Colonising Communities? Community Engagement, Democracy, and the Articulation of Power in the Governance of Multi-Academy Trusts in England

Andrew Pennington

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

York St John University

School of Education, Language and Psychology

December 2021

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

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Colonising Communities? Community Engagement, Democracy and the Articulation of Power in the Governance of Multi-Academy Trusts in England

The purpose of this study is to examine the implications of academy status and the creation of Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) for school governance, relations and engagement with communities and the accountability of schools in England.

The study employs a qualitative research methodology, using an instrumental case study of three MATs in England. Data were gathered through 11 semi-structured interviews with senior MAT personnel. A constant comparative method with the techniques of thematic analysis was used to develop a critical constructionist analysis to identify both: concepts and ideas; and assumptions and meanings. An abductive approach was adopted in which interview data, construction of themes and meaning and literature were in continuing dialogue as analysis proceeded.

Findings reported fall into three areas. Firstly, analysis of: the rise of transactional relationships, a deficit view of communities underpinned by a colonial discourse; centralisation of powers in the case study MATs; and the implications of these factors for the way community interests and voices influence decisions. Secondly, a critical examination of the business and market logics and ideologies driving the changes in school governance, community engagement and accountability in the case study MATs. Thirdly, critical examination of how these MATs' accountability to their communities has become performative and underpinned by a business logic which reduces the opportunities for democratic participation in governance. The thesis also Identifies potential practices that might be developed in the governance of MATS to enhance community engagement and democratic accountability.

Taken together, these findings: show how a post-colonial lens aids understanding of the economistic and paternalistic ways MATs relate to communities and critiques the issue of governance in MATs; have significance for discussion of how governance arrangements might move away from marketised and consumerist models of schooling; and suggest how governance might be more responsive and accountable to communities.

Table of Contents

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Context

The study examines the ways in which Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) engage with communities, the role of governance in this engagement and the extent to which they can be democratic organisations. MATs are the most recent manifestation of the academy programme in England which has its origins in the 1997-2010 UK Labour government's programme to transform what were deemed to be persistently failing schools. This programme was embraced enthusiastically by the Conservative-led coalition government that came to power in the UK in 2010 as the basis for a pattern of school organisation for all schools in England based on institutional autonomy and the notion of a self-improving school-led system. Although a policy programme of the UK government, under the long-standing constitutional arrangements brought about by the 1707 Act of Union between England and Scotland and the more recent 21 Century UK wide devolution settlement, education is a devolved matter, and this policy framework only applies in England.

In the context of England, the academy programme, and its privileging of MATs as the government approved model of school organisation, can be seen as the latest milestone on the road away from the post-1945 social-democratic consensus and its associated locally determined and administered system of schooling. This road from social democracy and its attendant collectivist ethos, privileging of professional knowledge and democratic governance to a neoliberal settlement of markets, responsibilisation and corporatist modes of organisation began in the UK with the election of a Conservative government headed by Margaret Thatcher in 1979. By the time of the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) in England the logic and language of business, markets and consumerism had taken firm root in English schooling. Parents were now consumers making individual choices from a range of schools in a marketplace of educational enterprises which promoted themselves via the use of

performance data about assessment and examination results. Schools were thus recast as instrumental enterprises closely aligned with the neoliberal demands of the economy and human capital development. In this repurposing of education and reformulation of the idea of a school, governance moved away from a model of democratic engagement with community to the corporate managerialism of New Public Management (Rizvi and Lingard 2010: 119).

Academies can be seen as a descendant and evolution arising in particular from two aspects of the 1988 ERA. Firstly, the autonomy granted to all schools under the fiscal and functional decentralisation of the Local Management of Schools provisions. Secondly, the independent state funded schools established under the Grant Maintained Status provisions of the same Act. The grouping of academies into MATs is a logical corollary of the deliberate post 2010 reduction in scope and capacity of local authorities' role in schooling and the need to fill the gap in support, administration, and provision of services this has created. It also serves the neoliberal intention of bringing a range of private sector and non-state actors into the schooling system; both overtly through the contracting out a wide range of core and ancillary services and through instilling corporate and managerialist disciplines into the organisation and conduct of MATs

This neoliberal reform of schooling in England should also be seen in the context of wider global trends in education reform. Sahlberg (2012) identifies these trends as the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) and locates it in the neoliberal discourse of markets and competition. He notes that whilst parental choice and school autonomy may have increased, 'nations pursuing such choice have seen both a decline in academic results and an increase in school segregation'. He asserts that a consequence of GERM is that 'standardized testing has increased teaching to the test, narrowed curricula to prioritize reading and mathematics, and distanced teaching from the art of pedagogy to mechanistic instruction'. The ideological turn associated with GERM in England has been justified and sustained by reference to international evidence about the positive impacts of school autonomy and freedom on the performance of school students, most notably from the Charter Schools movement in the USA, free schools in Sweden, and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

Rizvi and Lingard (2010: 117) examine the impact of GERM on school governance and conclude that 'the neoliberal imaginary of globalization has led to a new way of thinking about how schools, technical colleges, universities and educational systems should be governed'. This involves the introduction of the tenets of New Public Management to governance arrangements, including an emphasis on functional and fiscal decentralisation rather than 'the enhancement of democratic participation, local control and community decision-making.' (120)

This study therefore seeks to investigate the impact of these trends on community engagement, governance, and accountability arrangements. It looks at how the governance arrangements of a MAT might develop and incorporate community voices and perspectives; and if and how community engagement and democratic accountability might be designed into the governance of a MAT. These are important questions because, as the Canadian Institute of Governance (2020) states 'Governance determines who has power, who makes decisions, how other players make their voice heard and how account is rendered.'. In seeking to investigate these matters in the context of the post-2010 English school system, the thesis is based on a qualitative case study of three Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) in England, all of which have been established since 2015.

1.2 Timeliness and Significance

This is a timely study because since 2010 the organisation and governance of schooling in England has been transformed by the growth of academies which, as Gunter and McGinity (2014) explain, 'are based on removing the school from local democratic accountability by building on the self-managing school as a business in a competitive marketplace.' Prior to 2010 there were approximately 200 academies in England and now over half of children are educated in academies, increasingly incorporated into Multi Academy Trusts (MATs), which are limited companies with charitable status. What began as the 1997 – 2010 Labour government's policy response to school failure has become the organising principle for the English school system. This latest ideological turn in the history of English schooling has reordered who holds power, makes decisions and how they are held to account. This reordering has been achieved through: the introduction of market mechanisms; the

reduction of strategic co-ordination of the school system; and a diminution of community engagement and democratic accountability in the governance of schooling.

These changes are significant for several reasons. Firstly, as the majority of children in England now receive their schooling at an academy, questions of how the sector is governed and to whom it is accountable are important matters of public policy.

Secondly, as questions about the nature, purposes and resourcing of schooling become increasingly prominent in public and political discourse, the question of how citizens can be involved and shape the response to these questions through the governance of an academised school system requires attention. This is particularly so in the context of the renewed government commitment to full academisation of the English school system and the drive to group academies together into MATs. Concurrently there is a reduction of local authorities' role in education, through both a deliberate policy direction and large-scale reductions in their funding from central government grants. Taken together these developments indicate a trend to greater centralisation over the governance of local services and accompanying reduction of opportunities for local democratic engagement through and with schooling.

Thirdly, the recent increased focus in public debate on the legacy of Britain's imperial and colonial past trigged by the Back Lives Matter movement requires assessment of both what is taught in schools and the ways in which the legacy has influenced the values and practices of school organisation and governance. Underlying all these questions is the need for greater democratic engagement of communities at a local level in devising responses to the interlocking crises of climate breakdown, inequality and social cohesion that challenge centralised and elitist imposed solutions. Whilst it would be wrong to suggest that local authority stewardship of schooling and previous models of school governance provided a wholly satisfactory local democratic polity, its decay and destruction removes an important site in which to renew citizens' engagement and develop new modes of community involvement.

1.3 Reflecting on my role as researcher: a reflexive account

For the past forty years I have had a personal and professional involvement with democracy in education, schooling, and communities. The impetus for this thesis arises from this involvement and the desire to understand the possibilities and obstacles to the development of democratic modes of working and organisation in the current dispensation of schooling in England. As the study is so closely entangled with my personal history and interest, I think it is necessary to set out this position as a prelude to the thesis.

Since the advent of quantum mechanics and quantum theory nearly one hundred years ago, and in particular the work of Werner Heisenberg, the notion of a scientific method based on objectivity of the researcher whose presence has no impact on the outcome of the research has been challenged (Polkinghorne 2002: 33). Indeed, as Heisenberg (1989: 20) contends, the act of observation (and by extension the role of the observer) 'plays a decisive role in the event' and the ability to describe the world without any reference to ourselves is an illusion' (22). If the belief in a mechanistic, clockwork and deterministic universe is challenged within science and quantitative research, study of the social world, with all its messiness and unpredictability, characterised by 'human beings rather than cobble stones', as Polyani puts it (cited in Wellington 2000: 51), is even less likely to be amenable to the positivist paradigm of neutral observers having no effect on the phenomena being researched. There is much discussion of the position and role of the researcher in the literature of qualitative research (see for example Creswell 2007: 139, Denzin and Lincoln 2011: 11, Denscombe 2017: 224, Pring 2000: 108). Several writers take the view that questions of how to secure objectivity and minimise or eliminate the effect of the researcher on what is being researched are not relevant in the qualitative paradigm. As Braun and Clarke (2013: 36) put it 'within a qualitative paradigm, the question 'How might the research be biased?' fails to make sense'. There is a consistent theme in the literature that pursuit of objectivity is neither necessary or appropriate and that subjectivity should be embraced. In such circumstances, several writers (e.g., Braun and Clarke 2013: 36, Sapsford and Jupp 2006: 89 and Wellington 2000: 42) discuss the need for researchers to adopt a reflexive approach to their work. This approach seeks to bring the researcher into the research and make them visible as

part of the research process. This involves consideration of the researcher, his/her motivations, biases, assumptions, and understandings. And whilst Wellington (2000: 42), in his review of the importance of researchers being reflexive in this way, warns against the 'confessional approach' which has become common in research biographies which are included in much educational research, he does support the view of Braun and Clarke and others that reflexivity is vital and that some statement of the researcher's positionality is needed. With that in mind I would like to set out some detail of my position in the context of my experience, views and assumptions that have led to my interest in researching aspects of governance of Multi-Academy Trusts.

My working life has been in youth and community work, education, and children's services initially in in the context of the voluntary or third sector and most substantially as an education and children's services officer in two different local authorities. My 25 years in local authority work coincided with profound and far-reaching changes in the provision and governance of schooling in England initiated and sustained by neo-liberal market-led reforms. The beginning of my career in local authority education services coincided with the implementation of the 1988 Education Reform Act, particularly in my case the Local Management of Schools and delegation of powers previously exercised by local authorities to school governing bodies. This could be argued to mark the intensification of a move towards the dominance of market mechanisms, the reduction of strategic co-ordination of the school system, and a dismantling of community engagement and democratic accountability in the governance of schooling. The early part of my local authority career was in the education department of a metropolitan authority in the north west of England for which reform of the education service to develop a partnership way of working with schools and resistance to the government policy of Grant Maintained Status became the organising principles. This entailed an attempt to encourage and support school governance which was both focused on and taking responsibility for Local Management of Schools and being responsive and engaged with school communities and communities of schools.

The election of a Labour government in 1997 marked a shift in the role of the education service to a local delivery agent of increasingly tightly mandated central government initiatives to raise standards and improve schools. In my situation the

period post-1997 was also marked by the local authority becoming more corporate and centralised in its approach and seeking to curb the autonomy of the education department. I was able to observe and participate in these shifts and policy upheavals from the vantage of several different areas of the service. The Director at that time believed in developing a trusted cadre of officers, loyal to both him and the values of the service who could be moved around to ensure consistency of approach and management. To him, flexibility, adaptability, political sensitivity, and supporting and promoting the values of the service were more important than technical proficiency or time served in a particular discipline. His policy was to move people around the service to work in different areas to ensure tribal loyalties did not develop within sections in a way which might undermine the overall cohesion of the department and constantly refresh leadership and management of teams. This enabled me to develop a wide understanding of the service and form and maintain relationships with those managing, leading, and governing schools through working across community education, asset management and school place planning, school improvement and governor support and human resources. Out of this experience, I can identify several values and positions that became an important part of my professional and personal make up, most significantly: a recognition of the power of education to improve lives of both children and young people and the communities they belonged to; the importance of schools being rooted in these communities; and finding ways to support and cajole schools to engage with these communities in the way they worked. I was able to develop an appreciation of the strengths and flaws in local democracy and its engagement with schools and the need for some kind of local ownership and accountability for schools to protect them as community assets and mediate and 'hold the ring' in the inevitable range of conflicts and disputes about purposes and ownership of schools.

I moved to a larger and more diverse metropolitan authority in Yorkshire in 2000 and many of the issues of seeking to create a responsive partnership with schools, supporting school improvement and building strong community engagement were still core roles. Increasingly there was a tension with the centralising tendency of government and its seeming desire for local authorities to be its local agent rather than a force for bringing together agencies and communities locally to articulate a vision and put it into practice. This was a tension not just for education reform but

across a range of policy areas. There were two major policy shifts that occurred during my 13 years here. The first was the 2004 *Children Act* and its attempt to integrate education and the full range of services for children, both within and outwith the local authority (it brought in a statutory duty to cooperate for local authorities, police and health and, later on schools) under the *Every Child Matters* policy framework. This was certainly an exciting and optimistic time of major change as we sought to recast and build new relationships across the public and third sectors at a local level and create partnership structures that could develop a shared vision and priorities and re-focus resources on those priorities (helped enormously by availability of significant new resources and funding such as Sure Start and other specific grants).

Whilst it was buoyant time to live through and seemed an environment conducive to bringing my values and beliefs into policy and practice, when reviewed critically in hindsight there was a number of consequences which began to play out in a very different way after 2010, following the election of the Conservative-led coalition government and the introduction of its public sector austerity programme. Firstly, schools became a less central concern of the children's service directorate, as a result of four factors: the pressure of the high profile safeguarding and child protection remit that had become part of children's services; the increasing opportunity for schools to become detached from the local authority through the expansion of the academy programme in the 2010 Education Act; the reduction in capacity of the local authority to support schools and maintain close partnership as central government imposed budget reductions took effect; and the ambivalence and sometimes open hostility to schools by some elected members who saw them as turning their back on the local authority through academy status.

Other issues unfolded during this period and helped to change the relationship between the local authority and schools. Most notably our ambitious attempt to reshape the local pattern of school organisation better to reflect diversity and promote cohesive communities in the north of the district under the government's Building Schools for the Future programme generated concern and opposition from some schools and communities. These differences might have been negotiated over time as the programme progressed, but the local programme was cut short by withdrawal of the funding following the change of government in 2010 and the

Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition abandonment of the programme, leaving many unresolved differences and some soured relationships. The lack of any political drive to create a new partnership with schools that reflected the changed nature of school governance brought about by the academy programme, together with the loss of significant numbers of staff who were well regarded by schools and the hostility of some elected members (some in influential cabinet posts) served to create a situation in which schools were moving away from the local authority and severe strain was put on the relationship as a vehicle for democratic accountability.

My personal position as the post 2010 changes unfolded was one of hostility to the academy programme at a personal level but as an officer, in the lack of a clear mandate or alternative position from the elected members of the council was to seek to support schools in thinking through what was the best option for achieving their goals and seeking to maintain good relations and find ways of keeping schools engaged in the wider children's services partnership. On some occasions I found myself in an 'honest broker' role between headteachers, elected members and other officers seeking to mediate and find resolution to difficulties.

As a conclusion of this account, I also need to set out how these events played out in my personal life in my role as a school governor at a <city> secondary school, a role I had occupied for several years before taking retirement. Following retirement in 2013, I was in a position to put more time into this work and when the role of governing body chair became vacant in 2014, I was elected to the post. The local context in <city> (as in many councils) was one of stated but uneasy neutrality about academy status; these were seen as decisions for schools to take in the context of their own plans and priorities. The local authority's position was that it would seek to maintain good relations and continue to engage with all schools irrespective of status. However, this approach was tempered by a considerable reduction in resources and capacity to work with and support schools. My school had a long and successful set of partnership arrangements with the primary schools in its geographical cluster and there was a strong sense of partnership and joint working which it was felt would provide alternative peer support and practical assistance as the local authority reduced its capacity and ability to do this. The 2016 Education White Paper on extension of academy status generated concern within the partnership with its proposal of compulsory academy status for all schools. The view

in the partnership was that we needed to take control of our own destiny as far as possible and construct our own arrangements for academy status rather than waiting and having solutions imposed on us. Within the policy framework available to us we concluded that meant forming our own multi-academy trust founded on our community of <city> schools and seeking to root the trust in the communities served by the schools. Despite personal in principle objections to and ambivalence about the national academy policy, my experience of creative subversion (la perruque, or puling tricks as De Certeau (1984: 29) puts it) as an education and children's services officer, working within the spaces in national policy to achieve local goals in keeping with locally determined values, made me feel that this was the right option for our situation. As chair of governors, I steered the governing body through the conversion to academy status, including complicated and detailed negotiations and discussions with a wide range of parties to ensure the community influence and ethos was enshrined within the formal constitution of the MAT and the developing ways of working of the Board, and the creation of the MAT. I became a trustee and MAT board member, chairing the Board for the first 12 months until January 2019.

On reflection, I now feel some doubt about how successful we have been in realising these aspirations. These doubts are chiefly around the following questions and issues. Firstly, the pressure of managing a MAT as stand-alone charitable company in line with all the financial, governance, legal and regulatory requirements has been intense and consumed considerable time and energy. During the first year the board did not discuss children and education until a meeting in October! The second issue is related to this in that this pressure and the professional background and experience of board members has encouraged a culture and way of working which emphasises a corporate, business management approach. The NGA report Moving MATs Forward: The Power of Governance (2019: 10) highlights the need for MAT Boards to achieve the right balance between business, financial and legal matters and understanding educational issues. I felt we were at risk of not achieving this balance and were in danger of losing our founding focus on community connection and engagement as the MAT modelled itself as a business organisation. The final question is concerned with the MATs ability to maintain and develop its connection to its communities, a connectedness which was a foundational principle. As the political environment has shifted and the threat of compulsory academisation has receded

following the critical response to the DfE's 2016 White Paper (and government pre-occupation with the consequences of the 2016 referendum on ending the UK's membership of the European Union), some schools in the partnership have reconsidered their decisions to become part of the MAT. This has prompted some discussion in the Board about changing the focus of the MAT and expanding by taking in schools from a wider geographical area and outside the original community of schools. Whilst there have been efficiencies, improvements in services and cost savings made through better organisation of 'back office' functions and procurement etc. there is a danger that such a growth strategy is prompted more by the need to achieve a financial critical mass rather than educational considerations and community benefits. It would also set up a tension with the values and principles on which the MAT was founded.

There is a post-script to this concluding episode of the narrative which has taken shape during this PhD study. It confirms some of the concerns highlighted above and has informed my understanding and view of MATs and their effects. Shortly after I stepped down as chair of the board, the new chair brought a trustee code of conduct to the Board for approval and signature by each board member. One clause in the code stated: 'Trustees are representatives of the Trust and its schools. When communicating in either official or private capacity (including on social media), Trustees will be mindful of and strive to uphold the aims, values and ethos and reputation of the organisation'. Having just published a co-authored academic journal article (Wood et al 2018) containing a critical review of aspects of government policy on education and MATs and having another one with further critical analysis out for peer review with a view to publication (Wood et al 2020), I sought clarification that this clause would not constrain trustees' participation in academic research, writing and publication. This felt to me straightforward and uncontroversial but prompted a long and heated debate over several meetings. The Board eventually took the view that academic writing and publication by a board member which was critical of government policy concerning MATs, notwithstanding university ethical approval and associated academic safeguards, would pose a risk of reputational damage to the MAT (by virtue of having a trustee who had written and published material critical of the ideology and direction of government policy on education) and was not therefore compatible with a trustee's obligations under the code of conduct.

This episode had a significant impact on me; I felt this position created a conflict between my role as trustee and that of post-graduate researcher. I therefore resigned as a trustee and member of the board and ended all association with the MAT, a matter of some regret given the time and energy I had expended and the relationships I had built up and enjoyed over several years. There are three reflections I wish to draw from this chapter of events which may have significance for my position as a researcher into MATs. Firstly, the personal bewilderment and concern that a MAT, which is constituted as an educational organisation, should be so resistant, and institutionally averse to educational debate and seek to avoid association with critical comment on the policy environment in which it operates. Secondly, the power of the neoliberal logic behind academy policy which has such a pervasive influence on not only the formal structure and operation of the MAT, but also the way it moulds the thoughts and actions of individuals who come to view their role and relationships through a corporate lens. Perhaps the most significant of the three reflections is how any ambivalence and doubts about MATs and the possibilities of them being governed by democratic and community orientated principles has been dispelled; I am now concerned that the way in which MATs are currently constituted and operationalised limit and reduce the possibilities for genuinely educative, open, and empowering engagement with communities.

I feel it is important to set out this narrative as an exercise in reflexivity to highlight my background, understandings and knowledge of MATs and my professional and personal relationship to their origins and the policy framework surrounding them. It attempts to highlight my personal values and political position in relation to the organisations I am studying. I hope that it illuminates the biases and assumptions that this experience might bring to the work of researching community engagement and MAT boards. I also hope that this account makes clear my intellectual curiosity and desire to understand the forces and factors behind the policy of academisation and to explore the possibilities for democratic engagement in MAT governance.

1.4 Contribution to knowledge

MATs are a relatively recent formation and development of the English schooling system and much of the research interest in them has been concerned with

questions of the professional leadership and management, organisational and operational arrangements, and their impact on the outcomes for children and young people that fall within what is broadly defined as standards; that is issues of curriculum and assessment. Baxter and Cornforth's (2021: 571) work on MAT governance and community connection concludes that there is very little research with a focus on what they term the 'life world perspective', that is community engagement and place-based connection of schools at a local level. This study seeks to generate new knowledge and understanding of the relationship of MATs with communities; those in which they are located and those which they ostensibly exist to serve. In doing so the thesis constructs an explanatory framework for these relations drawing on and rooted in neo-colonial theory and perspectives. This framework underpins and illuminates the construction of knowledge undertaken in the thesis' analysis. This explanatory framework is of significance and makes an important contribution to knowledge for three reasons. Firstly, it brings to the fore the often hidden and dismissed but pervasive legacy of imperialism and colonialism and its deleterious impact on contemporary attitudes, practices, and institutions in education.

Secondly, the neo-colonial explanatory framework assists in the critical analysis of MAT relationships with community by problematising, disrupting and making strange the processes of academisation and MAT formation. This critical analysis enables potential and actual harms and detrimental effects of academisation on communities to be highlighted and challenged.

Thirdly, the framework prompts a rethinking of the way in which MATs approach and build relationships with schools and communities. Deploying the framework heightens awareness of the presence of neo-colonial discourse and material relations of power rooted in this discourse. This encourages and enables the exploration of different possibilities for relationships and approaches to governance which challenge dominance and hierarchies of power and further social justice.

The knowledge and understandings arising from the study fall into three areas: the ways in which MATs exercise power to control their constituent schools and associated communities; how MATs conceptualise and practice accountability; and the construction of an explanatory framework for MAT relations with schools and

communities inspired by the discourse of neo-colonialism its pervasive influence on British society and its institutions. This explanatory framework, whilst set out in chapter six, runs through, and informs all the analytical elements of the thesis.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured into three parts. The first part is the background material and comprises of three chapters: the current chapter provides an introduction to the area under examination, the context of educational reforms that underpin the academy programme in England and a reflexive account of researcher positionality; chapter two is a review of literature relating to the themes of this thesis, which identifies and examines some of the important arguments, understandings, and tensions which have bearing on the questions addressed; and chapter three sets out the methodological questions, theoretical perspectives and practical issues structuring the thesis.

The second part is concerned with the analysis and discussion of the data gathered from the case study MATs. It consists of four chapters which provide an analytical structure to examine the governance of the case study MATs. Chapter four provides and inward-looking gaze at the way MATs grant autonomy and exercise control over their constituent schools and how the structures and modes of working of MATs in the case study are influenced by neo-liberal market and business logics. Chapter five offers an outward looking perspective, examining the way the case study MATs conceptualise and relate to their constituent schools and communities, particularly through the lens of how the requirements and obligations of accountability are discharged. Chapter six seeks to develop an explanatory framework for MAT relationships with communities based on the discourse of neo-colonialism. This suggests that the ways in which a MAT gains control of the resources, people and assets of a school is akin to the process of colonialism where power is concentrated at the centre. Chapter seven is a coda reporting on the analysis of further participant responses about the impact of school closures during the first Covid 19 Pandemic lockdown in summer 2020. Whist structured into four distinct chapters it is important to recognise the interlocking and overlapping nature of the themes under discussion

and the underpinning role of the neo-colonial explanatory framework and that there is therefore an arbitrary element in the way material is allocated between the chapters.

The third part of the thesis is chapter eight which provides a conclusion, a discussion of the implications of the findings of the study, and a reflection on the way the thesis has responded to the research questions posed in section 3.1.1 of chapter three. These implications are concerned with: the power of neoliberal and neo-colonial discourse as an explanatory framework for the ways in which MATs relate to schools and communities; how communities are marginalised and excluded from governance; and the importance of alternative narratives which point up the possibilities for resistance to the hegemony of such discourses.

.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Since 2010, the organisation and governance of schooling in England has been transformed by the growth of academies which, as Gunter and McGinity (2014) explain, 'are based on removing the school from local democratic accountability by building on the self-managing school as a business in a competitive marketplace.' Prior to 2010 there were approximately 200 academies in England and now over half of children are educated in such schools. Individual academies are now increasingly being incorporated into Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs). What began as the last Labour government's policy response to school failure has become the organising principle for the English school system, to the extent that the Conservative government, in a prelude to the 2016 White Paper Educational Excellence Everywhere, set out an intention for all schools to become academies by 2020 More recently, in 2021, the Secretary of State for Education has restated that academy status for all English schools is the ambition of the Conservative government that took office in 2019.

This is the latest ideological turn in the history of English schooling. Carr and Hartnett (1996: 69) point out that this system was 'not designed for, or by, citizens in a democratic society, but for workers, servants and subjects.'

This was essentially a class-based system. A review of some of the writing on the history of education policy in England over the past 150 years (Carr and Hartnett, Ball 2017 and Ball 2018) suggests four themes of note which illustrate the changes and continuities in policy and the way in which policy comes about by a process of what Ball (2017: 63) terms 'accretion and sedimentation' in which old and new principles and practices mingle and merge exposing inconsistencies and contradictions. Whilst delineated neatly here, these four themes are not necessarily sequential, nor do they represent a continuous line of change or improvement. They intermingle and interact in a series of repeats and repetitions, going back as well as

forward (Ball 2017: 64). Firstly, the lack of any central government policy to create a system with agreed purposes and aims. Second, the involvement of a range of non-state actors in shaping policy and making provision of schooling, most notably churches but also political and community organisations. Thirdly the role of communities in the establishment and governance of schooling. Fourthly reconstructing schooling as a market-based enterprise. This has resulted in the introduction of market mechanisms; the reduction of strategic co-ordination of the school system; and a dismantling of community engagement and democratic accountability in the governance of schooling. This is significant because according to Francis (2018) '…the technicalities of our education system's governance structures sound tedious, and perhaps trivial. But … they are absolutely vital, and we overlook them at our peril.' This thesis takes up the challenge of this warning and seeks to critically examine some of the developing governance practices of MATs.

This thesis is concerned with the possibilities of multi-academy Trusts being democratic, community organisations and the governance which might be required to make this happen and sustain it. The exploration of this topic entails a journey through writings on democracy, educational policy, governance, particularly of schools and educational institutions, community, the purposes of education and schooling and the influence of imperialism and neo-colonialism. The review examines the literatures of democracy, politics, community, and neo-colonialism with a particular emphasis on how they relate to education and schooling. Whilst it is possible to begin with an exploration of these discrete areas of literature it is apparent that it soon moves towards areas where they begin to interreact, intermingle and collide.

2.2 Process of the review

The literature reviewed can be grouped into four categories: books, both academic and more popular and journalistic texts; peer reviewed journal articles; so-called 'grey' literature, the plethora of government and government agency policy documents, white papers etc. together with the reports of think tanks, parastatal,

non-governmental, and voluntary organisations (both independent and in receipt of government funding); and articles from the 'trade' and general press.

Reviewing the literature was not a linear process completed at the beginning of the project. Literature of interest was identified and used to add to and amend the review throughout the duration of the project. This is a part of the abductive approach (Brinkman 2017: 11) adopted in which there is a continuing dialogue between the literature, the analysis and interpretation of data and the researcher (see chapter three, Methodology section 3.10.2 interviews, sub-section 3.10.2.10 on 'stages in the analysis'). In particular the section on neo-colonial perspectives was developed in parallel with the analysis and interpretation work that brought the discourse of neo-colonialism and the legacy of empire into focus.

2.3 Purpose of schooling: tensions and contradictions in policy

It is clear from even a cursory analysis of public discourse about education that it is a contested field and that schooling, and education more widely is an area of public policy that is loaded with 'multiple and contradictory associations and expectations, including, amongst other things, empowerment and repression, individuation and socialisation, emancipation and regulation, inquiry and transmission, and creativity and standardisation' (Clarke 2018: 118). The overall effect of these associations and expectations is a series of tensions and conflicts over the purposes of schooling. Their impact on the development of English schooling and its connections with democratic society has been to create a sense of permanent cultural revolution and a shift from democratic, local and community accountability of schools to a fragmented, corporatised, instrumental schooling (Middleton, Abbott and Robinson 2018 chapter 2).

These multiple expectations also play out in a contradictory political, economic, and social discourse about education. For example education is frequently cited as the root of many social and economic ills (from poorly behaved children to full-scale economic decline) and also amongst the first solutions offered to those same ills, observable in the tendency of government to suggest schools as at least part of the

solution for many social policy problems including serious violence, gang culture, obesity, family breakdown and child health, for instance see Fullan (1998: 6), Fielding and Moss (2011: 34) and Biesta (2006 chapter 4).

Policy though is not univocal or unidirectional; there are competing and contradictory tendencies and movements. For example, there is the fragmentary and centrifugal drive to school autonomy and individualisation in the Local Management of Schools provisions of the 1988 Education Reform Act and the drive towards academisation since 2010.This can be set against the more centralising and centripetal forces of the National Curriculum and associated testing and assessment regimes.

The rise of neoliberalism as a dominant discourse in public policy has increasingly brought education into the orbit of economic and business logics. It is possible to trace the beginnings of the growing influence of business on education policy and practice to the then Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan's Ruskin College speech in 1976 (Benn 2012). The speech focused on the relationship between education and employment and the need to open up the curriculum to business and introduce greater accountability for what happened in schools. Since the Ruskin College speech, the influence of such logics has become pervasive such that 'business has not merely a legitimate concern for schools and the job they do; schools and the job they do are now an integral part of business itself.' (Benn 2012: 118)

The forty-five years since the Ruskin College speech in 1976, have been characterised by intensely political and frequent policy shifts and reforms (Benn 2012 chap 3). Callaghan's speech marked a major shift in government thinking about education, with national government claiming rights over the curriculum and internal organisation of schools, something which had been up to then an 'arm's length' issue for central government (education was sometimes characterised in the 1960s and early 1970s as a national service administered locally - see Carr and Hartnett 1996, chap 4). Whist it might be possible to locate this speech as the beginning of the neoliberal turn, it is important to note its long antecedents. For example, the 'Black Papers' in the 1960s and 1970s had an influential role in the crystallisation of conservative concerns and objections to post war progressivism and perceived left-wing bias and influence in English schooling (Wood et al (2020: 5). Looking further

back it is possible to locate the controversy underlying the conservative critique of progressive schooling in the 1920s and 1930s (Tisdall 2020). Whilst a historical perspective is useful in establishing the long pedigree of child centred strategies and pedagogy, it is also a reminder that summoning up the educational traditions of hierarchy, didacticism and authoritarian discipline which contribute to 'the phantasmagoria of Britain's golden age' is a tactic employed since the 19 Century to inhibit the development of an education system appropriate for fostering a more democratic society and has been remodelled as part of the argument underpinning the new right's success in establishing hegemony in education' (Carr and Hartnett 1996: 68). The point here is that whilst the 'golden age' of traditional education invoked by conservatives can be shown to be illusory, the purposes of schooling have a long history of contestation.

This is a process that has been unfolding for some time. Carr and Hartnett (1996) writing more than 20 years ago suggest that the

> 'current turmoil in education is in large part due to the sheer volume of radical educational policies introduced by successive Conservative governments during the 1980s and 1990s – policies which have been formulated and implemented with little or no reference to the educational professions and which have put control of the educational system firmly in the hands of politicians and unelected quangos'.

