers to accept. After that first meeting, some staff decided that they could not stay. 'We anticipated that this would happen, but we felt a whole school approach was critical to turn this school around', he tells me. The behaviour policy changes have made 'space' for learning and now he feels optimistic about the school's future: 'We have been doing this a

term now and the school is unrecognisable, now we want Ofsted to come to see what we are doing here'.

I ask Alex about his own teaching experience. He relaxes and softens as he talks about missing having more classroom time but that he hopes in a leadership role he can make a difference to more young people. He asks me about my background. I talk about how I got to be here and my research plans and my hopes to represent teachers and students in an honest and sensitive way. Too often, I share with him, it seems to me that the literature on schools and schooling distances itself from the voices of teachers and students and does not give their experience and expertise the validation it deserves. He agrees and talks to me about his own experience of carrying out a research project for his Masters.

Teaching is a vocation, he tells me, and there is no better job, but all that surrounds it must be navigated artfully to ensure that students get the best teaching. He recalls his proudest moment as a teacher: 'I remember when I was teaching a group of Year 11 students and I had to go on a training course for a day. I had gone through the work with them that I wanted to them to do with the supply teacher. I was seeing them the day that I was back, so explained that if they looked at this passage of literature and made notes, we would be able to go through it as a group on my return. It turns out that the supply teacher didn't show up and nobody realised that they didn't have a teacher with them, but they still did all the work. When I was back and asked them about it, they said that had wanted to do it. They wanted to talk with me about it and they didn't want to disappoint me. That's when you know you have connected with those students,' Alex becomes visibly emotional. He has tears in his eyes.

After a pause, he suddenly takes me by surprise and asks me what I need to progress the research project. I am actually unprepared for this. I had anticipated that the negotiation to gain even limited access to the school would be protracted and require several visits or, more likely, would be a non-starter and I would have to seek alternatives. I stumble that I would need access to the school, a group of teachers and ideally, in time, the chance to speak with students. How many teachers, he asks? What about four, I reply, to start with. Yes, no problem, I will sort out a group of teachers with a range of experience and email you their details and you can come to

> the school whenever you need to, he says. It feels as though I have passed some sort of unwritten test, an initiation, where my values were under scrutiny and an assessment made of how I might fit into the rhythm of school life.
>
> I am so grateful and thank him for his time and as he escorts me back through the door to the reception area, I think about all the other questions I wanted to ask him but remember that he has, in that moment, enabled this project to start and that my questions can now wait for another day when I will come back to this school and this small coastal community.

So began my relationship with Longton Academy Seachurch, and this research project and the time where I could place myself 'in the midst' of this narrative inquiry; this unscripted drama, where our lives were about to come together.

True to his word, within days Alex emails me to say he is happy to set up a further meeting with four teachers at the school to introduce me. As I look at the email I wonder how and why it is these four who have been asked and agreed to meet with me. I email back to thank Alex and agree that I will come back and meet with him and the four teachers initially as a group to explain the parameters of the study and give them time to reflect upon whether they would be happy to take part. By the time the meeting is set up it is June 2016 and I hope that the project might start just as the GCSE exams will finish in what might be a precious space for the teachers before the start of the summer holiday.

From field notes dated 13 June 2016:

> Alex meets me in the reception area, and we head to a small conference room up a narrow staircase. As we enter Louise*, Jess*, Michael* and Oliver* are already there. Alex introduces me and I start to tentatively explain my plans and hopes for the project. I anticipate that Alex will stay for the duration of the meeting but once these introductions have taken place, he announces that he will leave us to it with the reassurance that he can be contacted at any time should I need any more support.
>
> Despite the obvious warmth the teachers feel towards him, there is a palpable relaxing in the teachers' postures as he leaves. We are now no longer in the presence of the deputy head teacher and this has changed the dynamic in the room.

I anticipate that they may be concerned about what the project may entail. Conscious of their heavy workloads, I am keen to reassure them that I will do my best to fit into the rhythm of their lives and their work. My hope, I explain is that this might be a collaborative project which will not take them away from their teaching but perhaps give space for reflection. As I carefully talk of my vision for how the project might develop and my desire that they will feel central to its evolution, I am encouraged by their initial comments.

One of my other concerns is the fact that they had been asked by Alex if they want to take part. Whilst he has told me that he has assured them that once they have met me and heard about the scope of the work there is no pressure on them to agree to be a part of the project, I am acutely aware of the power dynamic at play. If the deputy head has asked you to take part, I imagined there was a strong sense that you would interpret this as a request it may be hard to decline. I decide to tackle this head on and share my concerns with the group. They smile, my guess is as a recognition that those thoughts had indeed crossed their minds, even so, they assure me that at this early stage they are keen to find out more and to see how it will go.

Michael, more so than the other teachers, responds to the notion that teachers' authentic voices are often missing from the debates around education and anything that might bring these out could only be a good thing. Oliver, who has only recently completed his teacher training, talks of his own experience of research as an undergraduate and during his training. He says that during this, his NQT year, he has missed thinking about his practice in the way that his research projects had allowed him to do and hopes that by taking part he might use some of the skills he feels being a researcher had given him. Louise is silent but leans forward to listen attentively to the discussion. Jess seems a little conflicted. She has leadership responsibilities at the school in addition to her role as a full time RE teacher. In this first meeting she seems unsure whether to take the lead in this group. At certain points she is more inclined than the others to explain the new school ethos, almost as if this had become a mantra that is outlined in every meeting to embed the new way of working in this first year of the change the school has made to become Longton Academy. Speaking to a stranger, an outsider, she seems a little warier than the rest of the group.

I agree that I will take their email addresses and arrange to come back to the school to talk with them all individually. If, in the meantime, they decided that they do not want to take part they can simply email me and this will remain the case throughout the duration of the project, which, at this stage, would be the rest of the summer term and the next academic year 2016/2017.

Oliver offers to take me back to the reception area. As I say good-bye and thank you I have a great deal to think about. I go back over my conversations and hope that I made a good impression and that all four of them would want to be part of the project. I will wait to hear from them and plan to come back in July. A summer visit to the seaside when exams are done and hopefully the sun will be shining and there will be some space to nurture our narrative beginning.

5.3. The inquiry and thinking narratively

5.3.1 Multiple landscapes

One of the key ways of thinking and working narratively, is to be aware of and attuned to differing and multiple landscapes. My first visit to the school, described above, gives a glimpse of how these landscapes can appear and as this thesis develops it will become clear that perceptions of them can change and evolve. Much like looking at what we might traditionally view as a landscape, a beach for example, the view can change depending on the time of day you are looking at it; the season you are there; who you are viewing it with as they point out a tiny detail that you might have missed and so on. So it is that this study illuminates a series of overlapping landscapes. The place, Seachurch, a small coastal town built on a heritage of local fishing but now experiencing both economic and social challenges. The school, now Longton Academy but up until a few months ago Seachurch School or as the locals like to call it ‘top school’. The personal landscapes of the teachers shaped by their histories and their experiences. The students’ landscapes, all of them born and brought up in Seachurch, many of them with families who have run small businesses through the generations. My own landscape shaped by the story of how and why I have come to this place. Each landscape unique in its personal history and unique at whatever time and in whatever context it is illuminated. Each landscape worthy of reflection and perhaps, most interestingly of all, is experiencing how these multiple landscapes come together, at times colliding and other times knitting together like a patchwork quilt, all the more beautiful for its

variations and juxtaposition of contrasting histories. The narrative threads weave together such landscapes and, in the process, help people create themselves (Greene, 1995). Central to this study is understanding the continual interplay between them.

5.3.1.1 The landscape of Seachurch

Seachurch, like many seaside towns, has to navigate multiple identities. It is somewhere now, but it always also somewhere remembered. Often it is somewhere remembered from youth - a place of 'golden' imagined memories. It is a place returned to by people who spent their childhood there with memories of the sea and donkey rides on the beach. They return with their children and their children's children.

Walk along the seafront and you can perch on one of the benches that stretch out in a row across the cliff top. Each one has its own plaque - 'Ethel and Bill' or 'Betsy and Gordon'. As you read each one you get a glimpse into the story that lies behind the brief inscriptions. Each bench a snapshot of memories, of stories, of narratives associated with this place. The row of benches extends all along the seafront and often they have been dedicated to the memory of a beloved grandparent or grandparents who had made Seachurch part of their shared family history. Reading the inscriptions, you will find out from which nearby cities they came from and how trips to Seachurch for holidays and days out became such a special part of their lives.

Glance up from the benches and you see the old bandstand. You can picture this over time. In its Victorian heyday you can imagine the band playing as families strolled in front of the newly built grand houses, now faded and crumbling, many turned into flats and only hinting at their glorious past.

Listen carefully and you can hear the trains arriving and departing from the small station which opened early in the nineteenth century and made a visit to the seaside even more accessible.

Look out to sea and six miles of sandy beach stretches out before you to your right and to your left is the small cobbled jetty which houses the lifeboat. Research this and you find out that the lifeboat station existed even before the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (R.N.L.I.) was established in 1824. You will be struck by the pride with which people still talk about

what it means to be part of the lifeboat crew. To be coxswain of a lifeboat was seen as an honour, particularly in a community where standards of seamanship were high. Trace the names of the Seachurch coxwains over the years and the same surnames appear; often the names of a small group of fishing families where brothers and sons took over from brothers and fathers. Early records and newspaper articles detail stories of heroic and dramatic rescues. One tradition stands out: *No boats ever went out on Sundays in Seachurch except to save lives*.

Trace back the importance of fishing to Seachurch in the history books and there is the likelihood that fishermen having been leaving Seachurch to go out to sea for 1200 years. The earliest concrete evidence of fishing in Seachurch can be found in the church records which show that in 1122 there was a disagreement about the tithes that should be paid for fish landed in the village. Today only five fishing boats are left.

In stark contrast to the golden memories of summer holidays, are the memories of loss of those that called Seachurch home. Wander through the graveyard of St Andrew's* church and you are struck by the number of gravestone inscriptions which show families devastated by relatives drowned at sea. The church's burial registers do not record a death at sea if the body is not recovered. For every tragic story behind every gravestone you cannot help but wonder how many more people from Seachurch, over the years, have disappeared; literally lost at sea.

It is difficult for Seachurch, like many other coastal towns, to navigate its history and its place in often rose-tinted memories, with the reality of where it is now. Seachurch in the present still has the same physical landscape and yet it faces challenges both economically and socially. Like many English seaside towns, Seachurch is facing economic and social deprivation. The challenges Seachurch faces are replicated across the United Kingdom. There are the exceptions such as Brighton and Bournemouth who have managed to develop and sustain tourist industries alongside business communities, in part due to their proximity and connectedness to London. For many seaside towns, however, the picture is much bleaker (see Ovenden-Hope and Passy, 2015). A report by the Centre for Social Justice entitled *Turning*

the Tide: Social justice in five seaside towns [7] found that although each town had its own specific issues common themes emerged which had adversely affected the towns particularly since the 1970s. The increase in foreign travel during this period and which has continued has decreased demand for traditional holidays taken in the United Kingdom. What tourist industry remains results in highly seasonal employment. Particularly affected are entry level jobs for the younger residents of such towns. This increases the financial cost of high unemployment, which is coupled with an above average elderly population who have moved to the coast and are in need of additional health care and social support. The report describes the 'negative spirals' whereby 'disadvantage attracts and perpetuates further disadvantage' (2013: 6).

Hence coastal towns such as Seachurch, along with many others, become exposed to a narrative of deficit [8]. The once grand seafront buildings are visibly crumbling, a metaphor for the perception of decline. In a recent House of Lords Select Committee Report entitled *The future of seaside towns*[9], such towns are described as 'the end of the line'. It should be acknowledged that the report describes as its aim to make recommendations that 'struggling places can be set on a trajectory to regeneration' (2019: 4) however within the first few pages the sense of disconnect between the authors of the report, sitting in the House of Lords and the reality of towns like Seachurch is stark. They tease the reader with a short narrative about the English coastal town of Seaminster and how successful it has been in regaining 'their pioneering spirit' (ibid:3), only revealing at the end that Seaminster[10] is, in fact, a fictional town. The reason they justify including such a narrative is to demonstrate how sustainable, successful regeneration is achievable. The following passage is a selection of direct quotes and give a flavour of these:

> A small group of local creative business owners and arts organisations started meeting regularly in the bar of a seafront hotel to network and socialise……. gradually, an ambitious plan was forged……they reached out to the town's diaspora……..one such Seaminster

[7] see The Centre for Social Justice, Turning the Tide, Social Justice in five seaside towns http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/core/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Turning-the-Tide.pdf

[8] https://www.ft.com/blackpool

[9] https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/ldseaside/320/320.pdf

[10] The similarity to the pseudonym used for the town in our study is an unhappy coincidence

> émigré was a property writer on a national newspaper; she led a media campaign to raise the town's profile. Another was a partner at an international bank, he persuaded colleagues and friends to join him in setting up a pension-based investment vehicle that went on to acquire several large, dilapidated wharf buildings in the harbour and convert them into creative workspaces, cafés and restaurants…..thanks to a philanthropic investment, full fibre super-fast broadband was rolled out to all businesses making Seaminster a magnet for digital and creative businesses in search of a balance between opportunity and the good life

Such a simplified narrative does damage on a number of levels. There appears to be a disconnect in both space and time which amplifies geographies of difference. Such towns, at the end of line, can be reconnected and 'regain their pioneering spirit' by imitating cosmopolitan wisdom. Scant regard is given to what the people of such towns may actually want. It becomes a universal truth that 'success' can only be achieved by gratefully accepting the vision presented by the wealthy elite which is delivered with a missionary zeal. Furthermore, if this is challenged or resisted it is viewed as a deficit of ambition or aspiration (see Chapter 2). The emergence of the 'aspirational' discourse in politics has grown in tandem with inequality. For Raco (2009: 443), the aspirational agenda represents for government both 'an alibi for its ineffectiveness' and 'a prescriptive blueprint' for policy interventions. Raco argues persuasively, that the tensions in such a discourse are built on new forms of existential politics which create, then measure, different forms of citizenship which are materialist and private sector orientated. The consequence of which is that:

> Selective views of 'human nature' are deployed as a discursive weapon in order to normalise a series of fundamental and potentially controversial reforms to the existing relationships between citizens and the state and their emphasis on a politics of expectation. Human well-being is conceptualised through the lens of enhanced middle-class choice and conspicuous consumption. It is through such consumption that the social, material, and cultural aspirations of citizens are to be met (Raco, 2009: 443)

Questions remain of how these contrasting perceptions of Seachurch can somehow be brought together. Dwelling on nostalgic remembrances might at first glance seem frivolous when the town faces such obvious challenges and yet, all the different stories of Seachurch are still of relevance and forge an identity (see Nash, 2008; 2015). We must think about the physical place but situate it in the wider community, exploring the notion that place is often ignored but also judged as values are imposed – are the people of Seachurch really lacking

vision and aspiration or are they continuing a generational desire to stay grounded in their 'place', their town? This can be examined form a geographical and anthropological angle. For education, it raises fundamental questions about whether schools must tune in to their location and the needs and wants of their local community rather than imposing a hegemonic view of what 'achievement' really is. In the crafting of our conceptual cartography and in our chosen narrative methodology, we must pay close attention to how these multiple ways of seeing and experiencing Seachurch can inform our thinking.

5.3.1.2 The 'professional knowledge landscape' of Longton Academy

A helpful way of understanding school contexts uses Clandinin and Connelly's (1995) metaphor of a 'professional knowledge landscape'. They suggest that by conceptualising a professional knowledge landscape as teacher knowledge, the working landscape, and the ways in which this landscape relates to policy and theory provides a way in to understanding their personal practical knowledge. In their own work they also see, as this study will also reveal, that the professional knowledge landscape inhabited by teachers creates epistemological dilemmas and tensions. They understand these narratively as 'secret, sacred, and cover stories' (1996: 24). As they themselves articulate it, the use of a landscape metaphor 'allows us to talk about space, time, and place' (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996: 25) 'because we see professional knowledge landscapes as composed of relationships among people, places, and things, we see it as both an intellectual and a moral landscape' (ibid). This moving in and out of different and competing landscape is also the case for the students who are also navigating tensions between the landscape of 'home' and of school and of friendships and of peers.

For Clandinin and Connelly (1995) their main focus is on the epistemological dilemmas which arise for teachers from *theory* and *practice*. Their argument is that *theory* has come to be collapsed into stripped-down knowledge (ibid: 8). Policy is also stripped of its deliberative origins and hence feeds into this 'rhetoric of conclusions'. For teachers, their instinct in how best to practice becomes distanced from what is prescribed. This has implications for students too, who also see their landscapes diminished, as their horizons are limited by the narratives of control which we examined in Chapter 2. Such 'rhetorics of conclusions' are constantly limiting educational space. This has implications for the multiple landscapes that both students and teachers inhabit.

5.4 Why are you a teacher?: The first 'teaching stories'

As narrative inquirers we move into inquiry fields as tellers of our own stories and of others. Field texts represent, by their very nature, the choices that we, as the researchers, make about what we select to write about. Some of these decisions we are aware of. We can, for example, choose to select a particular policy document to include. At other times, when we enter the site of our research, in this case a busy school, it is impossible to capture every sight and sound, every emotional response to what we see and hear and experience and hence we are subconsciously making choices. Field texts are inevitably interpretive texts (Clandinin and Connolly, 2000). Even when interviews are taped and by transcribing them we feel have something more tangible than hastily written notes to work with, such 'data' is shaped by the response we make as interviewers. A smile at a certain moment encourages the participant to continue; a sharing of experience by the researcher develops the relationship in a way that may change the response.

The interview procedure was informal and designed to encourage 'meaning-making' by the participants. I explained at the start of each interview that I was interested in how the participants would talk about their experience both in and out of school in their own words. They followed the flow of a natural conversation and whilst I was mindful to give space to the participants, I was also aware that there may be times when I may need to respond to their narrative or make prompts if they felt uncertain how to proceed. The informality of the discussions was encouraging and resulted in many long and detailed interviews. My sense was that it was somewhat of a relief to talk about their experiences particularly in relation to the period of rapid change they were going through in their work life, their life at school.

The first interview centred on their own experiences of school and whilst a common comment was that they might not remember that far back, their stories flowed with fluent and detailed recollections of their own time at school and how this had impacted on their decisions to become teachers. The following narrative fragments see their 'teaching stories' emerge:

Meeting the teachers individually
From field notes dated: 15 July 2016

As I make the drive to the coast I wonder if I have somehow managed to pick the hottest day of the year for my first visit to meet with the participants of this study. After months of grey, disappointing days the sun is already blazing despite the early hour. As I take the turn onto the single road into town, I think about how at some point all coastal towns require the driver to make a conscious decision to visit them; to come off the main road and follow the winding roads down to their seaside location. I have a feeling of nostalgia which I put down to a remembrance of both trips to the sea as a child and of my own schooling. Today, and in the coming months that will turn into years, I will combine these memories.

I arrive early and so have time to drive past the school and onto the seafront. I am excited to see the sea and remember trips where as children my brother and I would be straining to be the first one to be able to claim we had seen the sea with the promise that it would confer some prize, ten pence or an ice-cream that I am sure never materialised. I park the car and climb up the steep, cobbled street in search of a café. Although not yet 9 a.m. it is hot and with seagulls flying and screeching overhead I feel somewhat incongruous in my suit and smart shoes instead wondering if I should be wearing shorts and a T-shirt and clutching a towel and a bucket and spade.

I find a small café perched on the edge of the town and overlooking the bay. Thankfully it is open with staff setting up for the day. I order a coffee and the friendly waitress asks what I am up to today in the town. I tell her that I am here on a business trip and immediately reflect that I have told her a bit of an untruth. It reminds me that we are always telling stories with different motivations.

As I sip on my coffee, I wonder how the day will unfold. I have arranged to meet three of the teachers at Longton Academy. Now that the Year 11s have finished their GCSEs, had their Prom and left the school, things should be quieter they have told me and so there is some rare space to speak with them.

5.4.1. Louise:

From field notes dated 18 July 2016

When I arrive at the school in time for my meeting with Louise, I head towards the meeting room as arranged. It is the first time I have been allowed into the school unaccompanied, a privilege I guess from now being recognised and having my DBS[11] processed and entered into the school system. I am wearing one of the school red lanyards and the young people walking along the corridors stare at me attempting to place me. Many look up, as if they are trying work out if I might be a new teacher. I am mindful of the fact that I have been told that a crucial part of the new behaviour policy is 'quiet corridors' and so I move silently around the space, keeping to the left as instructed, as the students' voices drop to a whisper as I approach them, aware perhaps that even though I am a visitor I may have some authority.

Eventually, after a few wrong turns, I arrive at the designated meeting room which I recognise from my first meeting a few weeks before. I set about arranging my papers and the recording machine. I fiddle with it and keep re-arranging it, in a way resentful that I need it and conscious that this small, black device may well be a barrier to what my newly found 'co-researchers' might tell me as we embark on our first recorded meeting. I want to make a good impression. I want them to like me. I want them to trust me. Whilst ingrained in me is the view that I should remain impartial and keep a level of academic criticality, I am struck by how much I feel an admiration for the job that they do and a gratitude that they had so warmly and openly encouraged me to come back and talk with them. Eventually I am set, recorder in the right place, notebook and pencil laid out, my watch on the table so that I can check we will not go over time, water bottle in case I started coughing, tissues strategically placed.

After five minutes or so there is no sign of Louise. I check the time, it is ten o'clock, the time we had arranged to meet. I wonder if I had made a mistake so check my diary again and there is the entry with the time confirmed, as I knew it would be. Perhaps she has been held up, perhaps she thought we were meeting in Reception? I give it another couple of minutes before I head out of the room in search of her. No sign in the staff room, so I head back down the stairs and literally bumped into her. She smiles and says

[11] DBS – This is a Disclosure and Barring Service check which is carried out on employees and volunteers in the United Kingdom. For those working with children or vulnerable adults an enhanced check is carried out. This allows employers and/or charitable of sports organisations to check a person's criminal convictions and cautions prior to offering them a position in the organisation.

hello and it is clear that she has forgotten we were meeting. I hesitate, not wanting to cause her any embarrassment, but then I decide to gently remind her and then quickly add that if the time was not convenient, I can come back…no, no she says, now is fine she had just completely forgotten. She has spent the last three days at another school, and it had just slipped her mind. Would I like to come to her room? It was just down the corridor ahead the first door on the right. 'Yes' I say, I will just get my things and meet her there. I smile as I hastily pick up the recording machine that has taken so long to position and all my other 'equipment' and go to find the art room before she has a chance to change her mind.

She appears relaxed and eager to talk to me, this is in contrast to our earlier meetings where, as part of a group, she had been silent. Perhaps, I guess, this is as she is now in 'her space'. The art room smells of paint and chalk and brings back memories of my own school days. The desks have layers of multi-coloured paint on them, made permanent under layers of glue and varnish, the evidence of years of artistic toil and endeavour. The school is 'new' but this room, I suspect, has remained in many ways unchanged for years. I resist the temptation to pick at raised blobs of paint as I go to set up my recorder now with little time to be anxious at what angle it should be positioned, just grateful that I have seen her and that she is still happy to talk with me.

As I explain the details of the forms I have brought with me, and the notion of consent, she munches on an apple and then, having circled all the answers, signs it with an artistic flourish. Louise begins to speak, describing to me initial memories of her own schooling and her journey into teaching.

Louise's teaching story

'I went to [redacted] school which is in [redacted]. The first memory I have of that school is going in with all the new friends I had just made and someone kicking a bottle and it splitting my lip. That's the first thing I remember of that school. It was very, very rough throughout the whole time I was there. There was a lot of supply teachers and I think the one thing that has stuck with me was my art teacher and she came about three years before I was leaving and was one of the most solid forms I had at school because she stayed for longer than everybody else had. They seemed to have all drifted off or there were supply teachers covering them a lot. I

remember watching her and there were some naughty kids and she actually managed, using art, she managed to get them to calm down, to sit down and they enjoyed school. That was the only class they were ok in. Every other class, they were asking for silence and they were asking them to do something that seemed to be out of their reach. They weren't taught properly, they weren't independent learners, it just seemed that the behaviour went out of the window, but when they were in art *(Louise pauses in thought).* You know, she was using things like spray painting and things like that and the naughty kids would grasp on to and it enabled them to learn and they actually came out with good grades in art. It seemed that in the other subjects we had obviously had to work quite hard by ourselves from textbooks that they just…their grades didn't obviously meet the standards that they needed to meet.

I suppose for me I had the drive of my parents the whole time, but I was very arty and they wanted me to be very academic. So, the next step was sixth form. Again, my Mum and Dad wanted me to be academic *(Louise laughs)* and I was pushing against the grain and going 'no, I'm creative!'. So, I ended up doing maths and biology and design technology and then I did art, which obviously I stuck to. I think it was when I took my parents to university and we were looking at them and I was looking at doing art at university and that was the first thing for them. It hit my Mum and she has always told me that 'I never took it seriously until I went to uni with you and they said how many options you had with art and you know, how complex it actually was, and it's not just an easy, doss subject'. You don't have to be academic to do it, but you have to be creative and imaginative to do it. That was the first time she had actually stepped back and gone, 'oh I should have been pushing her the whole time for art!'.

Then obviously I went to college after that because the universities told me that I needed another year experience, just generally, so I went to [redacted] and did art again. So, I suppose the whole time I've never been out of education, I've always been in it. But I think the reason I became a teacher, the reason I wanted to do teaching was a) because I wasn't bright enough to be a doctor! *(Louise laughs)* but b) because my art teacher has always stuck in my head and I have always thought, you know, you look around Seachurch and there are so many kids that have just sort of gone into working in a shop or working for their parents because they have no other option. They didn't understand that if you were creative there are other options for you. She was the first one that showed us, as a 'bad' school, that there were other options and how to do that rather than being told that you've got to be good in maths and English and science, which you do, but she also showed us that if you are creative you can run with that. So, she's actually my inspiration *(Louise laughs).* She knows she is as well! I still talk to her. She's helped me the whole time I've been here as well. She's always been there for me but

she's just…… *(Louise pauses)* Because she wasn't one of these teachers which had come in and were particularly really strict either….like I had a history teacher and he was very strict and I got on with him, but because the rest of the school was as they were, they didn't get on with him. You had to be that sort of person who could understand why he was doing it and a lot of the kids there didn't understand. If you were being strict, you were being nasty. She wasn't particularly strict. She had rules but it was just basic rules. You know, line up outside the class and that sort of thing. She's still teaching now. It's combined with [redacted] School so she's at [redacted] now, she's still there, sort of.

It was difficult growing up because I felt that I couldn't fail at GCSE. I didn't feel that I was in the right school to help me not fail. So, it was very much down to me and went I went to sixth form I didn't particularly want to go to sixth form. I wanted to go straight to [redacted] which was an art college. When I went to sixth form it was very much… *(Louise sighs)*. I felt like I was there because I had to be there and I didn't want to be there and also the gap, there was a big gap between what I'd learned at [redacted] to what I was being taught at sixth form and trying to bridge that gap was infuriating because I thought what have I even learned at school? They are teaching me something which I have no idea about when I had never been taught before because we had just had supply teachers and things like that…...although our school was very creative…whereas here, when I came to sixth form, there wasn't a lot of experiments in biology. In maths he was quickly writing it on the board, and I was thinking I don't know what's happening. So, it was really hard to bridge that gap, especially……. It almost felt like here. We get results here from primary school and I think what an earth are you talking about, they are not on this grade at all. It was almost that feeling, as though we had come in and sixth form didn't know what level we were at and didn't know what we'd been taught. We were all sort of dropped in.

It was very difficult because it seemed like all the other schools knew what he was talking about and we felt a bit ….it wasn't just me it was some of the others that had come with me. There weren't that many, there was about 5 of us in total but we all went there and felt quite stupid really to do the academic subjects. Like I say to my Mum, at the end of the day if I hadn't of picked them, I probably wouldn't have felt stupid because I would have been picking the arty subjects rather than the academic…...but yeah…. So that was hard…that was hard.

It did create a lot of tension between me and my parents because obviously they wanted me to do one thing and I wanted to do the other and it was a big battle to try and get them to understand what art was about that it wasn't just pick up a pencil and you can draw all of a

sudden it took time and it was just getting across that that was my life, art was my life, every time that I had a moment I was doing something arty. If there was a gap in between some subject that I was doing I'd be there sketching away *(Louise laughs)* even if it was a little animation saying how bored I was, it would be something arty and I'd go home and I'd do something arty and yeah it's difficult when you've got the academic drive. But I've seen kids here that don't have the academic drive or a drive at all and they've been told you know…you can work in Dad's *chippy* when you've come out of school and I think that's equally as hard if you don't have someone pushing you. I think that's part of our job is to keep the drive going here, but when they go home, they're quite relaxed. You need the support from both I think.

Ideally I wanted to open up an art shop in Spain, sort of go for the jump but you are always controlled by the fact that you need the money, you need the security so…… plus I wanted to show the kids there's more to life than just doing the academic subjects….you can be arty and get somewhere.

Do you feel you are fighting that corner?

I do feel that I am fighting that quite a bit, I feel like art is slightly getting lost a little bit and the technologies are taking over in a lot of the schools. I think sometimes they do see art, even other teachers see art, as oh you're just messing around, just having a quick draw and you think well that's not what I'm doing. I could say in maths you're just playing around with a few numbers! Like you always have to *(Louise pauses)*. I was always told at uni that you have to fight the corner of art because there is always that controversy as to is there any point to it, why are you doing it, and you have to fight against it.

I know that was another thing when I went to university it seemed like everybody there…again it was like bridging the gap …… everybody there had done all these magical things with clay and they'd done all of these wild things and I'd be very much 2D and painting because that's what I had been used to even at college. We never went really off the radar it was very much if we were doing a sculpture it would probably be papier-mâché. If we were doing a painting, it would probably be on canvas. There was nothing really that sort of took off and then I went to uni and they were all doing these absolutely crazy things and bringing in old sofa cushions and all sorts (Louise laughs) and I was thinking what's going on! I'm just bringing this pink painting in! I was looking around so again I think that's one thing I've taken from the whole experience is that they need to learn what's coming before it

actually happens because I didn't know what sixth form was going to be like I just went there because my Dad wanted me to go.