It is striking that this view of Carr and Harnett from 1996 could also serve as an accurate summary of the 20 years since it was written, but perhaps with even greater intensity and a clear political direction to 'take on' and 'defeat the 'producer interest' in education. Indeed, it can be argued that this is part of a deliberate neoliberal policy to move education from a community and social good to a market-driven, instrumental process of compliance and preparation for an unequal and precarious labour market (see for example Fielding and Moss 2011: 17). This kind of landscape gives rise to a culture of performativity, stress, and anxiety for both teachers and students, to the extent that they become what Ball (2003: 220) describes as 'ontologically insecure' as teachers' professionalism is challenged and children and young people's psychological health and mental well-being is threatened.

What this process highlights is an educational-political question that should underpin a strategic vision for education at a local level and that therefore requires an examination of fundamental questions about what education and schooling are for and to whom schools belong (Hatcher 2014: 368). If schools are to be civic institutions belonging to the community, then questions arise about whether 'ownership of such an institution can legitimately be transferred from civil society to a third party by means of a commissioning and contracting process' (Glatter 2017: 120) that underpins the neoliberal public sector doctrine of New Public Management.

The question about the deeper purpose of the school system therefore arises. Should it be geared toward pursuing a state determined neoliberal ambition of improved outcomes and preparing young people for the labour market or the more profound moral purpose of furthering the common good through a democratic community; a system with a clear moral purpose which seeks to provide opportunities where 'people, whatever their social background, could live distinctively human and flourishing lives through broad-based learning which develops critical thinking and preparation for citizenship' (Pring 2015: 27).

The foregoing indicates that contradictory currents and tensions in education policy are many and various but for the purposes of this analysis might be synthesised into a fundamental tension between; a neoliberal formation of education as a process for reproducing and maintaining existing social and economic structures and relations, and a liberatory endeavour to support human flourishing. Dealing with the former policy orientation first, the following sets out some important elements of the neoliberal discourse on the purpose of education.

The neoliberal colonisation of education should be set in the wider historical context of the struggle between these two versions of education's purpose and viewed as

> 'the latest outcome of a continuous political struggle over how the internal tensions between the two political traditions of liberalism and democracy ought to be resolved. What also becomes clear is how New Right educational ideas, by successfully promoting the cause of liberalism against the progress of democracy, have managed to reverse the partial democratisation of education which had been achieved by through past intellectual debates and political struggles. (Carr and Hartnett 1996: 184)'

What was a reverse of democratic gains in education in 1996 has now become part of a wider, political context involving a shift in the relationship between governments and citizens 'from a political relationship to an economic relationship: a relationship between the state as a provider of public services and the taxpayer as a consumer of state provision' (Biesta 2006: 20). This 'disenchantment of politics by economics' (Davies 2017: 6) relies on the deconstruction and undermining of the idea of the common or public good.

The decay of the common good is accompanied by the consumerist infiltration of education, what Biesta (2006: 19) terms learnification, and marked by the shift from the use of language about education to the language of consumerism. This privileging of business and consumer language highlights the transformation in understanding of education as a social and relational process to that of an economic transaction.

Three particularly telling examples illustrate how this shift in language redefines education as an economic

> '…transaction in which (1) the learner is the (potential) consumer, the one who has certain "needs" in which (2) the teacher, the educator, or the educational institution is seen as the provider, that is the one who is there to meet the needs of the learner, and where (3) education itself becomes a commodity…' (Bietsa 2006: 19)

This is not simply the introduction and use of a new language of professional interaction and institutional dialogue but a more profound transformation in which the ideas, language and practices of business have come to shape and define education policy. It concerns the way in which 'private sector businesses carry the language and practices of the private sector into the public sphere of schools, modelling them on the efficient firm' (Ranson 2012). The impact of this colonisation, reshaping, and repurposing of schools by business logics can be discerned by examining the way in which business and other organisations have become embedded in the new dispensation of school organisation and governance in England. Gunter and McGinity (2014) highlight how the involvement of private sector organisations and faith groups as sponsors in the Academy Programme 'is about building markets for

their ideas (faith groups) and products (entrepreneurs) and securing a 'compliant ready' workforce and citizenry.'

The overall effect of this process is that the private sector and education businesses have become an integrated part of the education environment, influencing and determining policy both in individual schools and at the level of national government, what Ball (2009: 97) terms 'a complex inter-relation between companies and the state.' He points out how such interventions and involvements

> '…draw their language and methods from business models of change management. What are being sold are the necessities of change, a new managerialist language and a kind of self-belief and self-efficacy – new organisational ecologies and identities.' (2009: 86)

These 'new organisational ecologies' represent an entanglement of business and education that goes beyond the involvement of business organisations and ideas in practice and policy. For Thomson, Gunter, and Blackmore (2014: vii) there is now a distinct 'leadership industry made up of knowledge producers, and popularisers located in private companies, universities and schools.' This industry has developed, sells, and imposes a range of both tailor-made and off the peg solutions across the whole range of education (buildings, staff, curriculum, pedagogy, and management and leadership) to individuals, institutions, and governments. This industry has come to represent a particular view of schooling which is narrow in scope, instrumental and removed from community connection and democratic accountability. A significant issue for this thesis highlighted here is the way in which the hegemony of business logics has colonised schooling and as a result undone community connection and brought new forms of governance into play which are not rooted in or related to communities.

As noted above, there are other narratives in evidence which highlight the potential and possibilities for schooling, and education more widely, to be an emancipatory and liberatory force. A radical vison of an education whose purpose is a transformation of society to alter the structures of power and bring about greater social justice and liberation of individuals from oppression, 'must be forged with, not for, the oppressed (be they individuals or whole peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity'. (Freire 1972: 25).

In delineating this 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed', Freire shows that for education to be a transformative experience it must be a cooperative enterprise in which both those being taught, and their teachers undergo change through learning together. He describes this as like a childbirth, bringing something new into being, which echoes Arendt's (1958: 9) view of the human condition of natality which has the closest connection with action in plurality, the 'political activity par excellence'.

Plurality is the essential feature of the human condition and vital for sustaining the kind of democratic community in which people can interact and bring about something new, what Arendt terms natality. It is this natality, each new person coming into the world being unique and different and initiating their own actions and interactions, which create plurality and, by exercising the capacity to do something new and different rather than follow prescribed actions determined by others which foster human flourishing and the possibility of a liberatory education. This capacity and the attendant possibilities are missing from the education on offer in the current dispensation of schooling in England (Courtney and Gunter 2015: 403)

Arendt wrote extensively on the conditions necessary for human flourishing and democratic community. Arendt's writing explicitly on education and schooling are presented in two essays - 'Reflections on Little Rock' published in 1959 and 'The Crisis in Education' published in 1961. Arendt's views on education cannot be restricted to these two frequently cited and much discussed essays devoted specifically to education and schooling. Her other writings on conditions for democratic societies also help us rethink conventional notions of education and consider its purposes (Nixon 2020).

Arendt's views on education set out in these two essays have been criticised for their conservative nature but she is clear that this is about conservation 'of the essence of the educational activity, whose task is always to cherish and protect something - the child against the world, the world against the child' (Arendt 2006: 188). Arendt's conservatism then was limited to the aspect of education concerned with relations between children and adults. She makes explicit that such attitudes in matters of politics and the wider purposes of education are dangerous and damaging; 'this conservative attitude - which accepts the world as it is, striving only to preserve the status quo - can only lead to destruction'. (2006: 189). Embracing plurality therefore

provides the foundations of an education and approach to schooling which counters the prescription and rigid conformity of the neoliberal formations which dominate school organisation and governance today; an education that is rooted in and at the service of communities and supports vigour and self-determination.

2.4 Democracy and its relationship with education

Democracy has become an idea which the public and societal consensus regards as self-evidently good, necessary and a corner stone of society. Some elements of current political debate suggest it has moved beyond a simple good and everyday common place to become a foundation of our national identity and society. This emphasis on democracy is also present in policy affecting education. The Prevent Strategy, the preventative and early intervention element of the Government's counter-terrorism strategy, which is now mandatory for schools, further and higher education, makes it a requirement for schools to teach and promote 'fundamental British values' including democracy, without any explanation of how the values and practices that underpin it extend beyond Britain and why they are a foundation of human society and human rights having common currency across many jurisdictions.

This invocation of democracy and democratic values can also be observed in the UK at times of crisis or national threat such as that engendered by recent terrorist acts. The campaign for the UK to leave the European Union, leading to the national referendum on the question of continued EU membership in 2016, and the subsequent process of negotiation of a withdrawal treaty and trade agreement between the UK and the EU were also marked by public statements and exhortations from those in favour of the UK leaving the EU which stressed the importance of fulfilling the democratic will of the people.

It feels particularly important to explore the meanings and interpretations of democracy and its application in an educational context, since statute requires schools to promote democracy. However, some writers and commentators would suggest that the thrust of policy on school governance and organisation is to reduce and diminish democracy as a principle on which schools are organised and governed (see for example Ranson 2018: 11, Glatter 2017: 121, Greany and Higham

2018: 101). The impact of the drive towards academisation, the creation of multi-academy trusts, the fragmentation of the system of schooling and the implications for children, young people, families, and communities is becoming increasingly well documented (see for example Greany and Higham 2018, Glatter 2017 and Hatcher 2014).

Gunter and McGinity's (2014) analysis focuses on the drive to improve schools through diversifying types of school organisation and bringing new 'providers' to run them, a series of policies set in train by the 1997 – 2010 Labour government. In particular, they highlight the City Academies programme of state-funded independent schools as being a significant development as this took schools out of the influence and control of local authorities and introduced commercial, voluntary organisations and faith groups into the governance of schooling. (It is worth noting that both the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church in England have had significant involvement in school organisation and governance for many years but since the 1944 Education Act and up until the legislation underpinning the academies programme this has been within a framework of partnership with local authorities.) Gunter and McGinity (2014: 302) argue that:

> 'From 2010, there has been a shift from a "some-thing must be done about inner-city schools" towards a "something must be done about all schools" where it is claimed that those who are doing well within LAs can do even better outside.'

They are also concerned that a plurality of ideas and views is not currently tolerated in the political climate created by the academies programme, and this is a barrier to the democratic renewal in education and wider society, which they believe is necessary. Drawing on Arendt's writing about labour, work, and action (Arendt 1958: 312) they conclude that:

> 'The dominance and revitalisation of elite interests in the provision of public education is based on a narrative of educational purposes that is seductive – we must do something about urban education – and, singular – what we must do is to produce a workforce capable of complying with our profit and missionary motives.'

This view is echoed by Glatter (2017: 120) who refers to the concentration of power and control of English education at the level of central government as a 'paucity of pluralism'.

There are several significant strands emerging from the literature which have bearing on the argument of this thesis. Firstly, that in spite of the contradictions and tensions in the often-haphazard development of education policy in England over the past 150 years, there has, until the advent of the academies programme, been a democratic element in the governance of schooling. No matter how imperfect or partial, the principle of community involvement in school governance has been applied. Even with the beginnings of the neoliberal turn in the 1980's, the democratic principle was evident. For example, the 1988 ERA provision for schools to opt out of the local authority relationship and become grant maintained required approval in a ballot of parents.

Secondly, the often chaotic and partial nature of policy development and the relative laxity in its enactment offered space for pluralism of organisation, curriculum, and pedagogy. This was particularly so in the years before the 1980s when local authorities were able to exploit their role in the system as designers and providers to develop schooling in line with community needs and local political priorities. Radical initiatives were both possible and successful; for example, village colleges in Cambridgeshire, community education integrated in upper schools in Leicestershire, an intense curriculum focus on arts and creativity in the West Riding of Yorkshire.

Thirdly, the manner in which the neoliberal turn has led to 'a paucity of pluralism' and not only reduced the space for democratic education and the role of education in fostering democratic engagement but increasingly taken on a neo-colonial aspect (see below section 8)

Gunter and McGinity (2014: 120) take these themes and begin to set out alternatives to the reforms highlighted by the academies programme and ways in which the underpinning ideology might be challenged. They suggest that Arendt's work could be important in developing different approaches to democratic renewal of schools 'Pluralism and natality generate imaginings of spontaneity, so integral to learning and creativity, but sadly missing from the politics of this reform.'

Middlewood, Abbott and Robinson (2018), take a normative approach to school collaboration, identifying the move to market-led systems of education in the UK and internationally as creating a system based on individual school autonomy and a diminished role for the local education authority, as a form of central control. These ideas – of increased school autonomy and reduced local government control - are contested. For instance, Greany and Higham (2018: 37) suggest that the academy policy was based on a false premise of local authority control and that in reality academies enjoy what they term 'coercive autonomy' because the tight accountability framework they operate in, and its attendant pressures to perform against targets, impose limits on their ability to exert genuine control over their own affairs.

Benn (2012) locates her account of what she calls the 'battle for Britain's education' in the struggle to introduce and embed a comprehensive system of schooling. She argues that this is better suited to the needs of late twentieth century Britain than the traditional grammar school/secondary modern arrangements, with selection at age 11. She believes that this was backward-looking and profoundly unequal in both its provision and the outcomes for young people. She makes some salient arguments in relation to democracy. Amongst these are what she describes as 'a general alliance between entrenched privilege and aggressive, yet ultimately deferential, aspiration' as having powered much education policy, the clear implication being that this has been a less than democratic way of developing policy. She provides evidence of this in her analysis of the 2010 Education Bill and the weakness of its requirements for consultation and engagement with affected communities when schools convert to academy status, and thus give up or have removed their community governance through an undemocratic process.

This also has echoes of what Arendt (1951/2017; 427) terms the temporary alliance of the elite and the mob which helps totalitarianism to take root in society. In the context of education and schooling in England the denial and reduction of pluralism (see Gunter 2014: 44), the growth of authoritarian models of schooling, the imposition of a curriculum that excludes and denies a plurality of voices and perspectives and the removal of democratic forms of school governance all illustrate a totalitarian tendency, what Courtney and Gunter (2015: 404) identify as a catastrophe unfolding in public education.

2.5 Democracy: interpretations, tensions and threats

Democracy is a contested concept open to many different and contradictory interpretations. A common understanding is that democracy is about the mechanics of government and is concerned largely with voters, political parties, and elections; a representative form of government in which people are involved marginally in line with the rhythms of the electoral cycle. Other theories centre on a deeper interpretation in which democracy is less a concrete means of government and more an aspiration for how societies conduct their affairs.

In the context of this contestation and contradiction, tensions are played out along many axes. A particular tension with relevance to this thesis, and which is explored in this section, is that between a liberal, representative from of democracy in which people adopt a passive role and an active and participatory form in which people as citizens shape their affairs collectively, particularly at a local level.

An historical and comprehensive review of the benefits impacts, and drawbacks of democracy is provided by Alexis De Tocqueville in his Democracy in America (1835/2003). He captures the tensions between individualism and self-interest and the well-being of the wider community and how the democratic spirit is built up through involvement of Americans in community associations and local self-government at a very local level. He notes that this spirit of association and locality is central to enabling democracy to serve the well-being and enhance the prosperity of the greatest number and preventing democratic government becoming a tyranny of the majority.

Dewey (2009: 55) focuses on democracy not just as a system of government but as a mode of associated living where individuals are involved in the formulation and exercise of the rules of community life. For Dewey, democracy is a form of social life in 'which the interests of a group are shared by all its members and the fullness and freedom with which it interacts with other groups'. He views a democratic society as one which has provision for the participation for all its members on equal terms and which 'secures flexible re-adjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life'. Dewey is well known for his application of democracy to education and Noddings (1995: 36) summarises some of this thinking

when she says 'schools should be organised democratically – as places where the best forms of associated living are practiced. Schools are then mini-societies in which children learn through practice how to promote their own growth, that of others and that of the whole society'.

There is another compelling reason to examine more closely the reputation, claims and realities of democracy and more clearly elucidate what is meant by democratic governance. The political climate in western democracies has shifted profoundly since the turmoil of the financial crisis of 2008. Ranson (2018) asserts that the economic dislocation and change culminating in the 2008 crisis and its conjunction with a state organised on the principle of market primacy gives rise to 'arguably the most profound crisis for contemporary democracy'. He goes on to argue that the tensions underlying the problematic relationship between liberalism, with its emphasis on individualism, and the collective decision-making about public goods inherent in democracy, whilst always present 'was a crisis waiting to happen', a crisis that was precipitated by the 2008 financial crash and its aftermath.

This move towards more nationalist, isolationist and authoritarian politics is gaining strength, with what Barber (2003) describes as 'dangerous new variants of neo-democracy'. The attraction of nationalist and authoritarian arguments about 'taking back control' and undoing the effects of globalisation have appeal in uncertain, volatile, and complex times but the danger of a move to authoritarian and totalitarian forms of government in response to such events was highlighted by Arendt (1951/2017) in the preface to the Origins of Totalitarianism:

> 'Never has our future been more unpredictable, never have we depended so much on political forces that cannot be trusted to follow the rules of common sense and self-interest – forces that look like sheer insanity …'

Against this background, it would seem important that there is sound and widespread understanding of democracy, the benefits it brings and how it can be strengthened in institutions and practices at all levels. Whilst acknowledging the longevity, wide spread and success of liberal democracy Barber (2003) provides powerful criticism of it as 'thin democracy'. The first part of the book provides an in-depth analysis of the short comings of thin democracy. His argument proceeds from a reversal of the view that an excess of democracy can weaken and undo liberal

institutions. Instead, Barber insists it is liberal democracy that has undone democratic institutions. This is a position echoed by Ranson (2018: 61) who claims that the idea that the spread of globalisation and liberalisation was hollowing out the state is not correct. He asserts that it is democracy that is being hollowed out and that in reality the powers of the central executive branch of the state have been strengthened and extended. This shift of power and control has come at the expense of parliament and local authorities, and this has been mirrored in the spread of a corporate model of governance to schools.

Barber's critique asserts that the institutions and forms of representation contrived by liberalism to guarantee liberty and serve democracy do neither. Whilst critical of liberal democracy he is clear that the failings in institutions it has given rise to can be remedied with a strong dose of political participation. His argument stresses that where the primary expression of citizenship is voting then the refusal to vote, as indicated by the low turnout in elections in so many democratic societies, is a signal of the bankruptcy of the dominant form of democracy. Further, he asserts that the fall in participation by the public means that public affairs are relegated to and taken over by the private sector with the attendant privatisation of services and selling off of the public realm.

Carr and Hartnett (1996) suggest that democracy, although a relatively simply understood term meaning rule by the people, is not unambiguous. Debates about who constitute 'the people' what 'ruling' entails and how power is used lead to the conclusion that democracy is a contested concept. They note the history of democracy has been marked by a struggle over politics and ideology and that as a result there are two broad and often competing conceptions of democracy. Firstly, a form of popular power which engages citizens in self-rule and self-government. Secondly, a representative system of political decision making, a means of legitimising the decision making of those elected as representatives to exercise power. Whilst these are broad ideal types, it may be noted that they also correspond to different types of politics with the former type aligned with radical, community-based and egalitarian movements and ideologies and the latter more often associated with practices and ideologies of powerful groups and elites in society. Indeed, Ranson (2018: 80) asserts that "modern capitalism has taken over the clothes of democracy and presented them in its own image".

A phenomenon of the early twenty first century has been a growing disenchantment with liberal democracy. Eatwell and Goodwin (2018: 85) in their analysis of the growth of populism across Europe and more widely also highlight the 'growing disconnect between the rulers and the ruled 'and suggest that this has exacerbated a much longer and deep-seated tension between 'people power' and more elitist conceptions of democracy, a trend that they trace back to the era of direct democracy practiced in ancient Greece. Davies (2017: 4) suggests that this distrust and populist revolt against institutions is in fact 'institutionalised anti-institutionalism.'

Eatwell and Goodwin's analysis shows how this tension has in recent years created space for the growth of populism and its promises to speak on behalf of people who have been forgotten, 'neglected and even held in contempt by increasingly distant and technocratic political and economic elites'. They assert that liberal democracy is subject to a series of revolts which result in the growth of populism, and which need to be understood by looking at long term trends.

According to Eatwell and Goodwin four major shifts in western societies need to be considered if we are to understand why liberal democracy is under stress. Firstly, the way in which liberal democracy has become elitist has promoted distrust of politicians and institutions and a feeling that ordinary citizens no longer have a voice in those institutions which affect their lives. Secondly, fears amongst some sections of western populations that the demographic and cultural changes driven by globalisation, with its attendant free movement of labour, and the migration driven by the linked consequences of economic inequality, conflict and environmental degradation are damaging and destroying historic national identities. The third trend is the impact of the neoliberal economic policies associated with globalisation and the economic inequality and environmental damage they cause. These have the impact of increasing deprivation and inequality in rich western economies. Whilst it might be argued this deprivation is relative in global terms, the impact of stagnant wages, insecure employment, and other aspects of economic inequality results in real fears for the future amongst some groups and a feeling that the past is better than the likely future for themselves and their families. Fourthly, there is the weakening of traditional political parties and their bonds with particular segments of the population which are a characteristic of liberal democracy. This leads to a more

fragmented, volatile, and even chaotic politics as people become de-aligned from mainstream political life and more prone to populist arguments and politics.

Woods and Gronn (2009: 432), writing more specifically about educational environments, also acknowledge the different conceptions of democracy dependant on political contexts, interpretations of history and differing traditions, identifying four ideal types. These range from liberal minimalism through civic republicanism and deliberative democracy to developmental democracy. These four broadly represent a shift from representative systems of decision making with minimal scope for participation through to a richer conception of citizen participation. Like Carr and Hartnett, they distil these conceptions to two broad categories; liberal normative minimalism with a relatively narrow procedural view of democracy; and a more expansive normative view with a position that

> 'seeks to reduce the distinction and unequal power relationship between ruling elites and the populace, with the aim of expanding governorship 'downwards' so that a greater proportion of the governed govern'.

They note that three core elements run through all these models of democracy: self-governance; protection from arbitrary power; and legitimacy grounded in consent. The important factor in this is that the protective mantle of democracy extends to all individuals especially those minorities who might lose a particular vote. In this sense democracy is an inclusive system whose strength lies in encouraging the participation of all citizens. Runciman (2018: 20) calls this 'democratic civility' the recognition that the winning side in an election does not hold a monopoly of truth.

Barber (2003) identifies three types of democracy. Pure democracy he characterises as all of the people governing all public matters all of the time. Representative democracy permits some of the people, chosen by all of the people, to govern over all public matters all of the time. This model ensures efficiency and accountability but, he argues, at the cost of participation and citizenship.

Thirdly, there is strong democracy, which revitalises citizenship by creating a form of government in which all of the people govern themselves in some public matters for at least some of the time. He asserts that only strong democracy provides for a legitimate form of politics that will give a good chance to ensure the conditions for

survival and growth of what is best in the liberal tradition. Three areas for discussion follow from this: firstly, what are and might be the institutions and bodies in which such strong democracy might be practiced; secondly and related to this, at what level or scale can strong democracy work; and thirdly, what constitutes the politics required for strong democracy.

It can be argued that high levels of central control over resources and the decisions about how to allocate them and the movement of power away from local institutions inhibits the conditions required for strong democracy. It is through devolution of power and decision making about resources to local areas and institutions that the conditions for engagement of all people in some form of control over public matters stand a better chance to flourish

In the final section of his book, Barber sets out a thorough survey of the kind of institutions and practices of strong democracy in practice. In doing so he transforms a theoretical critique of democracy into an illuminating review of real possibilities for strong democratic action taking in local government, community organisations, technological facilitated participation in decision making and referenda amongst others. It is possible that some of this practice and the thinking underpinning it could be applied to educational contexts at a local level of a single school or groups of schools in local areas.

Barber also argues that strong democracy is the only legitimate form of politics, and he goes on to define the conditions that give rise to politics and how strong democracy can respond to these. He describes politics as arising when consensus breaks down and the question of 'what shall we do when something has to be done that affects us all' arises. It is an untidy and messy business because it requires choices and action but without the benefit of guidance by absolute truths and knowledge, disagreement about means and ends and wanting to act in a manner that is reasonable and conforms to right. No wonder he describes being political as 'to be free with a vengeance'. He asserts the realm of politics is first and foremost a realm of human action.

Ranson's (2018) book focuses debates about democracy onto specifically educational contexts. His critique of contemporary crises, the undermining of democracy and the possibilities for democratic renewal are located in the context of

education, both as a site for the development of his critique and an illustration of the opportunities for democratic community participation that can enable the participation of citizens in public life and allow them to become makers rather than detached voters (the creation of strong democracy in Barber's terms).

Drawing on Arendt's writings, he sets out how her ideas of action, plurality and agency in the public sphere can be utilised to create a public space of participation and deliberation. Such a space would enable citizens to engage in transformation of democracy in ways appropriate to the collective action required to address the dilemmas faced by society. The action that goes on between people, according to Arendt, gives rise to something new, the coming together of people in communities and their participation in community activities. The words and deeds generated through such action creates the public space in which democracy can be renewed.

This section has reviewed some of the writing and theory on democracy in relation to the tensions and contradictions between liberal, representative forms and active, participatory conceptions. The shortcomings and challenges of liberal democracy have been delineated and the role of participatory democracy and its relationship to education have been explored. Several writers have identified the importance of small-scale opportunities for involvement of citizens in discussing, deliberating, and having active involvement in shaping actions and decisions at a local level. For example, Brown (2019: 27) states that 'democracy requires explicit efforts to bring into being a people capable of engaging in modest self-rule, efforts that address ways that social and economic inequalities compromise political equality.'

This participatory form of democracy is both of intrinsic value as experience of living in community, and a process of what Ranson (2018: 56) describes as 'becoming active citizens, makers of the worlds in which they are to live and work…' It is this participatory conception of democracy to which the local governance structures of schooling gave opportunity for expression and exercise. The latest neoliberal turn signified by the extension of the academies programme and the development of MATs removes the opportunity for this form of citizen engagement in the governance of schooling and thereby stifles participatory democracy. The removal of this form of democratic expression also reshapes schools' understanding of and relationship with

communities. The next section explores some of the ideas of community in the literature.

2.6 Community: Debates and Definitions

One of the research questions explored in this thesis is that of community and how it is understood and shaped by MATs. The initial questions on community concern the idea of the school in a community, what constitutes a community? How is the community served by a school? How might the community play a role in defining the purpose, the organisation and running of a school? There is also the question of the school as a community; what kind of community and how it is organised and led.

Robert Putnam's Bowling Alone (2000) sets out the impact on individuals and families of the breaking of communal bonds and disenchantment with community in a contemporary, wealthy, liberal democratic state, The process underlying the withering of community is that of atomisation, individualisation, and retreat into the private world, driven ultimately by the dominance of the consumer and economic logics of neoliberalism.

As Wood et al (2020:10) identify, schools have long played an important role in shaping and serving communities. They suggest that schools' engagement with communities has often been driven by what they term 'well-meaning paternalism' and what might be characterised as neo-colonial interventions (see section 2.6). Alongside such narratives of domination there is also an emancipatory discourse which places schools as central to the growth of liberated communities able to exercise self-determination (what Wood et all characterise as vigour in communities). As MATs come to dominate the landscape pf English schooling, the possibilities for this kind of community engagement diminish and the relations between school and community are reshaped as commercial and consumer transactions. This section explores some of the conceptions of community that might challenge the economistic logics now shaping schools' engagement with communities.

The work of John MacMurray (1999: 146) brings together many of these strands of thinking with a strong emphasis on the 'personal unities of persons' and association

as fellowship being essential for thinking about community, what Fielding identifies as being 'to do with our essentially relational nature as human beings and forms the fundamental basis of all true education, profoundly influencing the nature of schools as communities'. Macmurray analysis the origins and relationship between the State, society, and community. He identifies two modes of society: the pragmatic realist mode, maintained by power, which he associates with the writings of Thomas Hobbes. In this mode, society is identified with the State and requires the power of government to ensure its existence.

Macmurray identifies a second mode of society, an idealist conception flowing from the work of Rousseau and the liberal humanism of the romantic movement, as the antithesis to the society based on Hobbes' work. Macmurray concludes that both modes 'rest upon the same dualism between rationality and human nature' but suggest that whilst Hobbes maintains human nature requires control, Rosseau believes that it is inherently good and this goodness should be what informs the development of society, rather than the power and control implied by Hobbes' view. This 'contemplative society' is not, according to Macmurray, a state, 'it is not grounded in power, but in the voluntary submission of its members to the general will'. He goes on to explain that to function effectively it needs to be a small enough unit for all its individual members to meet together and make decisions collectively but recognising that representative government may appear to enlarge the scope of such a society. He concludes with the warning that both these modes are 'ambivalent expression of the same negative motivation' and that one can easily change into the other 'Rousseau gives place to Hobbes; idealism to realism; modern democracy to the totalitarian state.' He then seeks to distinguish between society and community, which for him refers to 'forms of association which have a positive personal relation as their bond' and are characterised by practical relations and the way in which people act in relation to each other.

This echoes Arendt's (1958) view of the *vita active* and the human condition. She identifies three fundamental aspects of the human condition: labour; work; and action. She defines labour as corresponding to biological process of the human body and work as the artificial world of things we make distinct from our natural surroundings. Action is different, she asserts that it is 'the only action that goes on

directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality'.

She identifies this plurality as the specific condition of all political life. Action therefore underpins what we do in relation to others and how we deal with questions and problems in an uncertain, ambiguous, volatile, and complex world.

For Macmurray (1999: 4), community entails friendship and the fullest possible relationships between people enabling each to achieve the highest degree of human fulfilment. For Arendt too, community is characterised by friendship as Nixon (2015: 4) points out 'friends become equal partners in a common world', which does not mean they have to be the same or even equal to each other but that they together make up a community. Fielding (2012) places Macmurray's concern with community and its difference from society in the context of schooling and education stressing the 'importance of the school itself as a living community, not just an effective organisation' in which community is both the end and means of human fulfilment. At the centre of the idea of community is a caring relationship between persons and a means of seeking the answer to the social question posed by Sennett (2012: 269) of how to live locally with others in relation and friendship in a complex society.

Biesta (2006: 55) explores two conceptions of community and their relationship to education and schools. What he identifies as the rational community is constituted by individuals sharing and building something in common; 'a nation, a polis an institution'. The rational, community has a common discourse in which its members act and speak as rational agents. Biesta maintains that the role of schools is commonly understood to be constituting and reproducing rational communities. The rational community determines what ways of speaking are acceptable and which are not; it has an exclusionary function. Those excluded from the rational community, those deemed not to be acceptable, constitute what Lingis (1994: 13) terms the 'community of those who have nothing in common'. According to Biesta the role of education in this community is to ensure that there are opportunities for encounters with what is 'different, strange and other' and it is through the way in which we respond to these differences 'that we come into the world as unique, singular beings.' (Biesta 2006: 69) Schools therefore need to embrace and engage with community in a wider and more inclusive sense than the consumer transactions

implied in the business logics of academisation and the neo-colonial domination of the 'other'.

Ranson (2018: 69) links community and citizenship, asserting that membership of community is a requirement for citizenship. To realise fully citizenship, such a community needs to be inclusive and democratic and embrace difference and heterogeneity, ensuring they are fully present and not simply represented formally in governance arrangements. In this conception, citizenship means participation in the life of the community not only voting and paying taxes. Ranson asserts that 'developing a community with a shared culture will require members of neighbourhoods to share responsibility with others…' This can only be achieved through participatory democratic practice and experience.

Previously Ranson and his co-authors have explored school governance as a site in which the development of such community occurs (Ranson et al 2005: 351), suggesting that

> 'The creation of over 400,000 volunteer citizens between 1986–1988, in England and Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, to occupy reformed school governing bodies and school boards across the UK, has been the largest democratic experiment in voluntary public participation.'

It might be argued that academisation and the growth of MATs seeks to undo the gains made by Ranson et al's 'democratic experiment' in community and reshape ideas of community in the image of the world of business, customers, and commercial transactions. The characteristics of communities that support human flourishing; friendship, association, participation, heterogeneity, and engagement with difference, are unlikely to be encouraged in the economistic conceptions of community engagement seen in the MAT sector.

2.7 Power and its exercise

How power is conceptualised and exercised in the governance of MATs is an area of enquiry in this thesis. Some theorists see power as a substance which can be taken or given; it is conceived as intentional and active and observed by its exercise (Lukes 2005:5). Other theorists conceive of power in terms of relations and networks. Hayward and Lukes (2008:17) suggest that there is often agreement on the subjects of power; those affected by its exercise notably the dominated, the oppressed and the powerless. Questions of the source of power tend to be more contentious, should the focus be on 'identifiable agents who are responsible for significant social constraint on the freedom of others? Or should we treat institutionalized human actions (structures) as sources of power.' Hayward and Lukes are left in somewhat of a quandary over this question suggesting that in examining how power operates both agency and structure need to be considered. This section looks at the operation of power through the lenses of Lukes and Foucault.

It is reasonable to assume that governance and leadership exercised in MATs involves the exercise of power and that as such it involves identification and conceptualisation of the interests of the parties involved. Lukes (2005: 37) strips down the complicated and dense superstructure built around the idea of power and offers a concise and straight forward definition: the concept of power is when 'A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests'. He further elaborates this by suggesting that power is about 'agents' abilities to bring about significant effects, specifically by furthering their own interests and/or affecting the interests of others, whether positively or negatively' (65). Lukes identifies three models of power based on how the interests of those involved are conceptualised. The one-dimensional view is concerned with decision making behaviour and decisions about readily observable conflicts of interest, most likely expressed through deciding amongst different policy options. Lukes' two-dimensional view goes deeper into the behaviours of decision-making and allows for consideration of ways decisions are prevented from being made as well as decisions that are made. This

view of power begins to grapple with how the agenda of an organisation or situation is set and by whom. It begins to explore the micro politics of interests, grievances, and motivations beneath the surface of formal governance processes. Lukes' most radical conception of power, his three-dimensional view, further develops a critique of decision-making behaviours. It focuses explicitly on the micro-politics underpinning decision making and the conflicts of interest (both manifest and hidden) between different actors. Lukes' analysis brings the contested nature of power to the front of consideration and highlights the need to examine conflicts of interest and the working of micro-politics in any situation in which governance is exercised. He reminds us that power is real and effective in a variety of ways, in ways that will often be hidden or indirect. Indeed, he notes that power is at its most effective when least accessible to observation by actors and observers (64). Any attempt to analyse the workings of governance and leadership therefore needs to be cognisant of how power works in the settings and interactions being studied.

Foucault's work on power helps to further illuminate the ways in which Lukes' dimensions of power operate. Foucault (1980:158) asserts that power is far more than Lukes' first dimension concerned with the observable and obvious mechanics of agendas and decisions making and that power evolves to meet the circumstances in which it is being exercised: 'one impoverishes the question of power if one poses it solely in terms of legislation and constitution, … Power is quite different from and more complicated, dense and pervasive than a set of laws …' in discussing the origins of these technologies of power he states that 'These tactics were invented and organised from the starting points of local conditions and particular needs.' There is a tendency to describe conditions in schools in in terms such as collaboration, collegiality, teamwork, and participation and so on. In such contexts, ways of exercising power and decision making may be, at least on the surface, of the shaping and influencing variety, seeking 'to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have – that is, to secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires' as Lukes puts it. In Foucault's terms (1980: 39), this is 'the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives.' Such an approach is a 'superb formula: power exercised

continuously and for what turns out to be a minimal cost.' (155) As Lukes puts it 'power is most effective when least accessible to observation' (64).

2.8 Neo- and post- colonial perspectives on education policy

2.8.1 Racism and the legacy of empire: re-awakening the debate

Recent events provoked by racial injustice, racist violence and the public and state responses to these phenomena have generated a renewed debate and focus for activism and academic activity on the legacy of colonialism and imperialism for contemporary society in the UK and more widely. The purpose of this section is to examine the impact of this legacy and identify how it infiltrates the discourses, themes and logics which influence and shape organisational change, governance, and institutional behaviour, particularly in relation to MATs.

The response to this upsurge of interest and questioning of the legacy of empire and colonialism in Britain from the state and the media has been one of defensiveness about the past and its legacy and attempts to play down, discredit or dismiss critical questions. One feature of these responses has been an assertion that colonialism is in the past and that history cannot be re-written or undone. But as Fanon (1963:40) so powerfully asserts:

> 'the history which he [the coloniser] writes is not the history of the country which he plunders but the history of his own nation in regard to all that she skims off, all that she violates and starves.'

This might be characterised as a seeming wish for collective, yet active, forgetting of uncomfortable and shameful aspects of history. The sentiment behind these responses is one of 'it was all a long time ago let's move on and concentrate on the here and now'. Yet as Andreotti (2011; 38) argues this forgetting is part of a conscious ideological formation in which a:

> 'discourse of modernization in which colonialism is either ignored or placed securely in the past, so that we think that it is over and does not affect— and has not affected— the construction of the present situation. The result is a

sanctioned ignorance (constitutive disavowal) of the role of colonialism in the creation of the wealth of what is called the "First World" today…'

The power of the 'sanctioned ignorance' and active forgetting which places spatial and temporal distance between contemporary society and the legacy of colonialism also ignores the influence, operation and indeed hegemony (and its continuing consequences) of colonialism and imperial logics much closer to home, within the geographical entity of Great Britain and Ireland and the associated national and political structures. Said (1993:302) helpfully and concisely sets out what he identifies as the colonial relationship between England and Ireland, the long-running struggle for Irish independence and the anti-Irish racism underlying the relationship, and the English attitudes and action over several centuries up to the present day. Devine (2018: 318) reminds us that the actions of the UK state in relation to the poverty and hardship of the Gaelic-speaking communities of Scotland in the nineteenth century was driven by an ideology of racial superiority and anti-Celtic racism and amounted to what might be termed ethnic cleansing. The implication from both is clear; not only did these events and ideologies adversely affect the lives of UK citizens in the past, but they also continue to shape the social and political discourse today.

The point here is that, as Said puts it (1993: 18) 'though for the most part the colonies have won their independence, many of the imperial attitudes underlying colonial conquest continue.' And, it might be emphasised are prevalent in attitudes and inform the actions of the state and public institutions in Britain. This pervasive influence has had a profound and damaging impact, the more so because of its widespread disavowal and denial. Sanghera (2021: 208) is explicit on this point: 'Our collective amnesia about the fact that we were, as a nation, wilfully white supremacist and occasionally genocidal, and our failure to understand how this informs modern-day racism, are catastrophic.'

2.8.2 Racism, white supremacy and white privilege
The persistence and pervasiveness of racism as a prime constitutive element of the British state and its political life is highlighted by Gilroy (2002: xvii) in his new introduction to his 1987 book 'There Aint' No Black in the Union Jack'. Setting out why he believes we need to be cautious and not give undue emphasis to the

progress made in overcoming the chronic institutional racism in Britain in the last 20 years, he argues that 'the arterial system of the political body' has been blocked and obstructed by a nostalgia for the imperial past and what he terms 'post-colonial melancholia'. This legacy of the imperial mind-set and its practical consequences affects contemporary institutions and their practice and Shajahan (2011: 185) stresses the importance of examining these impacts when he asserts

> 'we need to focus on the material and symbolic impacts of colonialism on the metropolis as well as the interconnected developments within empires. In short, the metropole and colony cannot be separated, but need to be researched within a common analytical frame.'

The critical examination of the UK's colonial legacy and highlighting the impact of racism is not a recent activity as a re-reading of Rushdie's (1992: 129) 1982 essay 'The New Empire Within Britain' confirms. In the essay he dissects powerfully how imperialism has shaped individual thought and attitudes and organisational cultures and practice because 'British thought, British society, has never been cleansed of the filth of imperialism' (131).

This renewed debate has brought forth several new analyses both in a journalistic and academic style which explore the enduring and pervasive effects of Britain's colonial and imperial past on present day beliefs, attitudes, and practices both individual and institutional. Lodge (2017: 3) provides a powerful but succinct summary of the extent of this effect starting with the scale and significance of slavery to the economic and social development of Britain:

> 'Generation after generation of black lives stolen, families torn apart, communities split. Thousands of people being born into slavery and dying enslaved, never knowing what it might mean to be free. Entire lives sustaining constant brutality and violence, living in never-ending fear. Generation after generation of white wealth amassed from the profits of slavery, compounded, seeping into the fabric of British society.'

This is not an entirely new concern, seventy years ago Arendt (1951/2017) devoted a third of her 1951 study The Origins of Totalitarianism to imperialism and the forces that give rise to it and sustain it. Two principal forces she identifies are race (or

racism) and bureaucracy. She examines the corrosive and powerful impact of racism and asserts that it is not only the main ideological component of imperialism but that it has the power to 'destroy the body politic' (209) of the nation. Imperialist policy is founded on an alliance between 'capital and the mob' (201) with the aim of combining domestic and foreign policy to 'imperialise the whole nation' and thus direct its full energies towards 'the looting of foreign territories and the permanent degradation of alien people' (201). Whilst motivations of racism attract 'the worst elements in western civilisation' bureaucracy attracted the 'best and sometimes even the most clear-sighted strata of the European intelligentsia' (242). This, she maintains, ensured imperialist expansion and colonisation was efficiently managed and, through government by imposed temporary and shifting decree, avoided the need for a system of rights and the rule of law for colonised people. There is a resonance here with the evolving system of schooling in England dominated as it is by the growth of MATs as the only approved organisational form. There is no systematic legislative basis to the relationship between government and MATs setting out rights and responsibilities. Instead, each one has an individual contract with government. It is perhaps as Arendt describes the colonial system; no enshrined rights or rule of law but a system of easily changed and manipulated decrees.

Several recent publications have added to the considerable literature assessing the origins and impact of the legacy of colonialism and imperialism on UK society and institutions. Andrew's (2021) forceful and polemical book focuses on the origins, manifestations, and impact of what he identifies as the 'new age of empire', asserting the fundamental importance of racism as a force blighting all aspects of Black lives and underpinning the economic and social fabric of the UK. In doing so he identifies the actual genocidal violence which drove British colonialism and the establishment and maintenance of the British empire; and what Andreotti (2011: 39) terms 'epistemic violence', underpinning colonial power relations that changes the colonised and coloniser's perceptions of self and reality and legitimise cultural supremacy and creation of an "inferior" other. Fanon (1963: 32) links this to what he identifies as the Manichaean nature of the colonial world. It is not enough for the coloniser to physically dominate the colonised through armed force, there must be psychological and social othering too in which, as part of the process of justifying

complete domination and control, the coloniser 'paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil'.

In his exposition of the 'New Age of Empire' Andrews traces its origins to the European Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He reinforces the patriarchal nature of the way in which the enlightenment is characterised and understood even today but goes further and asserts that 'racial science arose as a discipline to explore the superiority of the White race, and it is telling that basically all the key Enlightenment thinkers were architects of its intellectual framework' (7). He illustrates his argument by exposing the central place of racism in the views and writings of such influential Enlightenment figures as Mill, Hegel, Hume and Kant. Kant's work is subjected to particular analysis and Andrew's concludes (6) that, notwithstanding his later work that is critical of colonialism, his philosophy is permeated by racism and white supremacy and is therefore a foundation of both the colonialism and empire of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries and 'the new age of empire' and its attendant unjust social order. Kant, according to Andrews (20) is a major contributor to the theory of racial hierarchy and the brutality and genocidal colonialism that flow from it; and a 'moral universalist philosophy' that underpins the idea of the 'white man's burden' and its accompanying civilising mission.

In documenting the central importance of racism and white supremacy as the philosophical justifications for slavery, colonialism and empire, Andrew's constructs an argument about the continuity of these practices and their impact on the growth and development of the UK economy and the attitudes and values of wider society. Whilst not disputing the anti-colonial and anti-racist response to this history and the various forms of resistance to oppressive and unjust arrangements, Andrews' central argument is that there is a continuity of these phenomena through the present day 'new age of empire' which manifests itself in the neoliberal economic logics, technologies of governance and ideologies that dominate economic, social and political discourse. He demonstrates the ways in which neoliberal hegemony shapes and governs unfair relations between western nations and countries and peoples of the global south and stresses that, given these economic rationalities provide an overarching framework for economic and social life and relations, these relations are reproduced within nations as well as between them. As Shahjahan (2012: 3) puts it

these relations are 'not simply referring to territorial imperialism or states of indirect/direct cultural control, but also view colonial as anything imposing or dominating.'

White supremacy and white privilege have become an increasingly contested terms in public discourse, even to the extent that a government minister (the junior Treasury minister responsible for equalities) has suggested in the House of Commons that teaching in schools that implies white privilege is a phenomenon at work in society is illegal. Gillborn (2005) attempts to unravel the threads of white supremacy and through his analysis locate its place in the formation and enactment of education policy. By examining English education policy against its impact on race equality and racism across the domains of priorities, beneficiaries, and outcomes he concludes:

> 'that race inequity and racism are central features of the education system. These are not aberrant nor accidental phenomena that will be ironed out in time, they are fundamental characteristics of the system. *It is in this sense that education policy is an act of white supremacy.*' (498, emphasis in the original)

In Empireland, another recent publication Sanghera (2021), explores similar terrain to Andrews, explicitly seeking to explore how modern Britain has been shaped by its past of colonialism and empire. In chronicling what starts as a personal journey for a British born UK citizen of Sikh heritage he offers a balanced analysis of the way in which colonialism and empire have shaped the UK and concludes that despite recent reawakening of interest in issues of race, slavery and empire that 'the effect of British empire upon this country is poorly understood', (1) and that the British empire is absolutely embedded within us and how there are many more serious and troubling imperial legacies.

He chronicles the ways he believes that empire has affected wider society today. He offers a contrast in his choice of effects to analyse; Andrews is insistent about the neoliberal economic legacy driven by racism and white supremacy whilst Sanghera is somewhat more esoteric in the phenomena he illuminates. Three examples will perhaps illustrate this point. He focusses on the impact of imperialism on England's

(male) public schools and the way in which imperial nostalgia influenced and continues to influence their graduates, particularly those who move into (Tory) governments. He illustrates this analysis with the case of two old Etonians in the current UK Cabinet. He suggests that imperial nostalgia conditions and informs their practice of government but without explicit acknowledgement of the racist and white supremacist ideology of power and class privilege that hides behind what is seen by many as a quaint and old-fashioned view of Britain's place in the world.

Shain (2020: 277) also discusses the influence of elite public schools and their alumni and explains 'British public schools were therefore instrumental in constructing the dominant narrative of empire that justified the demonising of black subjects.' This was more than just a phenomenon of an earlier age of extant empire, but a contemporary question of attitudes held by some prominent individuals educated at these schools and how these attitudes inform their actions. Shain suggests that this is something that has a profound effect on the constitution and administration of the institutions that shape public policy and discourse. In Shain's words (2020: 277): 'These attitudes and beliefs have continued to linger within British Institutions, in part due to conveyer belt of individuals from elite schools into the key positions of power across politics, law, business, culture, and the military.' In accounting for the continuing power of these institutions Shain notes that alumni of these schools are 94 times more likely to become part of the institutions of the British elite than someone from any other school. Shain concludes that these schools remain powerful in shaping the attitudes and actions of those in positions of power in contemporary society because the 'schools remain largely unchanged and therefore the ideas about empire will still be firmly ingrained in the current establishment.'

Sanghera's second assertion is that a national suspicion of 'cleverness' is a psychological legacy of empire. Setting aside the question of whether ascribing psychological characteristics at a national level in this way is valid, amongst all the possible contemporary impacts of empire this seems of minor significance.

Thirdly, Sanghera offers celebrating heroic failure as an aspect of national character forged by imperialism. This seems strange; as Andrews (2021: 59) reminds us, the British empire and the slave trade which proceeded and accompanied it brought

significant wealth to individuals and corporate bodies and though generating funds for investment in industry and infrastructure laid the basis for the full-scale capitalist development of the industrial revolution. This hardly seems to be a 'heroic failure' What Sanghera does do however is cement in place the discourse of empire as selflessness as set out by Said (1978: 37). This discourse is intended to conjure the notion of brave but outnumbered noble British soldiers and administrators having to face overwhelming odds in bringing civilisation to uncivilised mases, who when rejecting the benevolent interventions of the colonisers must be meet with force, even at the cost of brave British lives. As Arendt (1951/2017: 242) so eloquently and dismissively puts it: 'The administrator who rules by reports and decrees … lived by the honest, earnest boyhood ideals of a modern knight in shining armour sent to protect helpless and primitive people'. This is perhaps an aspect of the discourse of the civilising mission and 'white man's burden' which is explored below.

2.8.3 The discourse of the civilising mission

This discourse of coloniser selflessness and the civilising mission is central to imperial ideology. Said's Orientalism (1978), an elegant and comprehensive survey and analysis of western relations and attitudes towards an ideological created 'other', contains a magnificent exposition of the historical, political, and philosophical origins and application of the civilising mission. His lucid analysis of a wide range of texts, events and individual actions and motivations secures a firm understanding of what drove the civilising mission and how its legacy is manifest today. He deals with how knowledge and power and the interplay between them produce an argument which:

> 'when reduced to its simplest form, was clear, it was precise, it was easy to grasp. There are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated, which usually means having their land occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal of one or another Western power.' (36)

According to Said, imperialism, exercised its imperial might and its power in a way that was 'more effective for its refined understanding and infrequent use than for its soldiers, brutal tax gatherers, and incontinent force. In a word, the empire must be

wise; it must temper its cupidity with selflessness, its impatience with flexible discipline.' (37)

Said links the selflessness of the civilising mission to the 'other' constructed by a 'biological determinism and moral political admonishment' (207) with elements in domestic Western society who are deemed in his words 'lamentably alien' who might also be characterised as poor, oppressed, or disadvantaged but who suffer from negative and demeaning representation by wider society and the powerful and well to do. Said identifies 'delinquents, the insane, women and the poor' as falling into this category. Importantly he suggests that these elements in domestic society are subject to the same kind of process as 'Orientals', they are the 'other', not treated as citizens, often ignored and denied agency and treated as problems to be 'solved or confined or – as the colonial powers openly coveted their territory – taken over.' (207)

The idea of the civilising mission is widely evoked and examined in writing on neo-colonialism and anti-colonialism (for example Shajahan (2011), Said (1978 and 1993), Fryer (1984), Rodney (1972). Said in his Culture and Imperialism (1993: 136) offers a succinct yet comprehensive analysis of the basis of the all-pervasive influence of imperialism on the institutions, daily life, and culture of Britain stating that 'there are hardly any exceptions to the overwhelming prevalence of ideas suggesting, often ideologically implementing, imperial rule.' The imperial mind set informs and drives 'the minutiae of daily life.' Even culturally embedded and ubiquitous institutions such as the Boy Scout movement are rooted in imperial concerns about the health and moral well-being of the nation's young people. Said asserts that there is a convergence between the domination of geographically widely dispersed places and peoples and what he terms 'universalising cultural discourses' of domination. As well the naked exercise of power, a foundation of this domination is a persuasive hegemony rooted in a 'duty to natives' that has been characterised as the 'white man's burden' (taken from the poem by Kipling) which justified colonialism and its attendant racism as being for the 'benefit' of the colonised. Rodney (1972: 232) points out that this justificatory discourse often had its roots in the religious mission of European churches and can be traced back to justification of slavery 'on the grounds that it carried heathen Africans to Christian lands.'

Ultimately, Rodney is very clear about what he sees as the real motives and intentions 'Europeans were in the colonial game because it was damn profitable, and that was that.'

Shajahan (2011: 184) analyses the colonial apparatus evident in the work of the evidence-based education movement and identifies that 'a certain ideological construct is built which permits 'those in power to assert power, dominance, and imposition through a binary discourse of superiority such as superior/inferior'. Such a discourse generates an imperialist ideology characterised by power relations which play out in 'a civilising mission composed of justificatory ideologies that claim to refine administration and eliminate corruption and inefficiency in order to construct a new order.'

2.8.4 Echoes of imperial language: conversion and trusteeship

Within the discourse of the civilising mission is the idea of the 'white mans' burden' and a moral obligation towards 'backward races' and this is explored by Fryer (1984: 185). The links between this obligation to both protect and civilise a conquered or colonised population was embraced not only by the churches, who pursued and fulfilled this obligation through missionary work overseas and other proselytising activity at home, but by those Fryer identifies as 'liberal minded English people' who accepted and embraced the four Cs; 'Commerce, Colonisation, Civilisation and Christianity'. According to Fryer this ensemble of ideologies and practices was 'in other words conversion to western ways.' which 'implied merely informal influence'. This then gave way to the idea of trusteeship as British imperial policy and rule in Africa came to be defined more rigorously. If conversion was about persuasion and influence in pursuit of the four Cs, trusteeship was about complete control and annexation. Whilst trusteeship has a long history in Europe, the sense in which it became incorporated in British imperial policy had two dimensions; the moral obligation to protect and civilise inferior races and 'pseudo-scientific arguments for racial superiority'. As Fryer cogently expresses the workings of imperial policy founded on this interpretation of trusteeship 'Britain marched across Africa with a clerical boot on one foot and a scientific boot on the other'.

Analysis of these ideas of conversion and trusteeship identifies an important way in which the discourse of colonialism echoes the language and discourse which is constitutive of the world of MATs. Conversion is the process by which the state, in the form of the DfE and its regional structures and officials, together with the corporate, voluntary, and parastatal apparatus surrounding the academy sector, influence, persuade, cajole, and coerce schools into academy status as part of a MAT. Once conversion is achieved, influence gives way to trusteeship, in which the assets and identity of a school is acquired and taken over and it becomes subject to the complete control of the MAT, under the guise of becoming part of a 'trust', although the actual process can be likened to annexation, absorption and replacement of local control.

Courtney (2017: 177) analyses this as a neo-colonial process in which 'headteachers and principals are being structured and subordinated by corporatized elites. This is happening in and through the regional empires that these elites are establishing, which draw on corporate structural models facilitating expansion and acquisition…'

Shajahan (2014: 3) in his analysis of post-colonial forces at work in higher education, identifies such corporate structural models as 'neoliberal colonisation'. In this analysis, a process that is analogous to the 'facilitating business-derived models of organisational expansion within education 'systems'' identified by Courtney (2107: 178), neoliberalism has come to colonise higher education through privileging 'economic and technological rationalities' over the social, intellectual, and ethical foundations of the sector. This, according to Shajahan, is much more than just organisational restructuring and business efficiency, it constitutes the hegemony of 'neoliberalism is a primary actor in the colonization of our ways of being'.

2.8.5 MATS as a neo-colonial enterprise: a subject of controversy?
In the context of the controversies and contested public debates on the legacy of empire and the modern impact of colonialism it may be suggested that this application of neo-colonial perspectives and logics to the transformation of schooling in England represented by academisation is the work of academic elites and/or those with political motivations and intentions to undermine and discredit educational policy

and institutions. If there is such concern Thomson reminds us of the depth and range of neo-colonial ambition underlying much of what Gunter et al (2014: x) identify as the Transnational Leadership Programme in education leadership, management, and administration. In School Scandals, Thomson (2020: 53) cites Osborne and Gaebler, some of the most influential architects of New Public Management in the 1990s, and how they described their programme for the neoliberal reinvention of government and the public sector openly and explicitly as a colonial enterprise aimed squarely at exploration and conquest and settlement of the public realm with technocratic business and corporate logics. The conclusion drawn from this review of some of the literature in this field is that this process of neoliberal conquest and settlement has continued and is a significant component of the logic and ideological impetus behind the development of MATs as the latest iteration of the academy programme in England.

2.9 Conclusion

This thesis is concerned with the ways in which MATs engage with the communities in which they are situated and work. It examines: the possibilities for that engagement to be supportive of democracy at a local level; the ways in which communities influence and shape the governance of MATs; and how power is manifest in that governance. The thesis seeks to construct an explanatory framework for MAT relations with communities rooted in the discourse of neo-colonialism. The foregoing review has therefore investigated some of the literature on the underlying concepts and theories concerning the questions of democracy, community, power, and neo-colonialism. A recurrent theme identified in the review is the way in which the neoliberal turn in English schooling has, through an intermingled and enmeshed ensemble of policies, practices, ideologies and logics come to dominate the structures, organisation and ontology of MATs and the people who lead them. The insights and understandings on these questions derived from this review have provided the framework for the three analytical chapters that follow: looking inwards; MATs, power, and governance through business logics; looking outwards: MATs and accountability; and looking critically: MATs as a neo-colonial enterprise.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Introduction: Personal Position and Social Research

This study is concerned with how MATS, and more specifically the senior personnel within them vested with decision making power and responsibility, exercise that power, account for their actions, and engage with communities. It focuses on the internal view of how MATs understand and exercise power, the ways in which MATs present themselves to the external world, and an explanatory framework which critically examines the ways in which the relations between MATs and their communities are constructed. It approaches this through an examination of how MATs and their senior personnel view, understand and construct the social, economic, and political world in which they live and work. In pursuit of this the study engages with the different constructions of social reality employed by actors within MATS and questions of which knowledge and interpretations are privileged. This constructivist understanding of the social world and the role of actors within it underpins my researcher stance and has conditioned the construction of the research questions for the study which are as follows.

3.1.1 Overall research question

What are the implications of academy status and the creation of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) for school governance, relations and engagement with communities and the accountability of schools in England?

Research Question one: What are the factors, forces and mechanisms driving the changes in school governance, community engagement and accountability in the three case study MATs?

Research Question two: What are the consequences of the governance arrangements in the case study MATs for the way decisions are made and the influence of community interest and voices have on these decisions?

Research Question three: How are the case study MATs accountable to their communities and what factors and forces shape this accountability?

Research Question four: What is the significance of the findings from RQs 1,2 and 3 in furthering the understanding of how concepts of power, democracy and ideology influence the governance of MATs and their engagement with communities?

Research Question five: What potential practices might be developed in the governance of MATS to enhance community engagement and democratic accountability?

3.2 Positionality

To address these questions in the context of the social world of MATs and the people who constitute them, the study is a qualitative inquiry based in a subjective and constructionist epistemology. The nature of the study suggests a reflexive approach is required and the question of researcher positionality be acknowledged and addressed. The introductory chapter of this thesis sets out a biographical account covering my professional and personal engagement with and immersion in the subject matter of the study. The following section examines the methodological issues arising from this.

3.2.1 Research and Researcher Positionality: Effects and Issues

This research has grown out of my professional and personal involvement in the process of school governance over some thirty years and more recently from having been on the ground level of the drive to academisation of English schools and the growth of MATs. My personal philosophical position has been shaped by the ideas mentioned above, of multiple social realities and the question of how power is used to shape those realities and privilege particular world views.

My particular stance, which has developed from personal and professional involvement as well as my political convictions, is rooted in a belief that schools should be public owned community assets with local democratic control and

accountability; and a purpose grounded in encouraging human flourishing, fostering social justice and supporting community development.

This stance is informed by the changes in my understanding and views about MATs from my experiences of being involved personally and professionally in establishing one. I started from an initial political and professional scepticism as a local government education and children's services officer charged with engaging schools in a wider partnership during a period of academisation which resulted in fragmentation and loss of local coherence of services for children and families. This was very much viewing MATs and the academisation process through an area-wide system lens. Following retirement and taking on the role of chair of governors at a secondary school my perspective shifted, and my view of MATs was conditioned by the threat of forced academisation in 2016 and the possibilities for local action and use of spaces and ambiguities in government policy (a form of creative subversion and the kind of tactics discussed by De Certaeu 1984: 30) to protect school autonomy and local collaborative arrangements. Upon formation of a MAT, I became fully embroiled in the remaking and refashioning of educational purpose and organisation by the relentless neoliberal logics of business. These proved to be formidable and, for me, ultimately insurmountable barriers to bringing about our original vision of a local school partnership, and my perspective shifted to a critical one of increasing disquiet about direction and growing opposition to the concept of MATs. This experience and stance have enabled me to understand the context and actions and relate to the MAT personnel who I have interviewed.

My position, assumptions and beliefs are crucial to this research process, and I have tried to openly acknowledge them. This may be said to pose a risk of bias (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013: 70) in both the conduct and interpretation of my research. My intention is to mitigate this risk by: openly clarifying my position in the debates about MATs use of power, accountability, and relations with communities; and setting out my philosophical stance located within a constructivist paradigm which accepts and works within the messy realities of multiple social worlds. I believe that all research is political (whether acknowledged or not) in that it sits within a web of power relations and has the potential to reinforce or challenge organisational policies and practices and thus have an impact on people's lives and well-being.

According to Pring (2000: 7) (citing Lawrence Stenhouse) in discussing the purposes of educational research and the debates about its value and usefulness: 'the term 'research; is used to refer to any 'systematic, critical and self-critical enquiry which aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge'. Pring states that this definition is broad enough to encompass a wide range of research: empirical; historical; documentary; and philosophical.

The assumptions underpinning this study are that it is a rigorous process of enquiry into the way MATs engage with and relate to their communities, based on collection of data and evidence and seeking to extend and create knowledge through developing findings, drawing conclusions (however tentative) and communicating these to relevant audiences. These findings emerge from interpretation of the data and evidence gathered by drawing on theories and previous knowledge. I believe that all research has a purpose, whether stated explicitly or not. There is a strong theme in the literature that supports this position and maintains that research should involve challenge to and questioning of common-place and accepted notions aiming to bring about change in favour of greater social justice (see for instance Denzin and Lincoln 2011: 11, Roman and Apple 1990: 42, Crotty 1998: 113, Denscombe 2002: 35-36, Clough and Nutbrown 2012: 4). To do this, this study seeks to produce findings which are generalisable and have wider applicability than the confines of the study.

3.3 Considerations in shaping the research design

This study employs a qualitative design, and this section seeks to tease out the essential features of such inquiry. In the past, there have been intense and long running debates about nature of qualitative inquiry and its position and standing in relation to long established traditions of quantitative research. The collection edited by Eisner and Peshkin (1990) chronicles and illuminates aspects of the history and controversies of this debate. They suggest that the debate is not as adversarial as some would maintain, pointing out that whilst qualitative research has no statistical significance tests it does have its own claims to rigour in that it requires that 'that

most exquisite of human capacities must come into play: judgement' (Eisner and Peshkin 1990: 12).

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) identify five points of difference between quantitative and qualitative research and in doing so helpfully illustrate the dimensions and characteristics of qualitative enquiry and why it is felt appropriate for this study. Firstly, they observe that both have been shaped by positivist traditions, but they suggest that it is quantitative research that retains the strongest positivist orientation with its emphasis on measuring and quantifying phenomena, isolating cause and effects and seeking to generalise findings. They also note that whilst qualitative researchers do use statistical methods, it is quantitative research where one finds the more complicated and involved statistical techniques of measurement and analysis. The location of this study in a constructivist paradigm, whilst not eschewing quantification and numerical data, deals predominantly with the interpretation of participants' social realities and world views through analysis of their words, something best approached through a qualitative approach.

Secondly, they note that there are some qualitative researchers who have embraced a post-modern perspective and accept that positivist methods are but one way of telling a story but that they are no better or worse than any other. They point out this view is not necessarily widely shared and other researchers in the post-modern paradigm reject positivist approaches as research that 'reproduces only a certain kind of science. A science that silences too many voices' (9). As Denzin and Lincoln are at pains to suggest that qualitative inquiry can be used within a positivist paradigm it is worth stressing that this study, whilst utilising qualitative inquiry, is firmly constructivist. I have rejected positivism as it deals with uncovering fixed realities rather than construction meaning from the messy social worlds, varied voices and experiences of the participants.

Thirdly, qualitative researchers take an ideographic approach, coming up against and dealing with the constraints of everyday life and the social world, and embedding their findings within it. In contrast there is a tendency for quantitative researchers to be nomothetic and base their research on probabilities drawn from large numbers of cases. The use of a single instrumental case study as the strategy or methodology

for this study deals with an in-depth engagement with a relatively small sample of participants suggesting the appropriateness of an ideographic approach.

Fourthly, whilst both qualitative and quantitative traditions are concerned with the individual's point of view, it is qualitative investigation that is best placed to understand a subject's perspective. Building this understanding of individuals' points of view from the words of the participants is an important feature of this study. Quantitative approaches using more remote empirical data and drawing inferences through statistical analysis would lack this closeness.

Fifthly, rich and detailed descriptions of the social world and subjects' understandings of it are highly valued by qualitative researchers and are what this study seeks to build. However, these kinds of data tend to be given lower status by quantitative researchers because it is not conducive to analysis nor developing generalisations, thus reinforcing the choice of qualitative inquiry to pursue this study.

3.4 Power and the purposes of research

The summary of this review of differences stresses that the quantitative and qualitative traditions are different ways of addressing the same issues and illuminates and explains the choice to use qualitative inquiry deign for this study. This section looks at questions of power and the purposes of research and offers further illumination if the issue of researcher position and the risk of bias.

There is a theme in the literature on methodology which suggest that the most significant consideration in research design is the politics of research and who holds the power 'to legislate correct solutions to these problems'. The clear inference from Denzin and Lincoln (2011: 8) is that research should embrace some element of commitment to social justice. Consequently, they accord greater value to those methodologies and approaches that do so over the seemingly more objective forms, which, in a polarising way, they locate more within the quantitative tradition.