I didn't know what was coming with university actually it was made more apparent when I had to pick my course and I picked fine art, thinking that it was fine painting, you know very detailed painting, that sort of thing and I soon realised that it wasn't at all (she laughs) it wasn't anything to do with that, even when I read it on the computer it didn't come across as being this that you'd find in Tate Modern, being quite contemporary and 'out there' and coming from a realistic background again it was like jumping from one step to the next without any bridge to help me. I just had to, sort of, deal with it and figure it out so I think definitely in my experience I want the kids to know what is coming at university. I want them to know that don't just pick it cos it says 'art', make sure that you fully understand what it is. I'd like a relationship with them like I've got with my old art teacher. She said for me to pick fine art but I think it was so I could explore more things coming from a school that just did painting. I think it was to help me expand and broaden what I did but I felt that I could have had some more information about it, about what was about to happen!

I went to [redacted] for Fine Art for three years. We went around a few that was the year before and then I went to a few of them and they said I needed to go to [redacted] first because we like our students to be older so they understand it a bit more, so we had gone around. I think I picked [redacted]…a) because it wasn't too far away from home but because of the studio space. We never had studio space at school or particularly at sixth form so that sort of interested me and some of the teachers that I met were quite quirky and 'out there' as opposed to other ones at other universities seemed quite expressionless and strict and I thought I can't deal with three years of that coming from my background! So, I ended up at [redacted] and then my teaching degree was at [redacted]. I think I picked [redacted] really because it was quite far away from home, about three hours away, but I wanted a bit of diversity. I felt that [redacted] was fairly similar to the sort of background I've come from. The people were quite similar but in [redacted] obviously there's a lot of culture. I remember going into town and feeling very singled out in town, in [redacted], but it was an interesting experience and I think it helped me. I made a lot of friends who were Sikhs and different religions and I got to go the temples and things with them, so that helped but obviously it doesn't relate much to coming back to Seachurch (Louise laughs) because there's hardly any culture but it does help. It helps you to become more understanding of peoples' backgrounds as well.

Did you do your teaching practice placements there?

I did my PGCE (Postgraduate certificate in Education) in [redacted] so I was in one school for a while, about a month, teaching little bits and bobs and then my timetable went up when I went up to the next school and schools were both very different to each other. One was very strict; it just wasn't working for the school. It was a very big school, very big classes, knocking up to forty kids in one class. Whereas the other one was more relaxed, very, very creative, smaller classes. But the school itself was a new sort of build. It was turning into an academy. Whereas the other one was still a LEA (Local Education Authority) school. So just to see that difference was interesting. After that experience I'd always sort of said you know I'd probably go for an academy as opposed to the local authority as it just seemed like they had things together. They had more control over what was happening in the school. The routines were better. Whereas the LEA it was sort of every teacher for themselves, doing their own routine and seeing what happened. As far as art went, it was very basic, like what I'd expect in the olden days, sort of thing, you know, 'here's a flower, draw it!' that sort of thing. It was interesting…….it was interesting.

I'm glad I'm here now! Well I wanted to come back because I'm a bit of a home girl. I wanted to come back nearer my Mum and Dad but I did apply for some, you know, sort of [redacted] so it wasn't this close and when I came for this interview I'd gone through a (recruitment consultant) you know where they find you jobs, and they said there's a part time job here, so I said yes I'll definitely come and apply for it. So, I got an interview here. It was for a part-time position and the first week in the man that was supposed to be teaching the Year 10s and 11s had gone off…… *at this point the discussion is interrupted by a delivery. Louise asks, 'what have you got for me, are you bringing me presents?! Thank you very much …she laughs.* Yeah, the first week the man that was supposed to be teaching year 10s and 11s went off ill, for a good month and a half.

So again, I was very much dropped in at the deep end and had to look through the Year 11 books to establish where they were, pick up Year 10 and do what I felt was right with, sort of, a bit of contact from the man. It appeared that the case was similar to my old school, where they'd had a number of art teachers and no one had stuck around so when I'd come, I had a bit of that tension at first with the kids because they were very untrusting that I was going to stay around. I looked through the Year 11 books and they'd barely done anything. They'd barely hit the assessment objectives. I went into panic for them and had to be real with them and said you know you are missing a lot of things here; we need to do this. We need to do it together and we need to do it fast. I think that sort of helped them get on board with me because I was real with them. I wasn't lying and going 'we're all going to get fluffy A*s! It's going to be fine'. They know that I was being real. They knew that I was going to help them.

By Christmas the man had sort of left on the basis that they felt that I was ok to control the whole set of years but that was difficult. I didn't feel it would be hard getting them on board with me or building rapport because that was one of the things I was strongest at throughout the whole time but I felt that getting them to do the work when they'd hadn't had someone driving them the whole time…..they hadn't done any homework ever, so when I came along they were like 'what?!' (Louise laughs) 'what is this?!' so it's been interesting to say the least. It's nice to see the Year 10s now because I can compare and it almost gives me a little bit of a boost because I compare their books to the past Year 11s and already by the end of Year 10 they've done more work than what the Year 11s had done by the end of Year 11. So that for me, sort of, makes me feel good that, you know, either the kids are more driven or my teaching has been able to help them more to get them to do more things but again I think it was similar to my schooling, with the Year 11s, because they we all too de-focused and when it came to exams, I had a few comments from older teachers that all the dresses and things like that I'd done with them apparently no other year had done things like that, it was just a painting, things like that and I think….I didn't think about it at first but I've thought about it since and I've thought well that's because I've been to uni and I've seen that they don't just work in 2D you can actually do all this stuff and I don't want them to get to uni and go well my teacher never told me how to do that. I want them to be able to go – oh my teacher was a bit of a nutter and let us do all sorts of weird things! So, it's good to see that the older teachers have said, you know, that we've never done anything like this before, we've been painting and it's nice to see these dresses and sculptures appearing. That's good.

When you came here did you feel that was ok? Did you feel empowered to do that? Did you feel you were having to negotiate to do something different?

I think I felt that it was easier because I was the only art teacher and occasionally when the other art teacher came back he wanted them to do drawing and things and that was a bit of a struggle because I didn't feel like we were working together particularly because I'm more, wanted to be a bit more out there and straight away from just doing basic, you know, Georgia O'Keeffe and that sort of thing. I wanted them to be a bit more expressive and find themselves and get interested in art, rather than be telling them what to do. That was a bit of a struggle, but it did sort of work. When he came back, I let him do the drawing things, and when he wasn't here, I'd do more expressive, building stuff. But I think because I was by myself I felt that it was very much in my control what happened and what they did but I think if I had potentially had other art teachers and someone above me in art I might have felt not as able to be that expressive and allow them to go off because I would have felt that there was a focus on….. well you should be doing this, and we are all doing this. Whereas I like them all

to be a bit more individual and go off and find their own artists. I think a lot of the time for art teachers particularly if they are not all doing the same it's hard to control, it means that it's a lot more work for you because you've got to remember who they are studying. You've got to remember where they were at the last stage. You've got to know where they are going with it. Make sure that they are on the right path and that they are not going off on some wild chase because part of the assessment objectives is to have a clear…. You know be able to look through the book and understand how they have got from one artist to the next and sometimes that's hard because they go on Pinterest or where ever and find these random artists and you think well what's that one got to do with that one!

But I think they need to do that process themselves otherwise they won't understand how to get there and that was one thing I noticed when I went to sixth form and they had these sketch books and I thought well what do you want me to do in it? Because I'd never been given a sketch book, I'd always been told to do certain pieces and I'd draw, I'd happily be there for hours doing whatever I was doing but I never knew what the point of it was. I just did because I enjoyed doing art. So, when I got to sixth form and they said we want you to explain (I was like) well what do you want me to explain? … I need some questions if you want me to explain ……well no just annotate what you are doing…… it was really hard to understand what they were looking for because you would get your book back….well you were missing this and this and I'd be well I don't know how to do that. I don't know what you're asking for. I thought I'd wrote that and you're telling me I haven't. So that was difficult just changing from working on big pieces of paper similar to up there to working in a sketch book and understanding what I was supposed to be putting in it and the travel through it because it must have been a different exam board is all I could think because I never wrote one thing when I was a GCSE and it never came in to my lessons. We never once wrote anything, so I don't know where all this annotation has come from!

(Louise laughs as she thinks back to her discomfort and reflects for a moment) but it's interesting when I'm getting them to write now and I understand what I'm expecting them to write and understanding the journey but for the life of me I just couldn't grasp it when I was in sixth form because I thought why?...why are you telling me to do something different to what I have done in GCSE and everybody else again seemed to understand what they were talking about and just writing reams and reams of sheets and I thought what are you writing about?...I haven't got that much to talk about….I'm just painting because I like painting that's all I wanted to write 'because I like it…full stop!'

So that sounds like you felt it was a really big jump to sixth form?

Yes, and then from college to university it was another big jump not just through the arts and understanding what contemporary even meant and what the Tate stuff was, getting my head around that was hard but also by living by myself and all of that on top of it, it was crazy because I thought oh when I go to uni it might be a bit more relaxed and I picked fine art and I thought oh I'll just be painting like I used to do and I won't have to explain it (Louise laughs) I got there and it was the complete opposite to what I expected. *(Louise pauses and it seems is thinking back to her early university experience)*

So, were there times when you thought you might not continue?

There were times at university, yes. At sixth form I didn't particularly want to be there but I felt I needed to get…I had to go through it to get to where I wanted to go, because my Mum had told me, you know after sixth form it's your choice what you want to do. I want you to do academic subjects in the sixth form, so it was sort of a case of right let's just get through it and then I can do what I want, but it was more of a hit personally on me when I went to uni and I picked what I wanted to do and I thought this is it, I'm finally doing what I want to do and then it was nothing like what I'd expected and the art wasn't what I'd expected and it was sort of a personal hit. I sort of felt upset in myself that I have three years of doing something that I don't enjoy even though it's classed under as art and I didn't like it. That was really hard because I felt like I couldn't go back to my Mum and Dad and say I don't like this and I don't want to do this because I'd battled that long to do art, that I felt oh she's just going to take the mickey if I say I don't want to do this anymore.

But again it was sort of right, find my next step, what am I doing next, what do I want to do and so that I did some sort of workshop things at [redacted] and I worked in the hospital for a bit with the poorly children and did art with them and went to schools and did art with them. I think that's how I found that I wanted to go in the direction of being a teacher. I always knew that I wanted to do art and I always remembered my art teacher, but it never came to me straight away that I wanted to be a teacher. When you're at school you're like 'I don't want to be a teacher……I want to make it!' But yeah it became apparent that when I was in [redacted] and I wanted to know where my next stage was because I didn't want to come out of being at uni doing art and being one of these that just flops after uni and goes I don't know what I'm doing any more. So that was my next target, get through three years at uni and then find a uni that I could do teaching in and then I'll be alright, sorted, and then I'll go back to the art I enjoy finally so that was hard. It was hard, I did feel like the second year of uni……the first year of uni was ok.

> I remember this bizarre week, it was the first week and they'd said to all of us we want you to draw someone in front of you, the person in front of you, all but two of us knew how to draw a person and I was sat there and I was just like, 'how have you got into uni when you don't know how to draw' and I think that was the first realisation of 'ahh…this isn't going to be the art I expected it to be, cos if all of them can draw a person, what else can they do that I can't do. It was, sort of, it's the art where you sort of talk the talk about what you've done. There was another point that we had these critique sessions, and someone had put down the cling film with some talcum powder over the top of it. There was a little area of talcum powder over here and I was listening to everybody critique this piece of artwork that she'd done and 'ooh I like the way that that part is against this part and it's creating a lot of friction' and they were saying things like this and I was sat there, coming from such a realist background and I was like I have nothing to say on this at all. I don't know what you're talking about and the girl who had done said oh I find that really interesting that you've all said that because that was an accident, that little bit of talcum powder (*Louise bursts out laughing*) and at that point I was ready to scream 'what are you talking about!'. So, it has been massive jumps and I think if I'm completely honest. I think that has actually helped me with this year because again it has sort of been a giant leap from uni where I've sort of been, not baby sat, but sort of taken through it bit by bit, but not enough…I hadn't been told how to moderate. We weren't allowed to interact with Year 10s and 11s as we were training, so that (at this point the door opens and a student pops her head around the classroom door… '*can I just ask you one question Miss?'* 'Go on then' *'Can you have a look what's Izzy's got next?'* Izzy? She's got RE then English, RE at the minute *'Oh thanks'*…… The door closes and Louise continues as if these interruptions are normal and expected.) So yeah, I think, I think it has sort of helped for when I've come here cos again, I was sort of jumped into looking after the whole school for art.

Fighting her corner

As I read and re-read this description of Louise's own schooling and her decision to become a teacher, I am struck by the poignancy of her struggle to validate both her own decision to study art and her desire to validate art for the students she teaches. As she talks of the need to convince students that you can 'be arty and get somewhere' there is the powerful sense that she is drawing on her own challenging experiences of justifying her choices over many years. I reflect on her almost throw away comment that she became a teacher because she was not clever enough to be a doctor and behind her smiling openness, I sense a sadness, not about the choices she has made but the fight she has had to engage with. I look back at my own

question where I ask her if she feels she has to 'fight this corner' and I am surprised when I transcribe our conversation that this is the way I phrased it. When Louise and I go over her words she reassures me that this is how she feels. She is passionate about her subject and angry that it is often viewed as a peripheral activity.

In this, our first conversation, Louise also talks about the battle she had with her parents to get them to see that art was a worthwhile choice. Such a battling has influenced her as a teacher as she advocates art despite the squeeze she sees on it from subjects perceived as more 'academic'. What she describes sees a growing trend in educational practice for creative subjects to be viewed as merely add-ons to a tightening and narrowing curriculum.

'What else can they do that I can't do'

Louise also describes at various times in our first conversation how she felt not necessarily out of her depth but that she felt different, an outsider, as she struggled to negotiate different arenas in her childhood and as a young woman. She describes her 'rough' school and the behaviour of the 'naughty kids' which suggests that she saw herself as one of the good kids. We hear of the tension between what is expected of her at her sixth form college and how she feels unprepared by her previous school for this. She uses the metaphor of a bridge and talks about her frustration that no bridge existed and the challenges that this caused for her and for the handful of students from her former school who had decided to do A levels.

For Louise, her acknowledgement that after all her battling to do art she ultimately ends up at university and feels that what she knows to be art is suddenly called into question as she does not recognise what is being asked of her in the university arena. Louise sees her own two-dimensional experience of art both in reality, and metaphorically, as a deficit. Going to university and feeling that she had limited knowledge compared to her peers 'what else can they do that I can't do' she asks herself.

The perils of 'breaking free'

All of this has shaped her as a teacher.

Yet her story of freeing up the students to make choices is at odds with the school story of achievement. Her belief in the transformatory possibilities of art remind me of the words of Maxine Greene (1995: 133): 'Art offers life; it offers hope; it offers the prospect of

discovery; it offers light'. Louise is searching for ways in which the students can break free of the constraints of a school decision to insist that every student studies the same artist. She is willing to trade off a level of control and an increase in her own workload to give her students the freedom to choose an artist with whom they feel a connection.

Ultimately, as we will discover in the next chapter, Louise's optimism that giving the students such a choice will be accepted by the 'school story', so that their stories might become aligned, is misplaced. For now, during the summer of 2016 and the tentative beginnings of our narrative relationship, we hold on to Louise's spirit of hope that freeing up the young people she works with to engage on their own terms with an artist they wish to study leads to a 'happy ending'.

5.4.2. Jess

From field notes dated 15 July 2016

> I have lunch at the same small café overlooking the seafront. I feel incongruous in my smart 'work' shoes with the sun blazing down on the faded tables and chairs which are scattered outside. On the table next to me are holidaymakers in shorts and sandals. I meet the waitress again who I had seen that morning and hope that she doesn't ask me about my 'business meeting' as my 'cover story' would become more convoluted.
>
> I reflect upon my first meeting with Louise that morning and then turn my thoughts towards Jess, who I am due to meet, for the first time on our own, that afternoon. It had been clear from meeting Louise that she had an openness that had come both from youth and the fact that she was in her first year of teaching. She had shared with me many direct thoughts unburdened, it seemed to me, by any thoughts of the politics of school life. My impression of Jess, having met her during our group meetings, was that her ten years of teaching all done at this school had changed her. In our group discussions, it was she who had picked up more rapidly and consistently on the new 'language' that had been recently introduced. Her middle leadership roles appeared to have made her more circumspect. I make a mental note to try to explore this. I am looking forward to hearing more about her personal experiences. I know that she is due to have her third child in the Autumn and hence our time together is limited and

so more important. She has agreed to be part of the project before she goes on maternity leave.

As the sun scorches the skin on my face, I think about what a privilege it is to be welcomed into the lives of others. I will come to this place in the sun and the rain. The rhythm of the sea will stay constant but like the seasons, the lives of the participants and my life will change. With these thoughts, I head back up the hill to school.

I set everything up again in a small conference room adjacent to the meeting room where we had previously met as a group. Jess arrives exactly on time. She is carrying a plastic box of fruit she has prepared and explains that this one of the few moments she will have to sit down, and do I mind if she eats during our chat.

5.4.2 Jess's teaching story

I think as far back as I can remember I wanted to be a teacher and it wasn't that my parents were teachers…my Mum works in retail and my Dad is a gardener, but I think particularly my Key Stage 1 teacher, [redacted], she made a real impact on me and I thought yes, I really respect you and I thought I want to be like you, even at the age of seven.

So, I went to a really small primary school with about fifty or sixty students all together, so it was almost like that family feel because we knew everybody, and we didn't really think about the differences between us. You know looking back, I'm now aware of them but at the time we just didn't consider what they were, so we were all into everything. We had the allotments, we all did sports day, we went on lots of visits and I remember it really clearly - that lovely experience of going to a country school.

So when I went up to secondary school, going from that really small primary into a school of about eight hundred with a sixth form was very different, but I had a lot of cousins who were already there so they had gone to different primary schools but were still local and when I got to secondary school I just think that scope of different subjects excited me and I enjoyed school. I always liked the academic side of it and the sports as well and I think back then we didn't focus so much on this is your target, this is what you should be doing, it was about enjoyment and for me that was really paramount; that's what got me through. I enjoyed what

I was doing. I enjoyed being there and the different subjects and when it was options I had a really hard time. I remember doing the form about four times before I actually decided what I wanted to do. But the one subject that I never changed was actually R.E. and that's what I have gone on to teach.

Thinking back to primary school, I can only remember ever doing one lesson of R.E. that was explicitly different from Christianity and that was a lesson on Hinduism and I just don't know why it stuck with me because obviously I'm not from a very ethnically diverse area or religiously diverse area but I really took to that and thought 'yeah I like this…..this is going take me into different places that I'd never been'.

I couldn't do it at A level, which disappointed me, but I did do it at university. So, I did an education and religious education degree and then when I qualified, I studied down in [redacted] and I qualified, and I wanted to move back here. I think it was cost thing really, to come to live back home and the job at Seachurch was one of only two that came up that year for R.E. so it was slim pickings really and I've been here ever since, as an NQT, and now this is my tenth year teaching here. So, I've been fortunate in that I have had a lot of different experiences and different roles as well, as the school has changed and developed.

So, after being an NQT, I was Head of Department, I've been Head of Faculty and now, in this role, I'm Head of Key Stage. I've also overseen NQTs throughout the school so doing the CPD for them as well and then last year, particularly, I got into the careers side of things as well which was a new string to my bow. I was a little bit apprehensive about that, it was kind of just dumped on me but again it's been brilliant. I've really enjoyed that a lot more than I even anticipated and then with this new role it's just seeing where it's going and where it's evolving because it is a big change from what I'd done mmm……. *(Jess is pensive)*…… so that's me.

I can't imagine doing anything else because it was the most natural thing in the world. I went on work experience to a primary school and I just felt within my comfort zone straight away and I suppose the element that pushed me out of my comfort zone was the R.E. bit of it because it was so foreign to what I was used to. I mean growing up at a country school it wasn't a church or faith school, but it did identify quite strongly with Christian values. Being in a countryside community it was evident, even though we weren't really aware of it. So, we went to Sunday School as a social thing because that was the only event in the local area. So yeah teaching was always……it was the only option. I didn't think of doing anything else.

Can you remember what it was about that teacher that made such an impression of you aged 7?

I suppose we looked at her and we saw her obviously as a professional but also as somebody that we trusted, that we respected, she was almost like a bit of a mother figure. She was very similar to like our mums ages at the time and just I could see that she enjoyed what she did. You know there were elements of it where she was quite strict, but again I like that because we knew where the boundaries were and we all flourished and we knew at the end of the day she had our best interests at heart because we did feel like she was part of this school family we had. She knew everybody. She knew all the families. Everything we did built on those family values. The singing in assembly I just so enjoyed primary school and sitting with my friends now we talk about it with such fond memories. We want the same for our children. Which is what I would like to be able to provide everybody with. If everybody had what I got from school, I think they wouldn't be doing too bad.

From the moment that I first meet Jess I have a sense that she wants, more than any of the other participants, to fit her own story with the story of the school. This is now problematic for her as the school under the leadership of a new team and re-branded in the numerous ways it has been in the last few months, is desperately trying to create a new story. My observations made on my first visit to the school, from the smell of paint, to the pace at which Alex had marched through the building, had hinted at how forcefully and tightly managed the presentation of this new and agreed narrative was being instigated. I was interested to see how different the teacher and student narratives were to the school 'meta-narrative'.

When Jess describes her primary school teacher, who inspired her to teach, it is with a genuine fondness. The sense that she was part of a school 'family' and that this special teacher had their best interests at heart and was pivotal to their 'flourishing' is clearly a powerful memory for her. In the remembering it is as if she starts to think about her own teaching and the how the changes that have taken part in recent months have affected her own ability to create an environment for 'flourishing'. Something in her expression and the pauses she makes hint at this. I make the decision not to push Jess on this, it feels too early to delve too deeply.

As we see in later chapters, however, as my relationship with Jess develops, we get glimpses of her own 'sacred' stories as they emerge beneath her professional story. She has been adept at closely aligning her professional story with the institutional ones over time. As the story of the school has changed, so has her professional story and yet, there are moments when we see the personal cost of the institutional changes. At these moments, particularly in Chapter 6 and the story 'No time to breath, no space to speak', we see cracks appearing in her professional 'cover' story as Jess opens up about the personal cost of imposed change.

5.4.3 Michael's teaching story

> We can try…schooling… it's a long time ago now! I know I left school in 1983 and it was a comprehensive school. It was a proper comprehensive school and quite a big one and I think from memory I enjoyed my time at school. I enjoyed lots of sports, lots of lessons. In those days in the 70s and 80s you had about an hour and a quarter at lunchtime or something like that and you just played football with your friends …which for a boy who liked playing football it was great…and then you had to stop and go to lessons in the afternoon … but ok! *(Michael laughs).*
>
> My problem was I followed my older brother who went through getting A's in absolutely everything, so unfortunately I was compared to him by staff which actually has had an impact on me because I now deliberately do not compare siblings because I know what it's like *(Michael laughs)* ….so I deliberately don't mention anything about … 'you're not as good as'…or even, 'you're better than', because it works both ways. So, I suppose my schooling and my older brother being so clever and things like that, has had an impact on how I am as a teacher in that small respect. Because I used to, even when I met students the first time in schools or classes, I'd say, 'Oh have you got a brother 'cos I taught so and so' and now I don't even do that. If it crops up it crops up, but I make a big deal not to compare them because I know what it's like. So that probably has impacted on me certainly.
>
> I mean I went through school, O levels as it was then, and came out with 7 O levels A-C, one A in maths, 3 B's and 3C's I think it was, in the other subjects and then did A levels, but by the time I was in the third year, so Year 9 now, I'd had ideas of being a teacher. It was because I'd had a really good history teacher, and he was really good at telling stories but obviously he was telling them in relation to the context of what we were studying at the time. A lot of it was the Second World War and things like that and he made it interesting and real. I can't remember him showing videos or obviously in the 1980s not computers or interactive

stuff like that, he was just telling stories. I'm sure he did do other bits and pieces but the bit I remember was him telling stories. He was obviously a good storyteller and I thought 'ah, imagine doing this as a job, telling stories!'

So, I thought yeah, I'll be history teacher and I'd always liked P.E. and P.E. in those days wasn't an option it was just your normal P.E. and I used to swim as well when I was younger. I got reasonably good when I was 17 and 18 and went to the Olympic trials in 1984. So that was good and obviously the journey up to there…... *(Michael pauses as he remembers his youth and his swimming)*. So, I've always worked hard because you don't get there by luck. I've always enjoyed the training, working hard. So, I always did I suppose in my schoolwork. You know my parents were like if you want to go swimming training, you do your homework as soon as you get in. So, my routine was, go to school, come home, do the homework, ensure I could go training. Because when you come back at half eight, nine o'clock, you're shattered, you're starving and the last thing you want to be doing is more schoolwork. So, I suppose for me it was just routine, you come home, and you do your homework so that was never an issue, never a problem.

Did A levels, knowing by then I think by the time I was 16 or 17 I definitely wanted to be a teacher and did my A levels and applied to university and did a degree in P.E. and Maths. By then I'd changed and wanted to do P.E. but with P.E. you needed another subject and maths was my best subject…I got an 'A' in that, I got a 'B' in History and I chose Maths. I actually applied for universities some with P.E. and history and some with P.E. and maths depending on where they were. But the one I chose eventually was P.E. and Maths. So, I did my degree and always knew at the end of that I'll do a PGCE. I decided I wasn't going to do a B.Ed. in case I did that, got a job as a teacher and either was no good at it or didn't enjoy it, then I'm stuck with I'm just qualified to teach whereas at least with a B.A. I could go into recreation management and the leisure industry and things like that but no, I did my PGCE. I was lucky enough to get into [redacted] for that took me to [redacted]

Did that and applied for jobs all over the place and one to bring me back to here I thought I'd loved it up there, and if I could get a job there as well, I'll do that because I'd no intentions of moving back home. Once I'd left, I didn't want to go back at all. But my first interview was in [redacted] and I got it and, in those days, they interviewed you, they interviewed everyone and they made a decision and they offered it to you on the day which in a lot of cases happens now but not always. Quite often now, they send you away and they say we will think about it and let you know but in those days, they did that. With it being the first job and they offered it to me, I had other interviews lined up but I thought well that's it if I turn this down I might

not get any of the others and then where will I be, I'm stuck, so I accepted it and then rang the other places to say thanks but I'm sorted. So, I ended up staying in [redacted] and I taught P.E. at the school with a little bit of maths now and then for twelve years.

Then decided I wanted to do something a little bit different. Change schools but not just repeat the same thing in another school. So, I got a job as a primary school teacher, a P.E. co-ordinator in a primary school and after three days I realised that I had made the wrong decision…. Three days! *(Michael laughs)*. It's very different and one of those days was a training day and another day was my CRB check, as it was called then, hadn't come through in time so I couldn't be anywhere near the kids, so I was confined to the staff room until it came through. It came through at lunchtime so then I could go and meet my class of 8 and 9-year-olds and do my first half day. Then did the next day and by the end of that third day I'd realised, it's not for me. I wasn't enjoying what I was doing and I'd always enjoyed what I was doing and yeah it was completely different but I'd always been bothered about what I was doing and bothered about what I was delivering and bothered about whether the kids understood it and bothered about their education and I went home to my partner and said I'm not enjoying it and she said 'three days' and I said I know, but I've always enjoyed what I'm doing. She's a teacher as well and she said what do you mean you've always enjoyed it and I said well you know I've always enjoyed my job. I've always enjoyed it and I'm not enjoying it and she said, it's early days, and I said yeah but I know.

So, I spoke to the head teacher that week and told him my concerns. He said give it a little bit of time, you know, and I thought about it more. But after another couple of weeks I thought no, it's definitely not for me, definitely not, I'm not enjoying it. It wasn't because it was hard work. It wasn't because it was loads of planning. It wasn't because it was long hours, I don't mind hard work that's never been a problem, but I wasn't enjoying it and if I'm not enjoying it I'm not going to deliver in a way that's best for the kids, so I wouldn't be an effective teacher. They would not get the experience that they are supposed to get, that they deserve, and it would have been unfair to carry on half-heartedly just not doing a good job. So, I resigned as early as I could. I think it was the end of September to give the school the best possible chance to replace me. Because I knew I had to work until Christmas, I wouldn't have just left them, so I resigned with no job to go to but a few months to sort it out kind of thing and I still did my lessons and my planning as I was expected to in all the details and all …in primary school it's endless, endless, endless. I still did it because that's the sort of person I am. I will still do the best job I can, so I still did that and got into December and I saw a job advertised. There were no P.E. jobs – looking for P.E. jobs – no P.E. jobs around, but there was job as a temporary maths teacher for two terms at a school, a big comprehensive school.

> Never heard of it, didn't know the area at all, just knew it was about half an hour away from where I lived in the other direction. Looked online at the website and various things and applied and I got the interview and got it to start there in the January and my first day there in January went to my classroom, a mobile classroom, and the first class came in and I thought yeah, this is where I belong this age group.
>
> I'd taught in a classroom before because I'd taught GCSE P.E. and a bit of maths, so being in that environment with that age group I felt so much that this is where I feel good. So, I knew then I'd made the right decision to leave there and come in and once I'd started teaching the maths full-time, I realised that, yes, it's the teaching, not necessarily the subject. Yes, I don't think I could teach French or geography whatever, but it was the teaching. It used to be P.E. and now I'm enjoying teaching them maths to this age group and it was for two terms and in those couple of terms I decided that actually I don't want to go back to P.E. let's do maths and see how this goes, I'm enjoying this, so I looked for a permanent job nearer to where I lived. I was lucky enough on the second interview to get a job at a school ten minutes away from where I lived and I got the job and was there twelve years teaching Maths full time, no P.E. didn't get involved in the P.E. department. I thought I've moved on. I know what it was like teaching P.E. and other people who used to teach P.E. coming and saying we didn't used to do it like that, and I thought I don't want to be that person. Let them get on with it, that's their responsibility, their job, let them get on with it. So, I did that. Those twelve years were fantastic, absolutely fantastic.