This emphasis on the moral purpose of research is articulated by Roman and Apple (1990: 41), who go further in identifying the political context of research as 'the project of democratizing the institutions of our unequal society' and 'to participate in

emancipatory and democratising social transformation, not simply the "neutral" collection, analysis and reportage of data.' This is an issue addressed by Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005: 37) in their discussion of four chronotypes of qualitative inquiry. The locate the term chronotope as originating with Einstein taking his meaning of the term as being to do with time and space and apply it to social and cultural contexts. In this reading, chronotopes move beyond linking time and space and 'delineate or construct sedimentations of concrete, motivated social situations or figured worlds' (24). They construct a taxonomy of four chronotopes which they intend as a heuristic for understanding the tensions and contradictions in qualitative inquiry. Chronotope one is concerned with objectivism and representation and does not address questions of the social construction of knowledge and power relations. Successive chronotopes two through to four deal more explicitly with these questions. They warn that the 'open dialogue' and 'genuine understanding' constructed in what they term 'classic interpretivism' (chronotope one) risk ignoring or minimising power relations and hegemonic structures which embed privilege and injustice. In an echo of the neo-colonialist paradigm which is an analytical frame employed in this thesis, they assert that interpretivist methodology underpinned the work of ethnographers, who may have also been missionaries or part of colonialist military forces, engaged in the 'civilising mission' and making a powerful contribution to the creation of the 'other' which Said (1978: 207 for example) locates as central to the business of colonisation and imperial take over. Acknowledging the importance of addressing such questions, this study is therefore located in Kamberelis and Dimitriadis' chronotopes three and four.

This political perspective is also clear when Denzin and Lincoln (2011: 8) identify the two defining characteristics of qualitative research: 'a commitment to some version of the naturalistic, interpretative approach to its subject matter; and an ongoing critique of the politics and methods of post-positivism'. They explore the history and debates surrounding qualitative research and highlight that it is a field, not just replete with controversies, but that is defined by' tensions, contradictions and hesitations' (15). They identify the present as a messy, uncertain age in which, to quote W.B. Yeats 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold' and make the bold claim that the purpose of research should be to reflect on what a new centre might be. Crotty (1998: 2016) has a more limited, if pragmatic, view that the purpose of research is not to remove

or tidy the mess but to tread a path through it. Denzin and Lincoln (2011: 10) having illuminated the tensions within qualitative research place themselves in the interpretive paradigm. They stress though that this camp is not anti-science but believes in 'multiple forms of science: soft, hard, strong, feminist, interpretative, critical, realist, post-realist and post humanist'. They state that what is important though is 'a political orientation that is a radical, democratic and interventionist.'

However, Pring (2000) offers a note of caution and a call for a more subtle approach which integrates elements of different paradigms. He offers an analysis of two paradigms, the scientific and the constructivist. He contrasts their different treatments of reality (objective or socially constructed)' research findings (discovered or created) and truth (independent facts or a matter of consensus amongst constructors) and warns that there is a false dualism between these paradigms. What is important is to recognise the complexity of enquiry and the nature of what is being enquired into and seek to understand that

> 'human beings, and thus researching into what they do and how they behave, calls upon many different methods, each making complex assumptions about what it means to explain behaviours and personal and social activities' (Pring 2000: 56).

This review of issues of power and the uses of research suggests that, notwithstanding Pring's plea for an approach that integrates different paradigms to address the complexity of human interaction and behaviour, a political focus which recognises and addresses the uses of power is an acceptable (and some say necessary) feature of qualitative inquiry. Given this orientation, I would maintain that my positionality and personal stance as a researcher is awarded legitimacy and thus, being acknowledged and declared, mitigates the risk of bias.

3.5 Methodology: developing an approach to research

Denscombe (2017) suggests that in the context of social research the terms methodology, strategy and approach are used interchangeably but the important issue is that methodology is different from methods, which he describes as the tools

used for data collection. A methodology or strategy should have a distinct logic and rationale that shapes a plan of action to address an identified research question. In that sense the tools used to collect the data, whilst important, flow from the methodology rather than define it.

Crotty (1998) offers a process of four elements in developing an approach to research: the methods proposed; the methodology governing this choice; the theoretical perspectives underlying the methodology; and the epistemology informing the theory. Whilst this is useful in identifying the elements I would argue, in line with the structure and ordering suggested by Kamberelis and Dimetriadis (2005: 13) with their analytical strata, that his order might be more useful if reversed, starting with epistemology and moving through theoretical underpinnings to methodology or strategies and finally methods.

Clough and Nutbrown (2012) frame these elements differently and introduce the questions of politics, purpose, and ethics into the thinking about methodology. They also highlight that the development of methodology and selection of methods can only be made in the light of the specific situations pertaining to the research being proposed. In a field marked by conflicting positions this seems to be good advice. Eisner and Peshkin (1990: 9) writing at a time of some fierce debates on the legitimacy of quantitative and qualitative perspectives on educational research remind us that 'one way in which such questions have been answered is to remind the sceptical or the puzzled that the problem itself should be used to identify the methods appropriate to it.' Clough and Nutbrown (2012) suggest that research should be 'persuasive, purposive, positional and political'. Denscombe's (2017) three questions to address cover similar ground. He suggests the questions to be asked of a research design are: is it ethical; is it feasible; is it suitable (having a clear view of purpose for which it is being undertaken). The issue here is not one of the right or wrong research design but more about questions of how useful and appropriate the design or methodology is in relation to the question being researched.

Following this summary of some of the debates in the literature on methodology, the following section of the chapter is organised according to the elements of methodology of the typology identified by Crotty (1998) but presented in the order suggested by Kamberelis and Dimitriadis.

3.6 Epistemological considerations

An aim of this thesis is to generate and advance knowledge about how the case study MATs perceive and relate to the communities in which they are located and the communities they serve. It is therefore important to attempt to clarify how knowledge is generated and how we come to know what we know. According to Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005: 14) there are two what they term 'grand' epistemologies that dominate the literature and philosophical underpinnings of inquiry in the social sciences; objectivism and constructivism. Objectivist epistemology suggests that knowledge and meaning are objective and independent of any human consciousness. Meanings are 'out there' waiting to be discovered by the research process.

In thinking about this research project this seems to be an inadequate explanation of the range of views, experiences and beliefs that people involved in the leadership and governance of case study MATs hold and express. Indeed, the subject matter of this research is highly contested and there are likely to be few agreed meanings. What people know is likely to be influenced significantly by the positions they hold and political and ideological positions they espouse. Such a context suggests that there are few objective truths waiting to be discovered and that meanings in these circumstances are constructed by human engagement with the social world, that is the interaction between object and subject. Furthermore, these meanings will be constructed differently by different people, even in relation to the same events and phenomena. This view points in the direction of a more subjective and constructionist epistemology. Such an epistemology is founded in an understanding that knowledge and meaning are not fixed but always partial, provisional and perspectival (that is known from only some perspectives) (Kamberelis and Dimirtiadis 2005: 14). For any event or object there will always be a range of possible meanings and understandings, and these will be conditioned by the context, background, experience, and position of the person articulating the meaning or explaining the event.

There is a further epistemological issue that needs to be considered, that of the exercise of power and in whose interests it is exercised. There is a tendency for

interpretivism to tend towards an 'uncritical exploration of cultural meaning.' (Crotty 1998: 60) Interpretation of the data that does not consider where power lies in MATs, how it is used and the impact and consequences of the struggles between different interests on the structures and actions would only be partial. A critical edge, consistent with Kamberelis and Dimitriadis' (2005: 36) third chronotope has therefore been employed in the construction of knowledge which seeks to identify, factor in and interpret the influence of ideology and hegemonic interests.

3.7 Theoretical perspective and philosophical assumptions

Research and researchers take a particular stance whether explicitly acknowledged or not. It might be tempting to suggest that the traditional view of research has been based on a positivist paradigm in which the … 'goal is to determine the causes and regularities of human actions and beliefs' (McCutcheon 1999: 4). This has its roots in the scientific method developed over several centuries and is characterised by empirical observation and data collection, logic and cause-effect rationality. It is related to an objective epistemological standpoint in that it treats social reality in the same manner as physical reality, something existing independently waiting to be discovered. Research based on the positivist paradigm seeks to develop causal analysis and generalisable conclusions.

In contrast, an interpretative paradigm is based on seeking to develop meanings and interpretations based on insights into people's beliefs and lived experiences. The interpretivist paradigm sees the social world as multi-layered and complex. It might be suggested that this paradigm is marginalised in the everyday social discourse of scientific rationality but is in fact long established and embedded in cultural and other forms.

This approach often employs a hermeneutical method to interpret the claims and actions of people, which are often not clear or certain. Research using this approach does not pretend to be objective and argues that how researchers interpret what they see, read, and observe will necessarily be influenced by their own beliefs and values. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011: 11) put it 'Behind these terms stands the personal biography of the researcher, who speaks from a particular class, gendered, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective'. Researchers need therefore to be

clear about these and make them explicit in their study. In acknowledgement of this I have set out a discussion of my positionality and researcher stance in section 2 above.

The brief review of some of the literature on methodology and theoretical perspectives in the introduction to this chapter highlighted debates and tensions between different traditions. The review also indicates that the dichotomies implied by examining points of difference are, if not false, then open to debate. This implies a call for pragmatism and a willingness to employ the most suitable methods for the question under investigation whilst being clear about the philosophical and theoretical stance (or stances) of the researcher.

This thesis is located within an interpretative paradigm because it is exploring the perspectives, opinions, experiences, and feelings of human subjects. As such, it acknowledges the position, values and biases of the researcher and accepts these are part of the process of interpreting and developing insights into the situations and ideas of the subjects of the research. The research accepts that there are no fixed truths and indeed multiple understandings and views of the world of MATs. The research attempts to delineate and shape these meanings from the data about the experiences and views of the subjects.

According to Nixon (2012: 33) this implies the world of social phenomena and interactions is made through our understanding of it and this understanding is made by interpretation. In these circumstances, objectivity, and neutrality of observers are hard to justify. This has implications beyond case study and qualitative research; it goes to the heart of the physical universe too. Quantum Theory not only shattered the edifice of classical physics, as Polkinghorne puts it (2002:13) but challenges some of the conventional understandings we have of the world and how science relates to social research. In particular, the work of Werner Heisenberg and Niels Bohr on sub-atomic particles (e.g., electrons) and the impossibility of determining both position and momentum with certainty suggests that the act of observation of these particles alters their state, something which has strong echoes in discussion of the role of observation and observers in social research (Denscombe 2017: 224, Creswell 2007: 139). In drawing philosophical lessons from quantum theory, one of its founders and foremost exponents, Werner Heisenberg (1989: 25) states that

'what we observe is not nature itself but nature exposed to our method of questioning'. He concludes that we should 'never forget that in the drama of existence we are both players and spectators.'

Having reviewed some of the philosophical assumptions underlying my research, the next section examines the ethical considerations it poses.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the research was sought and obtained through the York St John University Research Ethics Committee process. Approval was granted by the Committee on 03 December 2018 with the approval code RECedu00020

On agreeing to take part in an interview, all participants were sent a briefing sheet setting out details of the research, issues of anonymity and confidentiality, information about myself as researcher and the avenue to raise any concerns about the conduct of the research (see Appendix 1). All participants were also asked to read, sign, and return a form setting out the details of their involvement and their consent to take part (see Appendix 2). This process and the obtaining of informed consent ensured that the research was conducted in line with the University's requirements and the BERA code of practice on research ethics (2018).

Codes of practice, whilst being comprehensive and regularly updated to take account of changing situations and understandings, cannot account for the circumstances of particular research projects. They deal with what Kvale (2007: 30) refers to as micro-ethical perspectives addressing questions of research conduct and relations with research participants. Issues may be viewed differently when approached from a macro-ethical level. In my research, steps were taken, in both preparation, conduct and conclusion of interviews to try and ensure a professionally satisfying and positive encounter with participants. I also set out my background of involvement in school governance and MAT development. This may have helped facilitate both access to participants and their willingness to talk freely to me in the interviews. The positive nature of the interviews may have been aided by my positionality as someone involved in the governance of a MAT; possibly viewed as an insider as much as an external researcher.

At a macro-ethical level, the wider consequences of the knowledge produced through the interviews and the subsequent analysis pose an ethical question. My interpretation of the data might be seen as criticism of individuals and the way their MATs work and relate to communities. The wider dissemination of these findings raises the possibility that interviewees may feel unhappy about participation and concerned that I have misrepresented them. Whilst there is a very clear academic explanation and justification for my interpretations and findings and there is no suggestion of malign motives or actions, this does not necessarily prevent such feelings amongst participants.

Lincoln's (1990: 291) review of ethical questions in constructivist qualitative inquiry suggests two guiding principles should be applied; the categorical imperative which she summarises as 'do unto others as one would have them do unto oneself' and a practical imperative of never use another as an instrument. She suggests (293) that these two principles can be satisfied in relation to respondents by 'giving them back something they can use'.

Punch (1994: 95) is somewhat more pragmatic in relation to such ethical questions. He suggests that at interactional and situational level some degree of impression management, manipulation and economy with the truth is almost inevitable by the researcher and that whilst this needs to be acknowledge and accepted, what is important is that researchers come clean about their position (what he cites as being honest about their 'muddy boots' and 'grubby hands'). Ultimately, both Punch (1994 and Kvale (2007) stress that as the researcher is the instrument by which research is conducted, the ethical questions rest on the integrity of the researcher.

I want to make two observations about the ethical question raised here in relation to my research. Firstly, all interviews were concluded with an offer to come back and discuss findings with those taking part on completion of my thesis. In this sense I am seeking to give something back in Lincoln's terms. How this would be presented should the offer be taken up would be a matter for further careful consideration. Secondly, I have sought to make my position clear to participants but as noted above in this chapter, one of the features of producing this thesis has been a shift in my position and thinking about MATs as the research unfolded and my role within a MAT changed. This poses a continuing dilemma of how to explain the nuances and

shifts my position has undergone without being accused of apostasy, betrayal of the sector or deceiving participants.

3.9 Research methodology and design

3.9.1 Case study

Within the broad paradigm of qualitative research this project employs a case study methodology. According to Wellington (2000: 90) the use of case study is covered extensively in the literature on qualitative research. It is therefore well established as a methodology and subject to much scrutiny and comment on the merits and drawbacks. The use of case study is influenced by its utility in drawing lessons from a particular setting; the question of what can be learned about and from the particular case according to Stake (2000: 443). For Stake (2000: 444), a case study enables focus on 'experiential knowledge of the case and close attention to the influence of its social, political and other contexts', a 'bounded system' which is particularly relevant in the exploration of how MATs operate in relation to their communities. This case study has an instrumental focus (Stake 2000: 445) as the purpose of the case is to illuminate and provide insight into the issues of democracy, accountability and power in MAT governance. The case itself (i.e., the three MATs) is examined and the various activities related to governance scrutinised in depth because this 'helps to pursue the external interest', as summarised in the research questions, and not because of the intrinsic value of the case.

3.9.2 Strengths and limitations of case study

Wellington (2000: 97) helpfully summarises the range of advantages and strengths of case studies which are found in the literature, and which inform the choice of this methodology. This thesis has employed a case study methodology because it presents the opportunity for illumination of the phenomena under investigation and the potential to develop insights. The case study helps to give a sense of reality and articulate the lived experience of the phenomena and how they are manifest in the setting being studied. In the case of the case study MATs, it provides the possibility of exploring in greater depth some of the aspects of governance and community

engagement identified in policy statements and official documents, bringing them to life and contributing to the development of explanatory frameworks.

According to Savin Baden and Howell Major (2013: 163) case study has the advantages of being flexible as it can encompass a range of philosophical positions and it permits detailed investigation of events and relationships. It can be a heuristic device providing learning both for the reader and the researcher.

Yin (2009:18) too emphasises the flexibility of the case study and highlights its suitability as a strategy for empirical inquiry that enables understanding of real-life phenomena, what he calls an 'all-encompassing method'. Yin also points to the major concern with case study being a lack of rigour in its use., something that can be overcome by diligent application of sound research principles and disciplines and therefore not a concern rooted in method itself.

3.9.3 Limitations of the case study methodology and responses to them

According to Wellington's (2000: 97) review of a range of literature on case study as a research methodology, the 'perennial problems' are interconnected and can be summarised as concerns that case studies may not be generalisable and that findings lack validity. These are of course concerns that are raised about qualitative research more generally and are not specific to case studies.

On the question of generalisability, this study does not attempt to make claims of wider generalisability of its findings for two reasons. Firstly, the boundaries of the case study embrace aspects of MAT policies and practices in response to issues which affect all MATs. All MATs are different organisations uniquely situated but responding to the same or similar pressures and concerns. The case study, whilst dealing with a set of specific responses is exploring how general principles are exemplified in practice. The analysis and interpretation of such responses can provide learning which contributes to the development of explanatory frameworks. Secondly, the idea of identifying and seeking wider applicability of learning and knowledge form a particular context(s) should perhaps be treated with a degree of caution, since as Wellington argues (2015: 177)   all knowledge is context and situation dependent.

The question of validity, or how the genuineness of what the case study discovers can be assured is the second of Wellington's 'perennial problems'. It poses the question of how the researcher affects the case being studied; to what extent are the observations and interpretations value and theory laden. If the interpretive methodology employed questions the idea of validity, there is still a need for rigour in the design to ensure trustworthiness and confidence that selection, interpretation, and presentation of evidence is done fairly. In this study this is a function of: a reflexive approach, in which the positionality of the researcher and associated value positions is made clear so that their influence can be accounted for; and demonstration of a rigorous process which gives the reader confidence in the integrity of the researcher and the processes employed.

The conduct of the interviews also sought to secure trustworthiness and a form of respondent validity through the questioning style employed. Frequent use of checking back, testing understanding, paraphrasing, and summarising was used to ensure respondents were content that, in the context of the interview, their responses represented what they wanted to say.

3.9.4 Case study boundaries: case selection and sample choice

Writers on case study research advocate that the limits or boundaries of the case study need to be clearly determined and the object of the study identified (e.g., Stake (2000: 459), Creswell (2007: 76). Savin Baden and Howell Major (2013: 165) also stress that boundedness is central to the value and utility of a case study but indicate that boundaries cannot always be easily set or managed once established. This is in essence the downside of the flexibility they identify as a strength of case study. The question of how the boundaries of this study were determined is entwined with issues of access to MATs for research purposes and the sampling strategy employed.

MATs, even small ones consisting of a few schools, are complicated organisations with a diversity of activity, a range of different disciplines and professions at work, different layers of governance and management, and hybrid constitutional arrangements (companies limited by guarantee with charitable status and non-executive or volunteer trustees/directors). The research question underpinning this study does not require an examination of all aspects of a MATs governance and

operations; it is focused on the engagement with communities and the influence this has on governance and leadership. This then leads to a boundary within the overall organisation and culture of a MAT which encompasses the views and actions of senior leaders at MAT and individual school level, the operation of the Board and relationships with communities.

As Stake notes (2000: 448) there is a tension between the desire and opportunity to examine the circumstances, actions and complexities presented by a case and the way the need for 'generalisation and proof linger in the mind of the researcher'. He suggests that opportunity to learn from a case is a primary and sometimes more superior criterion than the search for representativeness. MATs are all different and as they are geographically, socially, and culturally situated with unique histories they therefore present a very large potential population of cases. In respect of the phenomena and characteristics within the identified boundaries of the case, opportunities can be said to exist for learning in all MATs. As Stake suggests (2000: 451) this points toward choosing the most accessible. This then requires the very practical questions of which MATs are accessible and how many is it practical to study within the constraints of time and resources available.

As any or indeed all MATs offer opportunities for learning, selection of cases was purposive driven by opportunistic and convenience considerations. Ten existing personal contacts and connections with those working in MATs or involved in their governance were approached by email to take part in the research with the aim of gaining agreement from up to four different MATs. In the event responses (or lack of them) suggested sensitivities about research looking into how MATs operate. Several said no in a fashion which indicated a degree of reluctance bordering on hostility to the idea of being the subject of research. Several others simply did not respond to emails, even though these were not cold calls but contacts from someone known to them. Three MATs did agree to take part, and these were chosen as the sites of the case study.

3.10 Methods

Within the overall methodological framework of a case study, the project employs two research methods to gather and analyse data; basic documentary analysis of the formal published minutes of case study MAT board meetings (three sets of minutes from each MAT board covering a period of twelve months); and interviews with the three case study MAT chief executives, three headteachers of some schools (two in Heath and one in Iris) within these MATs; and the three chairs of the MAT boards (11 in total).

3.10.1 Documents

3.10.1.1 Selection of documents

The primary purpose of analysing documents was to shape the broad parameters for the interviews and assist in the formulation of the interview schedule. Interviews are seen as the main data collection instrument. The documents chosen for this purpose are publicly available minutes of board meetings of the three MATs which make up the case study sites. These were chosen both for ease of accessibility and because they represent an important part of the public image of the MAT and record of its business. Minutes record many voices but do not necessarily identify the speaker nor the exact words spoken. Minutes also tend to be concerned with concrete issues and facts, specific content and recording of decisions taken. They act as: a record of the salient points of a discussion; the conclusions reached and the arguments influencing those decisions; and the actions that should result. The language is more formal, that of record rather than colloquial speech. These minutes, which have been edited and prepared for public consumption, can be said to represent the official and sanctioned view of the board about how it makes decisions, which voices are heard in the decision-making process and what decisions are made. These documents then provide a source of official knowledge about the MAT.

The minutes yield written data in the form of words, which were subject to a basic numerical and qualitative analysis. Considerations about the choice of minutes as a data source have used Scott's typology (as set out by Jupp 2006: 277). This provides criteria to assess the suitability of particular types of document. The authorship and accessibility of minutes, as officially produced documents recording

the business of publicly funded organisations that are required to be openly published and accessible via the MAT website, gives minutes an authenticity and credibility which would suggest that documentary analysis might reveal insights about what the board sees as important issues, how decisions are made, and which voices influence those decisions. There is an important caveat here in that these documents, as officially sanctioned knowledge and the publicly available record, have been through a process of editing and approval which ensures that only what the board wishes to make public is published. As Atkinson and Coffey (1997: 47) observe

> 'We should not use documentary sources as surrogates for other kinds of data. We cannot, for instance, learn through records alone how an organization actually operates day-by-day. Equally, we cannot treat records—however 'official'—as firm evidence of what they report. … That strong reservation does not mean that we should ignore or downgrade documentary data. On the contrary, our recognition of their existence as social facts alerts us to the necessity to treat them very seriously indeed. We have to approach them for what they are and what they are used to accomplish.'

As it is relatively easy to look at a series of minutes over 12 – 18 months for each MAT, the minutes can also be regarded as being representative of the proceedings, concerns and ways of working of the Board. Also, and importantly for this study, they represent the ways and extent to which community concerns and voices feature, or do not feature in the official business. In this way the document analysis provides development of the primary data gathering technique, interviews, by identifying topics and themes for elaboration, clarification and areas for respondents' views and perspectives. Identification of the areas of questioning for the interviews helps to ensure that areas covered in interviews are of importance and significance and represent the public life of the MAT. This representativeness assists in establishing that the learning from analysis of interview data might have wider applicability beyond the case study.

The final criterion identified in Scott's Typology is that of meaning. As Wellington (2000: 115), Jupp (2006: 278) and many other writers on qualitative research highlight, there is not one single, objective meaning to a written document. No

document should be taken at face value and the task for the researcher is one of interpretation, identifying the literal or surface meaning, what the document denotes, and seeking a deeper understanding of the connotations of the document (Wellington 200: 116). Jupp (2006: 278) further divides the interpretative approach, identifying interpretation as concerned with social meanings generated in small-scale interactions and critical analysis, in which social meanings are analysed in a wider social context in terms of structural inequalities. The task of documentary analysis as applied to official MAT Board minutes provides indicators and pointers of issues which should be explored in interviews in three categories: seeking the literal or surface meanings; looking at what is shown about small-scale interactions between those present at the meetings; and the relative power relations between them and how these relate to wider structural questions.

Wellington (2000:117) offers a useful framework to base this analysis on, focusing on questions about authorship, audience, production, presentation, intentions, style, content and context.

3.10.1.2 Analysis of Documents

Having identified minutes as an appropriate and useful documentary source of data the approach adopted to analysis, bearing in mind Wellington's analytical questions, is as follows. Firstly, some numerical analysis is used at the simple level of a word search to measure the frequency with which some significant words related to the themes covered in the research questions occur. These are: teacher, staff, student, pupil, parent and/or carer, community(ies), learning and Ofsted. This offers an insight into the literal meaning of the document and some pointers about the relative significance of issues discussed by the MAT boards in the study and an indicator of which issues are dominant in those discussions. It does not provide an interpretation nor an analysis of meaning in the text. Taking account of Miles and Huberman's advice (1994: 56) that

> 'although words may be more unwieldy than numbers, they render more meaning than numbers alone … focusing on numbers alone shifts attention from substance to arithmetic'

The main component of data analysis for the minutes is concerned with interpreting and constructing meanings from the texts. Analysis based on words also enables the

widening of focus from 'what' and 'how' to the more searching 'why' questions (Silverman 2010: 229) which starts the process of building understandings and meanings.

Three levels of analysis were employed:

1. Overall sense-making of the document
2. Systematic and enumerative approach
   a. What is the content? What issues are discussed? What decisions are made?
   b. Amount and frequency of words and themes identified:
3. Textual analysis; interpreting meanings
   a. How are decisions made
   b. Who has influence, who is involved?
   c. Which voices are heard? (for the purposes of minutes and reports of meetings, voices are defined as three categories:
      (i) direct report or quoting of what someone said e.g. *The Executive Head concluded his report with a potential partner update*;
      (ii) indirect reporting of the views of a person or group e.g. *The Chair reported that a governor at <> Primary had suggested that risk management should be addressed at LGC level*; and
      (iii) reporting of the views of a group/category of stakeholders or an institution or organisation e.g., *Directors noted the previously distributed letter from the new CEO of the ESFA regarding a change to academy trust compliance with financial returns*).
   d. Where there is evidence of the voices and views of stakeholders being considered is it possible to discern the impact of such views on any actions or decision as a result of such involvement/consultation?
   e. Is there evidence in the text of who has influence, who has power and how is it used?

f. Is there evidence in the text of engagement with the community(ies) served by the MAT, for instance relationships, quality of relationships who is included etc.

The following themes and categories were identified through the process of overall sense-making of the sample of documents:

Content/issues covered in document	Voices represented in the document	Processes of governance evident in document
Finance and financial decisions	Plurality of voices heard and recognised at board level	Procedures and processes for conduct of MAT
Education, curriculum and standards	Parental involvement in MAT	Engagement with requirements and policies from government, inspectorates, other regulators and the MAT itself
School ethos, wellbeing and behaviour	Staff involvement in MAT	Location of power in MAT board, structure of authority and how power is used in making decisions
	Pupil and student involvement in MAT	Accountability, scrutiny, targets and measurement (MAT and individual schools)

Content/issues covered in document	Voices represented in the document	Processes of governance evident in document
	Community engagement and involvement in MAT	

The documents were analysed and coded in line with this schedule of themes, each occurrence of a theme being highlighted and colour coded. Occurrences were then tallied and recorded onto an Excel spreadsheet to give a score for the number of occurrences of each category. This provided a simple but effective way of identifying the weight and proportion of the theme, and therefore a measure of its importance, in the document. It does not provide an interpretation nor an analysis of meaning in the text.

The table below shows the importance of issues identified through the analysis of board minutes (percentages are those of total number of measured occurrences of the category)

Content/issues	
Finance and financial decisions	19%
Education, curriculum and standards	4%
School ethos, well-being and behaviour	0%
Staffing	9%
Voices represented in the document	

Plurality of voices heard and recognised at board level	0%
Parental involvement in MAT	0%
Staff involvement in MAT	1%
Pupil and student involvement in MAT	0%
Community engagement and involvement in MAT	2%
Processes of governance evident in document	
Procedures for conduct of MAT	25%
Compliance with requirements and policies from government, inspectorates, other regulators and the MAT itself	17%
Location of power in MAT board, structure of authority and how power is used in making decisions	13%
Accountability, targets and measurement (MAT and individual schools)	8%
Key word frequency	
Teacher/headteacher	28%
Staff	34%
Student	4%
Pupil	19%
Parent/carer	8%
Community(ies)	1%
Ofsted	2%
Teaching	4%
Learning	0%
Child/Children	1%

The results set out in this table would suggest that issues about which voices are given space in the board's considerations and the lack of voice for communities served by and involved with the MAT (e.g., pupils, staff, parents as well as the wider community) should be issues explored in interviews. Issues of accountability and how power is used also had a relatively low occurrence in the minutes which suggests these too should be explored in interviews.

3.10.2 Interviews

3.10.2.1 Why interviews

This study is concerned with how MATs and their relationships with communities are understood and shaped, particularly by the individuals in positions of leadership, power and influence in the organisation. As Brinkman and Kvale (2018) say 'If you want to know how people understand their world and their lives, why not talk with them?' The interview is a structured and disciplined way to undertake these conversations because, as Brinkman and Kvale (2018) explain: 'In an interview conversation, the researcher asks about, and listens to, what people themselves say about their lived world, about their dreams, fears and hopes; hears their views and opinions in their own words.' However, it is important for the technique to be more than an interesting conversation and take the form of a research interview which, in Brinkman's words, 'is an inter-view where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee.'

The chief technique employed as a data collection instrument was the qualitative, semi-structured interview. This format used the interview questions as a core structure or spine but, following Kvale's advice on scripting interviews (2007: 57) I exercised my judgment about the use of follow up questions and the exploration of the directions and issues these opened up. This enabled a richer conversation and more spontaneous and livelier responses. In doing this, I sought to find a balance between the two elements identified by Kvale (2007: 57); the thematic dimension which contributes to production of knowledge and the dynamics necessary to generate a good interaction with the respondent. This approach to interviewing was employed for two reasons. Firstly, it offers the potential to create a site or space in

which participants can create a picture of their world and their place and role in it. Using their own words they can express thoughts, feelings and views and express their own opinions, and describe their activities and experiences. Secondly, the powerful potential of the research interview to produce data from which knowledge can be constructed about the way in which MATs conceptualise and interact with their communities has been established, according to Brinkman, by the long history of its use and 'historical interview studies, which have changed the ways of understanding the human situation and of managing human behaviour throughout the twentieth century.'

3.10.2.2 Interview participants

The study seeks to understand the perceptions and understandings of those charged with leading and governing the three MATs in the case study. When negotiating access to the three MATs, interviews were sought with the CEO, the Chair of the MAT Board and one or two headteachers. In the smallest of the three MATs. Orchid Trust, at the time of the study the post of headteacher was combined with that of headteacher of the Trust's secondary school. The Heath Trust contains both secondary and primary schools so participation of one headteacher from each phase within the MAT was agreed. The Iris Trust is a primary school only MAT so participation of one primary headteacher was arranged. Headteachers in Heath and Iris MATs had a dual role of school headteacher and member of the school local governing body. Interviews with these three respondents elicited responses from the perspective of both roles. In addition, the clerk to the MAT Board in the Orchid Trust also participated as an interviewee, primarily to explore how business was conducted by a MAT board at its formal meetings and the process of recording meetings and producing formal minutes. The total number of interview respondents was 11.

All participants, their affiliations and their organisations were given anonymity by the use of synonyms as follows.

3.10.2.3 Key to MATs, schools and interviewees (anonymised names)

School names have been anonymised by taking the English name of a flowering plant with the same initial letter from the index of the Wild Flowers of Britain and Northern Europe (Fitter et al 1974)

Respondents anonymised names have been chosen from a list of children's names of Greek origin, again using the same initial letter and with a name appropriate to the gender.

	MAT		
	Heath	**Iris**	**Orchid**
Schools	Betony (sec)	Aspen (pri)	Nettle (sec)
	Bilberry (pri)	Arnica (pri)	Feverfew (pri)
	Fuchsia (pri)	Foxglove (pri)	Thistle (pri)
	Marjoram (sec)	Gentian (pri)	
	Primrose (pri)	Gorse (pri)	
	Vetch (sec)	Harebell (pri)	
		Self-heal (pri)	
		Teasel (pri)	
Personnel	H1 Basil - CEO	Ir1 Sonia - CEO	Or1 Judith - HT (Nettle)/CEO
	H2 Theo - Chair	Ir2 Jerry - Chair	Or2 Gina – Exec Director
	H3 Anthea – Primary HT (Fuschia)	Ir3 Jocinda HT (Gentian)	Or3 Leona - Chair
	H4 Jocasta – Secondary HT (Betony)		Or4 Denis – Clerk

3.10.2.4 Conduct of interviews

With three exceptions, all interviews took place in the office of the participant or meeting room on the premises of a MAT school. This arrangement was employed to address what Kvale (2007: 14) terms the power asymmetry in research interviews. Such an interview is not, Kvale asserts, an open dialogue between equal partners; the definition and choice of content, questioning and follow up and point of conclusion is all in the hands of the interviewer. These are not intentional factors but dictated by the structural positions of interviewer and respondent. Conducting the interview on the home territory or place of choosing of the respondent was an attempt to mitigate these effects.

Face to face interviews were sought and granted in all but one case The CEO of the Heath Trust was interviewed by telephone whilst he was alone in his office. The Chair of the Heath Trust was interviewed in person at a neutral but private venue for reasons of time, choice, and convenience for the interviewee. For the same reasons of time, choice, and participant convenience, the headteacher of Betony School in the Heath Trust was interviewed in a private meeting room at a university. All participants were sent an information sheet about the researcher and the study setting out practical and ethical issues and details (Appendix 1). A signed consent form setting out their agreement to participate and the conditions of the interview etc (an example is at Appendix 2) was obtained from each participant. With participants' agreement, all interviews were recorded for subsequent transcription and analysis purposes.

Interview questions were used as per the schedule with all participants, with each question acting as a technique to open a space for the subject to recount their activities, experiences, feelings, and views about the issue in their own words. 'Could you give me an example?' and 'how might that be improved?' questions were used to focus participants on exemplifying and analysing the phenomena they were discussing. Minimising the possibility that the semi-structured interviews, employing a form which seeks some of the spontaneity and engagement of open conversation, might become too informal and discursive required a high degree of attentiveness and active listening and seeking a careful balance between connection and rapport with the subject and sufficient distance and discipline to structure the flow of the

interview. Brinkman and Kvale (2018) characterise this as a dichotomy between the interview as research instrument, focused on the what of situations and experiences, and interviews as a social practice which seeks to get at the how and why. It is perhaps more appropriate to view these not as competing elements but aspects that need to be kept in balance to ensure both sufficient validity and relevance. Translating this into the conduct of interviews for the case study involved the use of verbal and non-verbal signals, prompts, follow ups, clarifying, and reflecting back as appropriate during interviews. Kvale (2007: 57) highlights the importance of this dynamic dimension in maintaining the flow of conversation and creating an atmosphere in which participants feel able to talk about their experiences of and feelings about the topics being discussed.

3.10.2.5 Interview schedule

There were four elements involved in the development of the interview schedule. Firstly, reference to the research questions to identify areas of questioning which would elicit responses covering the required areas. Secondly. the *a priori* process of drawing on the researcher's personal knowledge, experience and understanding of the context and functioning of MATs to identify possible questions. Thirdly reference to the analysis of MAT board minutes and the issues and themes identified from them. Finally, a pilot or trial interview was undertaken with fellow post-graduate researcher at York St. John University undertaking an EdD programme whose professional role was a headteacher in MAT which was not one of those taking part in the case study. Analysis and consideration of all aspects of this pilot was undertaken to identify learning for developing the interview schedule, the conduct of the interviews and producing and analysis of the interview transcripts.

3.10.2.6 Research questions and the interview schedule

Overall research question	What are the implications of academy status and the creation of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) for school governance, relations and engagement with communities and the accountability of schools in England?
Research Question	Interview question
What are the factors, forces and mechanisms driving the changes in school governance, community engagement and accountability in the three case study MATs?	IQs 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5
What are the consequences of the governance arrangements in the case study MATs for the way decisions are made and the influence of community interest and voices have on these decisions?	IQs 3 and 4
How are the case study MATs accountable to their communities and what factors and forces shape this accountability?	IQ 5
What is the significance of the findings from RQs 1,2 and 3 in furthering the understanding of how concepts of power, democracy and ideology	IQ 1,2,3,4 and 5

influence the governance of MATs and their engagement with communities?	
What potential practices might be developed in the governance of MATS to enhance community engagement and democratic accountability?	IQs 2,3,4 and 5

Interview questions (IQ)

1. Who are the communities served by the MAT, how would you define them?

2. Tell me about how your MAT Board (Trustees) / governing body engages with its communities? Can you give some examples of when community engagement worked well? And examples of when it worked less well?

3. Tell me about how your MAT Board / governing body engages its communities in its considerations and decision making. How are communities' views fed into the decision-making process? Can you give me two or three examples? How might you develop this area?

4. Tell me about how parents views and concerns are reported to the MAT Board / governing body and how these influence decisions. Can you give me some examples? How might this area be developed?

5. How does your MAT board / governing body manage its accountability to the community / communities served? Can you give me two or three examples? How might this be developed?

3.10.2.7 Lessons from the pilot interview

The pilot involved the full process of devising a schedule of questions, conducting, and recording the interview, transcribing the recording, and conducting an analysis of the written transcript. As such it provided an opportunity to test all aspects of the process from the practical technical details such as the volume and clarity of the recording device, minimising background noise and what constituted a suitable setting etc. through to the possible approaches to analysis of the interview data and construction of an interpretation. There were three areas of learning form this pilot that informed the substantive data collection and analysis work. Firstly, the practical question of transcription, which proved time consuming and laborious. This prompted the decision to use a transcription service with subsequent interview recordings. Secondly, was an understanding of the need to use questioning to encourage focus and exemplification by the subject to encourage concrete expression of the ideas and concepts being discussed. In Kvale's terms (2007: 58) this emphasised the need to ensure the thematic dimension and a focus in clarifying meanings was maintained. Lastly, when the pilot interview recording was transcribed and analysed it became apparent that the interview had moved towards a conversation and had not exhibited a high enough degree of discipline and rigour in the interviewer's style and conduct. This prompted an examination and review of interview technique to ensure the necessary changes and ensure awareness of the thematic dimension and the balance between research instrument and social practice.

3.10.2.8 Transcribing the interviews: creating texts and maintaining connection

As alluded to above, to ensure manageability of the transcribing task a decision was taken to use a professional transcribing service. Any process of transcription involves what is essentially a translation from one language (oral speech) to another (written text). This poses the risk that the interviewer will lose familiarity and closeness to the interview which comes through the task of transcription. Brinkman and Kvale (2018) highlight the pitfalls of transcription arising from this translation. In order to mitigate against these problems, clear instructions were provided to the transcription service to transcribe verbatim. The process involved dispatching the recording for transcription as soon as possible after the interview. Written transcripts were received back within a week to 10 days of dispatch. On receipt, transcripts

were read through whist playing the recording and annotating, noting pauses and hesitations etc. and making any corrections. This was carried out several times for each interview recording and transcript. Once this initial process of listening and noting was complete transcripts were ready for analysis, During the analysis, recordings were regularly listened to to refresh understandings and check nuances and ways of speaking.

3.10.2.9 Analysing the Interview Transcripts: Approach Used

Analysis of the text of transcripts of interviews and minutes is by a process of Thematic Analysis although as it draws on several approaches and is applied flexibly it might be characterised as what Kvale (2007: 115) terms 'bricolage … mixed technical discourses where the interpreter moves freely between different analytic techniques.' According to Braun and Clarke (2013: 178) thematic analysis is a method well suited to a bricolage approach as it is not tied to particular techniques of data collection nor does it prescribe particular theoretical frameworks or orientations. This flexibility seems appropriate for the study as the process of alignment with and refinement of theoretical frameworks is taking place in tandem with the practicalities of data collection and study of the literature.

As writers on qualitative research such as Wellington (2000:134) and Braun and Clarke 2013: 174) point out, there are many different methods of qualitative data analysis but there is not one single, correct way or method. There are however some well established guidelines and principles which should be followed, which, when applied to this study, gives the following kind of approach. In the first place, the process of data collection and analysis is not linear with analysis coming at the end. Analysis of data begins as soon as data is gathered and the issues and themes emerging help to inform both continuing analysis and the framing of questions in data gathering; it is a cyclical process, and each drives the other (Miles and Huberman 1994: 65).

Next is an attempt to ensure the analysis process is systematic but not rigid so the process of developing codes and themes proceeds in a disciplined fashion but is always open to modification and change as further data is subject to analysis. The process began with immersion in the data and building familiarity by reading the whole corpus and noting points of interest and moving to break it down into more

manageable segments. I categorised these data segments by a system of codes and themes that were in large part derived from the data. Some *a priori* codes or themes were employed based on my understanding of the field and the literature, but these were modified and elaborated and replaced by those built up from what was in the data. Patterns, themes and categories were built up through comparing and contrasting data segments and assigning them to categories. These categories were tentative and subject to continuous modification and change as further data became available and were analysed.

The process of developing codes, identifying themes, and establishing patterns follows the three-stage approach set out below. This process is carried out with an initial set of transcripts and the codes for use developed. These form a starting point for analysis but are be refined and modified in an 'organic and evolving process' (Braun and Clarke 2013: 211) as more transcripts and documents were subject to analysis.

I analysed data across all three MATs as they were treated as one case, and I was not concerned to compare between the MATs.

3.10.2.10 Stages in the Analysis
The first step towards analysis of the written transcripts was a process of familiarisation with the documents to gain immersion in the data. This involved reading and re-reading of the documents. During this process overall impressions were formed and initial items, concepts and ideas of relevance to the research questions noted. This is an observational and informal approach aiming to provide a rough listing of ideas in the data and a sense of the overall shape and picture of what can be drawn out of the data. In essence, these notes represent my initial impression and things that 'jump out'. These were the aspects which were the most obvious and most allied to the research questions and my research interests, views, and experiences of the topics under discussion in the interview. These observations and notes were used to build an analysis and to support the process of thinking critically about what meanings might be constructed from the data. This process involves continual reading and re-reading and using this as a springboard to thinking about possible interpretations of the data.

The second stage involved a more analytical process of coding of the data as a prelude to establishing patterns and themes which illuminate the research questions. Braun and Clarke (2013: 206) identify two approaches, selective and complete coding. The data analysis was concerned with identifying anything of interest in the data which might have relevance to the research questions, so the complete coding approach was used. Using this approach helped to refine the research questions, during the process of coding. This allowed flexibility to code the data in a comprehensive way and at the same time identify data which are not particularly relevant to the question and thus did not need to be coded. The codes were a series of phrases which highlight pieces of data (phrases, words, sentences, or longer extracts) which might have relevance to the research questions. This process of coding was not exclusive, and it was possible to code any piece of data in several different ways. In that sense, as Braun and Clarke (2013: 207) helpfully describe them, codes form the building blocks or bricks which are then used to construct themes from the data for analysis. What was being sought was the meanings that could be built from the data that lie behind the words and relate to the theoretical understandings and knowledge of the issue under discussion, therefore in Braun and Clarke's terms (2013: 207) these are researcher derived codes.

As well as developing codes from the data related to the themes and issues spoken about in interviews, part of the approach is to look at the words used, and language used. Looking at language is very pertinent to interview transcripts since these record the actual words used by participants This involved looking for: commonly used words and phrases; the use of word patterns, jargon and technical language associated with management and business as well as education; and the use of metaphors and similes to explain ideas and concepts. It also involved looking for linguistic clues that might indicate participants' deeper feelings about the ideas under discussion (words and phrases such as 'you know', 'to be honest', 'I mean' etc.).

The third stage involved examining the codes and coded data and beginning to create provisional themes. Constructing themes was governed by assessing if the themes related to and said something about the research question. There was a high degree of intuition involved in this process but given the significance of personal positionality and the impact of the experiences, understandings, and background of the researcher this is appropriate. Clearly, different researchers could construct

different themes from the same data, and Braun and Clarke (2013: 225) both acknowledge this and stress that this is an important feature of qualitative research.

This process was not a linear movement through the stages. It involved a continuous circular movement between the data, the literature (including the incorporation of new literature as it comes to light) and the written analysis and interpretation. This process is perhaps closest to the abductive approach set out by Brinkman (2017: 113). This reflects the fluid and changing nature of the social world and that knowledge of it is not static or eternal. The social world experienced and described by interview respondents changes constantly with events and the reaction to them and, partly at least, in response to the interpretations and knowledge developed about it.

Chew (2019) describes this cyclical process as 'informed guessing' in which tentative propositions (the guessing) are informed by surprise encounters between data and theories and concepts. This process then makes new connections and generates new insights. Two elements identified by Chew are evident in my data analysis process as it evolved and engaged abductively with theory and concepts. Firstly, is what Chew terms a recontextualisation, which in my case involved interpreting the ways in which MATs relate to communities in terms of neo-colonial theory. This was what Chew explains as making relations and connections that are not directly observable. The second element is what Chew identifies as defamiliarisation; making sense of a surprising encounter by explaining it differently. He describes this as a process of 'making the familiar strange' in a way that shatters existing normative understandings to open spaces for new connections. In my work on the analysis of interview data a surprise encounter with neo-colonial theory prompted the kind of recontextualization suggested by Chew and lead to my use of neo-colonialism as a different, surprising, and unexpected analytical frame.

This process of emersion, familiarisation, noting, coding and constructing themes was recorded in tabular form. An example of an interview analysis recorded in this way is at Appendix 3

This section has set out the techniques employed to collect and analyse data which will address the research questions. Methods and techniques have been described

and the practical issues and considerations of shaping them for this study have been discussed..

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter has set out my personal positionality and research stance and the considerations that arise from these. The thesis has been located firmly within constructivist epistemology and an interpretive paradigm. My background and experience have been discussed and related to the epistemological stance of the thesis. The chapter has set out the rationale for the choice of a case study methodology and given an explanation and analysis of the data collection methods employed to operationalise the case study. The analytical work of interpreting and making meaning from the data gathered has been set out and located within an abductive approach. The ethical questions arising from the nature of the inquiry and my positionality have been identified and examined. The abductive approach has focused interpretation into the following three analytical groupings which form the basis of the chapters that follow. Firstly, looking inwards: MATs, power, and governance (particularly through business logics). Secondly, looking outwards; MATs and accountability. Thirdly, looking critically: MATs as a neo-colonial enterprise.

Chapter Four

Internal affairs: Corporate logics and MATs' relations with schools

4.1 Introduction: the coming of academies and MATs

The antecedents of the present arrangements for English school organisation and control favoured and promoted by the current UK Government can be traced back to the changes begun by Conservative governments since 1979. Regarded by many as marking the end of the post-World War 2 social democratic era and a shift to a post-welfare social policy environment (Wood, et al 2020:3), the changes have come to be widely conceptualised as a neoliberal political settlement. This is characterised by the application of the market as the mechanism for the design and delivery of all public services and the reduction or removal of the state as an actor in the operationalisation of social policy; 'indirect governance via economic means' as Kotsko (2018: 20) puts it. The application of this neoliberal philosophy to education and schooling is set out by Thomson (2020: 32). Beginning with the creation of quasi-markets in education through budget devolution, enhanced opportunities for expression of parental preference in the choice of school their children attend, and other aspects of Local Management of Schools introduced by the 1988 Education Reform Act, autonomy for individual schools became an underlying principle of the school system. The same Act's provision for schools to gain complete autonomy (at least from the local authority) by opting out of the relationship with the local authority via the Grant Maintained Status route, whilst seen by many at the time as primarily a device to undermine and weaken the role of local authorities in education, with hindsight can be characterised as a fore-runner of the academy scheme and a vital component in the construction of the neoliberal state apparatus.

Introduced by the 1997 - 2010 Labour government as a response to what was designated as persistent and irremediable school failure, academy status was enthusiastically embraced by the 2010 the Conservative Secretary of State for Education in the Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition government as a model for

the future of the English school system. The 2010 Schools White paper, The Importance of Teaching, makes clear the intention to expand academy status and establishes a process by which outstanding schools (in Ofsted terms) can become academies through a process of conversion. It also asserts the Government's view that the autonomy of individual schools is fundamental: 'In the best school systems autonomy is not rationed as it has been in England. Extending greater autonomy to all schools is an absolute priority for this Government.' (DfE 2010: 54)

The 2016 White Paper Educational Excellence Everywhere confirms the government's belief in school autonomy via academy status and the creation of Multi Academy Trusts as the future of the English school system: 'MATs are the only structures which formally bring together leadership, autonomy, funding and accountability across a group of academies in an enduring way and are the best long term formal arrangement for stronger schools to support the improvement of weaker schools.' (DfE 2016: 57) The White Paper also sets out the intention to require all schools to convert by 2022, a proposal later withdrawn following the negative reaction form the sector during consultation (West and Wolfe 2019: 73), although this position remains the government's desired outcome but, for the present, to be achieved without legislative compulsion.

This chapter will analyse the interview data from the case study MATs and offer an interpretation of how the internal dynamics of autonomy and alignment (or more accurately control) operate between the MAT and its constituent schools

4.1.1 Autonomy and alignment

One of the significant debates in MAT sector is the balance between individual school autonomy and alignment with the policies of the MAT. This question of the balance of central control by a MAT and the autonomy and freedom to act of individual schools is also a theme identified in analysis and interpretation of the interviews in the case study MATs.

From a sector-wide perspective, the report by Ambition School Leadership (Menzies et al, 2017) gives details of national research commissioned by the Education Policy Institute into MAT strategies for school improvement and identifies two strategic choices for MATs: preserving the autonomy of individual schools or achieving consistent teaching and pedagogy across schools (3). The report acknowledges that

alignment or central control of back-office functions is common practice in MATs, but states that school improvement choices are different. The report concludes that there is not enough quantitative evidence to determine which strategic option has the greatest impact but nevertheless advocates 'that all schools in the MAT need to be aligned around a common approach to school improvement.' (8). Whilst the discussion in the sector is framed by use of the term 'autonomy and alignment', interpreting the responses of the case study interview participants would suggest that the notion of 'alignment' more closely resembles control by the MAT centrally.

The application of the workings of colonialism may be a useful lens here to view, magnify and build understanding of how alignment operates as control by the centre in the case study MATs. Justification for colonisation and control of colonised territories by a metropolitan power is located in the idea of the civilising mission and mixed in with a form of benevolence as well as an imperialist response to the practical problem of administering 'empires that were too large and too far flung to be ruled by a handful of nationals' (Anderson 2003:140). Relationships of domination and control by the metropolitan power were couched in terms of local administration and devolved control whereby, as Anderson explains the colonies were administered by 'subordinate cadres' produced by imposed educational and administrative systems. Viewed in this way, alignment is the ensemble of policies and practices by which the MAT Board secure implementation of its preferred courses of action and compliance of local governing bodies whilst simultaneously creating the sense that individual headteachers and governing bodies have some degree of autonomy over their actions and practices. These matters are examined more fully in Chapter Six

4.1.2 Autonomy: the wider context

Notwithstanding such debate about the balance of autonomy and alignment, the legal position in a MAT is clear; the trust itself is the responsible body and individual schools have no separate legal identity or powers. Any functions carried out and decisions taken at an individual school level must be delegated formally by the trust (see for example West and Wolfe 2018:16 and Richmond 2019: 20). In the case study MATs, and more widely in the sector, this delegation is set out and codified in a scheme of delegation. Such schemes also demonstrate the trust's intentions with

regard to the balance between central control (or alignment) and the degree of autonomy of individual schools. Ending of the legal basis for a school as an institution, removal of the requirement for an individual school to have a governing body and stripping those that do remain of their powers taken together with centralising tendencies and the concentration of control and decision making at the centre of MATs points to the reimagining of the idea of a school.

In the context of institutional self-governance, school leadership and professional practice, autonomy for schools and school leaders has been a fundamental organising principle behind successive governments' policy over the past 15 years relating to academies and academisation. This policy of creating state funded independent schools with no local authority involvement represents a significant ideological turn in policy on school organisation and control in England. It has been justified and sustained by reference to international evidence about the positive impacts of school autonomy and freedom on the performance of school students, most notably from the Charter Schools movement in the USA and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Mansell 2016). However, as Stern (2018b: 2) reminds us, autonomy can be a 'dangerous friend'. This is particularly so in this case because, as Mansell points out, this justification for autonomy is based on a very partial interpretation of international comparisons and because autonomy of schools in the MAT sector is contingent on remote data driven decisions and judgements on performance made by MAT officers. As a consequence, promises of greater autonomy do not always materialise in practice. Under the guise of autonomy, control is concentrated upwards, ultimately to central government. As McMullen (2016) says: 'What the newly academised system does, though, is give more control to the Department for Education.'

This chapter reports on the characteristics and practices of autonomy and alignment that can be constructed with the interview data from the case study MATs. In doing so, the chapter seeks both to illuminate and tease out interpretations of power and control and how they are manifest through a discourse of business and markets within the MATs in the study.

4.2 Autonomy and alignment: MATs and the control of constituent academies

4.2.1 'We value the uniqueness of each school': earning your autonomy

The public rhetoric of MATs is often couched in terms of respecting and valuing the autonomy and different character and ethos of individual schools. Indeed, enshrining the unique identity of each constituent school is seen as an important factor in the foundational rhetoric of the case study MATs which use the promise of maintaining individual school autonomy and uniqueness as an important element in their public statements and prospectus for schools that might join. For instance, one of the case study trusts says in its Our Offer to Your School brochure 'we value the uniqueness of each school because each school has a unique history and serves its own unique community'. On another case study MAT website schools considering joining the MAT are told 'Your school is unique and as a <MAT name> academy, you will retain this distinctive identity.' Some of the interviewees suggested that this claim of individual schools retaining autonomy was valid. Jocinda, headteacher in the Iris Trust, said:

> *'And certain things that work will cascade down to all of the schools because they work, but you can keep your autonomy and things that are working well for you as well.'* Jocinda, Headteacher, Gentian School, Iris Trust.

Basil, CEO of the Heath Trust, also stressed the degree of autonomy enjoyed by schools within the MAT, to the extent that it was something of deep, perhaps almost religious, significance ('the mantra was *nothing will change*'), but only where they were judged to be worthy of it ('another mantra was *earned autonomy*'), determined by a successful Ofsted inspection outcome. Seemingly conflicts between principles with religious significance (mantras) were to be resolved by the much more secular business of Ofsted judgements:

> *'and the mantra was nothing will change and another mantra was earned autonomy … The first two schools are outstanding therefore, you know, very light touch, total autonomy'* Basil, CEO Heath Trust

The idea of autonomy according to Lukes (2005:115) invokes the idea of freedom and thinking for oneself according to the dictates of one's nature and judgement. The

idea of earned autonomy is then somewhat contradictory; if autonomy must be earned, is in the gift of another and can be withdrawn at the others discretion to what extent is it constrained and therefore really autonomy?

The response from a headteacher in the Heath Trust develops the theme of autonomy as a something awarded for good conduct rather than a right and which can be removed or curtailed if performance and standards are deemed by the Trust to have declined:

> *'I think because we are doing okay, you know, it's the kind of earned autonomy idea, we are doing well and moving forward and making progress as a school so actually it's okay, you know, potentially in the future if there was a school in significant difficulties where it was clear that the governing body were struggling, there may well be, there is the provision there to remove their sort of governors responsibilities'* Anthea, Headteacher, Fuschia School, Heath Trust

Implicit in what Anthea says is that autonomy not only has to be earned in the first place by good performance (as determined by the Trust and relying on quantitative measures such as test scores and Ofsted inspection grades) but is subject to an inspectoral gaze through continual monitoring and assessment. Continued enjoyment of autonomy and its benefits would seem to be conditional on 'moving forward and making progress' and therefore could be seen as part of the apparatus of performative pressure.

The understandings of autonomy developed here suggest that it is constrained and subject to determination by others outside the school concerned. The next section explores how ideas of control sit within what in the MAT sector is termed alignment.

4.2.2 Alignment as control
The extent to which case study MATs saw autonomy and alignment as being about control and how to implement controls is seen in the Orchid Trust. As a new MAT, the CEO stated that its early priority was about aligning business processes across the schools, but control of educational matters was also in view. Judith, the CEO says:

> *'clearly this period of time is about getting the business operations established and aligned, and also starting on the education improvement alignment'.*

And she suggests that in her mind alignment is a firm position of the Trust:

> *'Yeah, I think we've taken the stance that we definitely want to really have quite a tight rein on business operations, so, payroll, contracts, HR, certain SLAs, compliance, we have a central team who are quite effective, who are able to run all that, on behalf of the three schools.'* (Judith, CEO, Orchid Trust)

The use of the phrase 'we definitely want to have quite a tight rein' here reinforces the message about central control and suggests it is exercised strongly. In addition to the explicitly stated benefits of alignment such as economies of scale and efficiency in business operations, Judith spells out one less publicly acknowledged reason why such a level of control might be important:

> *'and that also prevents somebody going off on a tangent, and appointing four teachers, you know, and they haven't got the money.'* (Judith, CEO, Orchid Trust)

The language here, with talk of going 'off on a tangent' and the exaggeration for effect might suggest Judith has a concern about some schools' willingness or ability to comply with MAT requirements and that schools might assert their own priorities and ways of doing things, all of which implies a suspicion of school autonomy within the MAT. Judith also signals very clearly that schools' autonomy is limited by the central MAT ownership and control exerted over budgets ('they haven't got the money'). Whilst this implies non-compliance will be dealt with swiftly and firmly, she also suggests that this firm approach to central control is welcomed by schools that have joined the MAT, almost as a form of protection.

> *'We're getting a bit of feedback, how appreciative the primaries are, of the rigour and robustness of the systems we put around them'.* (Judith, CEO, Orchid Trust)

The feedback quoted by Judith perhaps indicates a regime of control and imposition and suggests containment of schools but couched in terms of something provided for the schools' benefit. Whilst there is a degree of ambiguity in the idea of 'systems put around them' it does evokes the neo-colonial discourse of 'civilising mission' with its ideological justification of the benevolence of the coloniser to the colonised, akin to the selflessness of colonialism set out by Said (1978: 37) and what Arendt

(1951/2017: 274) describes as a 'tradition of dragon slayers who went enthusiastically … to strange and naïve peoples to slay the numerous dragons that had plagued them for centuries'.

Judith is also suggesting that educational matters also might be aligned across the trust ('starting on the education improvement alignment'). Running throughout the discourse of autonomy and alignment, both at the national level and in the case study MATs, is the question of aligning (or seeking tighter central MAT control) of school improvement. Whilst the discussion in the sector literature (see for example Menzies et al, 2017) speaks of school improvement, what is really under discussion is the control of curriculum and teaching from the centre in pursuit of improved scores against a range of assessment metrics. As Gunter (2104: 24) notes, the field of school improvement and the associated Transnational Leadership Package has become a globalised industry supported by an exceptionally large array of research and policy initiatives.

Biesta (2010: 11) sets out a clear summary of the origins of school improvement thinking. He outlines its shift from a wide focus on a range of school-based variables that might make schools more effective to a much narrow concern with measurable inputs and outcomes. He argues this rise in measurement culture has had a profound impact on educational practice and given rise to normative validity; that is, the valuing of what can be measured in schools at the expense of clarity about what is really of value. He advocates a need for those who lead and manage schools to engage in a debate about values in determining policy and direction.

Leona, the Orchid Trust chair echoes Judith's suggestion that educational provision needs to be aligned across the MAT and speaks about the need for alignment/control and the requirements of the MAT, linking the business arguments for alignment ('all the economies of scale involved in that') with the educational issues:

> *'we're not just looking after Nettle now, we're looking after other schools … what our overall vision is, what our overall goal is. So, in developing those young people from the feeder schools right from an early age, right up to 18 … And actually making that as seamless as possible … you know like the factor for us I think that's at the heart of everything for us is about providing that*

excellent education for those children right through and that approach. And looking at obviously from the MAT you've got all the economies of scale involved in all of that. (Leona, Chair, Orchid Trust)

Which again suggests that the thinking driving the MAT's educational provision is that of standardisation, central direction, and imposed notions of quality to achieve centrally determined outcomes for children. When taken together with the way in which Judith and Leona talk about the MAT vision, this might also suggest that the pervasiveness of business logics and market hegemony is so strong that the debate about what is valued educationally has been directed into a narrow, shallow, and performative channel.

4.2.3 'Meeting the vision' – moral purpose and educational arguments for control

Leona has an educational argument to support her view on alignment; it is driven by concern about the primary/secondary transition and ensuring this is as smooth as possible because this is better for children and serves the interest of the secondary school in the MAT. There is also an implied criticism of the approach taken to Year 6 in the primary schools, what might be termed teaching to the test.

> *'What you find as well, a lot of feedback is when the kids come in at year six there's a big discrepancy between what the reading age is supposed and their maths. And sometimes I think the SATs, they've just got them ready for the exam and that's it. But then at other times year seven has been a bit of a repeat for some kids and they're bored stiff. I think if we've got feeder schools coming in, we know what they've already done, we can prepare the transition, we can get them better.'* (Leona, Chair, Orchid Trust)

Judith, the CEO sees this alignment of the curriculum as part of the moral purpose of the MAT and linked to its vision and an opportunity to address what she feels are the long-standing problems of primary/secondary transition:

> '*we then have a moral purpose to ensure that the curriculum offer in each of the schools meets that vision, and that's something that we're really getting into now, about revisiting the curriculum offer, aligning it, from the key stages,*

particularly 2, 3, because we all know that's been a wasted opportunity for a number of years.' (Judith, CEO, Orchid Trust)

For Judith it seems that alignment or control of the curriculum is of great importance, it is a 'moral purpose' and underpins achievement of the MATs vision. Earlier in the interview Judith describes the hierarchical and top-down way in which the MAT's vision was developed by senior MAT officers and in essence imposed on the schools in the MAT:

'But I think one of the fundamental things that the trust has tried to do, on the trust board, is to get across the vision and the values. So, we had a big launch event, which then brought in all the governance of the trust together, and key staff in those three schools, of which clearly within the room, there were parents that are active members of those local advisory committees, and we shared what we, as a trust, wanted the Orchid Trust, what was its mission statement, and we sort of, it's quite simple. We want our youngsters to be school ready, work ready and life ready. So, that's communicated out.' (Judith, CEO, Orchid Trust)

There are two elements in what Judith says here that relate to the themes of neo-colonial discourse and the pervasiveness of business logics in the way the MAT relates to its schools and communities. Firstly, the hierarchical relations of power that are demonstrated in Judith's description of the process for launching the trust and establishing its aims and purpose. All those with an involvement in Trust governance (mainly teaching staff and governors) are 'brought in' to be told what the Trust wanted and crucially what its already determined mission is to be. This has the feel of a new regime announcing the new rules to its subjects rather than a collaborative working group establishing the direction of a new organisation that all participants have ownership of.

The second element is what is signified by the mission statement determined by the Trust. 'School ready, work ready, life ready' suggests a capture of childhood and family life by an economic logic; school is about preparation for life solely through the medium of work and its attendant disciplines. This calls to mind Foucault's (2004)

analysis of the origins and development of neoliberalism from an economic system based on the primacy of markets to a novel political and social formation in which market principles and economic logic is applied to, takes over and governs institutions, families, and wider society.

4.2.4 Control and coercion

Whilst the responses of the Orchid Trust Chair and CEO suggest that the publicly stated position is support for the idea of individual school autonomy in the MAT, it is contradicted by the model of hierarchical central control that can be assembled from Judith's comments and by concern expressed by Leona the Chair that there should be consistency of provision. As Leona says:

> *'we listen to what the schools want and what is great is- my style is very much involve and if it's not broken don't fix it. But actually let's get consistency and let's share best practice and do the best across.'* (Leona, Chair, Orchid Trust)

Two features of the discourse of power and central control are evident in what Leona says here. Firstly, autonomy is on the MAT terms and only available as long as it generates the kind of results and outcomes determined by the MAT. This can be characterised as a form of coercive autonomy, which as Greany and Higham (2018:35) explain, is driven by external accountability pressure on MATs and raises the question of 'whether academies can genuinely claim to be autonomous.' What is on offer to schools within MATs is at best an extension of the operational powers first introduced through Local Management of Schools following the 1988 Education Reform Act. Greany and Higham argue the kind of close scrutiny and enforced compliance illustrated by Judith, the Orchid Trust CEO, acts as a counterweight to any autonomy granted to academies. Greany and Higham argue this adds 'coercion and fear into the school system'.

The second feature in Leona's remarks concern what could be termed her faith in best practice. Whilst Leona is not explicit about how she understands best practice, her view that it is a route to achieving consistency across the MAT suggests she is locating it in the discourse of standardisation and control. Gunter (2014: 23) suggests that what she terms the 'attempts to canonise best practice' have been

used to normalise and legitimise 'the unreflexive acceptance of a mishmash of business thinking' which furthers the business discourse of imposing market-based reforms and ways of working.'

There is also a concern from Judith (Orchid Trust CEO) that the schools in the MAT need to show they can justify their autonomy through being able to demonstrate that performance, as measured through test and assessment results, is at a sufficiently high level to minimise risk to the MAT:

> *'there is a degree of autonomy in the schools around their own school improvement plans, and their own education … We are keeping a very weather eye on that, because for two schools, that will be ok, for one of the other schools, we may have some question marks around the leadership, and there lies, you know, I need the results in, I need some, a clear steer of where the school then sits, following these results, and then I'm going to have to take a measured view on that.'* (Judith, CEO, Orchid Trust)

The way in which collective and personal pronouns are used here might suggest that the MAT board are responsible for monitoring but that Judith is taking personal responsibility and power for deciding the degree of autonomy schools will be allowed (we are monitoring – 'keeping a very weather eye' – 'we may have some question marks' but **'**I need the results in', **'**I need some, clear steer'.., 'I'm going to take a measured view').