Even at our first meeting, it is clear that Michael has high standards for himself and that his identity as a teacher is bound up with 'doing a good job'. As we go on to see in the following chapter, the pressure that Michael puts himself under to constantly deliver creates challenges for him. What he describes is his experience prior to coming to Seachurch, and as I get to know Michael and hear his reasons for moving to the coast, I begin to understand the complexity of how his identity as a teacher is bound up with his identity of himself and how, at times, these support each other but at other times they collide. Michael, perhaps more than any of the other participants, articulated early on in the project his frustration that his professional voice is not listened to, and yet we will go on to see instances where his long career in teaching, spanning over twenty-five years have seen him sometimes passive in the face of changes he is uncomfortable with. He has sought out environments with the students where he feels he can teach at his best and in doing so insulated himself from the responsibility for change. Michael is often telling me 'that's the sort of person I am' and we go on to reflect about the extent to

which his stories are of that person or what else begins to emerge from our shared inquiry space.

5.4.4 Oliver's teaching story

I always was a sporty kid…always …played sport, did sport and then I always thought I would do something with sport, but I never knew what I would do. Then, in second year of uni, there was an opportunity to go on like a work placement to Zambia and it was half coaching but half in disadvantaged schools and communities as well. That was ten weeks and we kind of lived like in the slums. We didn't have any hot water. We had like a nice house and a shower but there was no hot running water, so you had to get your bucket and tip it over yourself. But going to schools there and seeing the kids just meant so much. They have like five pens and one book for one class. One school I went to had the whole school in one room, the youngest at the front and the oldest at the back and the same teacher in one lesson and it was then that I thought teaching could be for me.

So, had you done a sports degree?
Yes, it was rubbish!

Really, where did you go?
[redacted] I breezed through it, I probably should have done science or something but I suppose it got me to the next step, got me on the PGCE and got me here so …..

Yes, and it's a difficult decision to make at such a young age. At seventeen it is a big decision…

Yeah, I know that's why I chose sport in the end. I applied for sports science at [redacted] and I got in and then I went to look at the campus and I didn't like the campus at all and the campus feel and then [redacted] had a city feel and it was really nice.

And you've got to where you want to be

Yes, that's what I always tell the kids, you don't see it now but everything happens for a reason

So, is this your first teaching job then?

Yes, my NQT was last year but I've gone straight through from school to sixth form to uni to teaching not had a year out. I did like a SCITT (School-Centred Initial Teacher Training), have you heard of them? It is a PGCE but in a school, so you are affiliated to a uni, so it's like a separate training…...really intense. We had like a 60% timetable for 8 weeks before Christmas and an 80% timetable for fourteen weeks for the second phase. But every lesson had to be planned and typed up, every lesson had to be evaluated with a written evaluation. You had a third of a Masters with it so I think we had six assignments. For PE you've got to have your qualifications – your swimming qualification, your trampolining, your gymnastics, your dance, otherwise you're not like insured to do it. So, we had all that in our half terms, we had all our courses. My girlfriend is on that course, we did uni together and we did the teacher training together as well and like that year was quite intense but it makes teaching seem a bit easier now but even then, I think a lot of people do get put off in the PGCE year. It was an awful year.

There is a shortage of teachers isn't there, but then what you have had to go through makes me wonder…?

Yes, it's nuts, even to get on them they were asking for a minimum of ten weeks' experience and I was like I've been at sixth form and I've come to uni, where the hell am I meant to get ten weeks from? But I had like a playing background and that experience in Zambia and I think that bumped me up really.

Why did you decide to do the SCITT route rather than a PGCE?

Practicality more for me. I kind of went in a bit blind, but lucky because it was affiliated to the uni, so my mentor at uni, my dissertation tutor, he …..I did a teaching dissertation so I looked at like how teachers conceptualise ability and talent and things like that and then he was like you would be perfect for this course would you fancy it? He knew the SCITT leader. So, I did like a little Youth Sport Trust workshop for her and it turns out that's the best SCITT in the country, so it was a tough one…it really was the course.

So, does your girlfriend teach here?

No, no……it's a long story! We were in [redacted] together for three years did uni, did our training four years, and then she stayed up there last year, to cover a maternity, and I was planning to come back for a year and get my job and nothing came out, so I thought I'll stay again and then her maternity cover was only for a year. So, she's Northern Irish so she's now

in Northern Ireland (Oliver laughs) so we are like in our fifth year and we are gradually getting further and further apart! We were in Glasgow this weekend, so I got back about one last night on the train so yeah, it's hard. But it was a really good course, and my girlfriend teachers PE, same course.

You need to get somewhere close together!

I know, I know, we do! We are thinking about abroad but it's dynamics again so, we had to get our NQT…well, everyone says you need two years. We would be stupid not to get our two years and she's in a different ball game. She is at a big catholic school and the systems there are a bit backward really. So, like they all meet for a cup of tea in the morning and break time they have a cup of tea, lunch time everyone is in the staff room talking and chatting away. No CPD after school, it's so laid back. I think maybe it's a cultural thing. They get the kids and they know they've got family support; they know the kids are nice. The aspirations are there because it's a good school and they know if they go to that school they are going to do well. She says like you actually say to a group of kids 'right thirty minutes' independent work…off you go'…and no one speaks they just get on with it. If the teacher's not there they don't get cover, they just get sent to the study hall. The kids go themselves and they get maybe a bullet point on the board…like Mr [redacted] class they get like a page to copy out and revise from and they have like a deputy head who sits at the front, proper old school, and they all just sit there and make notes and do it. Imagine how nice that would be!

Oliver's straightforward account of how he came to be a teacher reflects an immediate openness he had which continued right until the end of the project. As I look back, it is Oliver who takes hold of this project and is pivotal in opening up opportunities for me to talk with the students and with other members of staff and to start to feel a sense of belonging within the school.

In this, his first teaching story, he touches upon the theme of 'aspiration'. This is a complex strand of this inquiry. We see it mentioned time and time again in central policy and reports, in the media, in the narratives of school leaders, in the narratives of the teachers. It is a theme which we unpick and in the three-dimensional space of this inquiry the views of the teachers change, and we will go on to explore this. Where it is never visible is in the narratives of the students. They present their own observations, desires and hopes and with them their own

agency. For the students, it is not a lack of aspiration but material and structural difficulties which challenge them, and this provides food for thought for all of us involved in this study.

5.5 The students join in

My narrative beginning with the students started much later than with the teachers. I had been unsure if I would get the opportunity to speak with them but as the inquiry progressed it seemed to me the missing link in piecing together the landscape of both the school and of Seachurch, the place. I acknowledge here that I had always wanted to speak with the students but had never planned to speak with the parents. Throughout the project when I was visiting Seachurch regularly and since my visits have been less regular and I have continued to write, I have reflected upon this decision. For the duration of the study there have been many times that I have been asked why I had not included parents in the plan. I wonder if it is my own belief in the special relationship that develops between teacher and student and the sense that they share in some ways a sacred space in the classroom which steered me away from including parents.

The classroom for me has the potential to be a more democratic space where the voices of 'pushy parents' determined to secure some sort of advantage for their offspring can be, for a brief moment, silenced by their imposed absence. This may seem unfair of me. Perhaps it is years of experience with my own children where, as a parent, I have fought to give them space just to be, rather than become embroiled with parental chats of comparison at the school gates. Listening to one of my sons tell me that his friend, whose mother was a school governor, told him one day that he was cleverer as had done better in his SATs and he knew that because his mum had told him both their results.

Maybe it is my own experience of being a teaching assistant for five years where I had to deftly navigate a way through the charm offensives of parents trying to elicit information which would confer on their child additional time or resources or cultural capital that would elevate them above their peers? I recognise that there are structural issues at play here. Parents are understandably anxious about their children's educational achievement. Concerns about the job market and 'outcomes' are real. Successive governments and their policies have encouraged parents to act in the narrow self-interest of their own children (Coffield and Williamson, 2012). However, whilst this may make them feel that they are being 'good

parents' it can make them 'bad citizens' without care for the detrimental effect some of their actions have on the education of other people's children (ibid).

I recount a story of my own here, not to labour the point, but to go some way to explain my stance:

I go back to my first year as a teaching assistant. I had decided to have a career change, following a family bereavement which had shaken my small family to the core and which meant that I couldn't face doing many of the same things I had done before. There were many reasons why I felt this was the right decision for me but in order to do it I needed to go back to study. I decided that I would try to work as a teaching assistant in a primary school, for the duration of my studies as this would give me valuable experience.

From the first day the children were so refreshing in their openness and their curiosity. Where I, and they, struggled was not in the free play, which we all embraced with enthusiasm, it was when we started with the Reading Tree. I have nothing against Biff, Chip and Kipper and have, over the years, spent many hours with them. What I found difficult was the clear sequential structure of the books. Coupled with this was the dawning realisation that several of the parents had bought the whole set of books for their homes, presumably in order that their children could get a head start!

Whilst the children and I laboured through our reading time, I would often get called in to be told that we had not covered enough content as I was asking the children too many questions. I have vivid memories of explaining at great length to parents why their child was on a particular stage, banded by colour, and trying to reassure them that it was ultimately about being able to read for enjoyment and to further their curiosity and not about whether they had moved from lilac to pink in quick time.

On one afternoon I thought I would go after school to the infant library for a tidy up. It was by now quite late and all the parents and children had left, or so I thought. One of the children's mothers who had been very vocal about the fact that she thought her son should be on a higher level was in the library. As I arrived, she became flustered and as I glanced at her and at her son's book-bag I realised that she was in the process of swapping his book for one from a higher level. There was an awkward silence which probably only lasted a few

seconds but seemed a great deal longer. I decided rapidly to try to make light of it and asked her if she was there because we had forgotten to put a book in her son's bag? Maybe, I suggested, we could just go and check which book he was due to borrow next and then it could be sorted out. She hurriedly agreed with only a flicker of disappointment that my arrival had scuppered her plans.

I acknowledge that my personal experiences should not blind me to thinking about this research project professionally and thoroughly and that to have included the narratives of parents would have added a valuable dimension to the work. In saying that I had thought about the scope of the project and decided that the focus should be on student and teachers and their relational connection in time and space and place and felt that this would be a worthwhile focus is one, I now admit, of my own *cover stories*.

I discussed how best to talk with the students with both Alex and Oliver. Alex was happy for me to talk with the students at school and felt that I would not need parental consent if the discussions took place as part of the school day and were focused on their experience of school. Oliver suggested that I approach Lindsey* who organised the school council and he felt sure I would be welcome to pop into those meetings at any time. I discussed with him that I was hoping to speak with a range of students and that perhaps the school council might be a certain profile of student, which had been my experience in other schools. Oliver reassured me that the councillors had been chosen by the students themselves with no input from the teaching team and were he felt reasonably representative of the student body.

Lindsey was happy for me to come along and so I attended my first meeting in early March 2017, nearly a year after my first meeting with the teachers. By then I had begun to feel part of the school and had recorded discussions with the participating teachers. I felt that recording meetings with the students would be ethically problematic and so decided that I would make field notes instead and ensure that we always met as a group with a member of staff within sight. The school library gave us a good location to meet as the school librarian was visible but at a distance where I felt the students could be open about their thoughts on how the school had changed. During the first meeting, Lindsey was present too. I explained who I was and the scope of the project and what had happened so far. I asked them if they would be happy to talk with me and if they would prefer not to that would be ok.

The group seemed keen to share their experiences with me and I was surprised how open they were even with Lindsey there. It seemed as if these meetings which took place towards the end of the school day had become a 'safe space' for reflection and debate. I learned that Lindsey had two daughters who were now grown up who had attended the school. She referred to them often in the discussions with the student group. They were made up of Year 9 and Year 10 students: Sam*, James*, Dan*, Holly*, Libby*, Rebecca*, Marcia*, Amy* (14 and 15-year-olds) as the Year 11s were focusing on GCSE preparation. After explaining the parameters of the study, I asked if I could just observe this meeting and then perhaps come again to ask them some questions. This was fine they agreed. One of the boys in the group, Sam, seemed particularly interested in where I had actually come from. He wanted to know all about university and what it was and what you do there?

From field notes dated 8 March 2017:

> Sam beckons for me to sit next to him at the school council meeting, so I do. The rest of the group smile. I sense that Sam is the 'character' of the group. Lindsey introduces me and asks me to say a few words about the project. I begin by talking about the project and how I am a researcher from university. I explain how I have been talking with some teachers and with Mr Smith* (Alex) about the school over the last twelve months and I am interested to also find out what they think about the changes they have seen. I ask them if it might be ok for me to attend some of their meetings and have a chat with them about how things are.
>
> Sam seems particularly taken with the fact that I have come from a university. 'What exactly do you do at university?' he asks me. I start to explain. 'Why would you go to university?' he asks. I talk about all the interesting subjects you might want to study and how you get to think about things differently. Sam is thoughtful. The rest of the group seem surprised by both his questions and his thoughtfulness. There is a pause, and Sam says, 'I could never go to university' I ask him why not? 'Because I would never be clever enough' he replies. There is another pause as both I and the group digest what Sam has said. I glance at Lindsey and we both look anxious. I ask Sam what his favourite subject is, and he replies that it is P.E. The university I have come from does lots of courses to do with Sport and P.E. perhaps he should think about coming for a visit, I suggest, and Lindsey joins in by saying that they are trying to

> arrange visits to places outside Seachurch. The group then rally round to talk about places they might want to visit.

This fragment of the field notes I made that day, makes me think deeply about the importance of not making assumptions of taking real care in in what we say and how we say it. It also makes me think about how often during the study the view was expressed that it was important for the students to be taken out of Seachurch. As we explored in Chapter 2, it is easy to absorb the narrative of deficit and, however well meaning, to fall into the trap of conflating encouraging and enabling achievement by moving young people away from their 'place'.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has described the narrative beginnings and introduced the participants who shared this study with me. In paying attention to the multiple landscapes they inhabit, we start to piece together much needed context. At times 'seeing big' and at others, 'seeing small' (Greene, 1995: 16), and shifting between the two, will allow us not only to deepen our understanding but also to ignite a conceptual spark, that of geographies of connection and solidarities. A relational account of place listens to and understands the particularity of the local, yet concurrently conceives of place as a *meeting-place* and hence sets it as a continuum with the global. This is not to abandon the notion of uniqueness of place, it is to rethink the relationship between space and place in order that we may move from the conservation to the reinterpretation of identities (see Robins, 1991).

In the following chapter, we get to explore extended narratives and what they tell us, not only about how school life is now, but also how it might be. A critical discovery, which becomes central to the study, is the realisation from both teachers and students that their thinking is often so closely aligned. This realisation takes place in the three-dimensional inquiry space afforded to us all for the duration of the study and the chosen methodology. In the first part of Chapter 6, we come together at a particular time, in a particular place, and we work on deepening our understanding of the damaging narratives which compress the spatial and fracture the relational. In the second part of Chapter 6, we begin to see how connections can be made and result in a more open geography which mobilises our counter-narrative.

Chapter 6

'Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. So, it helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside stories and stories between stories'

Deena Metzger, 1986: 104

Chapter 6: EVERYDAY DRAMA

Part I – The walls closing in

The light fading

6.1. Overview

6.2 'Don't you think it's like a prison here Sir?'

6.3 No time to breathe, no space to speak

6.4 Isolation

Part II – A window to new understandings

Letting in a chink of light

6.5 We still call it 'top school' here

6.6 Challenging the corridors of power

6.7 Conclusion

6.1 Overview

In the previous chapter we met the key participants of this study. From our narrative beginnings pictures emerge of Alex, Louise, Jess, Michael, Oliver and the students of Longton Academy, Seachurch. The first 'teaching stories' highlight the complexity of making the decision to teach. For Louise, Jess and Michael critical to their decision was their admiration for one 'special' teacher who they connected with and who inspired them to want

to become a teacher too. For Oliver, it was his visit to a small village school in Zambia, where he worked with the one teacher who had a class with children of all ages and such limited resources, which was a pivotal moment for him in his decision to teach. Their initial narratives give glimpses into not only the lived world of the school but also into their world and how the two at times intersect, bumping into one another and at other times they diverge. The ebb and flow of their relationship with school life in many ways reflects the tidal patterns of the sea in this coastal location.

Sit on one of the many park benches at the top of the bay and you will sometimes see the sea as a distant glimmer beyond the damp and puddled sand. You may feel cheated that on this day and at this time you have somehow missed it, unable to wait for its return. At other times the sea is crashing so close to the shore that hardly any beach is visible. The power of the crashing waves is deafening. Arrive at a perfect time and the sea is near enough for you to experience but still far enough away for you to walk along the beach breathing in the salty air or build sandcastles or explore the rock pools left by the tidal retreat.

This chapter presents a series of narrative accounts that were shared over the two-year study. Each is different and it is argued they open a window which allow for reflection not only on what they might reveal but also give space and light to develop new understandings.

I could have chosen to share many other stories and it has been a challenging task working with the participants to explore their narratives in a way that gives the reader a way-in to thinking about the issues faced by schools and those within them. As we enter into the lifeworld of this school, and these people, we will see things differently. The hope is that through this study we catch a fleeting glimpse of school life at a moment in time and space and place. Lefebvre (2002:47) describes everyday life as:

> A mixture of nature and culture, the historical and the lived, the individual and the social, the real and the unreal, a place of transitions, of meetings, interactions and conflicts, in short, a *level* of reality…It is existence and the 'lived', revealed as they are before speculative thought has transcribed them: what must be changed and what is the hardest of all to change

It is the ongoing reflection of what we see and the ongoing conversations that we have that will continue to light up our understanding of how things are now and spark our imagination

about how they might be. We move the temporal from past to present to future, we create the space to listen and reflect, we privilege the place and what it can show us and we celebrate the relational as we connect with the participants and we find the connections they have with each other.

The following fragments are crafted into stories, which give us insights into the tensions and dilemmas, the joys and rewards of a life at school and where the literature has been selected to enable us to interrogate and illuminate the narratives.

Firstly, in 'Don't you think it's like a prison here Sir?', we hear about Louise and Oliver's trip to a neighbouring academy school which has employed a strict behaviour policy in its bid to become an outstanding school in the midst of a deprived inner-city location. We see clear echoes of Christy Kulz's (2013; 2017) work at Dreamfield's Academy School*. As we step inside Hargreave Academy* and view it through the eyes of Louise and Oliver, we get to feel as they felt and we think about the questions this raises for us; where does the decision come from to run schools in this way and what impact does it have on the people and the relationships of the people who experience it?

We then return to Seachurch, to share the narratives of Jess, Michael, Oliver and Louise as they afford us a deeper understanding of the pressures of school life for a teacher. At a time of acute teacher shortage in England we listen to their narratives, which raise serious questions about what being a teacher entails and dilemmas they experience.

We then get a glimpse of a school day from the perspective of Jess as she patrols the corridors as the senior leadership team on-duty behaviour manager and of the students who find themselves in 'isolation'. We experience the palpable tension between finding the space to learn and finding the space to care.

What follows these narratives, which engender a sense of anxiety at the mechanisms of control and containment which are being employed in our schools, are two further narrative fragments which begin to build the case for some hope. We become aware of how mapping a counter-narrative grounded in place and paying attention to local knowledge can add context to, and hence inform, the change agenda. In addition, as the students enter the narratives, a multi-dimensional space emerges and we explore the power of a collective voice as the

students and teachers come to a realisation that they share many of the same views. Working as teachers *with* students, meeting in a shared space and place, increases their ability to bring about change which matches more closely the rhythm of Seachurch and their relationship to it and to each other and the shared values that guide them.

6.2. 'Don't you think it's like a prison here Sir?'

As we interrogated in Chapter 2, school is becoming an increasingly global 'business', leading to the growing practice of governments looking to other countries and their models of education in the hope of borrowing transferrable 'quick fix' solutions to what they see as their own national educational dilemmas. The rise and acceleration of the academy programme in England can be seen to have roots in the school reform policies adopted in the United States which authorised the creation of public charter schools. Over the past twenty years, forty-two states have passed legislation which allows for the creation of charter schools and in twelve school districts more than thirty percent of students attend charter schools (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

As seen in the rapid expansion of the academy programme in England, the charter schools have grown from government policies which have sought to shape educational practice in a market-orientated way, such that the neo-liberal discourses of performativity and accountability have embedded themselves in the fabric of schools. The No Child left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 has become emblematic in the United States of accountability school reform. Increasingly schools are implementing market reforms such as performance incentives, high stakes testing, school choice, teacher evaluation and the restructuring or closing of schools deemed to be 'failing'. Within the programme of public charter schools is a subset often termed 'no excuses' schools. Examples of these such as KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) and the Harlem Children's Zone Promise Academies, share the characteristics that they implement high levels of authoritarian discipline practices. The no excuse school model sees meticulous disciplinary practices as central to delivering their aim of raising test scores for students (see Whitman, 2008).

The premise of the no-excuses school can be justified by its ability to demonstrate that it 'works'. 'Working' in this sense directly equates to statistically showing that such disciplinary measures are critical to improving results in public examinations for students.

Whilst studies have shown that discipline is but one aspect of a range of measures adopted by the no-excuses school (see Dobbie and Fryer, 2011; Thernstrom and Thernstrom, 2003 and Whitman, 2008) it has been widely accepted as providing the central underpinning required for the model to work and to be successfully replicated. Such a notion is highly contested, and the narrative fragments drawn on here from discussions with Louise, Oliver and Michael will explore the concerns that are associated with accepting such a reductionist view.

Pierce (2013) argues that central to our understanding of the dominance of such strategies, which seek to treat educational life as calculable and regulated, is to critically examine the history of human capital theory. Human capital theory has been born out of the development of neoliberalism as an intellectual movement which started in the United States with a small group of economists at the University of Chicago following the end of World War Two. Central to their thinking was the view that free market restructuring of the welfare state would create a utopian capitalist state. Human capital theory, as described by Pierce (ibid), played an instrumental role as a means of removing the regulatory and legal parameters of the welfare state which from an intellectual neoliberal perspective was inhibiting privatized growth in society. Specifically, human capital theory 'serves as an important conceptual bridge' (ibid:45) which allows for more human spaces to be privatised. Schools find themselves as one such space where life can be evaluated in terms of human capital accumulation and investment. Pierce discusses what he describes were two central problems for the Chicago School theorists. Considering these, give us a key into thinking about the current trajectory of politics in general, but for education and schools more specifically. The first, is the central dilemma that for the neoliberal project to be successful a way had to be found to ensure that corporations, governments and individuals could be 'recalibrated through a revised notion of labor that understood people as continual investment machines, or atomised sites of productive potential or diminishing returns within a free-market social context' (ibid: 45). In a sense, this dilemma involved a re-framing of the nature of work in a capitalist system from one of exploitation to one of personal responsibility; a responsibility which extends to personal investment and development. Arising from the first problem emerges a second, which was the human capital theorists needed to invent metrics which could measure how investments in human capital fared in economic terms. Thus, human capital theory could create for itself a new science of how to measure human economic value. Such measurement could also quantify 'value added' so that education and training 'in-puts' could be evaluated. There is a concern that such is the consensus that human capital narrative

is the dominant and exclusive educational discourse, it has achieved a nearly universal acceptance as the practical and ethical framework in which to judge the health of education.

What does a no-excuses school look like?

The no-excuses schools share characteristics, many of which can be seen more broadly in charter schools and clusters of charter schools supervised by centralised management teams known as charter management organisations (CMOs). The 'laser focus' (Goodman, 2013) on behavioural compliance manifests itself in a number of guiding principles. The belief that, in such schools, not a moment of time should be wasted, results in students being instructed to keep their focus on the teacher at all times, and mechanisms are put in place to ensure this. Students are expected to carry out all lessons and time moving between lessons in silence unless they are directly asked a question by the teacher. All teachers must use the same language commands so, for example, the school may choose the command 'track on me' to signal that students must look at the teacher. Checking that the students' focus on is on the teacher is reinforced by hand signals, so schools employ a series of hand claps and hand signals which the students must follow.

The desire to ensure that time is always used productively sees academic instruction divided into tiny subunits. A teacher may give students three minutes to copy instructions from the board, followed by three minutes to read a passage out loud. If the student is hesitant or mumbling, then the time reduces. The teacher may then allot time to asking the students a series of questions about the topic at which point the other students would be asked to 'track on' the student chosen to answer. If a student fails to comply then a series of clear sanctions are invoked. In addition, schools such as KIPP use shaming as a disciplinary tool. A student whose behaviour has not altered through early interventions may thus have to wear a different coloured shirt and spend the day in complete silence neither speaking or being spoken to.

Such sanctions are balanced with rewards, so that students can gain access to trips and events if they accumulate enough reward points or tokens. Rewards are decided by the teachers and often linked with making the *right choices*. Problematic here is the use of the word 'choice'. Genuine choice would give the student space to consider options and alternatives and make genuine choices with impunity. What appears to be evidenced in the no-excuses model, is that choosing is a matter of right and wrong and hence decision making becomes more like

coercion, as the school system limits exposure to genuine deliberation in efforts to control the students' actions (Golann, 2015; Goodman, 2013).

The broken windows theory (Wilson and Kelling, 1982), used in criminology, has been adopted by the no-excuses model to promote their justification for what Whitman (2008:3) describes as 'sweating the small stuff'. As the broken window theory suggests, if a broken window in a building is left and not repaired then it is more likely that further windows will be broken and the sense of disorder will encourage further crimes and anti-social behaviour which will escalate in seriousness. Thus, the no excuses model insists that students adhere strictly to a uniform code, that they place their hands in a certain way on their desks, that they remain silent in lessons and in the corridors and so on. The argument here is that in themselves these behaviours are demanded by the school not because they are inherently wrong; a student talking quietly about their work to a friend is not in itself harmful, but they are behaviours identified as potentially leading to the possibility of misbehaviour.

The following narrative fragments give a glimpse into a school which has adopted such a framework. It is the story two newly qualified teachers (NQTs) Louise and Oliver tell of their visit to a neighbouring English academy school which has been set up to replicate the no excuses model seen in the United States. You will remember that we met Louise and Oliver in Chapter 5 and shared their first stories of how it was they came to be teachers. Building on our tentative narrative beginnings they went on to independently share versions of this story.

Their head teacher asked them along with two other NQTs from Longton Academy, Seachurch, to visit a school which has been set up with a strict behaviour policy as central to its vision for ensuring success for its students. Louise and Oliver and their two colleagues are asked to spend three days at the school and then write a report about what they find there and specifically, to make recommendations about policies or initiatives which they think might work at back in Seachurch. What follows is some of what they tell me:

Louise

> It's ridiculous like the routines have just gone too far.
>
> You know if we'd have taught, we potentially wouldn't have stuck to the routines and I don't think they would have accepted that. They were…they did pick the teachers on the basis that

they would conform to that. Two other teachers had told us that a couple of teachers had been given the sack because they couldn't conform. They weren't able to follow every single routine to a 'T', and so that was obviously being a weak link in the whole system, so they had to go. I just said to the boys I think I would have been out within the first term because I couldn't do it. I mean it would be easy to do it. It's not as though I'm incapable of putting my hand up or saying, 'can you be in 'your natural state', asking them to be quiet, I just wouldn't want to.

It's really interesting to see, it's interesting to find out what sort of teacher you are as well because the art teacher at Hargreave Academy* had only just started, she'd been given the job about a month ago and I said how are you finding it and she said well I'll be honest when I was offered the job, she was offered the job on the day, she said to them that she needed two days away to go and have a think about it. She said that she just didn't want to lose who she was as a teacher and she felt that that very much was going to happen because of the routines because they want them in 'natural state' which means being silent and I remember sitting in on one of her art lessons for two hours and she had them in 'natural state'…. Just silence for the whole two hours of art. I thought you'd never get my kids quiet for half an hour never mind two hours! Well you would, but I wouldn't make them! So that was interesting, and I very much did think that when I walked in, I potentially wouldn't be the right teacher for that school.

They had silent corridors that worked but the kids knew that they had to be silent and I never really saw anyone particularly behave badly except for this one student……..he'd been silent the whole day with no break and he was just ready to just explode and I think he was Y7 so he was new to the school and …… he, sort of, just threw his book on the floor and obviously got sent out and was put on report and the next day that I saw him was the first time I'd seen something creative happening and it was in a science lesson funnily enough not even in art, she gave him play dough and pasta and they had to make the tallest building and the strongest building and he was on it. You wouldn't have imagined it was the same boy that was acting up so badly in front of all the other students and he was just on it and his was probably the best building there and I just kept smiling at him and I was like you're doing so well but he was on report for that incident he'd done the day before. It's sort of quite sad to see really because we had to report back on what we'd seen and what we think could work here and I think in part of the report I've put, you know, it's very automated. There wasn't a lot of creativity, the students didn't appear to have personalities as such or rapport with the teachers.

> One of them had said to the P.E. guy here 'Don't you think it's like a prison Sir?' and the fact that that was a Y8 and the fact that they are thinking that, I just worry.

Oliver

> It was completely robotic. We use a lot of their ideas I think we've just tamed it down a little bit. I don't think our kids would cope with their behaviour. It was silent, every corridor. It was just the norm though. I went into one lesson and the teacher gave them a sheet. It was a P.E. lesson and she was just like…. There's the sheet with thirty-five key words….. complete them for me …go through the textbook and write them down and the kids were just like started writing. It's just the culture.
>
> They all had to before every lesson line up in this big hallway. So, they all had to line up in alphabetical order in form groups. It was like if so and so has got Mr. X, step to your right and they would step to the right in silence, if so and so has got Miss Y, step to your left and then the teacher would come to the front of the line and then they would just walk them off through the school in silence in alphabetical order, in their 'natural state' that's what they used to call it. For me a natural state for a child, for a human, is not silence.
>
> The thing is the kids in the classes were brilliant and then we got to teach them and it was like teach them as you would normally just to kind of see the difference and in P.E. it was…well I think P.E. anyway was a chance to be kids again. It was release, so P.E. was carnage anyway. I was thinking this is horrendous because they are used to so much structure every day that P.E. was their bit of freedom, so they were going nuts. I asked the teacher are they always like this and he said well yes but it's their only chance to run around, to talk, to chat.
>
> They've got a mountain they call it. They've got a mountain to climb to get to university and every kid must aspire. I remember I said to the deputy head but what if university is not for every kid, what if they're more vocational or want to go on to labouring, what if they don't want to go there? Well no, he said, we want to put them in university, it's the best route.
>
> I've got it in my report it's a good school because they get the grades, but it's a prison.

As I first listened to and subsequently read and re-read both Louise and Oliver's account of their visit, I am always struck by the depth of their emotional response to the experience they

shared. I spoke with them just a few days after their return and they both urgently wanted to tell me this story. For Louise and Oliver this had been a disturbing visit. It had challenged their core beliefs about children and young people having freedom and space. In Louise's case it was the space to be creative. For Oliver, it was the space to stretch out and be physical and engage and articulate choices and it all comes tumbling out.

In a sense it is the 'wrongness' of it all that is overwhelming for them. We have shared their first teacher stories in the previous chapter and in getting to know them we have touched upon what motivated them to become teachers. Often prefaced by qualifying comments such as 'I know this might sound corny'…...or 'don't roll your eyes but…' they have talked about how being a teacher can, in their view, make a difference. In these narrative fragments it is as if their inner '*sacred story*' of teacher as nurturer, as inspirer, as facilitator has dramatically and shockingly been faced with such scenes of control that it has elicited a deep anxiety for them and called into question many of the foundations on which they have built their own teaching style, even their own identity.

Seeing a school so effectively shut down identity for both students and teachers in a way awakened them to considering how the changes being brought about in their own school would impact on them and the young people who they work with. The tools of control they describe see discipline embedded and legitimated into everyday life. We see a controlled institution which brings to mind Bentham's panopticon as a model designed on the principles of discipline, surveillance and hierarchical classification (as referred to in Chapter 2).

The panopticon was a prison designed so that the 'controller' could always remain invisible and at a distance from the inmates and yet control every aspect of their daily lives. The panoptic principle however extends much more widely. As a metaphor for control the panopticon colonises social life and 'inserts the power to punish much more deeply into the social body' (Lowman, 1983: 237). Foucault develops this notion of the control of space and time as the making of docile bodies constantly exposed to a calculated gaze (Foucault, 1977). Discipline, argues Foucault, is the 'specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise' (ibid:170). 'Discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise' (ibid).

Foucault's description of an educational past presents us with an eerily accurate prediction of the present:

> All the activity of the disciplined individual must be punctuated and sustained by injunctions whose efficacy rests on brevity and clarity…….the training of school children was to be carried out in the same way: few words, no explanation, a total silence interrupted only by signals – bells, clapping of hands, gestures, a mere glance from the teacher (ibid: 166).

The instructional and behavioural systems used to eradicate the 'risk' in education are often noted and reported but tend not to be critically inspected in evaluations of success. As Joan Goodman (2013: 90) suggests, this separation of means and ends may be problematic, for the 'product' is not merely the test score but the student whose work it represents. As she argues, we would not consider a competitive athlete successful if she or he won an event but acquired an anxiety disorder through the stress of training and attempting to attain that goal, or a student worthy of honour if he or she cheated to achieve success.

The impact of such a rigid regime of discipline has serious consequences. Students learn to suppress their speech and to defer to authority which has detrimental effects on their ability to develop their identities and construct strategies of action (Nunn, 2014). Lack of student autonomy can be contributing to an impoverished view of self (Harter, 1999, 2006).

In the zealous drive to find and implement initiatives which can make education 'work' we fall into the trap of thinking that we must deconstruct what is complex and creative endeavor into component parts which can be evaluated and where satisfactory outputs are defined, measured and secured. As Biesta (2013:3) cautions, the desire 'to make education strong, secure, predictable and risk-free' raises moral, political and educational questions about what price we are willing to pay to make education 'work'.

Reflecting on Louise and Oliver's narrative fragments

It could be argued that sending this group of NQTs to visit a school, which has adopted some of the more extreme behaviour policies seen in the no excuses model, was somewhat of a cynical move by the head teacher from Seachurch. It might be expected that these new teachers would compare the strategies used there to those new policies introduced in their own school, and come to the conclusion that perhaps they, and their students, were not being

too badly done to. As Louise says, ‘I thought it was strict here until I went there’. But their stories also show a capacity in them to resist and challenge what they saw. Their vision of their own pupils as able to question restrictive practices was also strengthened. They knew that they did not want compliant ‘robotic’ students in their own classes. Perhaps their resistance gives some hope for future shifts in educational frameworks. This story fragment from Oliver and Louise is small; a small story in a world of grand narratives about education. Yet, the visit they made has had a powerful impact on them both and given them a new outlook on their personal and professional landscapes. They are our future teachers and in the telling of this story they are reflecting on their beliefs about teaching and what education is about.

Much of what they say, such as the creativity that Louise knew was missing from the school they visited and Oliver’s understanding that he too felt it was like a ‘prison’ and was stifled by it, demonstrate that they recognise that the disciplinary mechanisms felt too extreme. In their current school they are using many of the behaviour strategies which they witnessed but as Oliver describes they are ‘tamed down’. We will go in Chapter 6 to explore how and why this taming developed and what this tells us about the agency of teachers and students and strategies for nudging pragmatic, appropriate and hence sustainable change in our schools. We can have some hope that these future teachers rejected what they saw. They do not want teaching to be like that. Perhaps their ‘small’ story will go some way to challenging the current, dominant educational discourses and such a challenge will in turn play a part in a ‘big’ story of the future of education re-imagined and re-interpreted.

> ‘I just said to the boys I think I would have been out within the first term because I couldn’t do it. I mean it would be easy to do it. It’s not as though I’m incapable of putting my hand up or saying, ‘can you be in ‘your natural state’, asking them to be quiet, I just wouldn’t want to.’

6.3 No time to breathe, no space to speak

'22% of newly qualified entrants to the sector in 2015 were not recorded as working in the state sector two years later' (Foster, 2019: 11)

Behind this stark statistic, from a United Kingdom House of Commons Briefing Paper[12], lie the stories of becoming teachers who leave the profession. One of the two newly qualified teachers (NQTs), Louise, who took part in this study, became one of those who decided to leave teaching part way into her second year of teaching. We will explore her story here and we also hear from Oliver who started with her at the same time as another of the four NQTs appointed to Longton Academy, Seachurch in September 2015 and from Michael, not new to teaching having worked as a teacher for twenty-six years, but new to Longton Academy and from Jess, the longest serving member of teaching staff at Longton Academy, who had seen a series of changes at the school under different head teachers and regimes.

Piecing together their narrative fragments give us some insights into the world of the teacher. The pressure that teachers find themselves under can, at times, feel overwhelming (see Galton and MacBeath, 2008) and their narratives lead to substantive questions of how space has been restricted for them and their students. Space and time compressed, squeezed out to the margins, has implications.

Louise

You will remember that we first met Louise in the previous chapter and heard her first teacher story. We shared with her hopes and dreams of making a difference to the lives of the students she worked with. Inspired by her own art teacher she felt as she was 'fighting' for art to be recognised as of value, intrinsic to the life of a school not merely an add-on activity. Her own experience of convincing her parents that art was a valid choice of degree to follow and her subsequent experience of feeling out of her depth at university, shaped her as a teacher. In the previous section of this chapter we also share her dismay as she experiences

[12] Teacher recruitment and Retention in England (Briefing paper published 12 February 2019) https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7222

the ‘no-excuses’ model of behaviour management on her visit to Hargreave Academy*. She is shocked by the stifling of creativity and the silencing of voice, as, amongst other things, she witnesses a two-hour art lesson conducted in complete silence.

In our meetings through the summer term of 2016 she is optimistic and hopeful. She is proud of the fact that she had managed to convince the senior leadership team (SLT) to allow her to give the students a free choice of artist to study. Why? She had wondered, had the previous art teachers made all the students study the same artist whether they connected with their work or not? Why? She had wondered, did the previous art teacher give the students a prescriptive template for them to follow so that all their folders looked almost identical? Why? She had wondered, would you reduce art with its variety and excitement, texture and colour, to a series of tick box criteria just to pass an exam? What hope did you have of connecting with, and inspiring, the next generation of artists if art became such a denuded exercise.

I remember sharing in her joy that despite the intensity of her first year of teaching she had made real strides in developing the artistic culture of the school. ‘There is a papier-mâché ball gown for goodness sake in the reception area’, she beamed, ‘so the first thing you see when you arrive at school is art!’

I had been looking forward to living alongside Louise for the next academic year. Her enthusiasm and her candour during the summer term when I had met up with her had made me eagerly await our time together after the summer holiday. We would meet again in September. Except we never did meet again.

In September I have an email from her to say that there had been developments over the summer which meant that she would not have time to be part of the project. I sensed a feeling of sadness and a touch of embarrassment in that email, although neither were explicit, and Louise did not say exactly what the development had been. I did not want to press her in any way, so replied that I completely understood and hoped I would see her about school and if, at any time, she wanted to reconnect with the project to just let me know. I wondered if the development might have had something to do with the GCSE results which had come out in the August but quickly hoped my wondering was wrong.

From field notes dated 30 September 2016

I open up my emails early this morning and read one from Louise. I feel an immediate sadness that she is unable to continue with the project. I re-read the message several times searching for a hidden meaning. I am struck that her words do not quite reflect the person I have come to know. Scratch the surface of this message and is there another story? Louise had shown such an enthusiasm for the project. Her openness had been refreshing and engaging. I wonder what could have changed for her to now feel unable to continue.

I look again:

Hi Emma,

As much as i would love to assist you with your project I'm afraid I am not in the right place to continue with it. I hope this isn't a problem.

All the best for your project.

Kind Regards

Louise*

I feel unsettled by it. Why is she 'not in the right place'? I play this phrase over and over again in my mind. I feel anxious for her. I had been worried that the GCSE results for the school had perhaps not been as expected. There had been no mention of them on the school website, no celebratory congratulations or photographs of beaming students clutching their results, and this had worried me. I begin to wonder if Louise's decision is a signal that pressure of accountability is pressing in on her? If she is not in the 'right place', where is she?

Then, seemingly from nowhere, selfish feelings creep in that her departure may compromise the study as there will be one less important voice. I quickly chastise myself for this. This study is not about me and to make it so would feel like a betrayal of the values and premise on which it is based. I have committed to enter the midst of others' lives and to come alongside them and together create a space which is safe and based on mutuality. I realise that I need to constantly check myself - another reminder

> that any project should be a constant re-negotiation of the ethical positioning of everyone involved.
>
> I start to type a reply that has a lightness of touch so that she in no way feels that her departure is 'a problem' but, in reality, I write with a heavy heart.

Re-reading those field notes still makes me feel sad. As the academic year rolls on I occasionally see Louise as she sits in staff meetings or walks about the corridors. The anxiety that I felt reading her email is exacerbated every time I catch a glimpse of her. Most of the time she does not see me, she seems lost in her thoughts. Occasionally she smiles, smiles which seem to me to be her way of trying to convince me that she is ok, except they never do.

I think back to our summer conversations which took place in her art room. I looked back over transcripts to see if there were any warning signs that her hope and optimism may have come up against obstacles which are leaving her looking more and more anxious.

In further meetings with Oliver and with Jess I get snippets of insight into why Louise is not 'in the right place'. Oliver tells me how much pressure they are all under and that Louise, in particular, is struggling because she is the only art teacher and so the whole workload and success of the department rests on her shoulders. He intimates that the art GCSE results were not as hoped for. We talk about the fact that Louise has only been teaching there for one full academic year, but Oliver says that such context is rarely applied, as we go to hear it is, he says, 'results, that's all your judged on'.

Jess is less understanding. 'How can you not do well in art?' she asks me rhetorically, in one of our last meetings before she goes on maternity leave. 'Of all the subjects we teach surely we can get that right?'. I think perhaps that she has forgotten that Louise had been part of the project and that I have come to know her. She is talking more broadly about the disappointing GCSE results. Jess seems anxious. This is somewhat ameliorated by the fact that she now only has weeks to go before her maternity leave begins. Her frustration however that some of her teaching peers have not elevated the examination results of the students, still seeps out. This is just one of many instances when the organisational meta narrative of renewal, of a school rising, phoenix like, from the ashes of failure to show what can be done with a new approach, does not quite hit the mark. So certain, it seemed, were the senior leadership team

that all the changes would join up like dots on a colour by numbers template to reveal a success story that could be paraded and lauded, that the matter of the GCSE results not dramatically rising and validating their decisions seem to have taken them by surprise. An improvement in the GCSE results in the summer of 2016 is what was expected and indeed, promised. This was a critical part of the institutional narrative that was being presented. A 'failing' school scooped up by a highly successful multi-academy trust, who would use their expertise to 'turn it around'. The new head teacher parachuted in as saviour, an educational super-hero and all everyone had to do was play 'follow-the-leader' and all would be well.

This would be an interesting year at Longton Academy. I resolved to try to keep a track of how Louise was doing. My instinct was that the pressure was ramping up for everyone and the following narrative fragments give us a palpable sense of the difficulties faced by teachers and how they might affect the decision to stay or to go.

Oliver

> Yes, but grades, as a school it's all you are judged on. As a teacher your performance management is all about grades. It's about the development of kids and you know I've got one kid in my class for example who is predicted from his Key Stage Two data, so from his primary school, he's predicted that as he goes to school he's going to get A's and his family life is like falling through. His Mum and Dad have split up. He's had a bit of a bad time with it. He's gone with Mum who's now like now seeing a rough man from the [redacted] Estate who is not into school at all. Now, he's not going to get an 'A'. There's nothing I can do that will get him an 'A'. He doesn't do his homework, he doesn't turn up for Corrections sometimes, he doesn't like P.E. It's like I can't be judged on not getting him an 'A'. There is only so much you can do. The only thing now is that you've got to put in so many interventions to record all the interventions you put in place just to justify if he doesn't get his grades. So that's what I've got to put in place. So, for every kid you've got to these interventions and 'context sheets' and you have to do all this work just for meeting this target data. So, it's all just top end focus on grades… so everything centres around you. It's massive.
>
> I think that's what's putting a lot of people off as well….a lot of people……there are so many things that you could do….your trips, letting kids see the real world because that's the best thing for them but you can't get kids for trips any more or fixtures for P.E. For a P.E. teacher I can't get year 10s and 11s out of school because they would be missing lesson time. Ultimately, they are going to miss out on learning for these grades, but you get as much out of

a sports fixture representing your school going around doing these things as you would a lesson. The pressure is there, and people can't have any leeway. They are restricted.

Last time I was here I was at a meeting where the SLT were talking about the data which had been input that was showing that the current Y11s were not on track to be showing the right level of progress? Is that still a concern?

They haven't been mentioned as such, but they were behind our expected levels of progress. We are actually inputting data again this week, so you are inputting whether everyone is making progress and on target.

It seems to me that you might be stuck between a rock and a hard place. If you highlight that lots of students may behind target does that reflect on your teaching but then if you don't and they don't 'perform' as expected does that create problems in that you are seen not to have identified the students accurately and put in the required interventions?

That's the thing, if you do grade them highly, you're setting yourself up to fail because you are covering your back but if you think you've under graded everyone then it looks bad on you, doesn't it?

I know you are a 'new' teacher…I expect you don't feel 'new' anymore but last year was your first year of teaching. Given the challenges with this how much help did you get?

None, no we didn't get any help. That's one of the things we raised because we have got an NQT programme and we were saying we wanted help with like parents' evenings, help with report writing, inputting data but we didn't get anything but I mean staff get like a sheet, like a template of what constitutes what but you don't really get training as such. I'm lucky that I've got Lily* next door who is the other P.E. teacher so I can just literally nip across and only me and her in P.E. so it's quite personal anyway so I can ask questions but things like English there are seven or eight teachers and they didn't get any individual NQT training which they should have really.

It sounds to me like you have so much to do. I was listening to the radio this morning and they were saying that it is getting difficult to recruit enough teachers and to retain the teachers we have. They were talking about paying more but I thought whilst more money would be good, I wonder if there is more to it than that?

There is…if I said to everyone on my training course why have you gone into teaching none of them would have said for the money…it's not well paid for the hours you put in, but I think teachers do go into it because they do want to make a bit of a difference. They have got a passion for that subject and that's what they enjoy and I think if I said to myself what do I enjoy about the job I would say *teaching*…what do I not like about the job is everything that goes around it. The contact with the kids is the best bit I think it's just overshadowed by all these pressures. If you've got a few days where you don't have much on and you can teach - it's 'class'. You could teach every lesson if it's planned, if you've got the time to do it then you'd be fine it's just…… (Oliver is quiet, contemplative)…….it's so tiring…I don't think people appreciate how hard it is especially with our new system where it is ten minute breaks and forty minute lunches….you don't get a break really. Ten minutes by the time I've left the classroom (I have to be back) They've said the less social time the kids have the less they can misbehave. At lunch times they were getting a lot of problems, like bullying or pick on each other so they've reduced it to like the minimum but then kids don't get time and the teachers don't get time to breathe. I have five lessons at least out of six every day. Teaching is quite tiring and intense… you don't have time just to wind down and sit at a computer for a bit. So, I get 3 PPAs[13] a week so there are thirty lessons and I teach 27 so I get 3 frees. I've got one on a Tuesday morning which is lovely because I come in and I get the like the whole hour to crack on. Sometimes like today it is Period 5 and you're knackered by Period 5 so I sometimes just sit there and have a drink and just try to breathe. It's quite intense.

I would say that my job as a P.E. teacher is just to get people interested in being healthy and active but like no one asks how many kids play football outside of school or who keeps fit and have got an interest in sport after school….it's just not judged on that at all….even core P.E. for Y7, 8, 9s, even core P.E. that's all graded now and all about results and progress…

I am thinking about now in my own writing about whether this can change…is it sustainable or can space be made to disturb things – make a punctuation if you like to allow things to change?

I think it's quite embedded now though, it's just the norm, teachers have just gone through the process so it's just the norm to work long hours, it's just the norm to expect it…to put up with

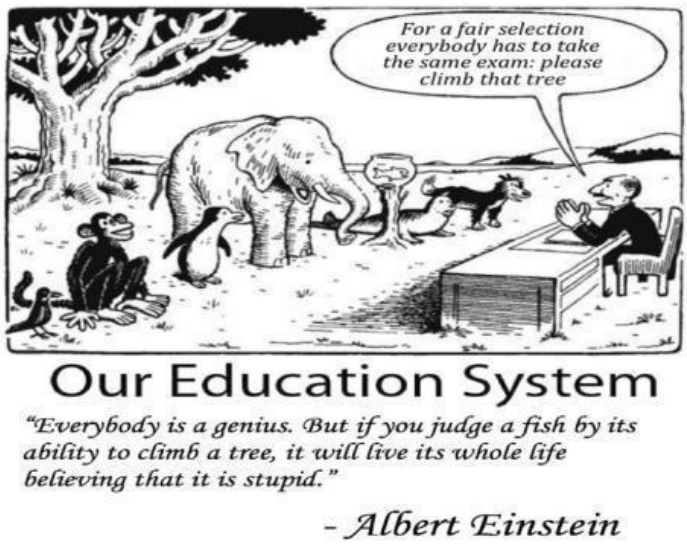
[13] Planning, preparation and assessment time is a statutory entitlement given to teachers in England effective 1 September 2005 and under the remit of the School teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD). The guidelines are that this should be ten percent of teaching time. It does not automatically apply for teachers working in independent schools (fee paying) or academies unless their contracts of employment entitle them to the pay and working conditions of the STPCD.

it….to put up with it…..I think if you're not willing to put up with it now then you're not pulling your weight….you're not being an effective teacher or working as hard as you should. It's the norm for teachers to accept it, to just get on with it. It's part of teaching in my opinion. You ask where the challenge could come from…it could from teachers but how would you do it?

My cousin, he's in his NQT year in a primary school with Y5 and it's an outstanding like 'singing and dancing' school and they work on levels of progress as well and three levels of progress is like the national average and his head of department said well I want you go for four. We are an outstanding school so you must strive for four levels for every kid and he said well surely I am setting myself up to fail, surely if I go for three and get four I am still aspiring and she says 'no that's not how we are doing it, you are going for four' and he is like we are setting ourselves up not to fail but to put all these extra hours in….it's all data, data, to get this 'outstanding' we need to get four levels of progress.

But I wonder what does 'outstanding' mean?

Our kids would like to go to universities or the theatre, science museum, anything - learn how to act in society. The kids know it's all about grades. Our Y11s are stressed out already about exams and it's March! There are about three different mock exam processes to get data on where they are at and their levels of progress so you can put your target grades in and interventions in place. Before half term they have about three exams a day some of them. So many kids aren't designed for exams. I was always quite lucky because I was always quite good at exams but like some of my mates were terrible. Just sets them up to fail doesn't it? It's like that picture with all the animals lined up under the tree, have you seen it? And the teacher at the front says the first one to climb it wins. We're a bit like it aren't we?



Do you think you will stay long term in teaching?

We all have this talk…all of us because we are quite close, the training group from [redacted] we all meet up (regularly) and all slate it, and moan. It's like you've spent this long to go into the wrong vocation. It's quite limiting once you're into it. I mean it's quite a respectable profession isn't it? But there's no easy option to say well I'm going to go from this to this, so I don't know. I think if you asked the people I trained with, are there parts of the job you enjoy, they would say yes. If you asked them if they would still be doing it in twenty years, I'm not so sure.

I was thinking about whether the rhetoric that academies had more freedom to do things differently was true?

The pressures are just the same. Even if you want a different approach to doing it it's all the same outcome. It's all working to get the same results.

Teachers are just sort of channelled …you've got to do this to get this and if you don't you are criticised as being a less than adequate teacher really.

That's what everyone doesn't like, I think if I asked all the lads I trained with, do they enjoy it? They'd say yes, but if you said can you see yourself doing it in twenty years, I don't know how many would say yes, honestly. If you say you don't like it there is nobody there who can do anything about it. I don't think people have time to speak.

Oliver (2)
Time restraints is always on you - you wouldn't get that leeway. I think for me if you see progress every year that's probably a good thing, but I don't know if you will because you always get the fluctuation between year groups as well – the natural distribution so it's difficult.

Yes, I was thinking of Louise. She said she doesn't feel she can carry on with the project because she needs to focus on the teaching, I didn't ask her any questions but my sense was that this years' GCSEs in her subject were seen as disappointing but then I was thinking she has only been here one year…

Yes, and she is on her own and last year was her first year of teaching. We were talking about it today because we have a work group art and PE, so they go through your books, go through your days, go through your interventions and she's got 300 books so I don't think maybe her timetable is as busy as I am but obviously that marking process is massive compared to mine, so she was like I maybe see all my groups for three lessons of writing per week and I've got to mark three hundred books and it's not doable. I think she's touched 200 she says like are good and 100 are just like need help.

Oliver (3)

Did you see those progress reports…the red and the green on the side? …well that's our top set English and I said to Sue*, who was sitting next to me, she's an English teacher, half of them are currently under-achieving in terms of the progress and that's your top set! And you've got four sets in Y11. I'd love to see the fourth set. As a fourth set teacher what more can you do to get them up?

So, what happens then, what conversations do you have?
You have appraisals every year, and as long as…… you can evidence your interventions and what you have done and why this kid hasn't made that level of progress. They will ask you why that kid hasn't made that level of progress and you've got to have this evidence of all the interventions that you have put in place; different strategies; different teaching and learning. So, you've got to justify why they haven't made that level of progress. If you can evidence it might be like well, yes, you've done all you can, but you have actually got to physically evidence it.

You have to do that for every child?

Yes, that's why you've got to keep…you know you put the interventions in place and then you have an intervention diary book and a register of who is at what so you know how many you've had contact with them and you'll keep maybe lesson plans or different strategies in lessons. So, one of them is like this *(Oliver shows me a printout)* but it is a name so like Mr. X and you have to list every strategy that you have used. So you might write 'after school intervention' or 'one to one support', they might get an in-reach session, you might pair them up with somebody and you have actually physically got to list everything that you do with that person and say that is why they haven't met the level of progress. I've tried this, I've tried this, I've tried this, but they still haven't. So, it's all electronic. Every teacher has a

> group: cycle one, cycle two, cycle three…that's your data input. You've got to evidence for each cycle, how your interventions have changed and whether there is progress or not.
>
> *So, we've just had cycle one, discussed at the meeting*
>
> Yes, we've just had cycle one which is why there is some anxiety because they are not where they wanted them to be…so it's now about what you can do. You have got to evidence it, all the strategies that are in place to try to move these levels up.
>
> Well, two of my mates one of them is twenty-four and one of them is twenty-five and they both accepted TLR (Teacher Learning Responsibilities) this year one is Head of Y11 data and the other one is Head of Y9. They are young lads and they are both absolutely shot through, shot through.

Oliver describes the pressure he feels. As a newly qualified teacher he is wrestling with some of the tensions that have arisen since he started teaching. Even after only a year in teaching he and his peers with whom he did his teacher training are unsure how long they will remain in the profession.

Reflecting on this narrative fragment from Oliver raises questions of how within one year of teaching he has already begun to think about how and when he might leave.

> We all have this talk…all of us because we are quite close, the training group from [redacted] we all meet up (regularly) and all slate it, and moan. It's like you've spent this long to go into the wrong vocation. It's quite limiting once you're into it. I mean it's quite a respectable profession isn't it? But there's no easy option to say well I'm going to go from this to this so I don't know. I think if you asked the people I trained with, are there parts of the job you enjoy, they would say yes. If you asked them if they would still be doing it in twenty years, I'm not so sure.

That he, and the group of young teachers he trained with, should already feel they might have chosen the 'wrong vocation' and have recognised how 'limiting' their role is after such a short time is deeply concerning but perhaps not surprising. Teacher recruitment and retention is an acute problem in English schools but it is not a problem that is particular to the English context. It is a picture which is emerging in other countries where increasingly performative

pressures and the language of 'attainment' are creating complex conditions for teachers and resulting in trends of attrition primarily at the early stage of teachers' careers but not exclusively so. Exploring briefly both the Australian and United States contexts, parallels begin to emerge in the reasons teachers give for leaving the profession.

The Australian context

Australia has a diverse and atomised schooling system (Gallant and Riley, 2017). There are nine separate state and territory governments who control 74.2% of schools, in addition to 13.8% Catholic schools and 12% which are Independent schools. As a consequence of such a fragmented system, there is no national repository of data on the teaching workforce. It is therefore difficult to find exact figures to track how many teachers leave the profession including the number of exiting early careers teachers. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) was set up in 2016 and commissioned research to ascertain the scale of teacher attrition particularly for early career teachers nationally. The resulting report however could only put the figure at somewhere between 8 and 50% (AITSL, 2016) and there was a lack of clarity at how the figures had been arrived at (Gallant and Riley, 2017). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) collects more general data. Data generated in 2015 showed that 53% of fully qualified teachers were not working in educational jobs. Although it is difficult to differentiate between early, middle and late stage career teachers although this figure does not include teachers taking early retirement. The fact that no definitive figures exist is, in itself, of deep concern (Weldon, 2018) and there are valid calls for a baseline figure to inform multiple questions surrounding teacher attrition. What can be agreed upon, however, is that further work into the extent of teacher attrition and a clarification of at what stage teachers are leaving the profession is long overdue.

A number of studies have identified excessive workloads, problematic collegial relationships, poor management practices, surveillance and increasing accountability and request for teachers to teach out of field as contributory factors in teacher attrition (AITSL, 2016; Buchanan et al., 2013; Craig, 2013, 2014, Gallant and Riley, 2014; Torres, 2012). Working with a group of young male teachers, research carried out by Gallant and Riley (2017) drilled down into the contributory factors affecting teachers' decisions to leave the profession. Although not explicitly described by the participants as such the characteristics of the difficulties and tensions they describe match those of the new Public Management discourse. These included *agentification* where professional relationships are reduced to contracts

between agents based on competition; economic efficiencies; accountability, evaluation and monitoring; hierarchical decision-making; league tables; outputs and performance indicators (Tolofori, 2005). For these early career teachers, the clash of perceiving that they were agents in a market driven system which emphasised education as a commodity rather than a public good was particularly problematic.

The United States context

'Public school teaching is not a long-term occupation for most teachers in the United States. Instead, it's a temporary job' (Glazer, 2018: 62). Mirroring the concerns in England, teachers are leaving the profession in the United States in high numbers. More teachers will leave the profession voluntarily than will stay until retirement (Ingersoll, Merrill and Stuckey, 2018). As in England, the highest rates of teacher attrition come in the first two years of the job, with almost half leaving the classroom before their fifth year (Ingersoll et al., 2016).

Large scale studies have been conducted into early career teacher attrition (see Borman and Dowling, 2008; Guarino, Santibañez and Daly, 2006; Ingersoll, Merrill and Stuckey, 2018) however Schaefer, Downey and Clandinin (2014) argue that in many studies it is often difficult to see the teachers as people both in and out of school. In the search for understanding the experience of teachers, they used a narrative inquiry approach to share the stories of teachers who left the profession early in their careers. Shifting from 'stories to live by' to 'stories to leave by' the teachers often presented a cover story as they felt unable to articulate the real reasons for their departures. Safer, was to construct 'acceptable stories'. This leads to a concern that policies or 'fixes' which are introduced to stem the tide of attrition maybe based on 'teachers' alibis for leaving, instead of their more complex and harder truths' (Schaefer, Downey and Clandinin, 2014: 25).

Glazer (2018) was particularly interested in exploring the motivations for leaving of teachers further on in their careers. He terms this group the *invested leavers*. Teachers who had moved past the 'survival period' (Day and Gu, 2010), the first two years, to fully certified teachers who had worked as a teacher for at least three years and had invested in their teacher education by either completing a master's degree in Education or becoming a fully credentialed and certified teacher. What reasons might lay behind the invested leavers decision when they had committed to the profession and made it through the critical survival period in the classroom. The accounts of the invested leavers suggested that for many it was

an act of resistance. It was a refusal to the job in certain ways or under certain conditions (Glazer, 2018: 63). Challenging the notion that twenty first century ways of working see people regularly re-training and moving jobs (Mayer, 2006), Glazer argues that these invested leavers were 'not simply seeking a new career, but rather they were people who had found success in their job and then began to find policies and practices objectionable' (2018: 69).

Teacher identity and teacher agency

What emerges are the multiple challenges involved in navigating the various landscapes where teachers live and work. As we discussed in Chapter 2, teachers' claim to *professionalism* has always been problematic. It is important not to conflate professionalism with agency, however theorising teacher agency is necessary to understand the processes through which 'change' and 'continuity' occurs in educational settings (Priestley et al., 2012), and how this impacts on them personally and on the shifting landscapes they move between.