The Chair of the Orchid Trust also talks about the move to limit autonomy of the primary schools in the MAT, justifying this on educational grounds.

> *'What we want is, we want our children to have a consistent education, learning in the same manner, understanding in the same manner, and then being able to be a certain quality'* (Leona, Chair, Orchid Trust)

What seems to be driving Leona's thinking here is a desire for standardisation of teaching and learning across the MAT and for the MAT to have greater control of what is taught and how it is taught across all schools. From her words, this would

seem not just to be a matter of consistency in what is taught and how it is taught, but desire for ontological standardisation too; 'we want our children …understanding in the same manner, and then able to be a certain quality.' The idea of 'a certain quality' also speaks to a neoliberal discourse of human capital in training and an economistic conception of children and the role of schooling. The suggestion here is that the MAT seeks to shape schools in a particular fashion and shape children in a similar way too.

Leona suggests that the MAT should take a greater degree of control and individual school autonomy should be reduced because it would benefit children through improved primary to secondary transition and curriculum continuity across phases. This feels to be a secondary school perspective, seeking the benefits of more uniform practice in its feeder primary schools. This is a long-standing issue and one which has been addressed through a variety of collaborative initiatives across associated groups of schools. What Leona seems to suggest is that the advent of the MAT gives the secondary school the opportunity to exert full control over what happens in the primary schools and impose its values and understanding about what constitutes useful knowledge. As Leona puts it when the MAT takes this control 'we can get them better' suggesting that the needs of the largest constituent school determine the overall MAT policy at the cost of autonomy of the primary schools.

There is much discussion in the MAT sector more widely about 'earned autonomy' for schools. These responses could suggest that the Orchid Trust view is not so much that autonomy is earned but that it is in the gift of the MAT officers. Judith seems to suggest that power to determine who has autonomy is something that resides in the central MAT structure and will be awarded based on their assessment of a school as if it were a reward for compliance:

> '*We like a degree of autonomy in the central team. I think educationally, we are willing to give, you know, if we've got a good leadership and good structures, and processes in a school, we're willing to let them run with it*' (Judith, CEO Orchid Trust)

When taken together with the earlier comments from Judith the CEO about the 'moral purpose' of aligning the curriculum across the MAT's schools and the centrality of this to the Trust's vision, it would suggest that Orchid Trust is driven by a hierarchical, centralising and controlling disposition which seeks to concentrate and hold power at the centre. The MAT awards limited autonomy to individual schools only on condition of compliance with the MAT's requirements, which are closely linked to test and other narrow performance measures dictated by external accountability pressures and audiences. As Greany and Higham (2018: 36) explain the much-publicised freedoms associated with academy status have been outweighed by the pressures for centralisation and standardisation driven by the pressures of coercive accountability.

4.2.5 Focusing on education – MAT arguments for central control

The comments of the Iris Trust CEO and the headteacher of one of the Iris Trust schools, Gentian, suggest that the Iris MAT have sought to codify the autonomy and alignment balance in a collaborative fashion.

> '…we engaged a national leader of governance to work with us and to work with all the governing bodies, everybody could send representatives, all the Head teachers were involved, all the central team were involved, all the chairs of governors were involved and we came up with a very clear scheme of delegation as a result of that consultation, which everybody is quite happy with.'
> (Sonia, CEO Iris Trust)

According to Sonia, the balance struck gives individual schools and headteachers responsibility over educational and community matters at a school level in exchange for ceding control of finance, premises, personnel etc. to the central MAT. This is a settlement that Jocinda, headteacher of Gentian School, feels allows best use of her professional expertise and resources of the school.

> 'But you sit in the chair because you want your passion of teaching and learning to be cascaded to your teachers. Because a lot of your time is taken up by everything else and the MAT know that, they see that, they identify that and they're wanting to have experts in fields that can make sure that all fields

are being looked after properly and collectively … And certain things that work will cascade down to all of the schools because they work, but you can keep your autonomy and things that are working well for you as well.' (Jocinda, Headteacher, Gentian School, Iris Trust.)

Sonia, the Iris Trust CEO believes this not only works well but is widely accepted by the MATs schools:

'Each of the local governing boards is very clear about their area of responsibility and they have all accepted that very willingly because for example they don't have anything to do with finance. So finance has been taken away from them. So that is not a bad thing and most governing boards are quite happy with that.' (Sonia, CEO Iris Trust)

It is instructive to examine this quote from Sonia a little more deeply for what it reveals about the tendency of MATs to move toward greater central control. She says, 'So finance has been taken away from them' and at a surface level this suggests relieving schools of a burden and allowing them to focus on education and children (which Jocinda, the Gentian School head, identifies as the strength of being part of the MAT). However, further reflection reveals another interpretation in that this concentration of control over finance represents an emasculation of governing bodies. It calls into question their ability to have a meaningful role; if they have no control over resources and their allocation, how can they make decisions or implement changes? They are reduced to making suggestions and seeking approval from the MAT board.

There is also an accountability deficit here as if 'finance is taken away' from the governing body they have no means of scrutinising or questioning the financial decisions of the board and holding it to account. As Richmond highlights (2019: 18), it is extremely difficult to ascertain from MAT financial reporting the allocation of funding to each school within the MAT. There is also a neo-colonial discourse present here which is evident in the way in which a shift in the balance of economic power and control is brought about using a justificatory ideology of improved administration and greater efficiency which requires no force or coercion (Shajahan 2011: 184) to take over the resources of the school and assume full responsibility for their control and use. That 'most governing boards are happy with that' suggests that

Lukes' (2005: 27) third dimension of power is at work here; that is, 'to secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires.'

 The next section explores how the logics of business and markets influence and shape the workings of MATs.

4.3. MATs' Business and the Business of MATs: Customers, Markets and Money

4.3.1 Introduction

The colonisation of education and schooling, particularly in relation to the process of academisation and Multi Academy Trust (MAT) formation, by 'a market rationality and entrepreneurial logic' (Thomson 2020:54) is a well-researched and documented series of interconnected phenomena (see for example Greany and Highham 2018, Glatter 2017, Wood et all 2020, Wilkins and Olmedo 2019, Wilkins 2017a and 2017b, and Papanastasiou 2019). This use of a discourse of business and finance as an explanatory and organising logic is one of the themes that can be constructed from the interview data and is explored in the following section.

4.3.2 The MAT and its community: engagement or marketing?

The pervasiveness of this business discourse in MAT thinking and its impact on practice can be drawn out of analysis of the responses to the question about how respondents understood 'community' in relation to their MAT. Several responses indicated the respondent's understanding was located in a business and finance logic. For instance, Judith, the CEO of Orchid Trust sees community engagement as an exercise in marketing and a route to financial sustainability for an organisation providing education as a commodity:

> *'How does it engage with its community; it's quite an interesting one, I'm trying*
> *to come up with a tangible example. Clearly, parents have to make decisions*
> *over which schools they are going to send their child, whether it's from early*
> *years or whether its key stage 3, 4 and 5; so, the trust has to market itself.'*
> (CEO, Orchid Trust)

Here she speaks of the MAT as an object she is observing from outside, perhaps distancing herself from the MAT as an organisation because she struggles to find an example of community engagement. She attributes agency to the MAT as a collective rather than individual actors within the organisation when suggesting what action will happen ('*the Trust has to market itself*'). Community engagement is expressed as the marketing of the MAT to potential parents, who are thus redefined as potential customers

However, as she develops her thinking about the MAT's relationships to community, she then steps back inside the MAT and takes ownership with a firm statement of what must be done (*We've got to make sure)*, this time locating the community as an outside, passive 'other' which must be acted upon:

> *'We've got to make sure that the community understands the Orchid Trust. Because if it understands what we're trying to do, and sees it as a high quality offer, then that starts to secure sustainability of the trust, because you are a commodity that people want to be a part of, in other words, we will send our child to a school in that trust.'* (Judith, CEO Orchid Trust)

Her response here would suggest that this firmly expressed purpose of ensuring the community understands is driven by the business logic of a transaction; of providing a '*high quality offer'* the take up of which '*secures the sustainability'* of the MAT. The MAT here is characterised as a '*commodity that people will want to be part of'*. This characterisation of schooling and education as commodity appears as a stark expression of the business logic; the more commonly deployed description of education as a service softens and disguises the transactional nature of the relationship between 'provider' and 'customer'. In any case, whether it is an 'offer', 'commodity' or service the purpose expressed here is clearly about securing the sustainability of the MAT. There is no suggestion here of educational or community benefit. Where educational purposes and benefit to children, parents and communities is raised, it is expressed in transactional terms and the need to market the Trust's offer. This is expressed in the earlier quotation from Judith about the MAT mission statement

> *'we shared what we, as a trust, wanted the Orchid Trust, what was its mission statement, and we sort of, it's quite simple. We want our youngsters to be*

school ready, work ready and life ready. So, that's communicated out … we
need our parents to understand the offer that the Oak Trust is going to provide
for their child' (Judith, CEO Orchid Trust)

And

'We've got some work to do, in getting that community buy-in, certainly from
early years through to 11, we're now thinking about a marketing strategy, we're
thinking about interacting much more proactively with parents.' (Judith, CEO
Orchid Trust)

The chain of logic seemingly indicated in Judith's interview is that of an educational
vision developed by senior leaders in the lead school in the MAT which is translated
into an '*offer*' or '*commodity*' and then '*communicated out*' by a marketing strategy to
parents and the community and which aims to achieve 'buy-in'. It is hard to
disentangle the purposes here, as both the commercial imperative of Trust
sustainability and education provision for a community are both evident, but it would
seem from the way these are expressed and emphasised in the interview data that
the more prominent motivation is financial and the MATs relations with its
communities is that of producer/customer.

4.3.3 The school as community: conceptualisations of pupils/students and parents

One construction from the analysis of headteacher interviews is the idea of
engagement with children and young people and bringing their views and
perspectives into decisions about how the school determines its approach to
teaching and learning. This represents a move from the idea of a student council,
what might be termed a guided democracy approach of consulting children and
young people about more marginal issues of school life towards using their views to
influence teaching and learning, a potentially more democratic role in shaping the
way the organisation works.

As Jocasta, headteacher at Betony, a secondary school in the Heath Trust, put it:

'So we look for as many opportunities as possible to engage in dialogue and discussion with young people, primarily about teaching and learning but obviously that becomes bigger depending on what comes out of those conversations. We have cycles of monitoring what happens in the school around teaching and learning and young people are involved in those cycles, so we actively ask young people to come and meet with us so we can hear what they think and that happens every six weeks. That's about trying to move away from engagement with students being about the toilets and you know things like that actually, yes we know we are always wanting to improve the toilets but actually that's one small thing and we really want our teaching and learning to be as good as possible. (Jocasta, Headteacher, Betony School)

When asked about how this approach worked in practice and what impact it had had on the way the school operated and served the community of children and young people Jocasta talked about a changed way of working.

'It's difficult to be very concrete in the sense that I can't probably give lots of examples but essentially the feedback that comes back from students informs CPD, so it informs staff development and informs how staff then deliver lessons and that can be on a really wide range.' (Jocasta, Headteacher, Betony School)

The Jocasta also talked about how this approach to engagement informed discussion and decision making at the governing body:

'at times depending on what it is, we will bring that to governors. So, if it's things that I know there is a need for something or where students have spoken about wanting more of then I can go to governors and say right, well we have got this issue coming and we need to do something about it. An example of that might be, well students might say that they want more support, pastoral support and I am struggling to afford more pastoral support, as many are, to do with, we could do with more than one full time counsellor in school and we don't have them. So that's something that I would then bring to governors and say right how can I resolve this, where can we find… so that would inform the budget setting process. So, if that's been said by our key stakeholders, what can we do

with the budget setting process to make that happen.' (Jocasta, Headteacher, Betony School)

In this scenario the headteacher is playing a pivotal role at the centre of a web of relationships. She describes carrying out a wide range of engagement activity with children and young people, ensuring it is incorporated into discussion with staff about the practice of teaching and learning and interpreting the views and needs of young people to the governing body in a way that informs decisions about allocation of resources. One interpretation here is that this is a process of democratic engagement with young people, giving them a real role in influencing decisions about the core purposes of the school. Another interpretation is that young people are being co-opted into performative mechanisms of governance by becoming part of the 'cycles of monitoring' which are a component of the surveillance mechanisms and business management required by the MAT. In Foucault's terms (1977: 165) the school becomes a machine for learning in which 'each pupil, each level and each moment, if correctly combined, were permanently utilised in the general process of teaching'.

Engaging with parents

The responses from respondents suggest that engagement with parents is a contribution to support for children and young people's learning rather than as a wider role in the governance of a school or MAT. Jocasta, headteacher at Betony, talked about the school using parent voice in this way:

> *'At parents' evenings, there are questionnaires then which are quite specifically, so we have Prefects who will stand and make sure that those are given out and collected back in again. We have study skills evenings for Years 9, 10, 11 at the end of each of those put out questionnaires that are tailored specifically to those events and think about how we can help students how we can work together more to help students with their improved teaching and learning.'*
> (Jocasta, Headteacher, Betony School)

Anthea, the headteacher at Fuchsia primary school in the Heath Trust felt that parents in her school community didn't want or weren't able to get involved in strategic governance issues and were content with involvement which supported aspects of their children's learning.

'I think that's a really difficult one to do, I think that's… because a lot of our strategic direction comes from involvement with the MAT and it's led by that or led by, you know, things that we want to move into there, which parents wouldn't necessarily have. I don't think parents would… if you ask parents about something to improve the strategic direction of the school a lot of them would say road safety or school meals or less homework, more homework. Now that's not specifically a strategic direction thing.' (Anthea, Headteacher, Fuchsia School, Heath Trust)

This suggests that responsibility for determining strategy and strategic direction has been shifted away from the school towards the MAT and that has rendered engagement of parents in governance difficult or redundant. There is also a suggestion that parents do not really want to be involved in wider governing issues, implying that a role as consumers has become normalised.

At the level of MAT board, the engagement with parents and understanding their perspectives would seem underdeveloped. As Jerry, chair of the Iris Trust, indicates, there is an issue about how parental views are gathered and the question of how it informs governance issues is still not resolved or fully worked out.

'We haven't actually got round to doing one on parent's views but we like to know what people are doing, we like to know what the local governing body view on things is. But I don't know whether, I mean you have got me thinking about this because we don't actually do anything as a Trust board about it other than if anything was brought to the Trust board. (Jerry, Chair, Iris Trust)

Whilst parent engagement and bringing parent (and indeed wider community) voice and perspectives into the governance process of the case study MATs is underdeveloped, locating parent engagement into a business logic which casts them as consumers and customers is becoming established practice as the next section shows.

4.3.4 Business everywhere: MATs and the hegemony of markets

Another aspect of the prevalence of business logic in the constitution of a MAT can be drawn out from the quotes from Judith the Orchid Trust CEO in section 4.3.2. The very core educational purpose of the MAT is framed as preparation for employment ('work ready'). This would seem to form a significant aspect of how the Trust conceptualises and constructs its understanding of community as this quote from Gina, the Executive Director illustrates:

> *'So, what we do is we have extended our community, and the way that we have sort of done that is through our strategic plan for careers and employability skills. So, what we've got is we've got a lot of employers which are friends of the school and are involved in working with the school and we use those for a whole range of different activities, and opportunities, for our young people.'*
> (Gina, Executive Director, Orchid Trust)

This is echoed in the interview with Leona, Chair of Orchid Trust who offers a conceptualisation of the educational mission of the MAT in business terms which her use of the personal pronoun suggests she owns strongly:

> *'we've got obviously the strap-line, School Ready, Work Ready, Life Ready. So that's across the Orchid Trust and I think for me it's about branding the Orchid Trust in the local schools for the parents.'* (Leona, Chair Orchid Trust)

The educational purpose of the organisation is here rendered in quite plain business language using marketing terms such as 'strap line' and 'branding' to be used with parents. What is perhaps on show here is the logic of operating in a competitive marketplace in a way that dominates and directs the thinking of the actors concerned and illustrates what Papanastasiou terms (2019:131) 'the hegemonic discourse of the market'.

4.3.5 Markets, morals and customers

The foregoing sections show that business language, market logics and educational purpose are mixed in the case study MATs in what Sandel (2012:88) identifies as an entanglement of markets and moral questions. This is illustrated in the interview with Basil, CEO of the Heath Trust, where community benefit and commercial logic are

tightly bound together in his discussion of community engagement. He suggests the MAT's work on community engagement is ultimately about securing financial viability of the MAT's schools in a competitive marketplace but wraps this up in an explanation of the community orientated deployment of staff:

> *'So each of the communities have different problems and team members are trying to solve those on the ground because without solving the problem of community engagement, your numbers are going to drop and they will drop dramatically. If you ignore that, what the community feel, you will find your numbers go down and then the viability of the school goes.'* (Basil, CEO Heath Trust)

As with Judith's response quoted above, Basil seems to be standing outside the MAT and making a general case to convince the interviewer, rather than giving a specific explanation of MAT policy and action (for example '*your numbers will go down', 'if you ignore that'*) What does seem to be suggested here is that action to generate community benefit is intrinsically bound up in a business logic or as Thomson (2020:54) says 'it blurs the boundaries and responsibilities for tackling social issues across public, private and third sectors'. This infiltration of business and economic logic into social concerns and community problems is perhaps an illustration of how the influence of neoliberalism spreads beyond economic policy and 'aspires to be a complete way of life and a holistic world view' (Kotsko 2018: 6). As Sandel suggests (2012: 91) relying solely on market reasoning without addressing the moral questions poses the risk of corrupting attitudes and norms that should be protected. This question of the corrupting of aspects of educational and social purpose is explored more fully in Chapter Five.

Theo, the Chair of the Heath trust also echoes this logic when he speaks about community first and foremost as customers:

> *'So you start with the obvious who are your customers, it's the pupils, who are supporting the customers? It's the staff and the volunteers. But part of our customer base if you like is the family of the pupils and that can be the direct family, or it can be the indirect family and the communities in which they all live.'* (Theo, Chair, Heath Trust)

Theo is perhaps demonstrating here the very pervasive influence of economistic logic and market hegemony as families, individual pupils, and communities are re-defined as customers and 'our customer base'.

4.3.6 Markets, growth, and sustainability

The focus by respondents on the viability and sustainability of MATs and their constituent schools in a competitive recruitment market with a funding model driven by pupil numbers suggests that in the case study MATs, community engagement is conceptualised as part of business model to secure financial viability and growth of the MAT. This is perhaps a reflection of a national trend, and a desired DfE direction of academy policy, which adds surveillance and control to the economic and efficiency objectives. A recent National Governance Association (NGA) report highlights this economistic logic through government statements showing a desire that MATs should grow: 'larger MATs will secure economies of scale, more efficient use of resources, more effective management and oversight of academies.' (NGA 2019:23). The argument here is all about business logics and extending central control hinting that this takes precedent over autonomy of individual academies.

Greany and Higham (2018:85) conceptualise MATs in the quintessential business discourse of 'mergers and acquisitions' as one way in which MATs relate to their schools. This adds another dimension to the concept of marketing and competitive marketplace. Not only do MATs see themselves competing for pupils (as illustrated in the interview extracts above) but also marketing themselves as potential 'homes' for schools seeking to become part of a MAT through the process of academy conversion, and sponsors for schools in difficulties (those with a poor Ofsted inspection outcome) which are required to become academies as part of a MAT. In the context of the growth of the academy sector and the thrust of central government policy since 2015, there is considerable activity as MATs, non-academised schools and stand-alone academies eye each other across the education market dance floor with a view to establishing more formal relations. The possibilities of MAT growth and take-over of schools then colour relationships with schools more widely. As Judith, Orchid Trust CEO says when talking about such local collaboration and relationships:

*'And building that relationship up, not just with schools that are in the MAT …
but with schools that are not in the MAT. Given the fact that if you build a
relationship up more positively, they may want to join the MAT.'* (Judith, CEO
Orchid Trust)

In this kind of climate, stand-alone academies and schools not in the academy sector
may wish to be wary of collaboration with MATs, straining the kind of professional
networking and collaborative arrangements that schools once enjoyed and relied on.

Judith, Orchid Trust CEO also talked about her view of networking as a professional
community.

*'However, we also serve other communities, whether you call it communities or
networks, where you sit in <town> network of trusts, you're in a <sub-region>
network of trusts, you're in a region of trusts, which is <region>. And within all
of those facets, is some interconnectivity, because we work it, you know within
the authority we're an opportunity area, but I'm also a member of the <sub-
region> CEO group, so these are all communities that you share information
across, you gather information from, you're an active member within'* (Judith,
CEO Orchid Trust)

Judith seems to suggest that these networks, representing a community of equals,
are an alternative to a hierarchical form of organisation and are not in thrall to the
market. However, these networks are under the auspices of the Regional Schools'
Commissioner and as such fit the characteristics of a 'network administrative
organisation' set out by Greany and Higham (2018: 75) which have external direction
and management rather being governed by their members. They perhaps fill a gap
for professional support and collaboration as well as attempting to provide a
mediating layer between individual MATs and central government following the
removal of this role from local authorities.

Given this context Judith's description of them being communities that are served
perhaps indicates a way in which senior MAT officers are beginning to conceptualise
their role; MATs are professional business organisations run by professionals whose
allegiance is to professional structures. This notion of a MAT suggests a turning
away from being conceived as community organisations with a purpose and

orientation rooted in their local communities. This raises a question of the focus of the developing professional role and accountability of those leading and managing MATS; is a new professionalism and professional allegiance fostering a reduction in the importance of connectedness with community?

Regional Schools Commissioners also use such networks to assist in their role of finding sponsors to oversee the academisation of schools in difficulties, as described by the Chair of Heath Trust. This can then become a lengthy and drawn-out process of business negotiation with an emphasis on financial risks and impact:

> *'we had discussions for many months about what we should do and whether or not we should allow them to join the Trust.'* (Theo, Chair Heath Trust)

Alongside the professional networking between schools providing mutual support, advice and sharing of knowledge, there have always been ambitious and entrepreneurial school leaders seeking maximum advantage for their own institution The growth imperative of MATs and the vying for position and advantage between schools and MATs introduces business logics firmly at the heart of relationships once founded on professional educational values.

4.3.7 Collaboration as an alternative organising logic?

In contrast to marketing and competition logics, a conceptualisation stressing partnership and collaboration as being integral to the structure and modes of operation of the MAT can be constructed from some of the responses. For example, Jerry, the Chair of the Iris Trust, says this about school-to-school working and relationships across the MAT:

> *'See I think one of the joys here is that you have got the Heads and office staff who come over every half term. And the day is spent, they are either training or going through things that are relevant to everybody in the MAT, bringing up practice, all sorts of things. And that makes them very tight knit and also it means that because they know each other so well, if you get an issue anywhere they will help each other out. So when Ofsted come in, as we have had in two schools, and you have any sort of issue, Heads will be on the phone to help and support.'* (Jerry Chair, Iris Trust)

The Chair's feeling of joy about the way colleagues collaborate and offer mutual support and the stress on a '*tight knit*' group who '*know each other so well*' suggests a MAT that has sought to develop a collaborative culture amongst its schools rather than a hierarchical model. He also quotes one of the recently appointed headteachers to emphasis the collaborative nature of the Iris Trust (in contrast to other MATs):

> '*… one of our schools, they got a new Head and Deputy this year so when we did the tour in the autumn term, it was interesting to hear what the Head said because she had been a Head in another MAT, one of the larger ones. And she just said, it's just totally different is the atmosphere, collaboration, working together.*' (Jerry Chair, Iris Trust)

However, as Greany and Higham (2018: 85) caution, whilst they can seek to build collaborative cultures, MATs are not partnerships. Neither in their formal legal constitution (a MAT is a single legal entity, a charitable company limited by guarantee where authority is vested in the Board of Trustees); nor in the way in which they operate in relation to individual schools which West and Wolfe (2019: 74) point out legally do not exist. 'Schools run by a MAT have no separate legal identity, being instead, simply the local site through which the MAT delivers the provision required by the central contract.'

All three respondents in the Iris Trust seemed to accept this position and to acknowledge that the benefits they saw of collaborative working were only possible because of a trade-off; collaborative working, mutual support, and autonomy on educational matters in exchange for central control of business and finance by the MAT. For example, Jocinda, the headteacher of Gentian school said:

> '*And the systems that are in place now, Sonia and the business operations and the finance they're constantly looking at how they can be creative with the top slice that we give to try eventually to have heads only thinking about teaching and learning.*' (Jocinda, Headteacher Gentian School).

Jocinda's enthusiasm for the way the MAT works is perhaps built on good working relationships between headteachers and MAT officers but may obscure the legal and organisational position; her school does not voluntarily give the MAT a budget top

slice, the MAT has ownership of the budget and delegates some control over the school's portion of it in strictly defined circumstances set out in the scheme of delegation. Such delegation is at the discretion of the MAT board and can be modified or withdrawn by them.

4.3.8 Control, observation and surveillance

Wilkins (2017a) explores the relationship of MATs to other forms of business discourse, highlighting them as a new form of monopoly which is supplanting the welfare bureaucracy of local state monopolies represented by local authority 'control' of schools. Wilkins examines the way in which MATs have taken on the financial, risk management, asset management and performance accountability of schools, exposing them to a more penetrating gaze of state observation and surveillance than was possible under local authority arrangements. This phenomenon of increased surveillance was raised by Jerry, the Chair of the Iris Trust in his interview, again quoting one of his headteachers who had come from a local authority-maintained school:

> *'she said the thing that I find difficult is we are being watched far more but rightly so, watched in the sense that, you know, we have got to make sure we are on the top of our game.'* (Jerry, Chair, Iris Trust)

Jerry also argues that this increased scrutiny was welcome and something local authorities did not do well. He describes how when schools are identified by the MAT board as being of concern, senior leaders in the schools are summoned to explain themselves:

> *'we asked them both to come to the Trustee meeting and basically they were grilled as to why, in the nicest possible way. It was all done very professionally but it was to me what local authorities should have done for years.'* (Jerry, Chair Iris Trust)

The performative and high stakes expectations of school performance and the impact of their imposition on senior staff are perhaps suggested here. Whilst it is a very professional exercise and performed in the '*nicest possible way'*, Jerry letting

the word '*grilled*' slip into the interview suggests something harder edged and less joyous.

4.3.9 Internalising market disciplines

New bodies from the business, philanthropic, higher education and third sector as well as religious bodies already involved in the governance of schools have been encouraged to become involved through membership or the formation of MATs in this development of the academies programme. Wilkins asserts that the private monopolies that are thus being established, encouraged by government policy since 2010, and with increased vigour since 2015, are arrangements which are 'intended to maximise opportunities for imposing market discipline on schools.' (2017a:173). The bodies and agents explicitly excluded from involvement in either establishing MATs or being members are local authorities, both their elected members and officers.

Wilkins (2017b) also analyses the changes in school governance and the growth of the MAT sector as what he terms 'creeping corporatism' which is seeing corporate ideology re-define the nature of governance and the organisation of schooling driven by an 'economic-instrumental rationality'. There is evidence of this process at work and the conceptualisation of MATs in economic terms in the way respondents discussed their work in the interviews. For example, the 'economic-instrumental' rationality infuses this extract from the CEO of the Orchid Trust and speaks to the way in which market disciplines have been internalised and govern actions:

> *'but you've got to have one eye on business all the time, and the business is that it's got to be economically sustainable, so you do have to watch numbers, you do have to watch that you may have a local competitor.'* (Judith, CEO Orchid Trust)

Judith is perhaps elucidating here the iron logic of a MAT, or at least that applying to those in leadership roles. The stress on watchfulness, the implied wariness of others and influence exerted on the thinking and activity of Judith in her CEO role by the demands of business and market logics is perhaps an indication of how being a MAT

starts to construct a new, corporate identity of those involved in leading the organisation.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has looked inward towards the workings, priorities, and values of MATs. This has entailed examining and analysing the case study interview data with respect to two aspects of the conduct and management of the MATs affairs: the question of how autonomy, alignment and control are understood and operationalised; and the way in which the language and ethos of business and markets influences people and practices. In doing this, a construction of the way in which power is manifest and exercised takes shape.

The analysis indicates a tendency to privilege and uphold the autonomy of schools within the MATs and this is evident in both the public statements and documents and the interviews. Autonomy is built up as a foundational value and something of considerable significance in the way the case study MATs are constructed and conceptualised by their leaders. But this version of autonomy is not absolute; it is constrained, conditional and must be earned. The analysis suggests it is conferred in return for good performance against metrics and indicators set by the MAT and conditioned by external inspection judgements. The denial of an autonomous subject's agency in determining its own autonomy questions how far it is really autonomy.

The analysis constructs the other half of the autonomy/alignment pairing, alignment, as a trend toward standardisation and centralisation; a way in which the central MAT controls what happens in its schools. Starting with centralising business processes in pursuit of efficiency and giving headteachers and their staff room to concentrate on teaching, the business logic inherent in the idea of alignment, that requires control over outcomes and results, moves into standardising the curriculum and teaching in pursuit of efficiency, consistency, and better performance against the measures by which MATs are judged.

Providing the impetus and driving force for greater alignment or control are the logics of the market and business. Not only do these logics inform the structures and operation of the business processes in a MAT; they start to govern how the educational purposes are fulfilled and begin to shape the way in which MAT leaders see and construct the world.

The following chapter will take an outward focus and examine how MATs relate to communities and discharge their accountability.

Chapter Five

External relations: Accountability and MATs' relations with communities

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored: the meanings and practices associated with autonomy and alignment, which in the way the word alignment is used within the MAT sector should perhaps more accurately be termed control. It also examined how the language and logics of business and the market have shaped the case study MATs and the people who have leadership roles within them. The chapter took an inward-looking perspective to see how these meanings and practices are manifest within a MAT. This chapter examines the question of accountability, something which is closely related to the idea of autonomy in the literature and in government and quasi-official publications. The chapter adopts an outward looking perspective to analyse and interpret how the case study MATs conceptualise and operate their accountability to the communities in which they are situated. In doing this interview data is used to construct two broad narratives: firstly, that of hierarchical, audit driven reporting in a marketised culture, and secondly a more relational form of accountability at the level of individual constituent schools within the case study MATs

5.2 Accountability: policy prescriptions, aspirations, and effects

Underpinning the reforms instituted by the state to English schooling since the 1980's has been the twin ideas of autonomy and accountability. Building on earlier developments, including the 1997 – 2010 Labour government's introduction of academies, the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition which came to power in 2010 intensified the drive to autonomy and accountability of English schools. The 2010 White Paper the Importance of Teaching (DfE 2010: 66) makes the government's case 'that public services will improve most when professionals feel

free to do what they believe is right and are properly accountable for the results.' This begs the question of what government deems to be proper accountability and to whom accountability is due, something addressed further on in the same passage. According to the White Paper, this autonomy for professionals will be enhanced by freeing schools and their leaders through dismantling the 'apparatus of central control and bureaucratic compliance' which would give schools the capacity to decide and manage their own fates and thus ensure greater efficiency and effectiveness.

The question of what might constitute proper accountability is then addressed. In return for this control and autonomy, schools would be more 'accountable for achieving a minimum level of performance because tax-payers have a right to expect that their money will be used effectively to educate pupils and equip them to take their place in society' and such accountability would be 'more meaningful, making much more information about schools available in standardised formats to enable parents and others to assess and compare their performance.' Proper accountability according to the White Paper is therefore concerned with demonstrating value for money to taxpayers by ensuring children and young people reach minimum standards. Achieving these standards is what is required for children to become useful members of society. Questions of active citizenship, democratic engagement in community, creativity and human flourishing amongst others do not feature.

Many writers and researchers who have examined the question of school autonomy and accountability under the academy programme instituted in 2010 have argued that the claims of greater autonomy and meaningful accountability are not borne out by the evidence. For example, Greany and Higham (2019: 29) argue that central control has not been dismantled and that the arrangements introduced have generated 'tremendous pressure on schools and school leaders to secure improvement in relation to externally defined metrics and frameworks.' Thomson (2020: 37) asserts that many headteachers have less autonomy than under previous arrangements. She argues that whilst the advent of MATs has made schools more open to scrutiny and surveillance, the accountability system created is too narrow, data driven and high stakes and has had a range of toxic consequences and perverse outcomes for schools, students, and staff (175). Thompson et al (2021:16) identify what they term 'indentured autonomy' from their research with academy

headteachers and principals in the north of England and set out their 'realisation over time that the autonomy on offer cannot resolve the problems of workload, funding, high-stakes accountabilities and wider societal inequalities and individualist fragmentation.' In this conception, autonomy is something that becomes increasingly onerous, loaded with the pressures of hierarchical accountability and the wider school context, and with terms and conditions that cannot be renegotiated.