Conceiving of teachers as agents of change (Fullan, 2003) may at first sight appear a wholly positive development. Yet, it is possible that agency in this sense can be construed as how successful teachers are as merely policy implementers (see Priestley, 2011 and Priestley et al, 2012). This raises legitimate questions of the sorts of agency achieved by teachers and that agency could be exercised just as much for non-beneficial reasons as to make positive changes. The pressures of performativity and the restrictions of policy act as inhibitors to teachers and student agentive capacity. Of significance is how they position themselves politically in relation to change policy. For teachers, according to Supovitz (2008), it is their ability to mediate policy through a process of iterative refraction. In other words, how successfully policy reforms can be adjusted and re-worked as they go through the school environment. Policy makers may want to control the school agenda, but they cannot control how policy will be perceived, understood and interpreted by individuals. This, however, is predicated on the notion of teacher agency as a given capacity.

Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2013; 2015) see Fig.1, present a conceptual model of agency they describe as *ecological agency*. This model rejects the view that the nature of agency is an individualistic human capacity. It is not something that people either possess in varying degrees as a result of their personal attributes. It is not something that can be attributed to an

individual solely because of his or her personal abilities whether it is exercised or not. Rather, agency is seen as emerging from the '*interaction* of individual 'capacity' with environing 'conditions'' (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2015:22). Agency therefore is not seen as residing in individuals as property or capacity, their *ecological* view of agency sees it as an emergent phenomenon of the ecological conditions through which it is enacted. In other words, agency is not something that people can *have* or *possess*, it is understood to something that people *do* or *achieve* (ibid).

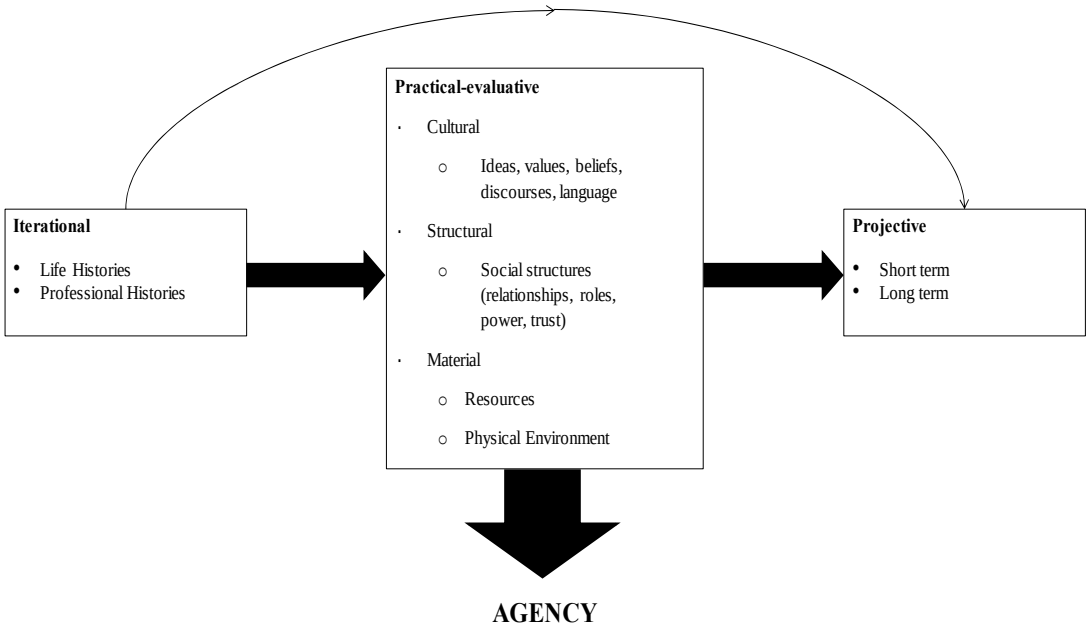


Figure 1: Understanding teacher agency (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2013: 190)

What Priestley et al. (2013) pick up on is the important point that the environment whether cultural, structural or material has a critical role to play in how successfully teachers, and I would add students, live out their life at school. Thinking of this narratively, the multiple landscapes through which they move can either enable or constrain people. There is a danger in ascribing the possession (or lack of) agency to teachers and students as the central factor in how they can successfully navigate such landscapes. It risks falling into the trap of ignoring the multiple and progressive regulatory devices that impacts them. As we examined in Chapter 2, performative cultures require a constant ramping up of measurement and response to it. Such intensification leads to an erosion of trust. As Coffield and Williamson (2012) caution, education becomes run by a culture of fear as opposed to a culture of trust.

For Michael, who has been a teacher for twenty-six years it is a personal situation which has meant that he has been unable to devote the time he normally does to his work. His partner's mother is elderly and has needed round the clock care that social services have not been able to offer. He and his partner have been caring for her, with Michael doing the night shift three times a week, whilst his partner does the other four. Having made the move to Seachurch for this job, Michael has recently been trying to organise things for his partner and her mother to join him. In the following narrative fragment, he describes the impact of this.

Michael

> I was absolutely shattered. It was like spinning plates and I didn't know which way to turn. I was all over the place. I ended up at October half term not coming back for five weeks. I went to the doc…..well Alex (the Deputy Head) he told me…he said …I spoke to him about it and said I'm not performing in the classroom at all and I don't like not doing a good job at all and it was all new to me that and my head…I think I was so mentally shattered I couldn't think of ways out or couldn't think of solutions of things to do and eventually over time when I came up with solutions or worked with other staff or whatever there were things I could have done and I knew about or could do or try but my head couldn't think of them. I was so tired that I needed that time and I had five weeks off, went to the doctor and they said you need a break. I told them the story I have just told you, (*they said*) you need a break, how have you kept going. So (*I said*) well I had to because if I didn't what would have happened. So that's what I do, I would have probably just kept going but it got to the stage where I knew because my partner didn't come up in September because accommodation wise we had bought the flat upstairs as well, above our flat, for my partner's mum to go into but it wasn't ready it needed tiling, carpets, it needed bits and pieces doing to it. We got a builder in but again I was coming home from my day here and painting walls or doing stuff in there do get that ready. We wanted it ready for October half term so they could come up at half term, which they did do. But that first half term I was just shattered and my previous twelve years at the school in [redacted] I had had one day off through illness. I'm never ill. I got norovirus on Thursday night and Friday oh god! And it was a horrible weekend, back in on the Monday and that's the only day off I had off in twelve years and the previous school I was there for twelve years first I think I had two days off ill…well….just a lot of teachers you go in anyway. So, for me to have time off I didn't like doing it and it turned out to be five weeks and I didn't know whether I'd come back.
>
> Sometimes in September and October, before I had the time off, I'd be driving to and from school and see a bus and think I could be a bus driver. I could do that. Someone digging a

ditch there, the builders over the road that were digging, and I thought I'd rather do that. At that moment in time I'd rather do that, and it was chucking down with rain and I'm thinking I'm going in that warm building there, but I'd rather be digging a hole there, getting soaked and it was like that. I'd think, what can I do? - I'll do that, I'll do that, I'll do that…money doesn't matter, I don't care about money.

I was all ready to pack in. I think if I'd have been single, with no responsibilities, I'd have packed it in…...I'd have packed it in. Looking back now I'm glad I haven't and (Michael is pensive and pauses) Yes, I'm …I didn't think I'd get to the end of the school year and still be here to be honest and I think I've done a reasonably good job…a lot better than I was in September put it that way. I think Alex (the Deputy Head) thinks I've done quite well….he never thought I wouldn't do well (Michael laughs) he said it's you that's saying you're not doing a good job but I know I'm not doing a good job because I know I want to be doing a job up there and I said I'm down here. He said that's because you're trying to get that (Michael holds his hand up high) every single time, well that's what I've always tried to do! But I did need the rest, just to mentally stop because physically I'd just keep going.

Yes, I was tired but that wasn't the main problem and Alex was very supportive so (Michael pauses) I didn't think I'd be here at this time at all, in fact it was only probably around about Easter time…. Well I applied for another job at a school in [redacted] January/February and the reason I applied was I was thinking well, I've not done a good job here and I still didn't feel like I was doing a good job so perhaps a fresh start and I'll have a restful summer and a fresh start and go to that school like I wanted to do at Seachurch, here last September and go for it. I didn't get the job and I thought I'd be thinking oh no and I wasn't so it started me thinking well hang on that tells you something, that tells you that you are actually not feeling too bad about being at Seachurch. So that started me thinking actually that's a good thing then and obviously getting to Easter and I'm thinking well, you know I'm starting to do a better job in my opinion and started to enjoy it more as well….and then it came towards May half term which is the deadline for resignations, if you want another job teaching in September because at one point I was thinking bye teaching all together. It wasn't oh go to another school because once I realised it wasn't oh I'll go to another school I started to think well it's obviously not the school, it's obviously something else so if I can sort things out then hopefully I'll be able to do a good job and carry on.

It got towards May half term and I'm starting to think well actually…..you know….do I want to go to another school? Or do I want to carry on teaching? I'm thinking well actually I'm starting to enjoy it now. Starting to get my head around all the new systems and starting to get

used to this that and the other and various things and there were things that school could have done better in terms of when I got here, I didn't know where any of the resources were in the maths department. There were three new staff out of four and all of us were kind of thinking where are the books for that, oh we haven't got any books right have we got to make our own up? Well, there are some but we ……..so there were things in the maths department that didn't help because the Head of Maths left suddenly at the end of the summer term so that probably contributed as well…..…things like that, but I got towards May half term and about three weeks before that I was thinking right I've got about three weeks to make this decision then. I don't think I thought about it for the next three weeks…about oh I've only got two weeks, or I've only got…I thought I'd be doing that thinking well I better make my mind up soon because it's getting there. But you know what I didn't. It never kind of crossed my mind seriously at all. I just kept thinking oh two weeks until half term then we've got the half term holiday. One week to go before the half term and those sorts of things and we were selling the house as well and I think that probably helped because the house sale was going through and it was edging towards May half term and I think probably my mind on that helped because doing a move from 150 miles away …because we could only pack up one of us go home at the weekend, pack stuff up or order a skip and chuck loads of stuff which is what I was doing as well. I think that probably took my mind off, not necessarily counting down the days but I suddenly realised well, actually if I was really bothered about resigning that would be in my head, as well as the house move that would be constantly going….and I'd have to make a decision. I realised actually I'm not going to resign because I think it's going ok now and I'm glad that I haven't, the house sale went through. That's all done, stuff is in storage or up here and yeah, I think it's the right thing to do so I'm pleased with not necessarily how I've got here but the fact that I'm here and I'm glad in September coming back here not going to a different school or not teaching. So that, I think, is a good thing.

It's those little tipping points isn't it and I'm not sure if it's fate? Those points where something could happen, and it doesn't for whatever reason, or you suddenly think actually, is this the right thing?

Yes, and sometimes you don't know at the time. It's only afterwards you start thinking well, actually if I wasn't that bothered about not getting that job it must mean I'm actually ok with where I am. So those things you can kind of think they would have a negative effect or you would be disappointed you hadn't got the job you applied for but as it turned out to be actually I'm not that devastated and that must mean therefore that where I am isn't too bad.

And do you think that was pressure you put on yourself?

Yes, oh yes, no one else was saying go on apply for another job, start afresh and things like that at all. Obviously I talked it through with my partner [redacted] and she was saying well…she didn't want me to resign at all but she said early on if that is what you want, you know if that's what you feel you've got to do you know she would support me. Even though she didn't want me to, and it's turned out ok.

I suppose there is layers of change? You came into an environment that was massively changing

Yes, so that would have been difficult to start with….

And lots of things in your life were changing?

Yes, mine as well,

Perhaps even coming into this environment if you had lived in Seachurch all your life might have been challenging?

Yes, so with being absolutely shattered as well as the change of moving up here and the new school all that together just you know…….so I'm pleased I'm here …I'm not just pleased that I survived because I think I've more than survived now …so yes, I'm looking forward to the six weeks knowing that I will relax and not worry about coming back in September which is good. Because strangely enough all last summer I wasn't worried about coming up here at all. I wasn't worried about coming up here at all but I think part of it was that I was mentally exhausted so I was just existing ….I was just existing rather than thinking or worrying about I've got this to do or worrying about that so it probably stopped me from thinking about all the change…because I don't like change anyway and yet suddenly I've got all these changes. But we all have to deal with change in our lives and in teaching there's always unpredictable things…they are called students (Michael laughs) so you can never think oh they had a good lesson yesterday and so they are going to come in and have the same again today and vice versa…yesterday was really challenging doesn't mean that today it's going to be the same and that's always the case in teaching so that's where we are at!

(Michael laughs) It's quite a story!

This part of Michael's narrative shows how difficult this year has been for him. His move to the school and to Seachurch was meant to be a fresh start. What he experiences however is the multiple layers of change both in his personal life and in his life at school. Longton Academy had worked hard to attract new teachers to Seachurch following the exodus which occurred as the school moved out of local authority control and new ways of working were introduced under the new regime. As Alex had explained on my first meeting with him, many of the teachers who had left found that they were unwilling to support some of the policies that had been introduced. In particular, the 'hands up – silence' rule had caused serious consternation. I remember one of my visits to a staff meeting where I was quietly chatting to a group of teachers and the head teacher walked in and raised his hand. I had forgotten about the new protocol and continued to speak until the group of teachers I was talking to raised their hands in the air and fell silent. I felt extremely uncomfortable and it was clear that they were embarrassed. They glanced at me apologetically. I was unsure if I should also raise my arm in the air but decided that just being quiet may suffice. It was eerie to see a room full of professionals with their hands in the air and the room in silence. The head teacher then put his arm down as the signal for everyone to follow. For the remainder of that whole meeting the only voice was that of the head teacher.

Michael had entered multiple new landscapes. A new school with a new management team experiencing a period of rapid change; a new place; a new home; a new role. He found himself navigating in-between places as he travelled the 150 miles between his former home and Seachurch, gradually moving his belongings whilst waiting for his partner to join him.

His comment that one day he looked across at a builder digging the road in the rain and thought he would rather be doing that than enter the school building is a powerful image. I often think back to the part of our conversation. Michael had set himself high standards and he felt that he was falling short.

Jess

> *When you talked earlier about trust and those things that are important to you about teaching would you say you need certain frameworks in place to be able to do that?*

I think you have to support the school's values because if your vision is very different from everybody else you are just going to, ……it's not going to work. It's just going to be abrasive….so you have to find the right school for you and luckily, I have agreed with the changes that have been in place otherwise I wouldn't, or I shouldn't, be here.

Were you worried about the changes that might take place? Presumably there is a moment in between where you are uncertain

Yeah, sometimes some of the changes that I have had to go through personally I have had my hand forced so for this new role it was a case of do I step back and go to being a classroom teacher whereas that wasn't actually what I felt I should be doing or wanted to do. As much as I love the teaching element of it I did feel that I could give more and I didn't want to just be……I say 'just be' *(Jess laughs nervously as she if she feels she may be revealing too much)* a classroom teacher when I had been Head of Faculty. I felt like I wanted to develop, and I wanted to push myself a bit more. So, with this Key Stage Leader role it's brand new and it's still in the stages of actually having its job description written I suppose because we didn't quite know what it entailed. I think the outgoing head's vision was slightly different from the incoming head, so we had to pair that up. So, this isn't naturally a role I would have gone for in another school, but the job that it potentially could be, I would.

I'd like to see the direction in which it is going. I always wanted to be Head of Department I suppose……...(Jess pauses). I wanted to be a really good R.E. teacher and get to be Head of Department and I didn't really see what was beyond that. Like, the Faculty leader role came up and again it was slightly forced on me. I was on maternity leave and there was three of us and it was either one of us stepped up or potentially we could all get pushed out, so I didn't really have anything to lose *(Jess smiles and laughs gently)* so I thought why not let's go for it! So I suppose what I did have to lose was my job because they could have got someone else who would have replaced me because they needed that layer and I'd rather I be that layer than give it up to someone else so yeah *(Jess is contemplative for a moment as if she is thinking about this really for the first time and she is finding it difficult).*

So, what happens when you are asked to take on a new role?.....do you have to adapt quite quickly?

Yeah, yeah you do. I haven't always found it easy I think there are certain skills that I am still developing and probably always will develop. There are other things that come quite naturally for me ……yeah as a teacher you lead people, but you don't necessarily lead adults and

adults are very different from children and their rules are different and their responses are different. I never thought of myself as being a manager of people and ironically that's what teaching does …….a manager of adults I didn't see that…… *(Jess is finding it difficult to talk about this part of her job my sense is that she feels much more comfortable in her classroom with her students and the 'stepping up' she has done to protect her job has been difficult for her in a number of ways. Despite encouragement from me it becomes clear that she doesn't want to explore this area any further, so following a pause I change the subject)*

So, there seem to be lots of new teachers here now?

Yes, I have found myself telling stories about such and such that happened and they are like looking at me blankly because they don't know who I am talking about or what it is I am talking about so there are very few of us who were here when I was first here. I think there is literally about five so I am one of very few now…….but it's nice that I have got to know the new people coming in and equally whenever there has been an opportunity to go out and learn something….I was part of a teaching development group the other year so I was selected for that and asked if I wanted to do that and I did and it was nice to go and see other schools and secondary schools elsewhere, having not had the experience myself teaching there it's hard sometimes to compare. So, when staff are coming in, I'm always quite keen to say 'oh where have you been?' because they tend to stick quite local round here so to have that inside view without actually having to go and teach at another school is quite interesting, I like that.

Yes, it is interesting isn't it the difference between schools, it's one of the things I am interested to find out also in relation to the Academy programme…will an academy chain roll out its own ethos or are the schools still different within the group?

I have felt that other people, like other colleagues from different schools have been quite intrigued and interested by us becoming an academy because we are the first one of the major secondary schools in the local area. They do want to know, so they are asking how is it? Is it different? And I say yes, it is, but is that because of the academy chain…or is that because it just needed to change, I'm not sure if I could ever split that and say this is because of this and this is because of that. Mmm (Jess thinks for a moment).

I suppose it about what changes are introduced…I know one of the first big changes here was the behaviour policy

It was one of the absolutely fundamental bits…. It was (such an important thing) because if you don't have the behaviour for learning then you don't have learning.

As a place of learning it was a struggle at times and it came down to more of like how many years have you been here, did you know their Mum or Dad. In some ways I can still benefit from that, but you have to support the structure from the whole school, and I feel other colleagues really benefit from that as well which they needed. So, it's nice to be able to support them and say we're all in it together. So there is no 'well I do it like this' 'I do it like that' I mean there is some and we do need to iron out those creases but equally if they come and say well this happened in this lesson and I will say well this is why…you know why. So it has given me more of a platform when I speak to the parents which I struggled with previously to this year, because we had some people who had been in post for quite a number of years for those sort of head of house roles and they relied on that experience rather than the backing of the school I suppose…….

Has the structure changed? I mean the management structure?

Hugely, hugely yeah so, I was Faculty Leader and my job role became somebody else's job role, so I effectively disappeared, and it was the same with one other colleague at school as well, so we tried to not take that as a personal slur. Naturally because the person who was already in post as an assistant head was a humanities teacher it automatically took my role so I had to find something different *(Jess looks pained at the thought and upset so I ask a factual question)*

So, what is the difference between a Faculty Head and a Key Stage Leader
(Jess becomes more composed as she explains to me)

So, a Faculty is a group of subjects whereas Key Stage is groups of students. So I don't want to say pastoral because you are not supposed to be in a pastoral role when I took it on, in the words of the outgoing head, but there is a lot of overlap and it's hard to distinguish where one thing is ended and another one begins so we have to work quite tightly together. I don't think we've quite nailed that yet, well we haven't but ……but that's something we know we need to do.

So, what I am hearing is that in some ways your values need to some extent to match with the schools would that be fair to say?

Oh definitely - and where people haven't, they haven't stayed because they have realised that it's not where they should be because every day would be a struggle because you have got to toe the line……

If you have been here for ten years have there ever been times when you have felt out of kilter?

Yes, there was a period of time when I wasn't sure what they wanted from me but I think maybe that was more just a clash of personalities to be honest …..somebody's management style didn't nurture me put in that way …mmm….*(Jess seems anxious about revealing any more about this episode of her career)*

(After a pause I ask) I was just thinking that it is interesting when you go into schools you see differences and I suppose as a teacher it's how quickly you think you instinctively you know whether this is a fit for you.

I felt like it was when I came to look round and I've never really lost that feeling and equally people who worked here who maybe decided that it isn't quite the right ethos talk very fondly about it to me still and say that there is just something about Seachurch , they are not quite sure what but they say there is just something about Seachurch…maybe it's because it's a smaller school, maybe it's quite a close knit community that it echoes where I have come from so I could identify with that ….you know when I went to school I had ten cousins all in school at the same time, I had an older brother and…. Yeh *(Jess looks emotional with tears in her eyes as she recollects this about her own school days).*

Throughout this study my conversations with Jess were challenging. I was acutely aware that she was navigating a fine line between sharing her inner story, whilst at the same time feeling a sense of anxiety about how this might collide with the institutional narrative which was being so forcefully and tightly managed. It required some excavation to tease out the meanings in her words. Some of her more revealing narrative reflections conflict with her recurring narrative of the importance of only still working here if you can 'toe the line'.

As with Michael, her identity is bound up with doing a good job however Jess has sought promotion. One of the resonant threads which emerged was that in taking on additional responsibility Jess would be able to insulate herself from the destabilising effects of continual change. Her comment that she needed to 'step up or be pushed out' was one such insight into

the fragility of her professional landscape. As her narrative continued, she shares that during one re-structure her job was given to someone else. I remember at the time that the phrase she used - 'So, I effectively disappeared' - seemed startling to me and it has played on my mind throughout the study. Jess has attempted to regroup emotionally and professionally multiple times, but in the telling of this story the emotion welled up in her as she revealed this inner, sacred story, which had been buried deep beneath her 'cover story' of flexible, adaptable professional.

I reflect that the time and space this inquiry afforded us was in direct contrast to the pace and constraints of school life. From having no time to breathe and no space to think, we carved out what I hoped was a safe space to explore experience. There were many times when it seemed the participants were thinking and then articulating those thoughts as if for the first time. This was surprising for us all and meant that we entered emotional spaces we were unprepared for. There were ethical tensions in this that we worked through collaboratively in the shared space we had created.

6.4 Isolation

> 'I decided I'd rather die than be in isolation because of the mood it left me in'

> 'I felt alone and trapped at school for such a long time that I felt as though it would be best, as no-one seemed to care anyway'[14]

The words above are from a teenager who spoke to the BBC about her experience of school 'isolation'. For many schools a robust behaviour policy is seen as central to success, for some this has extended to a sanction which sees them place young people in 'isolation booths' for periods of time which can extend to several days at a time. The words spoken by Sophie* above, raise a fundamental question of when does the need for space to learn cross the boundary of the space required to care.

As part of this inquiry I spend an afternoon with Jess as she patrols the corridors of Longton Academy Seachurch, as the on-duty senior leadership team behaviour manager.

[14] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-47898657

From field notes dated 13 June 2016:

> I had arranged to meet Jess for lunch. I was looking forward to seeing the new 'family dining' which had recently been introduced. As I understood it, these were viewed as a way of making the younger pupils feel more connected to each other and were also a way of encouraging them to learn skills such as sharing and listening as they took it in turns to serve each other from communal dishes, all eating the same food at the same time, mirroring a view of how a family might share a meal together. I make a mental note to ask the students what they think of it, should I get a chance to speak with them.
>
> Jess then emails me to ask if I would like to spend the afternoon with her. We may not have the chance to have a 'proper chat' but we might catch up if it was a quiet afternoon on behaviour management duty.
>
> I arrive at the school at lunch time. I explain to the team on Reception that I am due to meet Jess for 'family dining'. They reply that I needed to have been here earlier for this as now the older students are in the dining hall. I check the time I am supposed to be there on previous emails, and this is the time it says. Not to worry, I still have the afternoon with Jess.
>
> The afternoon starts quietly enough. We go to Jess's classroom and sit down. She checks her walkie talkie is working and explains to me that she will be on call and that I am welcome to follow her. If there are multiple calls it can get quite busy. I ask what reasons she may be called out. We have a new policy, she explains, the teacher gives out a warning and if that is not followed then the teacher will call for back up for the member of the senior leadership team who is on duty. The teacher will be asked what the student has done and then the student will be taken out of the classroom as quickly as possible. This is so there will be minimal disruption to the other students. I am about to ask what happens to the student taken out when Jess gets a call. We head off down the corridor.

What follows is a relentless series of visits to numerous classrooms where students are removed from the class. The majority of cases are for low level disruption such as talking, not listening, distracting other students, not focusing effectively so that when the teacher says 'track on me' the student has not followed that instruction. We take the students to a room where two members of staff are tasked with keeping them until the end of the lesson before they are sent to the next one. The students must sit in silence but this, I find out, is not 'isolation', this is an interim step.

It is midway through the afternoon when Jess gets a call to go to the 'isolation room' as a student is being disruptive.

The following field note describes this:

> As I observe the isolation room, I start to feel increasingly uncomfortable and claustrophobic. There are a series of booths in a semi-circle. Each is a desk and a chair surrounded by screens on three sides and they face away from the desk where the behaviour manager sits. A student, who I guess to be about fifteen, is getting agitated. 'I need to get out of here' he shouts, 'it's not fair'. The behaviour manager is sitting working at his desk. 'You know the rules - you wouldn't be in here if there wasn't a good reason……now because you are making such a fuss, I have had to call Mrs Brown*'
>
> 'I am invisible' he cries… 'I am invisible at home and I am invisible here'…. 'If I disappeared no one would care'. I glance at Jess, but she doesn't catch my eye. I feel disturbed and instinctively want to intervene. The student starts to moan.
>
> Jess explains to him that he will need to in here until the end of the day. He will need to be quiet. She explains the structure of the behaviour policy to illustrate to the student how he could have avoided getting to the 'isolation' stage in the future.
>
> We leave.
>
> Jess apologises that I have had to see that, but the behaviour has to be sorted out, otherwise it is not fair on the other students who do behave.

I reflect on this narrative fragment. Having experienced the difficulties that sustained, low level disruption can do to how lessons are conducted, I can understand that it is problematic, however the anguish brought on by the use of 'isolation' is palpable in the narrative shared here. This is the end of the behaviour management strategy continuum and raises the question: is this a step too far in the quest for compliance?

For young people school behaviour management practices are often their first experience of state punishment and control (Deakin and Kupchik, 2016; Deakin and Kupchik, 2018;

Kupchik et al., 2015). Deakin and Kupchik argue that school behaviour management strategies function as part of a 'hidden curriculum' which socialises students into normative expectations (2018: 136). Schools take on the role of 'disciplinary power wielder' with a responsibility for producing citizens who will be capable of acceptable, governable behaviour.

This can cause fault lines along gendered, classed and raced lines. Being a 'good student' is not value free. Middle class children and young people use the cultural capital obtained through their experience to develop skills to engage with authority figures, such as teachers (see Bourdieu and Passerson, 2000; Lareau, 2003; Raby, 2005). In contrast, the behaviours learned by working class young people such as the value of 'having a laugh' can be treated as deviant and hence result in punishment at school (Willis, 2017). The impact of exclusionary practices can go well beyond the time spent at school. Illustrating the long-term consequences of behaviour management, it has been found that students who are suspended from school, are less likely to vote and volunteer as adults in their communities, years later (Kupchik and Catlaw, 2015; Kupchik, 2016).

The need to 'isolate' students who misbehave resonates with a history of imaginary geographies where 'imperfect' people who are seen to pose a threat to the dominant group in society are cast as 'polluting bodies' or 'folk devils' (Sibley, 1995: 49). What follows is that they must be located 'elsewhere'. This 'elsewhere' may be nowhere, or it might be a spatial periphery (ibid). Values associated with conformity are 'mapped' in ways which relegate others to places distant from the majority.

David Sibley (1995: 77) argues that 'spatial purification' is a key feature in the organisation of social space. For Sibley, the notion of abjection and pollution can be given a more explicit dimension. He develops this line of thinking when he describes accumulation under capitalism as a key imperative. Developed societies have become centres of consumption. Our desires to want things and the way that this is promoted has led to a reification of the symbolically pure individual. The imagery of advertising, for example, 'promotes cleanliness, purity, whiteness and spatial order' (1995: 78). We see germ-free environments where fighting germs is seen as a virtue. There is the identification of residues that must be 'expelled from the body, the home, the locality', with the consequence that there are increased feelings of abjection in relation to the 'other'. In such environments, Sibley argues,

‘difference will register as deviance, a source of threat to be kept out, through the erection of strong boundaries, or expelled’ (ibid.).

The concept of the ‘generalised other’ provides a means of spatialising the self and situating the self in in a full social and cultural context. The term was first used by George Herbert Mead and was an interpretation of the relationship between the self and other located in the social and material world. The social positioning of the self means that the boundary between self and other can be formed through a series of cultural representations which allows for the non-human world to also provide a context for selfhood. To animalise or de-humanise a minority group in this way not only constructs them as ‘bad objects’ to which the self relates but also legitimates persecution (Sibley, 1995).

Erving Goffman critically examines the role of institutions in the construction of ‘self’. He introduces us to the notion of ‘total institutions’. In his work *On the Characteristics of Total Institutions* (1961) Goffman explores how the process of hospitalisation affects a person’s self. Whilst the school may be far removed from the hospital, there are interesting parallels which can deepen our understanding of how an individual can be systematically worked on through the routine measures of an institution (Goffman, 1961: 26). According to Goffman there are a series of procedures and processes through which a person passes which act as an assault on their identity. He describes these as a gradual erasure of the previous self in favour of a self which corresponds with the institution. Thus, the individual encounters processes ‘by which a person’s self is mortified’ (Goffman, 1961: 14). This notion of *mortification of self* is developed and reinforced by a series of practices which seek to distance the self from the autonomy and competency that the individual may experience in a world beyond the confines of the institution. The elements of the mortification process begin during the admission procedure. This may involve the need to wear a standardised uniform, have their hair cut in a certain way, give up personal possessions. The individual is thus prevented from ‘presenting his usual image of himself to others’(ibid).

Goffman also suggests that the process may involve forms of ‘contaminative exposure’ (1961: 35). An example of this may be that a person may be requested to take part in confessional practices - couched as therapeutic, these nonetheless see the person’s ‘self’ altered, as they are required to expose thoughts and feelings to audiences of professionals or other inmates (Jacobsen and Kristiansen, 2015). In addition, there can be more subtle

assaults. Goffman argues that outside the total institution, a person is normally able to defend or protect his/her 'self' by establishing a distance between his/her self and the threatening situation. This can be done through a number of means, such as refusing to show signs of respect, expressing contempt for the situation or irony. If this is done within the boundaries of the total institution however the effect, rather than protecting the self and autonomy, is to expose the person to further violations which take the form of punishments. This is rationalised by staff as appropriate as the person is perceived to have shown a lack of cooperation or naughtiness. Thus, acts of self-protection, rather than being seen as a mechanism for the individual to distance or save his/her self from a degrading situation are instead used to justify how the individual needs correction to fit into the institutional and social arrangements of the institution (ibid). Goffman termed these processes *looping*.

This notion of *looping* is useful to us in analysis of the structuring of disciplinary measures with 'isolation' as the ultimate 'in-house' sanction. Students find themselves in perpetual motion of exhibiting behaviours which distance them from the perceived deficit only to find that these behaviours are in turn taken to be evidence of deviance and poor behaviour which results in further sanctions. Schools need to weigh up a complex set of factors in the decisions they make about adopting certain behavioural policy approaches. The culture of performativity and the increase in parental 'choice' adds pressure to the decision making (see Chapter 2). Poor results, academically and behaviourally, can dramatically affect a parent's decision to choose a school and where a school loses credibility with prospective parents it becomes harder to attract children who are 'good' behaviourally and academically (Deakin and Kupchik, 2018: 1375)

The confinement in individual booths located in a room designated for disciplinary purposes is not used by all schools but is a feature of behaviour policy in schools moving towards zero tolerance behaviour policies (see earlier this chapter). Whilst there is the view that it is 'barbaric'[15] nonetheless it is currently used as a legitimate disciplinary tool. Whilst schools will use such rooms differently it is not uncommon, as was the case here, for young people to be in the room for the whole school day in silence, accompanied to the toilet and to their lunch.

[15] https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/sep/02/barbaric-school-punishment-of-consequence-rooms-criticised-by-parents

A justification for the use of 'isolation' is that it is simultaneously punitive and reparative. The space and time alone gives the student time to reflect on misdemeanours and therefore repent. This is to confuse the practice of isolation with what can be a positive and liberating use of silence and solitude (Stern and Walejko, 2020). Exploring forms of silence can be a way of understanding how the power of silence can move from 'silencing', as seen in isolation booths, and its association as a tool of oppression and aggressive control, to the 'power of silence for democratic outcomes' (Lees, 2012: 114; Alerby, 2018).

The wider context, which we explored in the previous chapter, already sees places like Seachurch as geographically and economically on the margins – the 'end of the line' – it could be argued therefore that these young people are experiencing layers of isolation and marginalisation which exacerbates their feelings of anxiety and inadequacy.

After this visit I talked with the group of students about their views on the behaviour policy recently introduced at the school (the full detail of this can be found in the last section of this chapter). They talked about both 'isolation' and 'corrections'[16] as 'mad', primarily, and perhaps surprisingly, because you missed out on schoolwork.

Dan

> 'If I'm at a correction, I can't go to any interventions to help me with my work. The teachers want me to be better at maths, I want to be better at maths, so why send me to 'correction' when I could be staying anyway for an intervention that would make me better at maths……that's what everyone wants, isn't it?'

There is surprisingly little research that examines the use of 'isolation' as a behaviour management tool and the impact this has on the young people it affects. I hope to develop this as a future research project. Of note is that there are schools who do not use it. This challenges the justification that 'isolation' is an essential component of behaviour management strategies. As one of the potential participants of this planned future study, a

[16] A 'correction' is where students are required to stay after school normally for an hour, if they have infringed the behaviour policy during school time. It can also be known as a 'detention'. On the scale of sanctions, it is not as serious as 'isolation', but a series of 'corrections' can result in an escalation to 'isolation'.

mother whose son is often placed in isolation, shared with me: 'he messes about in class to hide the fact that he doesn't understand the work and then they give him word searches to do in isolation and he gets even further behind. They couldn't put him in there on his own like that in prison, could they?.....and they call it a school!'

Part II: A window to new understandings

At the heart of the proposed counter-narrative is the search for context. Understanding context engenders a re-imagining of the change agenda such that it privileges space, place, the relational and local knowledges. We explored in Chapter 3 how an assemblage of concepts can assist us in mapping out how change can be framed when these ideas are applied to a school. The school becomes re-storied in the local, not in binary opposition to the national or the global but in dialogue with it. This has multiple benefits. Not only does the change proposed become aligned to the institutional and personal landscapes it affects, it also complicates the narrative in a positive way - thus, avoiding the simplified narratives that fall into well-worn tropes such as 'deficit' and 'lack of ambition'. Space and place are understood to be in relation to, and in dialogue with, each other. Attuning to local landscapes leads to a greater depth of knowledge about how places work and as Massey urges place is then seen not just place 'as is' but as *meeting place*.

6.5 We still call it 'top school' here

The following two sets of texts, from field notes taken early on in the project, illustrate in different ways how fragments of context are missed by the senior leadership team at Longton Academy. They are slivers of context in two Continuous Professional Development (CPD)[17] meetings which I attend with Oliver. The reader may ask why I have chosen to see these narrative fragments as a window to new understandings, when they could easily be viewed as evidence of the control and containment this thesis has examined so far. My answer is that by working narratively in a shared inquiry space I know that Oliver noticed them too. As a newly qualified teacher, there is some hope that he will not leave the profession early but will stay and his awareness of the missed opportunities will foster his ability to embrace multiple narratives and understand how they are of value.

[17] Continuous Professional Development has become a feature of training for teachers. It forms part of a suite of initiatives which mirror business cultures. This has been increasing and proliferated when performance related pay was introduced for teachers from 1 September 2013. This altered pay and appraisal policies.

From field notes dated 21 November 2016

Following emails to the Deputy Head Teacher asking if it is possible for me to attend some of the school CPD sessions, I am invited to attend whichever sessions I am able to and where the whole school is coming together, as opposed to some Mondays where CPD is done in subject groups. These take place after school in the school library. I arrange to meet up with Oliver and accompany him to the meeting.

The focus of today's session is concerns about the progress of the current Y11 students. Teachers have been asked to input tracking data on this current GCSE cohort. Following analysis of this data concerns were raised by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) that a high proportion of students were not on track to achieve the required/target standard of 70% 3 Levels of Progress (LOP) and 30% 4 LOP.

The session is led by Alex, the Deputy Head Teacher. He describes the data as 'worrying' and although he is aware that there are some 'mitigating factors' the data suggests that immediate action is required to address the concerns.

What is needed is a 'positive mind-set' from the teaching team and a 'belief' that the students can make this progress and that their teaching will secure this. If teachers are worried, they 'must ask the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to help you'. Teachers needed to develop a 'growth mind-set'. The Deputy Head is keen to stress however the importance of not allowing the students to sense the level of worry, 'we don't communicate our concerns to our students'.

He goes on to talk about how this can be achieved with examples from his own practice. 'We will achieve this with high quality Wave 1 Teaching[18]'….. 'your day to day teaching practice is crucial'…….. 'your teaching is absolutely critical'. 'In my own lessons I ask students to do their best work on assessed pieces. If they make progress, I say that I will leave them alone!' (he smiles).

'This year there will be challenge…..we must all expect challenge'

[18] Waves of Intervention: a national teaching strategy in England.

This raises questions for me about the extent to which this year is different to the previous year? And why?

'There will be both challenge and support'

At this point Alex hands over to David another member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) to talk about how to input the data and what interventions would look like.*

Currently the school runs a series of interventions for Y11 which take place immediately after the normal school day finishes at 3:15 p.m. Students who are 'of concern' are requested to stay for subject specific intervention 'lessons'. David explains that teachers should identify those students who they felt may not make the expected levels of progress and complete a spreadsheet on SISRA[19]. Once the data had flagged up which students require interventions then teachers are asked to input which combinations of strategies they would use from a circulated list.

The teachers are shown the example of one student who has been identified as being below the level of progress expected in 6 subjects. It is acknowledged that there is a tension between support in English, Maths and Science and other subjects as these are now currently weighted as double for the purposes of tracking school progress. Once completed the system will produce a personal timetable for each identified student detailing which days and which subject interventions should be attended. For some students it became clear that this would entail them staying after school every day.

The group is also shown an example of an English set. The data could be set up to show a class in addition to individual students. Students who in the most recent data input were cause for concern were highlighted in red. It appears that almost half the class were highlighted.

[19] SISRA is an educational data management package that has been purchased by the school involved in this study.

When I speak with Oliver after the meeting, he shares his concerns with me about the scale of the task the teachers are being asked to address… 'that English class we were shown in there are the top set! And there are four sets! You can see what we are up against.'

'We are currently in week 11' explains David, he explains to the teachers that they therefore have tight timescales for the suggested interventions. A proactive approach from teachers is asked for with the request that 'teachers dictate the agenda' - *as opposed to students, I wonder?*

Interventions can take the form of compulsory homework at school or involving parents with concerns.

David has finished speaking. The teachers have been sitting through this training session in silence for just under an hour. There are now five minutes for questions. I make a note to remember that at no point are the teachers asked for comments or ideas – this condensed question time is merely for them to check their understanding of the processes.

One teacher asks about an individual student who like many of the students is carrying out a high number of hours of paid work outside of school. The response from the SLT is that this will be tackled with the family who will be advised that this is not an acceptable situation in Y11.

I have pondered a great deal about this since this visit…what is the context of this student's family and their financial situation? Significant questions are raised about the purpose of education and the tensions between education and work indeed education and life. What conditions will encourage this young man to 'make the required progress' will he see this as important?

I was struck by the speed of the meeting and the limited time for questions…I noted that every time I visit, I am left feeling almost breathless with the speed at which the SLT walk, talk and conduct meetings. Is this deliberate? A way of transmitting to staff

the urgency of the job in hand?.....does it match what is seen as the optimal pace of a lesson? I will try to find out!

The pace was such that there was limited time for reflection and questions with David appearing to get quite agitated and frustrated that questions were being asked.

The next question raises the concern that for certain students there is a conflict between 'correction time' and 'work time'. The teacher expresses her concern that for a number of students their time after school was limited to 'correction time' as a punishment for behaviour during the school day and this prevented them from attending the planned interventions…for some, she went on to say 'correction time' may be seen as preferable as 'staring at a wall was easier that tackling an intervention session'.

This is in contrast to the views that the participant students in this study shared with me that they would much prefer to be in the 'intervention' session as it would help them with their work as opposed to the 'correction' session which they realised was a punishment but they saw as a waste of time.

In this narrative fragment, we hear the teachers urged to develop a 'positive mind-set' to combat the anxiety that too many students are currently not 'on track' to perform as the school has planned. The time for questions from the teachers was limited to five minutes at the end of the session. As in keeping with the new school rules, teachers had to put their hand up to ask a question and only a response form the SLT was allowed, thus modelling how the students should ask questions of the teacher in lessons. The effective of this was to limit any debate and to miss an opportunity to find out the honest views of the teachers and to dig deeper into what the barriers might be for the young people of Seachurch failing to 'make the grade'. Only in the final moments of the meeting did one teacher venture to suggest that one such barrier might be that for many of the students their families relied upon them to have paid work outside of school to support the family income.

From field notes dated 10 October 2016

Today's session is led by the Head Teacher. It is an opportunity to outline his expectations of how the forthcoming open evening should be conducted.

The head teacher enters the room and then raises his hand. Even though I have now experienced this on several occasions, I still feel uncomfortable with this school rule. The teachers around me shift uneasily. I sense that they are sharing my discomfort.

As silence falls the Head Teacher begins to talk about the importance of the open evening which is happening the following week. He is at pains to stress that this is now a 'new' school and teachers should talk as if it is. He shares concerns that the school needs to attract not only as many students as possible but also 'quality' students. I make a note to consider the implications of his 'quality' as well as quantity approach. When asked by parents about the school the collective line is that Longton Academy Seachurch is a new school, not yet rated by Ofsted, and that teaching and learning is improving every week. It is important, he stresses, to make sure that the new name should be used at all times and anyone referring to it by the old name of Seachurch School should be corrected. He recalls the following story to reinforce his point:

'The other day I was talking to one of the student's grandfather's about how the school has changed. I explained that it was important that everyone used the new name and no longer called it Seachurch School. He replied, 'well, we all still call it 'top school' here'. I said that it should be called Longton Academy Seachurch as it is now part of the Longton Academy Trust. This is what I am expecting you to do and especially next Thursday.'

*I make a note to dig deeply into this narrative fragment. I annotate his comments in my notebook with the following: * this makes me feel really uncomfortable – no irony – no fondness that the local community and former students, who are now parents and grandparents, have a special name for the school – why?*

The meeting continues with the Head Teacher suggesting phrases that the teachers might use such as 'your son/daughter will be challenged here' and suggesting that

> teachers script out their response to the question ‘how are you going to develop my child?’.
>
> The meeting is then closed by the Head Teacher. There is no time for questions from the teachers who have been sitting silently throughout.
>
> I glance at Oliver who raises his eyebrows and then, when it feels safe to talk, suggests we go somewhere else to have a chat.

As I came to revisit this research text, I am struck by two fragments. Firstly, the Head Teacher’s use of the phrase ‘quality student’.

Deborah Youdell offers a useful metaphor of *educational triage* to explain how intersecting discourses of conduct and ability have emerged from parental choice policies and the restructuring and diversification of state education and the establishment of education markets. This, she argues, has enabled a ‘hegemony of individualism’ (2004: 427) which encourages practices which constitute the triage of ‘ideal, acceptable and unacceptable learners – the ‘safe’, ‘treatable’ and ‘hopeless’ student’ (2004: 428). The result of an education marketplace which is underpinned by individualism, is an associated stratification of students based on their ability to deliver in exams and thus generate ‘success’ for the school. Practices develop which legitimate locating responsibility for this ‘success’ in the person of the individual student and furthermore, increases the advantage afforded certain sections of communities whilst exacerbating disadvantages faced by others (ibid: 410).

Secondly, the Head Teacher’s story about the school name. I share it again with Oliver during our subsequent conversation and we discuss our reactions to it. He, like me, feels that in the desire to present the school as all ‘new’, it has distanced itself from its local history and from the people, the families who for generations have been schooled there. In air brushing out what has gone before, the Head Teacher has erased precious connections that local people have to the school and an attachment to ‘their’ school, situated at the top of the hill that leads down to the sea shore – hence, to them, ‘top school’.

We can perhaps have some sympathy with the new Head Teacher who had been tasked with ‘turning this school around’. The fact that it has so recently been classified by Ofsted

inspectors as ‘Inadequate’, could be argued gives him little choice but to re-invent it. The new uniform, the new name, the new signage, the influx of new teachers, the new school hours, the new behaviour policy – all signals that every measure possible is being taken to ensure that this school will no longer be viewed as ‘inadequate’ next time around. Yet, something bothered me and bothered Oliver too. The story of the grandfather sharing with the Head Teacher the name that he and his old schoolmates had for the school, after what might have been fifty or sixty years, only to be corrected by him. In Chapter 2, when examining the narratives of control, we reflected on the works of David Harvey, that in our increasingly neoliberal world we are exposed to divisions….

> ‘Divisions of labour, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought, reproductive activities, attachment to land and habits of the heart’
> (Harvey, 2005: 3)

Harvey was writing in 2005 and reasons for such concerns have intensified since then as the current political landscape of so many countries sees the seeds of division taking hold. The story shared by the Head Teacher, a small but powerful and poignant story, that what is being lost in the drive for increased standards and centrally mandated change is resulting in a loss of attachment to ‘habits of the heart’.

6.6 Challenging the corridors of power

As I made the visits to the school over the months, the teachers told me of the changes that had been implemented. These had been met with varying levels of enthusiasm. There was agreement amongst the teachers that issues of behaviour needed to be tackled. The series of Ofsted reports which had precipitated the enforced academy takeover of the school had highlighted specific concerns about the behaviour they observed. Jess had been quick to explain that if ‘students don’t behave then they don’t learn’ and Oliver had shared that a focus on a collective and consistent approach from the teachers to dealing with behaviour issues had made a significant improvement to how smoothly lessons were running and created more time for teachers to actually teach. However, there was one change that both teachers and students had found particularly problematic.

As part of their shock tactics to herald a ‘new’ school with new ways of working the SLT had decided that they would introduce ‘silent corridors’. They had witnessed this at Hargreave

Academy (the site of Louise and Oliver's visit detailed at the start of this chapter). Like many of the other behaviour management policies adopted by the Hargreave Academy trust chain, the idea of silent corridors had its origin in the no excuses model developed in the United States. This element of the policy dictated that every student would stay in the silent state that was required of them in the classroom even as they entered the corridors to move on to the next lesson. The effect of this was that students would therefore be required to be silent throughout the school day apart from when they were outside at break times and at lunchtime. Students were tasked with walking along the left side of the corridors to enable staff to patrol down the right side to enforce the new rule.

The following narrative fragment is from an early discussion I had with Michael about some of the changes.

From field notes dated 20 July 2016

> *So it is interesting to see the changes here because many of them seem not to have been an evolving process - it was suddenly, on this day, there is a different uniform, the behaviour policy is different, the logo, the website….it is different….*
>
> Yes, a different language. It has probably been harder for staff who worked in Seachurch in the old time before it became part of the academy chain, because they are still surrounded by the same buildings and things and the way they did things before is now totally gone.
>
> *I wonder if over time do those changes evolve? Does it become a two-way process with the decision makers….and I wonder who are the decision makers?……do they listen and evaluate the changes and have that input from the teachers and the students?….*
>
> Yes, there needs to be that…I know they tried the silent corridors here and it didn't work. I didn't think it would work and it didn't. But then again there are some things that they have tried that I didn't think would work that have worked. So, it wasn't like, oh I can see that this isn't going to work at all……. but the silent corridors…..people were too noisy going down corridors so yes, something had to be

done, because they were quite loud and boisterous going down corridors and obviously with the timetables not quite matching – Y9,10 and 11 have a different break to 7 and 8 and lunch times are different, so there is a need for when half the school come out of lesson for break the other half of school is still in lessons and vice versa, so it does need to be quiet when they are going around the corridors.

They went for silent corridors and staff were supposed to give corrections for people walking in the corridors when they should be silent and obviously there were loads and loads of corrections for that. I mean there were good kids who were getting corrections because they just happened to walk round a corner and were chatting to their friend and a member of staff was there and here you are - a correction – talking in silent corridor and it kind of …I think the kids just thought oh, what sort of school is this where you're not in lesson but you're not allowed to talk? So that happened…I can't remember how long they did that for, but there was obviously talk from some students and the school council to senior staff or whatever ….how the students felt about it and possibly how the staff felt about it I think…I don't know and then the Head and senior leaders decided to change it. We will get rid of silent corridors but you've got to be quiet, which might have been what they were aiming for in the first place and this was the way they went about it because then they could say well, actually if we have quiet corridors, quiet and calm corridors, that's fine but if it starts being noisy you know what's going to happen, we will go back to silence and all the corrections. So, whether it was how ….I don't think it has, but that's how it's worked out to be, because I think the silent corridors was something that was at other schools and they've tried to implement it here, as you said, right we're all doing this regardless. So at least there has been some give and take in some areas and if it is that little local thing…it doesn't work here …this does, and the aim is for us to be calm in corridors so we don't disturb lessons well, actually here at Seachurch it is calm in corridors not silent, but calm and quiet and lessons aren't disturbed which is what you want. So, I don't know.

I know the NQTs of which Oliver* and Louise* are part of, I think they spent two or three days last week at a school where the feedback from another teacher Rob* who is an English teacher, an NQT, and came back and said it's almost Orwellian the fact that they clamp down on absolutely everything, so the kids are supressed. They kind

> of walk down …with their heads down and he said I wouldn't want to work there. Oh god, I wouldn't want to be a kid there because it's so suppressive and it stops creativity and it stops all this and things so that's not part of this chain, I'm fairly sure it's not, but whether that's part of a chain or a trust or whatever it is and all the schools are the same in that I really don't know but I know Alex is aware of it because he said he wasn't surprised when they went and they all came back and said oh my god I can't wait to come back to Seachurch. I'd hate to work in that school like that which in some ways is a positive thing (Michael laughs) very much so because you are thinking well, I don't agree with everything here but oh out there! - I'd rather have this!

This narrative fragment raises questions relating to how change is firstly implemented and then potentially moderated. As we go on to hear later in this chapter, the views of the students themselves shed further light on how the students working *with* the teachers managed to push back on the decision to have totally silent corridors.

Throughout this study, when working within a three-dimensional inquiry space, surprising connections emerged, and realisations dawned that in many ways the students shared the same concerns as the teachers. This narrative fragment illustrates the alignment that came from a sense of injustice that students who had never been in 'correction' were turning up, en masse after school to sit in the hall as a result of speaking quietly to a friend as they moved through the corridors of Longton Academy – 'good kids' who had never had a correction before. This alarmed both the teachers and the students. Michael's comment 'well actually here at Seachurch it is calm in corridors not silent' gives us a sense of place and of how change can only be successfully mandated if it fits with a sense of place. As Michael observes 'it is that little local thing' that influenced the decision to row back from total silence and which meant that the changed was accepted and enacted.

Scratch the surface of this story and the power of the collective student voice can be contrasted with the passive voice that Michael uses in the telling of it. When talking about the decisions made, he always says 'they' or 'their' never 'we'. It as if he has removed himself from any decision making. Perhaps as a protection? But then I reflect the way that the teachers are treated in meetings, for example, where we have seen that they are required to sit

in silence and follow the instructions form the SLT as if students themselves, in many ways infantilises them. Their professional autonomy and agency given little space to be exercised.

In mapping our counternarrative a critical element is the centrality of the relational. In this inquiry what came as a surprise was the inherent power that emanated from the relationship of student working *with* teacher. Finding space to develop a shared understanding of what 'school improvement' might look like opens up possibilities to envisage the school not only differently but to pragmatically make incremental changes that have an increased chance of working.

From field notes dated 15 March 2017

> I visit the school to meet with the Y9/10 representatives of the School Council. Lindsey had emailed me to let me know when the meetings would take place and was happy for me to attend whenever I could.
>
> I start by asking them what changes they had seen at the school the students remembered the summer term before the school was taken over by the academy.
>
> Sam:
> There were some big changes. The changes are smaller now. There were lots of rumours and we weren't sure what was going to happen. We knew that lots of teachers were leaving, well leaving…… some of them were sacked – *(they look at each other and wonder if they might have spoken out of turn).*
>
> Amy:
> We needed a new uniform. We got back in September and it was difficult because you know the new Y7s were at school for the day before us, so they knew more than we did about what was happening. Do you remember that Jack's* sister started, and she was telling everyone about how strict it was and how all the teachers were new?
>
> Holly:

The layout of the school changed so they got rid of all the mobile classrooms and put the departments together. That was ok getting rid of the mobile classrooms cos they weren't nice, and they were cold, and you had to go a long way to use the toilets.

Libby:
We all started on the next day and we remember that some of us had to line up outside and some of us in the hall and then we found out who our tutors were.

How did you feel?

Rebecca:
We felt nervous but also excited. We looked smarter.

How did you find out about the new uniform?

Marcia:
We found out in the summer before the holiday. We got free vouchers for a new tie and a blazer. No one had given us anything before. Before that we had to wear a jumper. The blazers are smarter. They have lots of pockets which we need now because we can't have our bags with us anymore.

Holly:
I miss having my bag. It takes us much longer now to get to and from PE because we have to get our bags out of our lockers. It was good that we all got a locker though.

Sam:
There were so many new teachers we have form time now with our tutors. They do a student briefing. In Seachurch School you could just skive but you can't skive any more. They watch you like a hawk! You can see them peering in through the glass in the doors!

Marcia:
There are a lot more rules. But they have been flexible. The School Council has changed things. Like the silent corridors we just got together and said this needs to be

changed. So, they are now ‘quiet and calm’ corridors. It wasn’t fair. We were like raging. Everyone was in correction and whilst they were putting one person in correction someone else was talking. You couldn’t talk with your friends. It’s better now.

Holly:
Family dining that hasn’t worked either. We had to sit in forms and sometimes you want to sit with different people. It looked good on paper, but it didn’t work. There were servers and wipers, but we didn’t like it.

Amy:
The new teachers have learned the rules, it’s fresh so it’s been easier for them.

James:
But then like the hands up…

Yes, I’ve seen that what does that mean, do you have to be quiet?

James:
Yes, when the teacher puts their hand up, we need to look at them and put our hands up and be quiet. It’s difficult because sometimes you are reading something or doing work when you are looking at your book and you don’t see the teacher and it stops you concentrating on your work.

Holly:
Yes, I’ve seen a class where the teacher waited twenty minutes for someone to put their hand up, just one person.

Libby:
Are you sure it was twenty minutes, that’s ages?

Holly:
Well, maybe it wasn’t quite twenty minutes, but it was a long time. A long time we were doing nothing, not learning anything.

Sam:
Then they say ‘track on me’ that means look at the teacher. I don’t know why they all have to say ‘track on me’?

Dan:
They also say ‘off task’ which means you’re not working but sometimes you are thinking.

What about the coloured blocks I have seen, what are they for?

Amy:
You mean these *(Amy gets one out of a box on the table)* they are prisms. They don’t work. I don’t know why we have those. I don’t believe in them. What’s supposed to happen is that everyone has one on their desk and you can have it turned on ‘green’ if you understand it, ‘orange’ if you’re not sure and ‘red’ if you don’t get it. But often the teachers don’t notice so if you have someone sitting in front of you, they can’t see yours.

Sam:
Yes, and I have had mine turned to red and the teacher didn’t come so I waited and timed it because it had happened to me before and it took the teacher seven minutes to come and help me and then I got a correction for not doing enough work so I don’t bother with them now.

Marcia:
Lots of the teachers don’t like them but when Mr. Graham* (the head teacher) comes in he’s always asking where they are, and the teachers have to use them.

James:
They must have cost a lot of money too and we need the money for other things like rugby balls and goal posts.

One of you were talking about having a correction, is that like a detention? That's what we called them when I was at school.

Rebecca:
Yes, it's a detention. You have to stay for half an hour at the end of school.

What sort of things might you get a correction for?

Holly:
If you done something bad you can go straight to a correction but normally you get a 'warning' then it goes in your planner, then you get a correction. You can have two corrections in a day so that means you have to stay for an hour. Or there's 'red line' then you go to 'isolation'.

What's 'isolation'?

Libby:
That's when you have to sit in a small space, and you can't see anything.

Rebecca:
There's also coloured reports now.

Dan:
Yes, I don't understand those.

Rebecca:
Yes, I'm not sure either. I think you get a different colour if you've had corrections. Do they do them every two weeks? I'm not sure? Is it green that's bad?

Amy:
It is much more strict - but I suppose it's given us boundaries. Yes, the students have changed because the school has changed.

Marcia:

Before the teachers didn't care, some of the old teachers.

Rebecca:
It's clearer now. It was a challenge at first, but we are getting used to it and they have changed some of the rules. Before students could just do anything. Do you remember that group of girls who used to sit on the field smoking? The teachers would stand there watching them, and they didn't do anything.

Now they are always watching you, if something bad happens they call for other teachers.

Are they the teachers that have the walkie talkies?

Sam:
Yeah, they're the big dogs!....the 'swat team'! They come in the classroom.

We get visits from them and when they come in the teachers change.

Do they come to the classroom to see what's going on often?

James:
Yes, a lot.

We had a visitor today and the teachers are really different, like really positive, and then when they go out, they're like what are you all doing?

Is there anything about the behaviour policy that you would still like to change?

Dan:
Well, I don't understand why you can get a correction in a correction, if you see what I mean. Like you're in there anyway. Also, if you get a correction for behaviour like if you're not listening then you can't go to intervention. I don't understand that - like I'm not good at maths and I want to be better at maths so I go to maths intervention

but If I get a correction then I can't go and surely it's better for me and better for the school if I get better at maths?

What's an intervention?

Dan:
It's like if you need extra help with stuff you can go after school. The Y11s have them to help with their GCSEs. It's like now you have to go to fifty interventions to get to go to Prom.

Fifty! That sounds like a lot?
Dan:
Well I suppose it's over the whole year.

Do you think having a school council is good?
Dan:
Yes, we have changed things, they do listen. Like the lunch committee changed the lunch. We also get to choose the teachers. Like some of us have been to teacher interviews. We try to choose good teachers but sometimes they lie and tell us things that aren't true and like you can be different in an interview than you really are. Sometimes they do a part of a lesson but even then, you can't always tell. We have a good question though that we always ask.

Oooh, what's the question?
Dan:
If you were a chocolate biscuit what sort of biscuit would you be?

Yes, that is a good question!
Dan:
Yes, that sorts them out a bit - you can find out more what they're really like. We had this one teacher, and do you know what they said? They said a 'milky bar'. What sort of an answer is that! That's not even a biscuit! Then they started asking us what flavour crisp would we be and we're like - hey that's not what we're on about.

> We want to find out what they like about their subject and do they believe in every student.
>
> *There is a pause and then Dan asks Tony, who has accompanied me on this trip,… 'What sort of biscuit would you be?' - 'I'd be a double choc chip' replies Tony, (Mmm, they say) What about you? (they turn to me) 'I'm not sure, I think perhaps a chocolate hobnob' (good choice, they say).*

I meet up with the students on other occasions as a group and occasionally bump into them individually around school. The text that emerged from this first meeting, however, exemplifies what a refreshing and insightful dimension they bring to the assessment of changes that have been brought about. They paint a nuanced picture of which changes they feel have worked and which need to be changed or scrapped altogether. Their narratives are at the heart of the counternarrative I offer here. Listening to them talk so thoughtfully about the changes had a profound effect on the trajectory of the study and conceptual cartography which I developed to underpin it. Their desire to learn and their observations that many of the changes actually impeded learning. The prisms - a mere gadget that evidently did not work and were not bothered with unless the head teacher visited the class. The idea that you could get a 'correction' in a 'correction' and that anyway this would stop you from attending an 'intervention' where you might actually learn something. In contrast, some of the changes that might to an outsider look like merely part of an empty re-branding exercise, like the new school uniform with blazers – welcomed by the students as they felt smarter and that in the giving of the blazer someone actually cared.