5.3 Accountability: theoretical background

In this context of a failed promise of autonomy and increased pressures from narrow and oppressive forms of accountability, it is instructive to look at some of the theoretical perspectives on accountability. This will help to illuminate the interpretations of how accountability operates which can be constructed from the interview data yielded by the case study respondents when asked about how they saw their MATs accountability to the community/communities served by the MAT. Barber (2003: 223) argues that accountability is a form of reciprocal control in which government is responsible to its citizens via formal representative institutions which, because they are characteristic of a 'thin democracy', constitute relations with the institutions of government in client/customer terms. Accountability is thus a tool of 'instrumentalist democracy' which subverts participation in the 'common institutions of self-government' and 'ties of common activity and common consciousness', replacing them with client relationships more akin to those of the market. Thomson (2020: 55) emphasis this point when she explains how with the modernising of the public sector in the 1990s under the banner of New Public Management introduced the model of commissioning of services and a funder:purchaser:provider structure. Central to what she identifies as 'colonisation of the public sector' by 'market rationality and entrepreneurial logic' are forms of accountability that have implicit faith in markets and privilege accounting, audit, and other business methods.

 Moncrieffe (2011: 10) sets out two contrasting paradigms, hierarchical accountability, and relational accountability. She outlines ways in which individuals and institutions explain themselves and their actions and the processes by which those affected by those actions can express satisfaction or seek redress through the

two dimensions of accountability; answerability and enforceability. She stresses that both elements entail appraisal and monitoring and therefore the possibility of institutions and mechanisms for the collection, analysis and sharing of data with varying degrees of intensity. There is what she terms 'bareness and restricted potential' of accountability that is focused solely on technical approaches of collecting and analysing data and a mechanical and managerial performance management regime. What is more important in her analysis (39) is the relations of power between the various actors in an accountability system. Accountability mechanisms can exist and function while relations of accountability remain destructively unequal. Accountability, when interpreted in a technical sense, can thrive comfortably with injustice (45). She concludes (176) that accountability will remain a technical and non-transformative affair until the implications of power relations are properly understood and factored in to processes of accountability. Such a relational approach would require consideration of not only the power dynamics, histories, cultures, and structures that influence how organisations work but also the way in which people perform, why they act in particular ways, and the quality of relationships between the different actors in an accountability system. She argues (48) that questions that address these issues are 'concerned with the very substance of democracy' and 'intricately related to people's understanding of citizenship'.

Accountability then, when viewed in the relational paradigm, takes on a wider significance. In the case of MATs, instead of upward reporting and explaining narrowly defined financial and performance data in a hierarchical governance arrangement with the DfE and its agencies at the apex, it could become part of the way in which citizenship is exercised. Lingard (2011: 373) discusses 'reversing the accountability gaze' and the possibilities to create a 'bottom-up accountability' in which schools and communities, even in a hierarchical structure, are given a voice to raise questions and make demands of the system, its leaders, policy makers and politicians. Accountability can thus be an arena in which citizens agency is expressed through their active engagement in processes of debating, designing, and creating education and related services rather than being mere beneficiaries and recipients of those which are externally devised and imposed. It can also be argued that the imposition of externally designed education services and modes of school

organisation bereft of opportunities for citizen's involvement is a manifestation of the neo-colonial paradigm discussed in Chapter Six.

Bennington and Moore (2011: 27) argue that a single-minded focus on readily quantifiable outcome measures in accountability have led to a checklist mentality amongst public managers. This heavy emphasis on data and measurement in education and the effects it produces are well documented and critiqued. Wood et al (2018: 2) argue that concerns about the importance placed on valuing what can be easily measured have a long antecedence, citing the views of Sir Alec Clegg, the West Riding County Council Chief Education Officer from 1945 to 1974, highlighting that 'his anger and exasperation could be seen when he spoke about the consequences of a focus on measurement and testing in schools'. They summarise the malign effects of the current intense focus of data driven upward accountability which is exercised through the school inspection arrangements; 'Inspection has now become remote, judgemental, driven excessively by data and performance of pupils in tests and assessments and punitive in its effects (11).' Lingard (2011: 373) quotes the aphorism 'what is counted is what counts' as a contemporary expression of how neoliberal regulation of the social domain operates through excessive use of data and numbers within an audit culture. He argues for broader based, intelligent form of accountability which seeks to embrace and measure the wider and social purposes of schooling.

Moore's work on public value makes it clear that those managing public services such as MATs have a mandate which shapes their accountability; 'taken together, the mandated purpose and means define the terms in which managers will be held accountable' (1995: 17). How the mandate is determined, who defines its terms and what constitutes the capacity to operationalise it are the three points of Moore's strategic triangle. In the context of relational accountability and its centrality to citizenship, involvement of communities in defining and judging public good and public value and opportunities and structures to weave this into the fabric of organisations is of great importance if organisations such as MATs are to be rooted in and responsive to communities' needs and the demands of active, democratic citizens.

Informed by these perspectives and considerations, this chapter analyses the way in which interview respondents on the three case study MATs talked about and conceptualised their accountabilities and the attendant relationships with communities.

5.4 Who is accountable to whom?

There is evidence from some interview respondents of a desire to demonstrate an open attitude to accountability and justify the extent to which they are accountable to their communities, with a sense of their MATs providing a service accessible to all, as Basil the CEO of the Heath Trust suggests when he *asserts 'I am a free, open educational trust'* in the extract below. He also shows some awareness and sensitivity to the criticism of MATs for their lack of accountability and openness. Basil is keen to distance himself from any notion that the MAT is an aggrandising organisation which is closed to scrutiny and opaque about finance. He shows some pride in his MAT's level of accountability and what he feels is its open access to all:

'It's not my money, it's not my money, okay, it's the taxpayers and the community of ,<city> who are paying for me, or <town>, you know and I have got an accountability to them because, you know, this is not my company, I am a free, open educational trust and all the money comes from government or local authority and I have an accountability to them.' (Basil, CEO Heath Trust)

He suggests there is an accountability in terms of Moncrieff's answerability to both wider community and institutions of government. In reality MATs have no formal accountability to the local authority, but Basil is keen to highlight the good relationship with the local authority and the arrangements for joint working that have been established.

'And some MATs have no time whatsoever for their LA but we do.'

We set up the <city> Schools and Academy Board, it's the only one in the area like that where we talk openly and honestly with the local authority about what the problems are in all of our schools, local and, they are all <city> schools.

And to support, how on earth can we support each other and work together.'
(Basil, CEO Heath Trust)

Whilst Basil couches the description of the schools and academies board in terms of mutuality and collaboration it is important bear in mind some of the hierarchies, tensions and shifting relationships that such bodies generate. Greany and Higham (2019: 42), in analysing similar developments identified in their research, indicate that questions of which actors locally are involved in decision making, what resources are involved and where the power lies remain unacknowledged and unresolved. There is an important question about such a body as to whether it will become a new local governance arrangement for the school system in which a range of newly autonomous institutions agree to pool sovereignty and resources and make decisions which are binding on the participants. Development in this direction is assisted by the availability of external school improvement grant funding which local authorities can offer for joint decision making on expenditure against priorities agreed by the board. However, the reduction in such grants and increasing atomisation of the school system and reduction of the capacity and role of local authorities, as funding is increasingly directed via individual academy funding agreements, will pose significant challenges to the robustness of such joint commissioning and decision-making arrangements.

In the context of a fragmented landscape of school organisation in which established networks and relationships are being remade by the development of MATs, Basil's bewilderment about working jointly with others ('how on earth can we support each other and work together') reflects Greany and Higham's (2109: 45) finding that there are no single or simple answers to the question of schools finding support and that the government's Self Improving School-Led System policy is unclear and problematic.

5.5 Accountability, surveillance and self-policing

5.5.1 Self surveillance
One of these problems in the Self-Improving School-Led System is the accountability framework, which whilst premised on greater autonomy and respect for professional

judgement in reality is driven by high pressure and high stakes. As Greany and Higham conclude (2019: 50)

> 'any increase in operational powers available to academies has not been comparable to the changes to the accountability framework, which have allowed the state to continue to steer the system from a distance and to increasingly intervene and coerce when and where it deems necessary.'

This steering of the system is not necessarily performed directly; there would appear to be a strong element of self-policing. Foucault's exploration of the working of the Panopticon (1977: 201) offers a useful explanatory framework here. According to Foucault, the constant awareness of observation and surveillance (even if its actual exercise is discontinuous) achieves compliance by the subject, such that the 'perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary'. The way in which Leona, Chair of Orchid Trust, talks about the impact of self-surveillance generated by the MAT's interpretation of Ofsted's requirements on actions planned by the MAT highlights the extent of self-policing and the self-surveillance that guides MAT thinking:

> *'obviously you've got your OFSTED framework and you've got, you know, the different areas that you need to work on. You've obviously got your outcomes, so if you see your outcomes you know that our focus has definitely got to be in from an educational perspective across the board … , I just think its clear, you've got some key priorities haven't you and you know when OFSTED's going to be round the corner for one school. And you know when you've got a school that actually you think, God we need to be taking action on this now, let's get that sorted.'* (Leona, Chair, Iris Trust)

Here action to 'get that sorted' is prompted by the MAT's internal understanding of consequences from an Ofsted inspection rather than from external instruction. Foucault's 'inspecting gaze' (1980: 155) is evident here where 'each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself.' Lingard (2011: 370) suggests that this process of self-policing and steering at a distance is not only

driven by individual internalising of 'the inspectorial gaze', but that it flows from the privileging of the neoliberal discourse of the competition state and its attendant performative technologies of governmentality. He asserts that the audit culture and resulting new forms of accountability driven by data, as exemplified by the Ofsted regime, are central to this process.

This interiorising of the inspecting gaze and the influence of the competitive and market-orientated state is evident in the Heath Trust where Anthea, a primary headteacher, talks about her accountability to the MAT:

> *'So you feel, although you can feel more accountable, you also feel like they are more invested in you as opposed to a twice a year local authority advisor visit where you can pretty much do anything in between.'* (Anthea, headteacher, Heath Trust)

This extract suggests some intriguing ambiguities and paradoxes. Anthea, together with some of the interviewees across all three case study MATs, suggests that local authorities did very little by way of overt surveillance of schools which were deemed to be performing well. As Anthea puts it, 'where you can pretty much do anything in between' has an element of ambiguity about it; is Anthea suggesting that the previous experience of local authority stewardship of schools was one of autonomy and responsibility mediated and moderated by proportional, and in her case light touch, local authority support? Or is this a veiled criticism of local authority lack of care and attention and negligence over accountability? It might be suggested that Anthea's internalising of the surveillance imperative and her surveillance of the self has conditioned her view of the previous local authority arrangements as not being intensive enough. In Foucault's (1977: 202) terms derived from his analysis of panopticism as a mechanism of discipline, she is 'subjected to a field of visibility … assumes responsibility for the constraints of power' and 'becomes the principle of (his) own subjection.' In an interesting echo of the normalisation and penetration of the competitive state and business and market logics discussed in Chapter Four, Anthea rationalises the greater scrutiny she feels as evidence of the MAT's investment and presumably the commitment and support this brings.

5.5.2 A market model of accountability and its effects
This section explores the penetration of market and business logics into the way the case study MATs conceptualise and exercise accountability.

Leona, chair of the Iris Trust also talks about investment and draws an unfavourable comparison between the investment of the MAT board and the involvement of their local authority.

> *'if you were talking about the local authority too far away, too far away, not got the same erm … to invest in it. You're investing in this, the people on the Trust are investing in that Trust, for certain reasons, they're doing it for nothing. So you're investing for some reason you know, for the kids because you want to add value and do something right. I think if you're working in local government, I think it's a job, it's not an investment, it's a job.'* (Leona, Chair Orchid Trust)

For Leona, voluntary effort of trustees is seen as altruistic and superior to the professional involvement and democratic accountability of the local authority. She seems to suggest that those involved professionally in education through local authorities might be less concerned about wanting 'to add value and do something right' for children and families. Although voluntarism implies an altruistic intention, 'certain reasons' has an intriguing ambiguity; what other reasons might be at play here? The argument that Leona begins to develop here is that public services can be provided through private philanthropy, as well as or better than, publicly funded, community determined and democratically accountable organisations working on behalf of a wider community. In this sense she is demonstrating the way in which the arguments originally put forward to justify the academy programme have influenced thinking and shaped the justificatory discourse of MATs.

In a business sense, the other aspect of outside investment is the expectation of the investor of return on the investment and the possible consequences of failure to deliver those expected returns. Outside investors are known to track closely the performance of the organisations in which they invest, particularly the indicators and measures related to finance and business success. Swift and decisive action often results where such performance is deemed unsatisfactory resulting in removal of

personnel, reductions in or closures of functions or disposal of the business. The stakes are high; judgements can be harsh and formed on narrowly performative grounds and have far reaching consequences for individuals, organisations, and their communities.

There are clear parallels here with what happens in the MAT sector. Schools judged unsatisfactory by the inspection regime can have their leadership and teaching staff removed and replaced and their curriculum, behaviour and other core areas of policy and operation reshaped or replaced by something externally devised. Ultimately such schools can be transferred to another MAT or left in an educational and governance limbo whilst attempts are made to negotiate another MAT placement. This can be a lengthy and drawn-out process as Theo, chair of the Heath Trust describes when talking about his MATs sponsorship of a school in difficulties.

> *'The Regional Schools Commissioner rings up and says here are these <town> schools will you take them? … Initially, clearly our Executive staff looked at and came and discussed it with Trustees and we had discussions for many months about what we should do and whether or not we should allow them to join the Trust. … senior leadership has changed, we have new Heads in both schools, some of the senior leadership teams are the same but some of them are new'* (Theo, Chair Heath Trust)

Theo is clearly stating this is long process and does not seem to be driven with any sense of urgency. Even accepting that this may be to do with a range of factors and agencies some of which might be outside the control of the MAT, this leaves the school concerned in a lengthy period of uncertainty. More than that is the suggestion here of the power hierarchy and the nature of the school in difficulties as completely powerless supplicant ('should we allow them to join the Trust') with its fate in the hand of others and over which it has no control or agency. This has echoes of the way in colonial rule was exercised over newly acquired territories and people (see Chapter Six).

5.5.3 Surveillance of schools causing concern: supportive embrace or strait jacket?

The influence of self-surveillance and self-policing generated by the national accountability framework is deep rooted and has become embedded in the way MATs operate. This section seeks to examine the impact of these processes. Jerry, Chair of the Iris Trust, demonstrates how self-surveillance works in this extract from his interview in which he discusses how the MAT works with its schools. He begins by quoting the comments of a new headteacher in the MAT who has come from a local authority-maintained school.

> *'She said "the thing that I find difficult is we are being watched far more but rightly so, watched in the sense that, you know, we have got to make sure we are on the top of our game"'.* (Jerry, Chair, Iris Trust)

It is interesting that he feels the new headteacher has so readily embraced and internalised the surveillance culture and accepts that being 'on the top of our game' requires a high degree of external scrutiny, something which perhaps suggests a lack of trust in teachers' professional judgement and skill. Despite finding it difficult, the new teacher is ready to justify and defend it. Jerry then discusses how the MAT responds to schools that are of concern, as identified by test and assessment results data.

> *'We have got two schools at the moment we are a little bit concerned about, so we have what we call wrap round meetings. And at those they have the CEO, they have the school improvement partner, they have three Trustees, they have the Chair of governors, they have another governor and they have the Head and maybe the Deputy if necessary. And they talk around how we can move this school forward. And that could mean that we ask one of our Maths teachers from somewhere, leading Maths teacher or an English teacher or whatever, to go in and support during the term. So everything is done from an Ofsted perspective'.* (Jerry, Chair, Iris Trust)

There are two differing interpretations of the idea of 'wrap around' employed here by Jerry. In the sense that he is perhaps using it is about the warm and protective embrace of the MAT to safeguard and support the school. However, there is another

sense, that of a restraining and suffocating grasp that restricts movement and independent action by the school and forces it to submit to a greater power. This has echoes of the neo-colonial civilising mission paradigm (see Chapter Six) in which the superior power, status and knowledge of the MAT coerces the school under the guise of a supportive and benevolent embrace.

What would also seem to be on display here is a well-developed 'inspecting gaze' and an organisational culture of self-surveillance and policing, rooted in what are understood to be the expectations of the external inspectorate and enforced by the full weight of the MATs senior leadership. The workings of the external accountability framework have pushed the MAT to develop a strong self-policing apparatus and mindset and a regime of enforcement.

5.6 Accountability, finance, regulation, and corruption

This section looks at the ways in which respondents conceptualise the regulatory aspects of accountability and its effectiveness at establishing probity and sanctioning questionable and unethical practices by MATs.

5.6.1 'I can't understand how trusts get away with what they do'; MATs and corruption
In response to a question about how the MAT manages its accountability to the wider community served by the MAT, the Chair of the Iris Trust, responded as follows:

> *'Well financially we have got the annual audit, every year, in fact twice this year, we have had the DFE coming in to talk to us. … What we find is of course they come and question us about anything they have seen in reports, anything they have seen in the audit, and this is why I can't understand how Trusts get away with what they do. Because, you know, without using this word, they appear to me to be crooks, because they are undermining what the law says we should be doing. ... So I think, you know, that the accountability is to the DFE because we have nobody else to be accountable to.'* (Jerry, Chair, Iris Trust)

Despite the question being about accountability to the wider community, Jerry focuses his response on the formal and financial accountability to the DfE, to the extent that he asserts that 'accountability is to the DFE because we have nobody else to be accountable to'. This is perhaps indicative of the power of the national accountability framework to re-shape thinking and crowd out any ideas about the MATs engagement with and responsibility to its communities.

Accountability has also been reduced to a narrow question of financial reporting and audit, about which Jerry expresses concern regarding the activities of some MATs ('I can't understand how Trusts get away with what they do. Because, you know, without using this word, they appear to me to be crooks'). Jerry is showing he is a keen observer of some of the malpractice and corrupt behaviours of some MATs and feels a sense of injustice and concern that the DfE frameworks and regulation, which to him are rigorous, thorough and dominate his thinking, do not seem to prevent such abuses. This is an issue of some concern to him which is preoccupying his thoughts and responses about accountability, he doesn't want to use the word but readily does; 'they appear to me to be crooks.'

Jerry also talks about his reaction to a national TV programme which investigated the failure and malpractice of a MAT in Wakefield.

> *'You just think, if that's how that Trust was working, the Chair of the Trust had his daughter working and was giving her a salary for a job. I am sorry but that shouldn't be allowed and the one thing I would say is that I don't think the DFE is strong enough, you know, when we have had concerns about a school that we have been asked to sponsor they are very, very willing to listen to what you say. And yes they will give you a little pot of money to help so, not the whole of the amount that you want, but they don't actually do anything to stop the adverse things happening, it's a bit difficult when it's political in that sense but it's kind of shoved down to you to sort it out'* (Jerry, Chair, Iris Trust)

Jerry's annoyance and sense of unfairness about corrupt practices in MATs on display here perhaps illustrates Moncrieff's (2011: 39) point about the need for accountability to be concerned with more than the mechanics of financial and

performance reporting and regulation. Perhaps Paxton's (2020; 15) 'democratic space vital to hold politicians to account, fulfil individual autonomy, develop better relations between diverse citizens and reach well-considered outcomes' would be the kind of accountability that addressed Jerry's concerns.

Jerry is indignant that actions of those he terms 'crooks' are obscuring the good work of MATs such as his and expresses bewilderment that such abuses should happen within the context of what he sees as a rigorous, perhaps even overbearing, regulatory framework. However, as Thomson points out (2020: 15), whilst corruption can be understood as the actions of a few 'crooks', if corrupt practices and cultures are to be challenged there is a need to look more widely and systemically at the institutions, policies and practices involved. In this sense, the question of impacts, incentives and thinking driven by the accountability framework need to be considered.

Denis, the Clerk to The Orchid Trust, explains in a very understated way how the national response to unethical and corrupt practices in the MAT sector is having the effect of imposing greater central control on who could become involved in governance in the Orchid Trust.

> *'Yeah, it was a requirement that all the trustees put forward for the trust board, were vetted by the DFE, before it being appointed, because I think there is obviously a bit of jitteriness at national level now, about the… if some, individuals who become trustees, given some cases where there's been, you know, things haven't gone quite too well.'* (Denis, Clerk, Orchid Trust)

This additional scrutiny of the Orchid Trust is a further limiting of their scope for local determination of governance arrangements and reinforces the DfE's expectations of who is suitable to be involved.

Jerry's concern about the action of a few 'crooks' tarnishing the image and reputation of the whole sector and obscuring the efforts of professional, dedicated and caring teachers and schools suggests he subscribes to the 'few bad apples' explanation, so often used by those speaking for government and the academy sector when

confronted with evidence of dubious, unethical, or illegal practices. What he does not do is consider the possibility that the system of high stakes, high pressure accountability coupled with the rhetoric of autonomy for schools and their leaders and the 'chaotic centralisation' (Greany and Higham 2019: 38) of government is systemically inclined to 'sanction corrupted practices, as well as producing the conditions for individual corrupt acts to occur' (Thomson 2020: 15).

5.6.2 Why aren't MATs being inspected? Cruel optimism at work

There is a paradox here: Jerry is concerned about the overbearing nature of DfE accountability mechanisms but suggests that there should be more regulation. He focuses his responses about accountability on the DfE and its financial regulation regime, indicating it is shaping the focus of the MAT's time and attention but he is also concerned that DfE needs to do more and exercise stronger control ('I don't think the DfE is strong enough') and supports his view with his own experience of the ineffectiveness of the DfE through his dealings over the Iris Trust's sponsorship of a school ('they don't actually do anything to stop the adverse things happening'). Jerry's frustration at the ineffectiveness yet demanding nature of the DfE in his experience is perhaps illustrative of Greany and Higham's 'chaotic centralisation', a system lacking coherence with multiple and partially overlapping agencies and actors all with 'competing claims to authority and legitimacy'. Such is his frustration with those who engage in corrupt practices and harm the reputation of MATs that he feels there should be more inspection, and specifically inspection of MATs, which is not currently within Ofsted's remit. He seems to suggest that this might clearly identify and sanction wrong-doing and bring a measure of order and justice to the sector which would exonerate MATs such as Iris Trust from guilt by association.

> 'Ofsted yeah. I mean I still can't understand why they don't come, I mean I know why because it's not part of the, it's not been done legally yet through parliament, but why aren't MATs being inspected?' … you look at what it says in the new Cfsted handbook, I can't understand for the life of me why we still only have about that much that we are asked about the MAT. I think, you know, what are you doing for that school, there should be some time where one of the inspectors comes and talks to us and wants to see the evidence.' (Jerry, Chair, Iris Trust)

This also is suggestive of the cruel optimism identified by Berlant (2011: 24) who argues that this is characterised by 'attachment to compromised conditions of possibility' which are never realised in the way individuals hope for. Jerry's 'conditions of possibility' revolve around optimism about his MAT and the work it does. However, to feel in control and comfortable with his MAT's situation and to be accorded proper professional recognition and autonomy he is actively advocating more of the surveillance and regulatory burden (what might be deemed the cruelty element of cruel optimism) academisation was supposed to remove. Thompson et al (2020: 7) describe the situation of those like Jerry who, somewhat paradoxically, claim autonomy in a MAT whose autonomy is in fact constrained as 'indentured autonomy'. As they put it 'this is the sinking realisation that in the pursuit of more school and professional autonomy, headteachers have found themselves locked into a series of policy demands that are of a kind they were desperately trying to escape.'

Perhaps too Jerry's experience is indicative of the way in which 'indentured autonomy' works. Whilst the Iris Trust was formed as a positive initiative to build on the collaboration, connections and mutual support across a group of schools in a discrete geographical area, the heavy emphasis in the formal accountability framework, the pressure for progress against externally imposed metrics of performance and the stress on financial matters and audit has tempered the autonomy promised as a MAT. This range of external governmentality pressures and instruments sets the parameters and governs debate and discussion about priorities for the MAT, how the time and energy of MAT officers is used and how thinking is conditioned.

5.7 Accountability, enforcement, and the market

The previous section examined cruel optimism at work and the way in which MAT leaders both embrace self-surveillance and seem to be seeking more of the data driven, narrow forms of upward accountability to government and its agencies. This section moves on to look at the direct and sometimes brutal effect of market and business logics on the way MATs hold their schools to account.

5.7.1 'Making sure we're providing that quality education across': challenging and controlling schools

Leona, chair of the Orchid Trust demonstrates the application of accountability, in Moncrieff's sense of enforceability, to the constituent schools in the MAT. This highlights another aspect of MAT accountability, the way in which processes of accountability are used by MATs to exercise control directly on their constituent schools.

> *'Our accountability. … Like I was saying before is about the education making sure that we're providing that quality education across. For us as a Trust you know we are looking for that consistency and that transition from that early years to our sixth form, that's what's key and really adding value in that area. The financials obviously, so it's looking at all the financials … Some of the challenges that are coming up in terms of our local schools are, in this particular school that we've got an issue, is a lower number of entrants coming into the school. Which you just think why, when you're in a really popular area, they've got low SEN and lowish pupil premium, so there's no reason why the educational standards and results are so poor.'* (Leona, Chair, Orchid Trust)

Leona's account of how she understands the MATs accountability focuses on two things; what she describes as ensuring a quality education and finance. What becomes apparent as she speaks is that this process is about constituent schools being accountable to the MAT and being challenged about poor performance. So 'quality education' would seem to be mostly concerned with test and assessment results. She also seems to suggest that 'quality education' is related to the absence of children with SEN and those eligible for pupil premium funding; that is those groups of children who suffer the most disadvantage. The implication here, that 'quality education' is a matter of test and assessment results and that the presence of children subject to disadvantage leads to poor performance is perhaps indicative of the way in which the pressures of high stakes accountability have distorted educational priorities and risk further disadvantaging children who are already poorly served by schools. 'Challenges that are coming up' is the process by which the MAT board seeks explanations for performance not matching expectations and targets. Performance is defined in terms of externally derived metrics and standards:

'So for example we have the headteachers from each of the school come in to tell us, the Trust board. Come and tell us what are your key priorities, what are your challenges, give us a bit about what's going on. One of the headteachers came and put it in a fantastic document which was linked to the OFSTED framework … fabulous document. Basically as a Trust we're saying that document is amazing, that gives us everything we need to see.' (Leona, Chair, Orchid Trust)

Leona, in describing the process by which schools report to the MAT Board makes explicit the way the focus of the Board's attention has been narrowed and that the Board have enthusiastically embraced this diminished and partial definition of the schooling for which they are responsible. The report from constituent schools against the Ofsted Framework, lauded with superlatives such as 'fantastic', 'fabulous' and 'amazing' 'gives us everything we need to see'.

The way the MAT uses accountability as enforcement in a very high stakes, even brutal, fashion is illustrated when Leona explains what happens to the headteacher in a poorly performing school in the MAT:

'From a Trust point of view my biggest thing at the minute is we need to sort this primary school out. Because how does that reflect on the trust, we need to show that we're taking action. We are responsible and it's not necessarily great for a Trust to be going in and saying, oh by the way, what does that look like to everybody else, oh God they've gone in, that Trust has gone in and they've already sacked a headteacher. You know what I mean, It doesn't look amazing, but it has to be done.' (Leona, Chair, Orchid Trust)

The language used here by Leona is suggestive of the performative logic and the kind of harsh managerial and employment practices leading to the removal of school leaders who are held personally responsible for performance that is deemed poor and unacceptable. This phenomenon and its impact on teachers and school leaders has been extensively reported on (for example see Courtney and Gunter 2015: 405 and Thomson 2020: 170).

There is also concern in Leona's remarks about the reputation and public appearance of the Trust because of such action. The Trust might be able to construct arguments to defend its actions, as Leona certainly does here, as being necessary to fulfil its responsibility to secure 'quality education' and protect the interests of children. However. concern about adverse publicity and reputational damage point to another way in which accountability is understood and exercised, as part of the marketisation and commodification of the MAT and its 'product'.

5.7.2 Accountability and marketisation

This section looks at the impact of market and business logics identified in the previous section on the way accountability is conceptualised and operationalised by the case study MATs

In the interview with Judith, the Orchid Trust CEO, the question about the accountability of the MAT to its community provokes a response about answerability which is couched in terms of the market.

> *'we've got to make sure is that we have a strategy for marketing what is working, out to the community. What are we doing with those SATS results, those early years results, and key stage 1 results, because if you're looking at a school for your child, that's critical. … that is helping to drive up standards, because you have to have a robust programme of improvement, you get your standards up, but you've got to market that out then, when you've got that hard and fast.'* (Judith, CEO, Orchid Trust)

The view of both accountability and what is important to the MAT and the community here is significant. What Judith views as critical in communicating and explaining to the community is test and examination results and the process by which this is shared is that of marketing; that is a one-way communication of information selected and moulded to present a particular view and with the intention of encouraging parental choices for a school place in an environment of competing claims from other providers. This is not an open reporting of organisation performance on a range of dimensions intended to create a dialogue with the community served.

Gina, the executive director of the Orchid Trust makes this economistic construction of accountability explicit:

'… that formal reporting system, and of course, all the stuff that we have to put on the website, which is all the statutory stuff, and minutes and things, I suppose how are you accountable, well, I suppose people don't send their children here do they at some point.' (Gina, Executive Director, Orchid Trust)

The language in these three extracts suggest there is an assumption that the market discipline works back into the trust and serves as part of a performative disciplinary technology ('robust programme' 'get your standards up' 'hard and fast'). Taken together with the view of the Chair on enforcement and action taken by the MAT to address 'poor performance' provides a narrative of the linear way the marketised and performativity process of accountability is used to enforce a narrow focus on results in pursuit of parents as customers backed up with tough action against those school leaders deemed to be falling short of the required performance.

5.8 Accountability: community and dialogue

Previous sections of this chapter have examined the interview data and constructed an ensemble of processes and technologies which focus on hierarchical, upward reporting in an audit driven and marketised culture. This section examines the interview data from the headteachers' interviews and builds up different interpretations of accountability.

5.8.1 Accountability and community

The performative and economistic interpretations of accountability can be constructed from the interviews with MAT executives, CEOs and chairs, but in the interviews with headteachers it is possible to put together a different perspective on how accountability works in relation to the community and a different set of purposes and processes. Moncrieffe's ideas (2011; 47) about relational accountability and its focus on the operation of power relations and the encouragement of active citizenship and agency are useful in constructing this perspective on accountability and community. Accountability of MATs, particularly in relation to use of public funds

and performance using measures related to pupil and student outcomes, is clearly and prescriptively upward to funders and commissioners in government and its agencies.

Bennington and Moore (2011) address the question of downward accountability of public bodies such as MATs to the plurality of publics and communities that they serve. They invoke Moore's idea of public value as a means by which organisations can build wider support for their actions. Engaging the communities served by a MAT in a process of 'defining the value outcomes to be achieved' (11) might serve to increase support from the community and the legitimacy of the organisation. Legitimacy of MATs, it can be argued, is contested, and challenged and often derives largely from their legal position and a political mandate from central government rather than any professional or moral basis.

Professional issues about trusting and allowing the full exercise of teachers' expertise and judgment and moral questions about democratic participation and community ownership of MATs could be seen as major impediments to the legitimacy of MATs. Even if these questions could be resolved, high pressure performance accountability driven by command and control hierarchical relationships with government and its agencies and the neoliberal logic of marketisation, choice and consumerism may continue to act against MATs achieving legitimacy. Public and community participation in MATs through the structures and activities of governance, co-production and consultation might widen accountability, build strong and supportive relationships with communities, and build legitimacy and support for MATs. MATs could thus become an integral part of a network of community organisations and services working collaboratively with the range of publics as opposed to a commercial enterprise competing for customers or an external imposed colonising force. Jocinda, a primary head in the Iris Trust, had a noticeably clear view of how she saw the accountability of the school to the community as a component of its wider remit and responsibility to promote community development in area wrestling with high levels of economic and social deprivation.

> *'We are completely and utterly accountable to our community because what we do with our children every day is what <town> will be like in the future. So we*

have worked and we continue to work really hard on our children's personal, social and emotional development.' (Jocinda, headteacher, Iris Trust)

Jocinda's discussion of accountability was focused on the role of the school beyond that of the externally defined measurement of test scores and demonstrates an understanding of the issues confronted by supporting the children and families of a predominately white and poor urban community. Her response suggests she has a clear sense of the school's place and purpose in its community and her language indicates she is convinced that she is correct in this. She suggests she has a well worked out understanding of how this is put into practice.

'So it's the outside influences that are going to impact on our children. So we have to make sure that we get in there first through our school values and through our children's' experiences to give them that open mindedness. So being continually open to them they will have a deeper understanding of what they are and it is things of honesty, respect, love, friendship, aspirations, all of those, honesty. All of those values that we want to instil into our children that we hope and expect that they will take through their lives with them.' (Jocinda, Headteacher, Iris Trust)

Accountability for Jocinda is about the future, developing future citizenship and providing the community served by the school with some of what she argues are the important values which will enable children and families to build a more optimistic future. There is conviction, care, compassion, and connection with the community in Jocinda's person and the manner in which she talks about her actions. She suggests her priorities are far wider than an economistic paradigm obsessed with scores and metrics and more rooted in a social democratic understanding of the purposes and potential of schooling.