For the students their sense of place, I argue, gives them what Relph would term an 'authenticity' (1976). Rather than 'no sense of place' which involves 'no awareness of the deep and symbolic significance of places and no appreciation of their identities' (ibid: 82) the students' demonstration of the link to place develops in them an authentic involvement which can have a critical and powerful impact. It is a sense of place which can move them from a *placelessness* to become 'existential insiders' who have a deep and complete identity with place (see Relph, 1976: 51 -55).

As part of the inquiry, I ask the student group if they are comfortable with me sharing some of their observations with the teachers who are also participating in the study. They are happy

for me to do so. What emerges from making this connection is that the teachers are surprised - they are surprised that the students have thought about the changes so deeply and perhaps, even more so, they are surprised that they agree with nearly everything the students have said. In one of our conversations, Oliver remarks that he never gets the time to talk with the students, in the way that I describe. He asks me if I might come back to the school at the end of the project to facilitate further discussions. How much more, he wonders, could he find out from the students and powerfully, how much more leverage would this give the teachers in challenging the senior leadership team when they feel the changes suggested are inappropriate for this school in this place.

For the students what emerges is their desire to feel safe at school, to be listened to and to work with their teachers – teachers who, as Dan sums it up, – 'believe in every student'.

6.7 Conclusion

In Part I of this chapter we get a palpable sense of how the narratives of control examined in Chapter 2 impact directly on how schools operate. It highlights the tensions and dilemmas that teachers face in navigating the pressures that come from multiple sources. With a Boris Johnson led Conservative government just in place in the UK as this thesis comes to an end, the concern over draconian behaviour policies in schools is only set to be exacerbated. Within weeks of office, funding plans for schools are being linked to an increase in tough sanctions for problem students. There are plans to set up special schools to deal with those who have been excluded rather than constructive solutions to how these can be avoided. A hardening of the rhetoric deepens concerns that the United Kingdom is seeing a resurgence of the neo-conservative mantras.

Yet, the glimpses that we see of the students' engagement and refreshingly honest and accurate view of how things are, and what changes have worked, and which need to be revised, coupled with Oliver's sensitivity and awareness of the positive impact of change located in the multiple landscapes of Seachurch allow us to move on to the final chapter which turns to the possibility of hope.

Chapter 7

'Hope is rooted in men's incompletion; from which they move out in constant search which can be carried out only in communion with others. Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it……As long as I fight, I am moved by hope'

Paulo Freire, 1970: 91-92

'Possibility, therefore, that is partial existence of conditions which is still by no means already sufficient for their realisation, this constitutes the sphere in which nothing whatsoever can be too beautiful not to be true'

Ernst Bloch, 1986: 865

Chapter 7: CONCLUSIONS AND THE CASE FOR HOPE

7.1 Overview

7.2 The complexity of 'hope' in education

7.3 The nature of hope

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7.4 Reclaiming the soul of education as a craft of *place as meeting place*

7.1 Overview

It may seem strange to conclude this thesis with an extended case for 'hope'. In many ways this story does not have a 'happy ending' and it may appear that the narratives shared and explored might lead us closer to a feeling of hopelessness. Of the key participants, only Jess

remains at Seachurch. As her first 'teacher story' reveals, it was she who was the only one of the participants to have been at Longton Academy when it was still Seachurch School. Despite the personal hurt it had caused her to absorb every change that was asked of her, we come to understand from her narrative how wedded she is to the place. She is now bringing up her own three children in this place and throughout our time together it was clear that she valued it. Perhaps it was her fondness for her own schooling experience which has motivated her to try to replicate that for the students in Seachurch.

One comment she made early in our time together has stuck with me. We see in Chapter 6 how the constant changes to her role mean that she felt that she 'effectively disappeared'. I reflect upon that often. Change agendas which are distanced from people and from places can have such a significant impact which can often become forgotten as people are moved across, upwards and downwards on a spreadsheet with little thought of their own narratives and how these intersect with the narratives of others and of the institution.

Jess was always cautious - cautious of how her own narrative fitted in to the institutional narrative of Longton Academy. That narrative had been deliberately planned to promote newness and dynamism. Remember my first visit to the school where Alex marched me around the school at such a speed that I was out of breath - a way of physically transmitting the sense of urgency and energy needed to 'turn this school around'. Such a turnaround involved some decisions which shook the school to its very core. The head teacher's nervousness that the parents and grandparents of Seachurch would remember and refer to the school as 'top school' rather than Longton Academy Seachurch, is a sliver of a story. Yet, such a sliver gives us such a powerful insight into how the school improvement agenda was planned out and enacted by the senior leadership team. Incremental and consensual change, building on the school's foundations, its place in the community, is not enough. It is 'creative destruction' (Harvey, 2005; Klein, 2007) which delivers.

Of the other teachers who took part, Michael in the end felt that the push and pull of his family commitments could not be reconciled with staying at Longton Academy. Louise, as we saw in Chapter 6, left teaching all together part way through the study. As for Oliver, the following narrative fragment describes our final meeting:

From field notes dated 10 July 2018:

On my final visit to the school I arrange to meet Oliver. For the first time we end up in his classroom. In all our other conversations we had met in the staff room or in a meeting room. I am struck by how neatly it is organised but then reflect that actually I am not all that surprised. I have purposely not taken my recording device with me and Oliver seems surprised. It would have been no problem, he says, to have recorded our last conversation at Longton Academy. The researcher in me is initially frustrated and wonder if I have been naïve to have not captured every word of this last encounter, the person I am feels that this is appropriate….in some invisible way we have both moved 'beyond' and it feels right that we should talk, possibly for the last time in this place, without an intervention. I decide to write some notes, conscious that I suddenly don't want Oliver to feel that I am not going to capture his last words.

Oliver has not told me that he will be leaving Seachurch, but something in the tone of his recent emails, or something shared in our conversations together has given me a sixth sense that this is what he is going to tell me. Sure enough, he does. I am struck by how emotional I feel. He goes on to describe how hard it was to tell his students the news.

'I didn't want to do it', he tells me, 'but then one of the other teachers thought everyone knew and told his class, so I was sort of forced to do it'. He goes on… 'I said to them, I have some news to tell you and Jack* says you're leaving Sir aren't you? So I say, 'yes', and then he says 'I knew it, everyone good leaves us in the end' and then I worry that I am going to cry in front of the whole class and then George* says 'don't worry Sir, there won't ever be a right time to go, if you stay for us, for our GCSEs next year, then you will be leaving the Year 9s' I am so grateful to him and then try to explain that I am moving to be able to live with my girlfriend as we both have jobs in the same city. It is one of the hardest things I have had to do. They are great kids and they deserve great teachers.'

Both of us now are close to tears. I try to compose myself and so does he.

He continues: 'They get a really raw deal here. Do you remember how hard it was for me to get them out of school for fixtures and things…we talked about that didn't we?

Well, I managed to get funding for a minibus. I was really chuffed and so were the kids. We were planning to go out when the exams were over, in the summer. I came in last Monday and found out it had been nicked…….can you believe that? We had gone to the police and they said there is not a lot we can do. Nothing picked up who had done it and they said there are no speed cameras between here and [redacted] (*the nearest port)* and so they just ship them abroad. I still can't believe it!'

We reflect together about him leaving, about all the other teachers who have left, in particular those who were integral to this study. Louise, who in her second year of teaching decided the pressure was too much for her; Michael, whose family situation had changed and who had been experiencing a crisis of confidence in the quality of his teaching and wasn't sure he could continue to keep so many plates spinning – it was the teaching plate which toppled; Alex, the one member of the senior leadership team who had for so long seemed to embody the human touch so longed for and respected by the teaching team and the students, now deputy head at a different school. Now Oliver, unable to stay because his girlfriend, also a teacher, could not find work close enough for them to be together after their five years apart.

Oliver tells me that he has found a new job in a city secondary school. When he went to visit it, he was impressed by the culture of the school. He tells me that their results are better than Longton Academy and they are therefore under less pressure. Their approach to discipline is quite different too. 'They try to engage more with the students, you know, ask them why they have forgotten something and then work with them to help them…..I think that's a better way of doing it'. He will be the Head of P.E., some achievement for a twenty-four-year-old, in his third year of teaching. I say that I'm impressed and that I am sure he will be great. He smiles broadly and seems pleased.

He asks how my work is progressing and we talk about the project and the writing I will be doing. I promise to continue to send him sections of the work and he says that he will be eager to see it.

We talk about what we have both learned and he says that being part of the study has given him space to reflect on his work and the school and he thanks me for that. I am

> touched by this and say that he should not be thanking me. He has been such an important part of the inquiry and I am so grateful to him for his time and his candour. 'I think about things differently now…….. I also hope this place is ok…I will miss it and miss the kids very much' he shares with me.
>
> As we get up when it is time for me to leave, he promises to stay in touch. Perhaps I could do some research at his new school? he offers, 'I will miss our chats' he says, and I know that so will I.

I remember driving away from the school on that day deep in thought - Oliver's story of the stolen minibus a powerful illustration of what this school, like many others, is up against. I reflect on his description of the way that two of the boys in his class had reacted to the news that he was leaving and his response to them - a reminder of the centrality of relationships and the emotional connection that develops between teacher and student and the impact of this on identity and self-efficacy. As I drive I consider how easy it would be to feel a sense of despair - Jack's* words 'everyone good leaves us in the end' is a deeply felt anguish that reinforces the narrative of a school in a place 'at the end of line' which even if it can attract 'good' teachers, it cannot keep them. This narrative fragment brings with it a sense of loss which strikes at the heart of the place and the people and their sense of marginalisation.

My mind wanders back to our previous conversations and one comment resonates with me. During one of our conversations we had talked about the pressure that he, his fellow teachers, and the students were under. I remember us talking about how this could be challenged. I also remember Oliver reflecting that the challenge could come from teachers but how would you do it? 'You ask where the challenge could come from…it could come from teachers but how would you do it?' This question of 'how' vexed both of us.

In taking a narrative approach to this study, the participants and I created our own three-dimensional inquiry space. It was in this space that narratives were shared between student, teacher and researcher. From the choice of methodology this work sought to consistently examine experience through the Deweyan belief that respect for experience must also be respect for its possibilities. As we came together, we could feel and move to the rhythm of Seachurch, this small English coastal town. Through our shared narratives, we realised how much we had in common and how much this place could teach us about what needed to

change but also about what could, and should, stay the same. The narratives were a way of understanding and respecting and learning from experience.

Although in many of the narrative fragments we experienced a 'discourse of containment' which has the power to produce a 'culture of containment' (Popen, 2002: 386) and described the claustrophobia of school life, lived in the shadows of a prescriptive and mechanistic system of control, we can still see glimpses of hope. It is a hope grounded in the belief that by harnessing the light of local knowledge we can craft an educational experience which is attuned to the teachers and students of a particular place, at a particular time and creates space for the political, the space to answer Oliver's question – 'we could do it, but how?'. To some extent this requires a re-imagining of education for the future school and of an alternative imagining of the spatialising of the places schools serve.

The narrative of 'deficit' - a lack of aspiration, a lack of vision, a lack of drive, a lack of pride, all diminish when explored through the lens of connectivity in space and place. This sense of a shared purpose gives us hope that there may be other ways and is why it is to 'hope' that this final chapter turns. It draws together the theoretical strands that have been carried through this work. In illuminating how hope and possibility can be borne out of space and place and the experience and knowledge of those living and working in Seachurch, or any other school in any other town or suburb, we find a way to move forward. We find a way to tell another story.

7.2 The complexity of 'hope' in education

> 'Conference, if there's one thing I ask of you today it's that we show every school that we are on their side. That everything we've done has been driven by the desire to raise standards for all pupils in all schools. And that we care more about what a young person sees as they walk out of the gate than we do about the name they see on the way in. We care that they see hope (Morgan, 2014)

> 'We are making sure that the best teachers and the best heads go to the toughest areas to give those children hope' (Gove, 2013)

> ‘Teachers should have high hopes of their students and for schools and government to help create and environment in which children have high hopes for themselves’ (Hinds, 2018)

The above quotes come from a series of UK education ministers. They show how ‘hope’ can be distorted and misappropriated. Hope in education, often through the lens of positive psychology, can be conflated with a number of problematic constructs which relate to children and young people, their teachers and their parents.

Drawing on Webb (2018), these include the claims that children with high levels of hope have increased levels of attainment. This can be through better school attendance, greater use of student support resources and so on. Indeed, the link between hope and attainment in some studies have privileged ‘hope’ as a stronger predictor of academic achievement than measures of intelligence, personality, self-esteem, previous academic achievement, or entrance exam results (Day et al. 2010; Gallagher, Marques and Lopez, 2017; Lopez, 2010). Furthermore, teachers animated by hope, can have a transformational effect on educational practice (Lopez, 2010; Schmidt and Whitmore, 2010). Hopeful teachers can, at their best, become ‘hope generators’ (Roebben, 2016). Webb (2018) also identifies the importance of ‘high hope parents’ to the distorted discourse of ‘hope’ in education. Resources such as ‘The Great Big Book of Hope’ (McDermott and Snyder, 2009) offers guidance on how parents can encourage their children’s hopeful orientation towards the future. Hope becomes entwined with other constructs such as ‘well-being’, ‘happiness’ and ‘resilience’. Thus ‘hope is reduced to, or is treated as, just another word for aspiration or ambition’ (Webb, 2018: 374).

‘Bringing hope’ has become a phrase, an imperative, which is everywhere. To be without hope, in the current climate, can be interpreted as moral failure (Morgan, 2014; 2015). What concerns us in this final chapter is not this simplistic conceptualisation of hope, which is so prevalent in contemporary policy discourse, but a consideration of how hope can be revitalised to energise our counter-narrative, and with it, political possibilities. As Ernst Bloch put it, ‘possibility has had a bad press’ (1986: 7). This final chapter aims to address this.

7.3 The nature of hope

Hope concerns imagined futures. To study hope is to consider future time. Hope can be viewed as a practice rather than just an emotion, belief or cultural model that members of a community simply enact, feel or espouse (Mattingly and Jensen, 2015: 38). Hope is also inextricably linked with despair. As Mattingly and Jensen (2015: 39) suggest 'to hope is to be reminded of what is not, and what might never be…….it is poised for disappointment'.

For Jonathan Lear (2006) his work of philosophical anthropology, *Radical Hope*, searches to legitimate hope. It centres on the words of Plenty Coups, the last chief of the Crow nation. As with the Diné h (whose story we explored in Chapter 3), for Plenty Coups and the Crow the 'question of hope was intimately bound to the question of how to live' (Lear, 2006: 105) At a time when there is a heightened sense of vulnerability, Lear argues that rather than give a name to our shared sense of vulnerability and find better ways to live with it, we have retreated into intolerance. What makes such a hope radical, is that it is directed towards a future goodness that transcends the current ability to understand what it is. Radical hope anticipates a good for which those who have the hope, but as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it. Perhaps rather than arguing for radical hope in isolation, one would argue that such hope may play a crucial role in a courageous life (Lear, 2006: 107):

> 'If we can persuade ourselves that courage is a genuine virtue - that is, a state of character whose exercise contributes to the living of an excellent life - then if we can also show that radical hope is an important ingredient of such courage, we have thereby provided a legitimation of such hope'

The issue of hope becomes crucial for an ethical inquiry into 'life at the horizons of one's understanding' (Lear, 2006: 105).

In constructing a theory of hope, this chapter will enter into a dialogue with John Dewey, Ernst Bloch, Roberto Unger and Eric Olin Wright.

7.3.1 John Dewey and 'living in hope'

It could be argued that there are three keys to understanding Deweyan 'hope': gratitude, intelligent wholeheartedness, and enriched experience (Fishman, 2007). Dewey has a sense

of gratitude stretching temporally from our ancestors to our successors. This sense of connectivity is a theme which this thesis returns to and is central to how we conceive of space, place and local knowledges and the importance of these to the mapping of a successful counternarrative. For Dewey, hope is intertwined with the importance of valuing and seeing meaning in what we do.

> In a genuine sense every act is already possessed of infinite import. The little part of the scheme of affairs which is modifiable by our efforts is continuous with the rest of the world. The boundaries of our garden plot join it to the world of our neighbours and our neighbours' neighbours. That small effort which we can put forth is in turn connected with an infinity of events that sustain and support it……When a sense of the infinite reach of an act physically occurring in a small point of space and occupying a petty instant of time comes home to us, the *meaning* of a present act is seen to be vast, immeasurable, unthinkable
>
> (Dewey, MW14: 180)

We have a responsibility to ameliorate our world, not only for our own sake but for those who have gone before, and those who will follow after.

> The things in civilization we most prize, are not of ourselves. They exist by grace of the doings and sufferings of the continuous human community in which we are a link. Ours is the responsibility of conserving, transmitting, rectifying and expanding the heritage of values we have received that those who come after us may receive it more solid and secure, more widely accessible and more generously shared than we have received it. Here are all the elements for a religious faith that shall not be confined to sect, class, or race. Such a faith has always been implicitly the common faith of mankind. It remains to make it explicit and militant.
>
> (Dewey, LW9: 58)

Whilst gratitude for Dewey offers the belonging and connectedness to continually keep reconstructing what is good in the world, Dewey's way of making choices and acting upon them in an intelligent and wholehearted way can allow us to carry on despite the setbacks which can threaten hope (Fishman, 2007). Dewey's pragmatism urges that we continually take small incremental steps using our 'puny strength' (Dewey, LW1: 314) towards reform.

To feel the engagement and unification that is another key to living in hope, Dewey urges that we connect with and make full use of the present.

> We always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future. This is the only preparation which in the long run amounts to anything.
>
> (Dewey, LW13: 29-30)

The present for Dewey is also, indeed should be, informed by the past. Such an integration of past, present and future was explored in Chapter 4 as an important influence on the narrative methodology. Here we see how it can be a source of hope. Past actions should not be regretted but should inform the present. Living fully in the present allows for our actions to create a better future – 'to the being fully alive, the future is not ominous but a promise; it surrounds the present as a halo' (Dewey, LW10: 24).

7.3.2 Ernst Bloch – defending the 'happy ending'

The Principle of Hope was written by Bloch as a phenomenological exploration of what he called our 'anticipatory consciousness'. He glimpsed in everyday life an awareness of the possibility of a different, better world. For Bloch, hope is not confidence, the principle of hope means seeing in seemingly banal things, the longing for something more. Like Dewey, Bloch pays attention to the temporal. The 'real', Bloch urges, is a process – a process which is unfinished as it mediates between present, unfinished past, and, above all, possible futures (Vol. 1,1986: 196).

Bloch's 'spirit of utopia' suggests that the human imagination works outside the constraints of time, place, and personhood. Bloch distinguishes between what he calls abstract utopia and concrete utopia. Abstract utopia can be dreams that do not effectively challenge the status quo, or fantasy that is divorced from the possibility of being realised; a 'happy end' which remains abstract and contingent. Concrete utopia, on the other hand, are those dreams which are mediated by objective possibility. Yet Bloch (1986: 443) defends the trope of a happy ending:

> 'More than once the fiction of a happy end, when it seized the will, when the will had learnt both through mistakes and in fact through hope as well, and when reality did not stand in too harsh contradiction to it, reformed a bit of the world; that is: an initial fiction was made real.'

Just because the Kantian definition of knowledge 'destroys rotten optimism' as Bloch puts it

> ‘it does not also destroy urgent hope for a good end. For this hope is too indestructibly grounded in the human drive for happiness, and it has always been too clearly a motor of history. It has been so as expectation and incitement of a positively visible goal, for which it is important to fight and which sends a ‘forwards’ into barrenly continuing time’ (Bloch, 1986: 443).

7.3.3 Roberto Unger – redrawing the map of the possible

Roberto Unger sets the task of understanding why contemporary societies are organised as they are and how they might be reformed to empower humanity…how can we make ourselves greater, individually and collectively? How can we make ourselves greater when an unforgiving scepticism has shaken or destroyed our inherited faiths?

Unger’s view of *false necessity* acts as a way of attempting to reconcile the institutional contexts within which we function – orders, structures, frameworks – with the occasions when we act surprisingly and in ways which disrupt the order of things. The narratives shared in this thesis show us glimpses of this. The teachers’ surprise that they shared many of the same concerns and feelings about the changes that were proposed. The students’ erudite assessments of the changes that had taken place. Their honesty in sharing their observations. As they describe the teachers only using the coloured wooden prisms in class when the ‘big dogs’ are watching because, in reality, they do not work. Their view that they are wasting valuable learning time by waiting for the teacher to notice that they have turned their prism from green to amber. Their observations a perfect example of what Unger describes as a way of disrupting established structures ‘piece by piece’ (Unger, 1987/2001: 10). A way of putting frameworks aside ‘as if they were not for real, as if we had merely pretended to obey them while awaiting an opportunity to defy them’ (ibid).

Following Unger’s thinking, the real meaning of our social ideals is largely defined by our, often implicit, assumptions about the institutional arrangements and social practices that realise these ideals. When we speak about democracy or community our ‘abstract principles and fighting words’ may be less telling of what we actually mean than the practical forms that can be utilised. If we discover an alternative version of democracy and community, we may be forced to re-conceptualise our understanding and in turn by choosing an alternative version we shall, in effect, be deciding what ‘really matters most to us in our democratic and

communal aspirations' (1987/2001: 10). Harvey (2000) suggests that it is useful to consider Unger's work due to its commitment to the exploration of liberatory alternatives, whilst avoiding some of pitfalls of disillusionment of utopianism. Unger avoids utopianism by urging that alternatives should emerge from critical and practical action.

7.3.3.1 Dialectical utopianism

At the heart of Unger's work argues Harvey (2000: 186) lies a 'simple but powerful dialectical conception'. Only by changing our institutional world can we change ourselves and it is only through our desire to change ourselves that institutional change can occur.

> We must not replace the dogmatic optimism of belief in a pre-established harmony between practical progress and individual emancipation, so characteristic of the liberal and socialist doctrines we inherited form the nineteenth century, with an equally dogmatic belief in the tragic conflict between these goods….we are entitled to hope that, by reforming our practices and institutions, we can reconcile them more fully without ever suppressing the tension between them. This hope is reasonable, because both practical progress and individual emancipation depend on the acceleration of collective learning, and on greater freedom to recombine people, ideas and resources (Unger, 1987/2001: 1xxii).

For Unger, hope and imagination are central to short-term creative action which then creates possibility for change (see Levitas, 2013). This sense of the potential of self is for Unger in relation to others and is a call to act by resisting the limitations of circumstances. For Bloch, 'we have in us what we could become' (1986: 927), with Unger the basic features of selfhood are 'embodiment, contextuality and the grasping for the supra-contextual' (1984: 123). For Unger you 'experience yourself as an identity that is never wholly contained by a character and that grows to greater self-knowledge and self-possession by the willed acts of vulnerability or the accepted accidents of fortune that put a character under pressure' (ibid: 109). Ruth Levitas (2013) highlights that these themes are developed in the work of Richard Sennett. In, *The Corrosion of Character* (1998), *The Craftsman* (2009) and *Together* (2012), Sennett argues that flexible capitalism undermines the conditions for the development of 'character' by removing stability and craftsmanship [20]. For both Unger and Sennett, it is the

[20] See Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstruction of Society* for a detailed discussion of the influence of Roberto Unger.

development, the crafting if you will, of inter-personal relations moving them beyond the existing order which can underpin political action.

> The readiness to experiment with different kinds of encounters, and with their distinctive styles of vulnerability, is akin to central features of the practical, transformative political imagination: its refusal to take any established set of alliances and antagonisms for granted, its efforts to mobilise people in ways that are not predefined by the existing order, and its capacity to make these essays in mobilisation the means for building new varieties of collaboration and community in the practical affairs of society (Unger, 1984: 110)

7.3.4 Eric Olin Wright in defence of radical visions

The use of the term 'utopia' can be problematic. Unger prefers not to use the term at all, despite his wealth of thinking on the subject of 'hope' and his pragmatism in his call for change. In *Envisioning Real Utopias*, Eric Olin Wright makes the distinction between utopias as fantasies, which are unconstrained by any realistic considerations of human psychology and social feasibility, to his idea of 'real utopias'. Echoing Unger, he urges that instead of indulging in utopian dreams, we must focus upon practical realities. The idea of 'real utopias' 'embraces the tension between dreams and practice' (2010: 6). His reason for developing the real utopias project rests on his belief that whilst 'where there is a will there is a way' may be naively optimistic, it is true that without a 'will' many 'ways' become impossible (ibid).

Arguing for emancipatory social change, Wright suggests that we currently live in a world where radical visions of change possibilities are 'often mocked rather than taken seriously' (2010: 8) and that such cynicism weakens progressive political forces. He situates his work on real utopias within a broader intellectual enterprise which he terms *emancipatory social science*. In his search to create the conditions for human flourishing he sets out three basic tasks:

> Elaborating a systematic diagnosis and critique of the world as it exists; envisioning viable alternatives; and understanding the obstacles, possibilities, and dilemmas of transformation
>
> (Wright, 2010: 10)

Central to his diagnosis of the problems we face, is a fierce critique of capitalism. The allure of capitalism and the reason it has taken such a firm hold, is its ability to create a great deal of money for a large number of people. It is the by-products of capitalism such as inequality, the ability to develop non-capitalist institutions which could eliminate sources of suffering, the exploitation of workers who are kept vulnerable, these inhibit human flourishing.

The achievability of an alternative rests upon the extent to which we can not only imagine alternatives, but also how we can create the conditions for implementing them, and the success we have in mobilising the necessary forces to support them when those conditions occur (Wright, 2010). The participants and I do not want to leave this thesis without returning to the pragmatism of the thinkers we have engaged with throughout it. Transformation in education requires an interruption to the regularities of school life – a rupturing of the ordinary – that enables teachers and students to 'see' alternatives (Goodson, 1992). Oliver's question, 'how would you do it?' should not be ignored.

7.4 Reclaiming the soul of education as a craft of *place - as meeting place*

The legitimisation of hope which comes from the thinkers we have drawn on here, the sense of acknowledging, perhaps even embracing, vulnerability, which Lear (2006) and Unger (1984) urge, can be fused with the spatialised understanding of Massey. The consequence of this is to hold open the possibility of alternative narratives.

A politics of place sees them necessarily negotiated. Places can be seen as a collective achievement.

> They are formed through a myriad of practices of quotidian negotiation and contestation; practices, moreover, through which the constituent 'identities' are also themselves continually moulded. Place, in other words does – as many argue – change us, not through some visceral belonging (some barely changing rootedness, as so many would have it) but through the *practising* of place, the negotiation of intersecting trajectories; place as an arena where negotiation is forced upon us (Massey, 2005: 154)

What links our thinkers is the place of the political in their utopian thinking and the connection of the temporal. Going back to Dewey and his view that looking to the past to

inform the present to then be able to create a better future, resonates with Bloch, Unger and Wright who share concerns that utopian thinking should be about exercising hope not as a distant, either temporally or spatially, but as something to be harnessed in the now. As Bloch urges, 'we need the most powerful telescope, that of polished utopian consciousness, in order to penetrate precisely the nearest nearness of the present as the concrete moment when historical change can begin' (Bloch,1986: 12).

Harnessing the 'utopian impulse' can be a way of pushing forward to a 'less cautious and more imaginative engagement with possible futures' (Levitas, 2013:149). As Ruth Levitas argues, seeing utopia as a method rather than a goal allows it to become a process which is provisional, reflexive and dialogic.

> It is always suspended between the present and the future, always under revision, at the meeting point of the darkness of the lived moment and the flickering light of a better world, for the moment only accessible through an act of imagination
>
> (Levitas, 2013:149)

Perhaps it is the notion of meeting points that we should end this thesis on.

I have argued that by a reconstruction of context through paying attention to the spatial, relational and temporal, we can, and should, situate schools in their own unique landscape. The particularity of each school – its 'thisness' as Thomson (2000: 152) describes it, should frame change practices. We can develop an imagination of change which is hence not discordant but, in a Lefebvrian sense, is synchronised with the natural and cultural rhythmic cycles. How we tune in to and sustain such a rhythm is dependent on our ability to conceive of our educational aspirations differently. The narrative of division, as we have explored, cannot be evaded. It feeds the current dialectic of 'either/or' rather than that of 'both/and'. We are constantly faced with the problem that the bitter struggle of 'either/or' perpetually interferes with the gentler and more harmonious 'both/and' (Harvey, 2000: 196). We are confronted by closure. The neoliberal project and a particular view of globalisation in its image, has led to forces which have ironically narrowed the spatial and in education, as in other spheres, led to an increasingly impoverished geography which fails to take account of context.

As we have explored, there are different ways of imagining the relation between space and society. Thinking narratively, there is 'modernity's story which sees space divided up into parcels – an assumed isomorphism between spaces and places, cultures and societies' (Massey, 1999b: 21). There is the hegemonic notion of the space of flows: the space of the story of unfettered globalisation. For Massey, both of these have been mobilised in stories which 'annihilate their spatiality' and where spatial differences lose the possibility of autonomy. Modernity has not brought about a simple isomorphism of place and culture. In the midst of space of flows of globalisation, 'new barriers are being erected - new fortresses being built' (ibid).

A world in which the local and the global really are mutually constituted renders untenable such separation. Whilst we 'live' spaces by attributing meaning to them, 'neither space or place can be a haven from the world' (Massey, 2005: 195), nor should either be divided or bounded as sites of deficit, of a process of 'othering'. Interconnectedness, whether that be between people - the student, the teacher, the researcher or whether that be between the school, the community, the family, the town, can be a way of embracing multiple narratives.

> This would imagine the spatial as the sphere of the juxtaposition, or co-existence, of distinct narratives, as the product of power-filled social relations; it would be a view of space which tries to emphasise both its social construction and its necessarily power-filled nature. Within that context, 'places' may be imagined as particular articulations of these social relations, including local relations 'within' the place and those many connections which stretch way beyond it. And all of these embedded in complex, layered histories. This is place as open, porous, hybrid – this is *place as meeting place* (again, the importance of recognising 'the spatial' the juxtaposition of different narratives). This is a notion of place where specificity (local uniqueness, a sense of place) derives not from some mythical internal roots nor from history of relative isolation – now to be disrupted by globalisation – but precisely from the absolute particularity of the mixture of influences found together there
>
> (Massey, 1999a: 21 - 22)

This study had made an important contribution to the field of narrative research and narrative inquiry more specifically. In the use of the participants own words, I argue that their contribution, their uniqueness, has been captured in a way that solely creating research texts from their words could not do. Not only have the participants 'come alive' (Davis, 1993: 31)

through their own words, they have been afforded the platform that they sought at the outset of the project. I believe that Louise, Michael, Jess, Oliver and the students of Longton Academy, Seachurch agreed to be part of this study to be heard and in sharing their experiences, their stories, with me and with the reader they took a risk. They took that risk because they wanted their experience to be valued and in the hope that they could affect change.

Setting the study as a narrative inquiry acted as a powerful way of privileging their local knowledges. Spatially and temporally, the inquiry evolved to build the connections between the participants and the researcher which encouraged and developed agentive capacity. It offers a significant contribution in relation to developments in school improvement. It gives a way of thinking about school change differently, as it has challenged the notion that change can be successful and sustainable if it is centrally prescribed and ignores local contexts. However, more than this, it has suggested a renewed way of conceiving of the 'local' by drawing on the work of Doreen Massey and arguing that the local is on a continuum with the global. This conception reimagines 'place' not as fixed and bounded, and hence exposed to the narrative of deficit, but *place as meeting place*. The inter-relatedness of space and place and the light of knowledge which has illuminated this study, has given us energy and optimism to piece together a counter-narrative which, I hope, can be crafted by other schools, in other places. Together we have moved from my wonderings at the start of the inquiry – the 'how come?' to where we end it with the 'what if?

Postscript

Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world

Hannah Arendt, 1961: 196

Researchers write narratives both for the participants and beyond. This raises questions of how researchers should write accounts of narrative inquiry and the ways in which such accounts should be read (Clandinin and Connelly, 1991). Something of the 'spirit of action' (ibid: 277) needs to find a place in the research story. A key purpose of narrative inquiry is for the readers to raise their own questions of both their practice and their ways of knowing. In doing so their own story becomes inter-woven with the participants and the researcher whose stories they share. My hope is that you have been drawn into this story - that in the reading of it you have felt an integral part of it.

Writing about education is a complex task but an important one. There are many reasons why this is so and we have touched on these throughout the thesis. The extent to which politics has come to invade the educational realm and the pace and reach of policy has created significant challenges. If, as Hannah Arendt urges, education is about renewal, then it falls on all of us to find ways in which the shackles of political control which continues to decontextualise and dehistoricise education, can be loosened and to conceive of new ways that education and schools can be 'improved'.

This thesis in no way makes claim to be anything other than a snapshot in time and place of the experience of a small number of teachers and students in a single English secondary school. The hope that it has illuminated a tiny corner of educational practice and experience. The aim of the study however, which emerged as it progressed, was not only to make experience visible but also to tune into the agentive capability of conceiving of school improvement not as up or out there, to simply be enacted, but as something that could be affected.

If schools are to change and become the sites of human flourishing which we hold in our imagination - if they are to be spaces where we enable our children to develop the tools to renew our world, then we must strive to work out practical ways this can be done. Restorying all our schools, by finding ways to generate context despite the pressures; privileging particularity; valuing the relational; making explicit links with space, place and the light of local knowledge in our conception of improving schools can be somewhere to start.

Even for those who do not roam so far, or even for those who remain 'in place', place is always different. Each is unique, and constantly productive of the new. The negotiation will always be an invention; there will be need for judgement, learning, improvisation; there will be no simply portable rules. Rather it is the unique, the emergence of the conflictual new, which throws up the necessity for the political

Doreen Massey, 2005: 162

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Appendix I: Outline of why school was selected as the site of the inquiry

Longton Academy Seachurch* is the pseudonym chosen for the school which was the site of this inquiry. Seachurch is a small coastal town in the North of England. It has a population of just under 7,000. Once a fishing port it now relies on a modest tourist industry.

Longton Academy is the only secondary school in the town and serves the town and surrounding villages.

Formally Seachurch School* the school was subject to a forced academy order following a series of disappointing Ofsted Reports (see Chapter 5 for a discussion of these). The school was put into Special Measures in September 2014 and in 2015 was taken over by an academy chain operating in the nearest city. The school's reputation as 'inadequte' has resulted in some of the town's young people choosing to travel to neighboring towns to attend alternative schools. At the time of this study (academic years 2016 – 2018) the school was engaged in a process of 'renewal' aimed at attracting a greater number of pupils from both the town and nearby villages to choose the local school as opposed to travelling (in some cases up to an hour) to alternatives.

The end of the study coincided with the latest Ofsted Report in May 2018. This concluded that the school had been moved out of 'Special Measures' but that it continued to require improvement. The summary of key findings is below:

- Although improving, pupils make weak progress in a wide range of subjects, including science and humanities.
- Significant variability exists in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. A number of lessons are characterised by low expectations and limited challenge.
- Pupils' attendance is below average and declining. A large proportion of pupils are persistently absent from school, including disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders do not use additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils or those who enter the school with below-average attainment effectively.

- A large proportion of pupils are not confident that aspects of bullying are dealt with effectively.
- The trust has not provided support to the school in the areas where it needs it most. Other support is not as effective as it could be because it is focused on primary teaching rather than secondary.
- Teachers do not consistently follow the school's assessment or behaviour policies.
- Some pupils do not display positive attitudes to their learning. The proportion of pupils excluded for a fixed period remains too high.
- Leaders' plans to improve aspects of the school's work are not precise enough. It is not always clear what is to be done and who is to do it.
- The reading age of many pupils in Years 9 to 11 are below their chronological age.

The school was shortlisted as a possible site for the inquiry as it was a school experiencing rapid change. The Deputy Head Teacher was known to the researcher and the lead supervisor and hence there was gate keeper access.

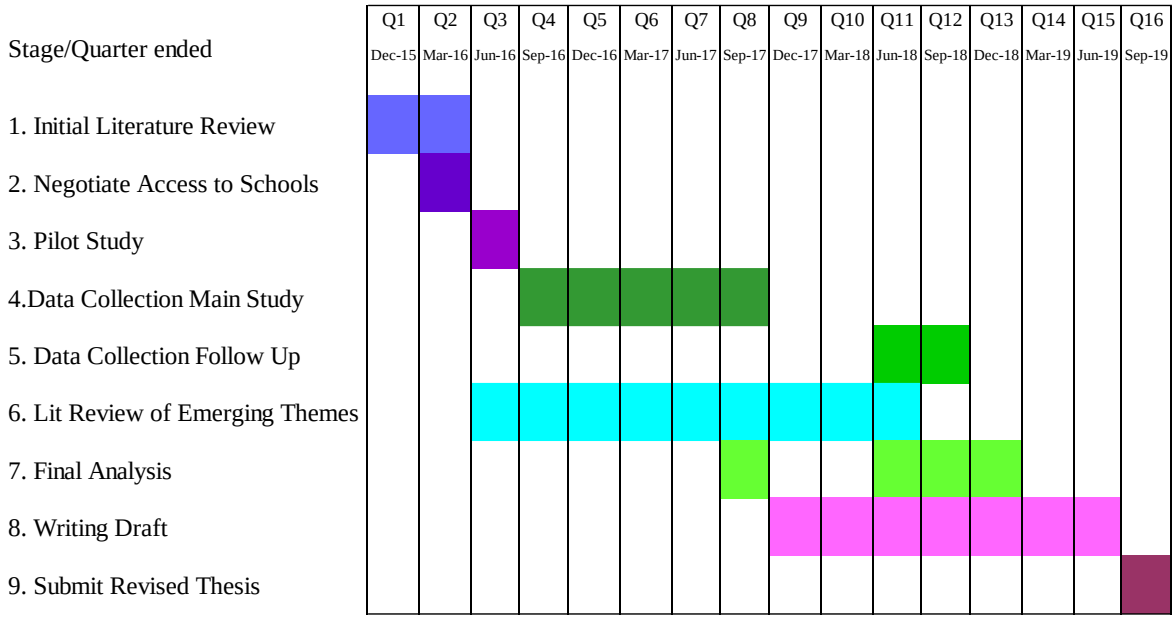
It was a particularly suitable choice as there has been a lack of research in academy schools in general but in the North of England especially. The situation that the school as one serving a disadvantaged community and entering the first full year of academy status which had been a requirement as opposed to a choice contributed to make it an ideal choice for an inquiry with a focus on school change.

Appendix II: Timeline and details of inquiry

Appendix II details visits made to the school, within the context of the overall plan.

Part 1 - Overall Planning Framework and Timescales
The Planning Framework was split into 9 separate stages:

Planning Framework and Timescales



In addition to email and telephone conversations which took place throughout, I visited the school through stages 2 to 5 listed above. In terms of planning visits - no visits were planned during quarters which coincided with external examinations.

In Part 2 of the Appendix, I detail the visits and how they link in to the stages above.

Appendix II - Part 2 - Chart of Visits by Week, Stage and Type of Visit*

Q	W/C	Stage	School Year	Senior Leadership Team	Teacher participants	Students	Other
Q2	07-Mar	Negotiate Access to Schools	2015/6				
	14-Mar		2015/6				
	21-Mar		2015/6	PM			PM
Q3	11-Apr	Pilot Study	2015/6				
	18-Apr		2015/6	S	S		O
	25-Apr		2015/6				
	02-May		2015/6				
	09-May		2015/6				
	16-May		2015/6				
	23-May		2015/6				
	06-Jun		2015/6				
	13-Jun		2015/6	SLT	M		
	20-Jun		2015/6	SLT		FD	O
	27-Jun		2015/6				
Q4	04-Jul	Data Collection Main Study	2015/6			FD	
	11-Jul		2015/6	SLT	M		O
	18-Jul		2015/6		M		
	05-Sep		2016/7				
	12-Sep		2016/7		M		TM
	19-Sep		2016/7				
	26-Sep		2016/7		M		TM
Q5	03-Oct		2016/7				
	10-Oct		2016/7		M		CPD
	17-Oct		2016/7		M		CPD
	31-Oct		2016/7				
	07-Nov		2016/7				
	14-Nov		2016/7				
	21-Nov		2016/7		M	SC	CPD
	28-Nov		2016/7				
	05-Dec		2016/7		M	SC	TM
	12-Dec		2016/7				
Q6	02-Jan		2016/7				
	09-Jan		2016/7				
	16-Jan		2016/7				
	23-Jan		2016/7				
	30-Jan		2016/7				
	06-Feb		2016/7				
	13-Feb		2016/7				
	20-Feb		2016/7				
	06-Mar		2016/7		M	SC	O
	13-Mar		2016/7		M	SC	
	20-Mar		2016/7				
	27-Mar		2016/7				
Q8	03-Jul		2016/7				
	10-Jul		2016/7	SLT			TM
	17-Jul		2016/7				
	04-Sep		2017/8				
	11-Sep		2017/8				
	18-Sep		2017/8				
	25-Sep		2017/8				
Q12	02-Jul	Data Collection Follow Up	2017/8				
	09-Jul		2017/8		M		O
	16-Jul		2017/8				
	23-Jul		2017/8				
	30-Jul		2017/8				

PM	Planning Meetings
S	Selection and confirmation of Participants
M	Meetings with Teacher Participants
FD	Family Dining - Meeting with Students
CPD	Staff CPD Meetings
SC	School Council Meetings
SLT	Further SLT Meetings
TM	Teach "Meets" - Early Morning Teacher Meetings
O	School Observations

** Note that the above details time spent at the school in individual weeks - these visits may have taken place over one day or a number of days in the weeks in question.*

Official School Holidays during the period above and Q7 and Q11 (quarters ended 30 June 2017 and 30 June 2018) have been removed from the list above as no visits were scheduled during those dates

Appendix III: The story tellers

Louise*

Louise was a newly qualified art teacher (NQT). This was her first appointment following her PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate in Education) which she undertook in the Midlands. At the onset of the inquiry Louise was in her first year of teaching. Louise was one of a group of four NQTs who had been appointed at the school following the resignation of a number of staff following the transition of Seachurch School to an academy chain.

She saw the opportunity at Longton Academy, Seachurch as a chance to return 'home' as her parents lived in a neighbouring coastal town, where she had gone to school.

Jess*

Jess had worked at the school for ten years as a Religious Education teacher. She had been an NQT at the school and over the years had held a number of management roles including Head of Department, Head of Faculty and Head of Key Stage. Jess had been brought up in Seachurch, only leaving to study, and then keen to return and to stay in the area to bring up her own family. She had two children and was pregnant with her third child during the study.

Michael*

Michael was an experienced teacher who had worked as both a secondary PE and Maths teacher in a number of schools over a period of twenty eight years prior to joining Longton Academy. As explored in his early narrative (see Chapter 5) Michael was keen to move to the area viewing it as a 'new start' for him, his partner and his partner's mother who was suffering with health problems. He started at Longton Academy in September 2015 teaching Maths.

Oliver*

Oliver, like Louise, was part of the cohort of NQTs who joined the school as it moved to become part of an established multi academy trust (MAT) in September 2015. He had studied P.E. at university in Northern England and had trained as a teacher through a SCITT (School-Centred Initial Teacher Training) programme through his university following his undergraduate study.

Alex*

Alex was the current Vice Principal. He had worked as an English teacher for twenty years. He worked for the MAT at one of their flagship 'outstanding' schools before being asked to support the transition of Seachurch School into the academy. His SLT roles had included Head of Department and Vice Principal.

As highlighted in a narrative fragment (see Chapter 5) Alex was conflicted about his leadership role taking him away from teaching but continued to teach English where he could.

Lindsey*

Lindsey's two daughters had attended Seachurch School and as they had grown up she came back to the school initially as a Teaching Assistant but recently as a Learning Mentor and coordinator of the School Council.

Sam*, Amy*, Holly*, Libby*, Rebecca*, Marcia*, James*, Dan*, Libby*

Sam, Amy, Holly, Libby, Rebecca, Marcia, James, Dan and Libby are pseudonyms of a group of school councillors. All Year 9 and 10 students they had been selected by their peers and agreed that I could attend their meetings.

Appendix IV: Scanned image of workings on interview transcript. In this example a section of Louise's* words during an interview carried out at the school 18 July 2016.

Louise's teaching story

'I went to [redacted] school which is in [redacted]. The first memory I have of that school is going in with all the new friends I had just made and someone kicking a bottle and it splitting my lip. That's the first thing I remember of that school. It was very, very rough throughout the whole time I was there. There was a lot of supply teachers and I think the one thing that has stuck with me was my art teacher and she came about three years before I was leaving and was one of the most solid forms I had at school because she stayed for longer than everybody else had. They seemed to have all drifted off or there were supply teachers covering them a lot. I remember watching her and there were some naughty kids and she actually managed, using art, she managed to get them to calm down, to sit down and they enjoyed school. That was the only class they were ok in. Every other class, they were asking for silence and they were asking them to do something that seemed to be out of their reach. They weren't taught properly, they weren't independent learners, it just seemed that the behaviour went out of the window, but when they were in art *(Louise pauses in thought)*. You know, she was using things like spray painting and things like that and the naughty kids would grasp on to and it enabled them to learn and they actually came out with good grades in art. It seemed that in the other subjects we had obviously had to work quite hard by ourselves from textbooks that they just…their grades didn't obviously meet the standards that they needed to meet.

I suppose for me I had the drive of my parents the whole time, but I was very arty and they wanted me to be very academic. So, the next step was sixth form. Again, my Mum and Dad wanted me to be academic *(Louise laughs)* and I was pushing against the grain and going 'no, I'm creative!'. So, I ended up doing maths and biology and design technology and then I did art, which obviously I stuck to. I think it was when I took my parents to university and we were looking at them and I was looking at doing art at university and that was the first thing for them. It hit my Mum and she has always told me that 'I never took it seriously until I went to uni with you and they said how many options you had with art and you know, how complex it actually was, and it's not just an easy, doss subject'. You don't have to be academic to do it, but you have to be creative and imaginative to do it. That was the first time she had actually stepped back and gone, 'oh I should have been pushing her the whole time for art!'.

Then obviously I went to college after that because the universities told me that I needed another year experience, just generally, so I went to [redacted] and did art again. So, I suppose the whole time I've never been out of education, I've always been in it. But I think the reason I became a teacher, the reason I wanted to do teaching was a) because I wasn't bright enough to

This is an interesting theme which appears in other headteacher participant narratives – is this a depiction of imposition of values? As a group could we explore this?

be a doctor! *(Louise laughs)* but b) because my art teacher has always stuck in my head and I have always thought, you know, you look around Seachurch and there are so many kids that have just sort of gone into working in a shop or working for their parents because they have no other option. They didn't understand that if you were creative there are other options for you. She was the first one that showed us, as a 'bad' school, that there were other options and how to do that rather than being told that you've got to be good in maths and English and science, which you do, but she also showed us that if you are creative you can run with that. So, she's actually my inspiration *(Louise laughs)*. She knows she is as well! I still talk to her. She's helped me the whole time I've been here as well. She's always been there for me but she's just…… *(Louise pauses)* Because she wasn't one of these teachers which had come in and were particularly really strict either….like I had a history teacher and he was very strict and I got on with him, but because the rest of the school was as they were, they didn't get on with him. You had to be that sort of person who could understand why he was doing it and a lot of the kids there didn't understand. If you were being strict, you were being nasty. She wasn't particularly strict. She had rules but it was just basic rules. You know, line up outside the class and that sort of thing. She's still teaching now. It's combined with [redacted] School so she's at [redacted] now, she's still there, sort of. ~ how does this sit with the new behaviour policy observed?

Connection with place but frustration of opportunity

It was difficult growing up because I felt that I couldn't fail at GCSE. I didn't feel that I was in the right school to help me not fail. So, it was very much down to me and went I went to sixth form I didn't particularly want to go to sixth form. I wanted to go straight to [redacted] which was an art college. When I went to sixth form it was very much… *(Louise sighs)*. I felt like I was there because I had to be there and I didn't want to be there and also the gap, there was a big gap between what I'd learned at [redacted] to what I was being taught at sixth form and trying to bridge that gap was infuriating because I thought what have I even learned at school? They are teaching me something which I have no idea about when I had never been taught before because we had just had supply teachers and things like that…...although our school was very creative…whereas here, when I came to sixth form, there wasn't a lot of experiments in biology. In maths he was quickly writing it on the board, and I was thinking I don't know what's happening. So, it was really hard to bridge that gap, especially……. It almost felt like here. We get results here from primary school and I think what an earth are you talking about, they are not on this grade at all. It was almost that feeling, as though we had come in and sixth form didn't know what level we were at and didn't know what we'd been taught. We were all sort of dropped in.

bridging the gap.

It was very difficult because it seemed like all the other schools knew what he was talking about and we felt a bit ….it wasn't just me it was some of the others that had come with me.

There weren't that many, there was about 5 of us in total but we all went there and felt quite stupid really to do the academic subjects. Like I say to my Mum, at the end of the day if I hadn't of picked them, I probably wouldn't have felt stupid because I would have been picking the arty subjects rather than the academic......but yeah.... So that was hard...that was hard.

It did create a lot of tension between me and my parents because obviously they wanted me to do one thing and I wanted to do the other and it was a big battle to try and get them to understand what art was about that it wasn't just pick up a pencil and you can draw all of a sudden it took time and it was just getting across that that was my life, art was my life, every time that I had a moment I was doing something arty. If there was a gap in between some subject that I was doing I'd be there sketching away *(Louise laughs)* even if it was a little animation saying how bored I was, it would be something arty and I'd go home and I'd do something arty and yeah it's difficult when you've got the academic drive. But I've seen kids here that don't have the academic drive or a drive at all and they've been told you know...you can work in Dad's *chippy* when you've come out of school and I think that's equally as hard if you don't have someone pushing you. I think that's part of our job is to keep the drive going here, but when they go home, they're quite relaxed. You need the support from both I think. – Tension of (aspiration)

Mixed messages

Ideally I wanted to open up an art shop in Spain, sort of go for the jump but you are always controlled by the fact that you need the money, you need the security so...... plus I wanted to show the kids there's more to life than just doing the academic subjects....you can be arty and get somewhere. – Staying true to yourself – navigating the pressures.

Do you feel you are fighting that corner?

fighting the corner! – surprised at my phrasing – check with Louise – is this language too strong?!

I do feel that I am fighting that quite a bit, I feel like art is slightly getting lost a little bit and the technologies are taking over in a lot of the schools. I think sometimes they do see art, even other teachers see art, as oh you're just messing around, just having a quick draw and you think well that's not what I'm doing. I could say in maths you're just playing around with a few numbers! Like you always have to *(Louise pauses)*. I was always told at uni that you have to fight the corner of art because there is always that controversy as to is there any point to it, why are you doing it, and you have to fight against it.

* bridging the gap – again

I know that was another thing when I went to university it seemed like everybody there...again it was like bridging the gap ...... everybody there had done all these magical

things with clay and they'd done all of these wild things and I'd be very much 2D and painting because that's what I had been used to even at college. We never went really off the radar it was very much if we were doing a sculpture it would probably be papier-mâché. If we were doing a painting, it would probably be on canvas. There was nothing really that sort of took off and then I went to uni and they were all doing these absolutely crazy things and bringing in old sofa cushions and all sorts (Louise laughs) and I was thinking what's going on! I'm just bringing this pink painting in! I was looking around so again I think that's one thing I've taken from the whole experience is that they need to learn what's coming before it actually happens because I didn't know what sixth form was going to be like I just went there because my Dad wanted me to go.

fitting in — why was this important?

I didn't know what was coming with university actually it was made more apparent when I had to pick my course and I picked fine art, thinking that it was fine painting, you know very detailed painting, that sort of thing and I soon realised that it wasn't at all (she laughs) it wasn't anything to do with that, even when I read it on the computer it didn't come across as being this that you'd find in Tate Modern, being quite contemporary and 'out there' and coming from a realistic background again it was like jumping from one step to the next without any bridge to help me. I just had to, sort of, deal with it and figure it out so I think definitely in my experience I want the kids to know what is coming at university. I want them to know that don't just pick it cos it says 'art', make sure that you fully understand what it is. I'd like a relationship with them like I've got with my old art teacher. She said for me to pick fine art but I think it was so I could explore more things coming from a school that just did painting. I think it was to help me expand and broaden what I did but I felt that I could have had some more information about it, about what was about to happen!

Bridge metaphor again.

Cultural Capital?

I went to [redacted] for Fine Art for three years. We went around a few that was the year before and then I went to a few of them and they said I needed to go to [redacted] first because we like our students to be older so they understand it a bit more, so we had gone around. I think I picked [redacted]...a) because it wasn't too far away from home but because of the studio space. We never had studio space at school or particularly at sixth form so that sort of interested me and some of the teachers that I met were quite quirky and 'out there' as opposed to other ones at other universities seemed quite expressionless and strict and I thought I can't deal with three years of that coming from my background! So, I ended up at [redacted] and then my teaching degree was at [redacted]. I think I picked [redacted] really because it was quite far away from home, about three hours away, but I wanted a bit of diversity. I felt that [redacted] was fairly similar to the sort of background I've come from. The people were quite similar but in [redacted] obviously there's a lot of culture. I remember going into

Need for belonging — explain this

Need to change.

town and feeling very singled out in town, in [redacted], but it was an interesting experience and I think it helped me. I made a lot of friends who were Sikhs and different religions and I got to go the temples and things with them, so that helped but obviously it doesn't relate much to coming back to Seachurch (Louise laughs) because there's hardly any culture but it does help. It helps you to become more understanding of peoples' backgrounds as well.

Did you do your teaching practice placements there?

I did my PGCE (Postgraduate certificate in Education) in [redacted] so I was in one school for a while, about a month, teaching little bits and bobs and then my timetable went up when I went up to the next school and schools were both very different to each other. One was very strict; it just wasn't working for the school. It was a very big school, very big classes, knocking up to forty kids in one class. Whereas the other one was more relaxed, very, very creative, smaller classes. But the school itself was a new sort of build. It was turning into an academy. Whereas the other one was still a LEA (Local Education Authority) school. So just to see that difference was interesting. After that experience I'd always sort of said you know I'd probably go for an academy as opposed to the local authority as it just seemed like they had things together. They had more control over what was happening in the school. The routines were better. Whereas the LEA it was sort of every teacher for themselves, doing their own routine and seeing what happened. As far as art went, it was very basic, like what I'd expect in the olden days, sort of thing, you know, 'here's a flower, draw it!' that sort of thing. It was interesting……it was interesting.

I'm glad I'm here now! Well I wanted to come back because I'm a bit of a home girl. I wanted to come back nearer my Mum and Dad but I did apply for some, you know, sort of [redacted] so it wasn't this close and when I came for this interview I'd gone through a (recruitment consultant) you know where they find you jobs, and they said there's a part time job here, so I said yes I'll definitely come and apply for it. So, I got an interview here. It was for a part-time position and the first week in the man that was supposed to be teaching the Year 10s and 11s had gone off…… *at this point the discussion is interrupted by a delivery. Louise asks, 'what have you got for me, are you bringing me presents?! Thank you very much …she laughs.* Yeah, the first week the man that was supposed to be teaching year 10s and 11s went off ill, for a good month and a half.

So again, I was very much dropped in at the deep end and had to look through the Year 11 books to establish where they were, pick up Year 10 and do what I felt was right with, sort of,

wanted to be a bit more out there and straight away from just doing basic, you know, Georgia O'Keeffe and that sort of thing. I wanted them to be a bit more expressive and find themselves and get interested in art, rather than be telling them what to do. That was a bit of a struggle, but it did sort of work. When he came back, I let him do the drawing things, and when he wasn't here, I'd do more expressive, building stuff. But I think because I was by myself I felt that it was very much in my control what happened and what they did but I think if I had potentially had other art teachers and someone above me in art I might have felt not as able to be that expressive and allow them to go off because I would have felt that there was a focus on..... well you should be doing this, and we are all doing this. Whereas I like them all to be a bit more individual and go off and find their own artists. I think a lot of the time for art teachers particularly if they are not all doing the same it's hard to control, it means that it's a lot more work for you because you've got to remember who they are studying. You've got to remember where they were at the last stage. You've got to know where they are going with it. Make sure that they are on the right path and that they are not going off on some wild chase because part of the assessment objectives is to have a clear.... You know be able to look through the book and understand how they have got from one artist to the next and sometimes that's hard because they go on Pinterest or where ever and find these random artists and you think well what's that one got to do with that one!

But I think they need to do that process themselves otherwise they won't understand how to get there and that was one thing I noticed when I went to sixth form and they had these sketch books and I thought well what do you want me to do in it? Because I'd never been given a sketch book, I'd always been told to do certain pieces and I'd draw, I'd happily be there for hours doing whatever I was doing but I never knew what the point of it was. I just did because I enjoyed doing art. So, when I got to sixth form and they said we want you to explain (I was like) well what do you want me to explain? ... I need some questions if you want me to explain .....well no just annotate what you are doing..... it was really hard to understand what they were looking for because you would get your book back....well you were missing this and this and I'd be well I don't know how to do that. I don't know what you're asking for. I thought I'd wrote that and you're telling me I haven't. So that was difficult just changing from working on big pieces of paper similar to up there to working in a sketch book and understanding what I was supposed to be putting in it and the travel through it because it must have been a different exam board is all I could think because I never wrote one thing when I was a GCSE and it never came in to my lessons. We never once wrote anything, so I don't know where all this annotation has come from!

(Louise laughs as she thinks back to her discomfort and reflects for a moment) but it's interesting when I'm getting them to write now and I understand what I'm expecting them to write and understanding the journey but for the life of me I just couldn't grasp it when I was in sixth form because I thought why?...why are you telling me to do something different to what I have done in GCSE and everybody else again seemed to understand what they were talking about and just writing reams and reams of sheets and I thought what are you writing about?...I haven't got that much to talk about....I'm just painting because I like painting that's all I wanted to write 'because I like it...full stop!'

So that sounds like you felt it was a really big jump to sixth form?

Yes, and then from college to university it was another big jump not just through the arts and understanding what contemporary even meant and what the Tate stuff was, getting my head around that was hard but also by living by myself and all of that on top of it, it was crazy because I thought oh when I go to uni it might be a bit more relaxed and I picked fine art and I thought oh I'll just be painting like I used to do and I won't have to explain it (Louise laughs) I got there and it was the complete opposite to what I expected. *(Louise pauses and it seems is thinking back to her early university experience)*

So, were there times when you thought you might not continue?

There were times at university, yes. At sixth form I didn't particularly want to be there but I felt I needed to get...I had to go through it to get to where I wanted to go, because my Mum had told me, you know after sixth form it's your choice what you want to do. I want you to do academic subjects in the sixth form, so it was sort of a case of right let's just get through it and then I can do what I want, but it was more of a hit personally on me when I went to uni and I picked what I wanted to do and I thought this is it, I'm finally doing what I want to do and then it was nothing like what I'd expected and the art wasn't what I'd expected and it was sort of a personal hit. I sort of felt upset in myself that I have three years of doing something that I don't enjoy even though it's classed under as art and I didn't like it. That was really hard because I felt like I couldn't go back to my Mum and Dad and say I don't like this and I don't want to do this because I'd battled that long to do art, that I felt oh she's just going to take the mickey if I say I don't want to do this anymore.

But again it was sort of right, find my next step, what am I doing next, what do I want to do and so that I did some sort of workshop things at [redacted] and I worked in the hospital for a bit with the poorly children and did art with them and went to schools and did art with them.

Appendix V: Summary of how co-production of accounts were created.

The process of selecting which transcripts might be used and where research notes would be more appropriate was decided in a series of open negotiations throughout the duration of the project.

Email exchanges were set up with each adult participant. Field notes made from visits and transcripts of recorded interviews that took place, would be sent back to the participants for comment. In addition, at follow-up meetings and visits to the school, discussions would take place to check prior understanding, to allow the participants to withdraw any comments or add contextual information. For the student participants, School Council Meetings were used to check understanding and to ask participants which narratives they felt should be included.

The decision to use extended passages of the participants actual words as they were spoken arose from this process. At the heart of the decision was the question of power. In developing a 'voiced research' approach and an inquiry space where the participants had a clear and acknowledged hand in the 'data' selected, the power imbalance often seen in research projects and settings was addressed. Where often participants are asked for compliance – offering up their views and in a way surrendering control over what subsequently happens – the design of this project set out to be a platform for validating the views of the participants, making sense of the narratives which emerged and adding an agentive capacity to the project outcomes.