However, also in Jocinda's narrative is a suggestion of a more paternalistic approach, which Wood et al (2020: 10) refer to as a 'deficit model of disadvantage in working class communities and the teacher as positioned to compensate'. They conclude that there is an important issue to be addressed in such situations of 'middle class professionals seeking to compensate for deficits in working class

communities in ways which did not recognise the strengths or vigour present and ignored a proud history of working-class organisation and scholarship.' In this context it is also possible to suggest that the idea of the 'civilizing mission' is at work here too, seeking to impose external values and solutions on a colonised community (see Chapter Six).

5.8.2 Accountability, dialogue, and governors

Another aspect of accountability is the role of governing bodies and governors at a school level. As explained in Chapter four, local governing bodies have no legal place in the governance of MATs, any responsibilities are delegated by the MAT board and can be removed at any point. Indeed, two of the three case study MATs indicated that the board were actively considering removing or curtailing local governing bodies and replacing them with some other arrangements, primarily for the expression and gathering of parental views as required by law relating to academy governance. This should be viewed in the wider national context of Greany and Higham's 'chaotic centralisation (2019; 40). From their research, they identify a growing sense of incoherence and competing claims to authority from multiple players with conflicting or poorly defined mandates and interrelationships. This is coupled with an increasing centralisation of control by the DfE and its agencies and compromised autonomy for individual schools.

Pressures from high stakes upward accountability, the need to expand in pursuit of financial sustainability and the neoliberal business logic of increasing efficiency and effectiveness are perhaps driving MATs towards privileging corporate and business forms of organisation and leadership rather than democratisation and greater public participation in governance through consultation, dialogue, and co-production. As an example of how these pressures influence MAT thinking and planning, in a follow up email interview seeking respondents' views on how the first Covid 19 pandemic lockdown in summer 2020 affected MAT governance, Gina from the Orchid Trust said:

> *'What has been interesting … is the role of the Local Advisory committees – because all the statutory functions lies with the trust – the governing elements of the lockdown have all been through the Trust Board and the LACs have had*

> *very little or no involvement such that we are reviewing our governance structure … so it may have helped to streamline some functions that are not efficient – interesting thought'* (Gina, Executive Director, Orchid Trust)

Horner and Hutton (2011: 116) identify that this trend and the thinking behind it represent a 'democratic deficit' which they suggest managers of public bodies such as MATs should focus on if they wish to address concerns about the loss of legitimacy and community engagement by public services. Moncrieffe's (2011) relational accountability with its stress on active citizenship and opportunities to develop and exercise agency also points in this direction.

However, government policy rhetoric appears to move the opposite way. For example, in the 2016 White Paper Educational Excellence Everywhere the DfE proposes to remove the role of an important community, that of parents, in school governance: 'Governance needs to be informed by parents' views, but governance structures themselves are not the right vehicle for gathering those views' (DfE 2016: 69). Whilst this proposal was modified following a widespread expression of concern during the consultation on the White Paper, Greany and Higham (2019: 41) report that their research indicates that this policy intention influences Regional Schools Commissioners (RSC) views. One RSC cited in their research acknowledged the lack of a democratic mandate in the system but maintained that improved school results would be more important than any democratic or community input in establishing the legitimacy of an academised school system. This is perhaps a revealing insight into government thinking; legitimacy is obtained through a centrally determined and hierarchically applied mandate expressed in a series of narrowly defined test and examination outcome targets. Questions of democratic legitimacy arsing through community involvement, discussion, consultation, dialogue, and co-production do not feature.

However, the interview data from the study do indicate a more relational form of accountability is in evidence at the individual school level. The importance of a body of and from the community served by the school, with a place in the governance arrangements of the school was suggested by Anthea, a primary headteacher in the Heath Trust.

'In the early days they would see everything and actually the Trustees were, you know, were overwhelmed with information of different year groups when actually there really are only a certain number of key statutory things that they want to know about. But that still means that there needs to be a knowledge in schools at a higher than me and the staff level which is where the local governors come in.' (Anthea, headteacher, Heath Trust)

Anthea suggests that the MAT board are only concerned with the 'key statutory things', indeed that is all they can cope with without being overwhelmed. Indeed, the pressure on MAT boards from financial, risk, audit, and compliance regulation and requirements already means educational issues are limited to discussion of the narrow range of test and exam metrics and other easily collected data. Therefore, for any wider purpose to be kept in view and for the school to be questioned and challenged about it there is role for governors at a school level who are connected to the community. How such a role is to be secured, both in relation to meaningful and democratic connection to community and resisting the pressure to remove it arising from MAT boards and government at a political and official level, is an unresolved question.

Jocasta, a secondary headteacher in the Heath Trust, explains why a governing body connected to the community plays a significant role in keeping the school focused on wider questions about the role of schools.

But they are also very well aware of the difficulties around disadvantage and also of crimes/drug problems and I suppose they are then in a way holding me up at the school to kind of in a sense of what it is that we are putting in place to help our young people not get involved or not go down a particular route. … But because of their knowledge of the community I think that helps inform how the school can best work to make sure that young people can contribute to the community.' (Jocasta, headteacher, Heath Trust)

Jocasta is suggesting that accountability for her is a multi-faceted process; governors challenge the school on its role in the community and support for young people and provide expertise and experience that the school can draw on in

fashioning its responses and interventions. According to Jocasta this is not about the formalities of checking, interrogating, and sanction but involves dialogue, debate and, she suggests, is rooted in humility.

'we have got to be humble enough surely to say we can learn from each other and through debate and discussion we can make the place a better place and use that time wisely rather than, you know, it just being oh I have got to do this and we are going to do it this way and I will report what you want to hear and then we will move on.' (Jocasta, headteacher, Heath Trust)

Jocasta would seem to be hinting here at the possibility of a collaborative process which identifies a public value proposition for the school (Moore 1995: 22). She goes on to emphasise the importance of both the clarity about the public value the school is creating and the democratic means to establish it.

'It's a healthy influence, you could argue that that depends on how, on what the relationships are like and how you work together. … 'if we listen and are engaged in really good dialogue where we are really dealing with the really pertinent issues, we can really learn from each other and make the school a better place.' (Jocasta, headteacher, Heath Trust)

Jocasta is an enthusiast and an optimist about the ways accountability can work to improve connection and response to the community. In this she is perhaps illustrating the importance of relational accountability in fashioning ways of operating and structures that promote justice and democratic working (Moncrieffe 2011: 39). What might require further consideration if this is to be realised is the power structure and hierarchies at play in these relationships and how these can be structured and operate in just and democratic ways.

5.9 Conclusion

According to Moore (1995: 17) the mandate of public sector organisations is central to the ways in which those organisations and those leading them will be held to account. Bennington and Moore (2011: 11) suggest that this mandate can be

constructed from a number of sources: political will expressed through government policy and translated into legal requirement; professional knowledge, norms and values; technical expertise; moral values; and the needs and desires of a range of publics and communities whom the organisation serves. Moncrieffe (2011: 178) establishes the importance of relational rather than merely hierarchical or technical accountability to building and maintaining democratic communities, norms, and values. In doing so, she highlights a broad divide between technical forms of accountability and relational accountability. The former she suggests are concerned with the construction and operation of the institutions, mechanisms, and processes of accountability. Relational accountability, whilst not incompatible with the mechanics and processes of technical accountability, is focused on whether and how such systems of accountability foster democratic outcomes and social justice. Such a relational paradigm is concerned with power relations and dynamics and how they operate between actors and affect the cultures and norms of institutions.

The analysis in this chapter has demonstrated constructions of accountability that echo Moncrieffe's two broad categories and offer three ways in which MATs and their constituent schools exercise and use accountability and how accountability affects and shapes their operation and identity. In the first category, the neoliberal competitive state and its market and business logics drives much of the operation of MAT accountability. In this conception, MATs are part of an apparatus of audit controlled and operated by the DfE and its agencies. It works as a one way, performative, upward chain which gathers data, and turns it into information which is used to question and judge performance. MATs are caught up in processes and exercises of reporting, regulation, and compliance with increasingly demanding requirements for data on pupil and student outcomes, financial performance, risk management, building condition and sufficiency etc. These demands consume time and energy and the attention of senior staff, they dominate the formal agendas of trustee meetings and occupy the time trustees have together. This concentration of demand, regulation and response begins to shape and modify the thinking and ethos of the MAT Board, instilling the logics of business and finance into the organisational culture and way of working and remodelling individual trustees into corporate beings. The mandate here is clearly derived from political, legal, and regulatory requirements as translated into techniques and procedures of accountability by market logics.

Secondly, is the accountability of constituent schools to the MAT and the way in which this is operated. In this construction, the MAT centrally uses the techniques, demands and logics of performative, data driven accountability as the mechanism to impose control on constituent schools. The marketised and corporate approach to accountability is applied to performance of children and young people in which the purpose of schooling is defined as delivery of a narrow and reductive curriculum. Assessment of effectiveness in this purpose becomes an increasingly large and complicated collection of data which is used to form judgements about the school's success or otherwise. Such judgments increasingly result in far reaching consequences for the nature and operation of schools, the communities they serve and the careers of staff. Such changes can be quite harsh, with removal of headteachers and senior staff and imposition of curricular and discipline policies and procedures from outside the school. Accountability here is a further manifestation of the hierarchical accountability system, with the MAT imposing the regimes and routines it is subject to on its schools. Schools within a MAT which are deemed to be successful by the measures of this accountability regime are given a measure of autonomy and latitude but significantly, would seem to have accepted and internalised an 'inspectorial gaze' and the degree of surveillance, self-control, and limits on thinking that this brings.

The degree to which individual schools within MATs can exercise this latitude and room to manoeuvre and express ethics of care or shifting the balance more towards caring about people and away from caring about performance as Stern (2018a: 18) puts it, is the basis of the third category of accountability that is constructed from the analysis in this chapter. Here, at the level of individual schools rather than across a MAT, a more relational accountability is at work. This is accountability as a reciprocal relation with the communities involved in and served by the school and is characterised by dialogue, humility and focus on the future. Notwithstanding that such views of and relationships with communities may be shaped by the neo-colonial 'civilising mission', they provide evidence of De Certeau's (1984: 37) understanding of how tactics can be employed by actors without power. He suggests that tactics can 'accept the chance offerings of the moment and seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves' and 'make use of the cracks that particular

conjunctions open up in the surveillance of proprietary powers.' In this way accountability is used tactically in pursuit of democratic relations.

Chapter Six

Colonising communities? A neo-imperial perspective on MATs

6.1 Introduction

The influence of empire, colonialism, white supremacy and racism are deeply rooted in British society and culture, as Rushdie (1982: 129) asserted 40 years ago with an analysis that is startlingly familiar and has a strong contemporary resonance:

> 'I want to suggest that racism is a not a side issue in contemporary Britain: that it's not a peripheral minority affair. I believe that Britain is undergoing a critical phase of its post-colonial period, and this crisis is not simply economic or political. It's a crisis of the whole culture, of the society's entire sense of itself.'

Said (1994:12) affirms the pervasiveness and power of the legacy of empire; 'the meaning of the imperial past … has entered the reality of hundreds of millions of people, where its existence as shared memory and as a highly conflictual texture of culture, ideology and policy still exercise tremendous force.' And as Andrews (2021: xxvii) very recently reminds us in cogent and comprehensive way, empire and its legacy of white supremacy are the 'foundation stone' of western economy and culture despite 'the delusion that we have moved beyond racism, that we are in a post-racial society'

6.2 Empire, racism, and schooling

There is a long, controversial, and contested history concerning the legacy of empire and racism on schooling and education, both on its curriculum, practices, and organisation. Fryer (1984: 390) gives us a powerful summary of how overt racism in the 1960's and 1970's manifested itself in education, for example how schools and education authorities labelled Black children as 'educationally subnormal (ESN)' and condemned them to wholly inappropriate places in ESN schools. He goes on to summarise the growth of multi-cultural education and the shift to a more political and

direct challenge to individuals and institutions through anti-racist education, a precursor of the decolonising the curriculum movement today. That this debate is current, contested and yet to be resolved is perhaps illustrated by events occurring as this is being written in April 2021. The Guardian (22 April 2021) reports that in response to the revelations by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission of its failure to commemorate properly, or at all, the tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands of Black and Asian soldiers who died in World War One, the UK Secretary of State for Defence told Parliament that 'he would explore the point about decolonising our education curriculum'. The exploration would seem to have not been very far reaching; in July 2021 Nick Gibb MP, the then Schools Minister at the DfE, gave a speech advocating for a knowledge-rich curriculum which implied that a radical reappraisal of how such a curriculum embraced alternative knowledges and dealt with the legacy of colonialism and imperialism in Britain was not necessary (Gibb 2021)

.

Sanghera (2021: 166), drawing on his experience as a child of south Asian (Punjabi) heritage in the English school system makes explicit the impact of empire and colonialism on the structure and content of schooling, drawing a clear line form how schools in the late 19 and early 20 centuries prepared and trained young people for roles in the administration and leadership of empire, through to the debate about race, empire, and education today. He argues (178) that schools discouraged young people to think critically or have 'too much thought of any kind'.

The work of Hannah Arendt on thoughtfulness and thoughtlessness suggests how this suppression of thinking as a purpose of education during colonial times may serve as an explanation of the resilience and longevity of colonialism, despite its foundation on and perpetuation of unequal and unjust relations between people and nations. Arendt (2000: 406) suggests that it is those exhibiting thoughtlessness who are shielded from the need or inclination to examine society's morals and values and are more likely to uphold 'whatever the prescribed rules of conduct may be at a given time'. Arendt assets that this lack of thought is an important component in the makeup of those who acquiesce to and participate in totalitarian systems of government; they are the 'ideal subjects of totalitarian rule' (1951: 622). She contends that thoughtfulness, and in particular representative thinking in which we

'form an opinion by considering a given issue form different viewpoints, by making present to my mind the standpoints of those who are absent' (2006: 237) encourages 'enlargement of the mind'. According to Nixon (2020: 53) this provides an inoculation against evil doing. For Arendt, it is a simple matter; 'nothing more than to think what we are doing' (1958: 5). In the context of empire, encouragement of thoughtlessness by schools helped to ensure that those engaged with administrating empire at all levels did not, in the majority of cases, seek to address or reform the injustices on which it was founded and by which it operated. Current thinking about schooling in England, as shown in the speech by Nick Gibb MP, the DfE Schools Minister quoted above, would suggest a preference for passing on a body of knowledge rather than encouragement of thoughtfulness.

6.3 The discourse of neo-colonialism

Notwithstanding the denialism of some contemporary conservatives, according to Shajahan (2011: 182) the impact of empire and colonialism in the field of education is shown in three interrelated domains. Firstly, that of the 'civilising mission, in which schools are deemed to exhibit superior knowledge, technology and moral values which must be applied to improving both the educational outcomes and the wider social well-being of the communities they serve. Such a discourse and its assumptions is widespread in official government documents, for example the government White Papers setting out important developments in the academies policy, *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE 2010) and *Educational Excellence Everywhere* (DfE 2016), are replete with assertions about the role of academies in improving educational outcomes for children and young people. The creation of others 'who must be dominated' within the discourse of colonialism, as set out so elegantly by Said (1978: 36) also finds its echo in these assertions. Said (1994: 286) too reminds us that integral to the idea of empire 'is that it was (or claimed to be) an educational movement; it set out quite consciously to modernise, develop, instruct and civilise.'

Shajahan (2011) also asserts that the 'civilising mission' privileges a positivist epistemological paradigm with a focus on objective and quantifiable knowledge to the exclusion of other ways of knowing. This exclusion is a feature of the discourse

in official policy on English education with its promotion of the Self-Improving School System and a heavy emphasis on test and examination results, the use of data driven methodologies and approaches and the measurement of performance in schools as set out for example by Biesta (2010: 11). Biesta also asserts (2) that not only do systems that focus on technical and managerial issues of efficiency and effectiveness ignore questions of the aims and purposes of education; they are not even aware that alternative aims and purpose exist; in other words, they are incapable of recognising and interrogating their own foundations.

Secondly, are the hierarchies, reminiscent of the colonial era, which privilege particular and approved knowledges, and which seek to narrow the field of what is acceptable and permissible in the content and organisation of schooling, which Shajahan (2011: 189) terms 'monocultures of the mind'. Such monocultures are evident in the way in which government discourse and policy promotes and enforces academy status as a part of a MAT as the only valid and acceptable mode of operation and governance for a school.

Shajahan's (2011) third domain stresses the connection between neo-colonial discourse and neoliberalism. The legacy of empire and the colonial relations which sustained it have been a profound driving force on the evolution of the current globalised world economic order and the inequalities enshrined within it. Andrews (2021: 190) sets out how the 'racist logic of empire' opened the way for the neo-liberal global economic order dominated by wealthy western nations and their dominance of international institutions. As Shajahan (2011: 193) says; 'neoliberalism is permeated by values informed by this colonial paradigm'. The translation of these values into action is seen within the academy sector of schooling through the adoption of business logics, the hegemony of market-based practices, and the monitoring, accountability and testing culture of performativity affecting children, young people, and staff in schools.

Shajahan (2011: 195) also asserts that neoliberalism has given rise to the reduction of delegated power within educational institutions and the growth of hierarchical forms of power relations. 'Such monitoring systems and hierarchical relationships bring to mind accounting measures used to organize labor and improve efficiency in colonial plantation systems.' These impacts and arrangements also recall the

'coercive autonomy' identified by Greany and Higham (2019: 35) and the 'indentured' autonomy posited by Thompson et al (2020: 7).

6.4 MATS and Communities: conceptualising and understanding the relationships

6.4.1 Mission, Vision, Moral Purpose and a Civilising Mission

The idea of the 'civilising mission' privileges the 'superiority' of the coloniser in matters such as knowledge, practical expertise, social organisation, and morality. It also imposes an obligation on the coloniser to provide for and improve the physical, mental, and spiritual welfare of the colonised. Although, as Said argues what is a 'duty to the natives' is also for the benefit and to enhance the 'prestige' of the coloniser. (Said 1994:137).

The moral and material improvement obligation inherent in the 'civilising mission' is evident from the interview data in responses about the 'moral purpose' and 'moral imperative' of the case study MATs. The CEO of the Orchid Trust employs the language of moral purpose and vision in talking about how the MAT relates to the communities it is involved with:

> *'I think that, coming back to that central vision, of making sure that our youngsters are school ready, work ready and life ready, we then have a moral purpose to ensure that the curriculum offer in each of the schools meets that vision,'* (Judith, CEO, Orchid Trust)

The idea of a 'central vision' expressed here has an element of ambiguity; it could be central in the sense of being at the heart of the Orchid Trust's purpose or an expression of the neo-colonial nature of the Trust, where the centre determines and imposes its values, culture and mode of operation on the units at the periphery. The description offered by the CEO of the way in which constituent schools were involved in the formation of the MAT might suggest the latter as a plausible interpretation.

The CEO was asked about how this vision came about and she described a coming together of the management and those involved in governance of the constituent

schools but in terms that suggest an imposition of a pre-determined 'central vision' as in this extract:

> *'But I think one of the fundamental things that the trust has tried to do, on the trust board, is to get across the vision and the values. So, we had a big launch event, which then brought in all the governance of the trust together, and key staff in those three schools, of which clearly within the room, there were parents that are active members of those local advisory committees, and we shared what we, as a trust, wanted the Orchid Trust, what was its mission statement.'*
> (Judith, CEO, Orchid Trust)

The Orchid Trust here is identified as an organisation with a centrally determined mission statement imposing its pre-determined vision, values, and mission. This is the preserve of the CEO and must be pursued by her. As Courtney and Gunter (2105: 401) suggest, in a discourse of neo-colonialism: 'visions are the property of leaders, who should enact them relentlessly and are authorized to have them enacted by their objects, who are all the other actors in and within the sphere of schools.' In keeping with this imperative, what Judith describes does not appear to be a collaborative process of organisational development in which the constituent schools have the role of equal partners in the genesis and development of the new Trust. This is in keeping with what several writers have consistently maintained that MATs are not partnerships (e.g., Greany and Higham 2018: 85), since a MAT is a single legal entity with no formal status for individual constituent schools which are incorporated into the MAT upon its formation. This is suggestive of a neo-colonial process at work of absorption of the periphery into the centre in which there is a loss of individual identity and rights and central imposition of aims and purpose.

6.4.2 Constructing a vision for a MAT; a top-down process
The CEO of the Orchid Trust further described the process of determining a vision as being one that:

> *'very much, probably, came from the leadership of the three schools, when we sort of started talking about the vision for the Orchid Trust almost eighteen*

months ago, and then that's been shared through leadership with local advisory committees, what were then local governing bodies, before the conversion, so that they understood what they were buying into, what they were becoming a part of, and then, that was articulated at that launch event, to everybody that attended, which was quite a large audience, and we feel that we need to convey that information, we need to have a clarity of our purpose, and we need our parents to understand the offer that the Orchid Trust is going to provide for their child.' (Judith, CEO, Orchid Trust)

This extract from Judith's interview throws up a number of aspects which are worthy of analysis. Firstly, there is an element of tentativeness at the start when describing the origins of the Orchid Trust 'very much, probably' and 'sort of started talking about' suggest tentative and uncertain steps by a small group from the three schools involved. This perhaps has the air of an activity akin to 'plotting', or at least discussions in private away from the gaze of the wider school staff and those involved in governance. That this process lasted some eighteen months before any more extensive and outward communication reinforces this interpretation of a small group of school leadership working on detailed plans to be announced rather than an open consultation or co-production process.

What follows on from this is a more certain and confident assertion of the process by which the Orchid Trust and its purposes are brought to a wider community, it is 'shared through leadership with local advisory committees' which have replaced governing bodies. The purpose Judith states for this sharing of the Orchid Trust vision is not to enable a discussion about the aims and purposes of education, review alternative aims or question the basis of the MATs foundation, something which Biesta (2010: 2) reminds us is foreclosed in the kind of system in which the MAT is working.   Nor is its purpose that of determining the shape of the new organisation and engaging in a collaborative, co-production approach but to ensure the schools (or their governors) 'understand what they are buying into'. This 'buying into' might be taken to imply that there is some agency and choice available to the schools in the matter of joining the MAT but 'what they were becoming a part of' suggests that this is really a process of annexation whereby they are being taken into a new, larger entity whose already established purposes they must understand

and accept in the manner of colony taken over and incorporated into a larger, more powerful central organisation.

The last part of the chronology outlined by Judith in this extract adds to the colonial take over analogy. Having taken over the schools and explained the new dispensation to the leadership, the next task is for an explanation of the MAT to the wider community; 'we need our parents to understand the offer'. This is about informing parents and the communities of the schools what is going to happen rather than engaging in any dialogue or consultation about the MAT and the way it will work. This can be aligned with the definitions of the 'civilising mission'; the 'superior' power determines its aims and purposes and articulates the superior knowledge, organisational and managerial prowess and moral authority of the coloniser and imposes this in a hierarchical manner. The MAT will explain what is going to happen and what will be provided to children and families, but there is to be no room for consultation, negotiation or amendment, the MAT authority is both superior and final. The process is that of a monologue rather than dialogue.

6.4.3 Religious discourse in the civilising mission

Leona, the Chair of the Orchid Trust, also alludes to the superior knowledge and prowess of the MAT and its hierarchical and dominant relationship with its schools when she says:

> *'when you've got a MAT, you've got a higher authority'* (Leona, Chair, Orchid Trust);

In the context of her remarks this might refer to the senior, higher role of MAT CEO who is able to exercise authority over schools, but there is another, interpretation possible which speaks to the religious discourse inherent in the civilising mission. Whilst neither the Orchid Trust nor its constituent schools have a church foundation, the use of the term 'higher authority' by the chair is perhaps also suggestive of the religious component of the civilising mission discourse. Theo, the chair of the Heath Trust, (which does have a Church of England foundation) explicitly evokes the Christian religious aspect of the civilising mission:

'we have got some very deprived communities and it is part of our vision and moral imperative or a Christian imperative to do whatever we can within our resources to improve the lot of those living and working and studying in those communities.' (Theo, Chair, Heath Trust)

Whilst this statement of purpose is suggestive of noble intentions, The Chair of the Heath Trust would seem to be drawing on important components of the 'civilising mission'; 'vision and moral imperative'. Theo is also making an explicit claim to ownership, 'we have got some very deprived communities', which reinforces the 'duty to natives to impose external solutions and practices for their own benefit (Said 1994: 137) The notion of vision and moral imperative is explicitly linked to a particular faith and its actions in the secular world ('Christian imperative') which suggests the long association of Christianity as a driving force and justification for colonialism and imperialism (see for example Said 1978:100) and Fryer 1984:185).

6.4.4 Communities, class and the redemptive role of MATs

For two of the case study MATs, because of the number and variety of constituent schools, respondents tended to focus on the socio-economic and class make-up of the communities served by the different schools. There are suggestions in these responses that different kinds of engagement and interaction with the schools were explained by reference to issues of class in the community served by the school. We can see this, for example, in the following extract from the interview with Jerry, Chair of the Iris Trust talking about the schools in the Trust:

'Teasel is a little bit more middle class ish but it's still in <town> which is a very nice but ordinary <sub-region> town. Then you have got three schools; Foxglove and Arnica and Self-Heal who are basically what was the old coal field and a totally different clientele. Arnica, quite a lot, we only took Arnica on last year, near <town>, totally different group of children, parents, a lot of issues that we haven't encountered in many of the other schools. And it's not winning parents over but making sure that parents understand what this school stands for and how we want to move it forward and taking the children with it. And that

takes longer there because of the sort of families that you are actually dealing with.' (Jerry, Chair, Iris Trust)

Whilst this is a description of the community served by a school in more challenging circumstances that the MAT has taken on and the approach it takes to serving that community, Jerry suggests that this is different in working class communities who have a *'totally different clientele'* and where the MAT is less concerned with an approach that wins the trust and co-operation of the community and more about imposing a particular approach to schooling: Jerry's view that *'making sure that parents understand what this school stands for and how we want to move it forward'* sounds very directive, conveying a will to impose the MATs approach. Notwithstanding that the MAT has taken on a school with difficulties in its newly acquired role as a sponsor, Jerry is suggesting that the MAT believes its ways of working with *'middle class ish'* schools won't work in a working-class community. He is clear that the MAT doesn't have the experience of this kind of community when he states that there is a: *'lot of issues that we haven't encountered in many of the other schools'*. Instead of finding ways to recognise and build on the strengths of working-class communities and working alongside them to address these issues, a deficit model of understanding the community is implied. This, it is suggested by Jerry, requires a much more directive approach from the MAT to impose its ways of working and values on the community: *'because of the sort of families that you are actually dealing with'* which implies a class-based value judgement of the capabilities and attitudes found in the school community.

Another approach to dealing with questions of class and how these become entangled with neo-colonialist discourse can be constructed from the interview with Basil, CEO of the Heath Trust.

> *'Now I said before, you know, Marjoram school and Primrose school, if the middle classes get into a tiff with you they will put in a formal complaint, you know, and go for Freedom of Information requests to prove some kind of legal case. Whereas here (Bilberry school) they will storm in but if you can take time with them you can calm them down and they walk out the door and then forget it, that's it, it's finished.* (Basil, CEO of the Heath Trust)

Basil makes the point that communities with a high proportion of middle class and professional parents interact with the school in a rational, rules-based manner using the correct procedures and official channels, thus demonstrating knowledge of and familiarity with the language and discourse of public sector and professional bureaucracy in which the school is located. Working class communities (characterised as being deprived) are described as volatile with parents exhibiting loud and aggressive behaviour. This suggests there may be class-based value judgments about the deficiencies and needs of working-class communities informing the responses the MAT makes. Theo, Chair of Heath Trust, also talked about this work with Bilberry School.

> *'It's probably worth also talking about Bilberry primary school in <city>, which is in one of the most deprived areas of <city> in <area>, where again a new Head had to be installed and this new Head came from, she was Deputy Head at a school elsewhere in the City. She has transformed the school by connecting with the community, so yes she has cleared out the rubbish in the school; yes she has made it a friendly, welcoming, a very calm environment there is classical music playing quietly in all the classrooms which calms the minds of the kids and presumably the staff as well.'* (Theo, Chair, Heath Trust)

There is the suggestion here of a tough and directive approach with talk of 'installing a new head' and 'cleared out the rubbish'. This latter phrase carries an ambiguity and whilst from the interview the obvious interpretation is that of improving the physical environment, tidiness and cleanliness of the school, there is also the possibility that 'rubbish' is a reference to other aspects such as teaching or leadership. Theo suggests that the MAT had no choice in its action if it was to improve the service offered by the school and that this tough, decisive action was something the MAT was used to ('where again a new head had to be installed') but was necessary to improve the provision for a disadvantaged community. This tough but necessary approach can be located in the discourse of the civilising mission; things have improved since the MAT takeover of the school which has brought order and improvement. The intervention 'calms them down', 'calms the minds of the kids' and creates a 'calm environment'. The emphasis from Basil and Theo on the calming influence exerted by the MATs interventions is suggestive of the subduing of an unruly other.

Having taken tough action the way was cleared for seeking to improve behaviour and outcomes at this school with a focus on close engagement with parents by staff and using the school as a venue for community work which supported the local community such as working with the local church and a national organisation to host a food bank. As well as improving the experience for children at the school, such initiatives were reported as building a sense of trust and improved relations between the community and the school. Basil and Theo suggest that this work has yielded benefits of improved outcomes, better behaviour, and more productive relationships with parents. Basil also identifies wider benefits from the engagement with the community:

> *'We have also got large numbers of community volunteers coming into that school and I think success breeds success and they have got readers coming in from the local community and people wanting to come and work, people want to come and work on building a community garden there for the children.'*
> (Basil, CEO, Heath Trust)

The narrative constructed here is very suggestive of the justificatory discourse of neo-colonialism; a disadvantaged school and its community suffering through its own inadequacies is improved and redeemed from outside by the interventions of the MAT which then unlock and generate community benefits, as set out in the next section.

6.4.5 MATs work with communities: approaches and impact

Basil, the CEO of the Heath Trust talks about the way the Trust had taken on a Bilberry School and the changes that had come about at the school as a result of being part of the Heath Trust.

> *'Now within the last two years what we have done is we have completely, I believe we have transformed due to amazing leadership that we put in of <headteacher> and the governing body there. So now we are working into that community in a very powerful way. We have established a really good relationship, even though it's not a church school, with St <church> on <area>*

and they have got a food bank situation that they support us in. They will drop off food for us three times a week for our families.' (Basil, CEO, Heath Trust)

Basil is proudly reporting on progress at the school, and he attributes the transformation he claims has happened to a new headteacher and 'amazing leadership' of both the head and the governing body. This might imply that a strong and competent headteacher with good leadership qualities has worked in a developmental way with a school governing body to respond to community needs and improve the situation for children and families facing disadvantage and hardship. However, later in the interview Basil describes how

'the governing bodies tend to be very imported from professional people that we know that want to kind of serve in the community but don't live in that area'. (Basil, CEO Heath Trust)

This explanation of how changes to governing bodies are brought about when a school joins the MAT begins to suggest another reading, one more akin to the neo-colonial idea of the civilising mission. As Kulz (2011: 101) points out, the professionalisation of governing bodies through a focus on skills-based recruitment, rather than a representative model, privileges middle class subjects and discriminates against those with a working class and/or BAME background, since the business skills and experience domains identified as required by governors are more predominant in the more affluent, highly qualified and predominantly white 20% of the population. Kulz asserts that the skills-based model of governance is therefore exclusive and privileges the person of white and/or middle class background as being of value and suitable for a governance role.

Basil's statement that 'we are working into that community in a very powerful way' therefore suggests a different interpretation is possible. The MAT has taken over a struggling school in a disadvantaged area and brought in external leadership and governance from outside the community to impose a new order which is 'transformative'. This can be seen as the civilising mission in action, an interpretation which is strengthened by Basil's description of the changes in the way parents behave:

'And the atmosphere has completely changed, behaviour has changed, the engagement with the parents has changed, they don't swear when they come, they are very respectful.' (Basil, CEO, Heath Trust)

This might suggest that the local community has been, in effect, 'civilised' into the values and norms determined and promoted by the MAT.

This element of the discourse of the civilising mission can also be constructed from the way in which Jocinda, headteacher of Gentian School in the Iris Trust, talks about the community served by her school.

'Our children are absolutely stunning, I would say with all due respect that they come from quite chaotic families. Where even though it's deprived, it is a very throwaway culture and a lot do live in <social housing provider> properties where if something breaks or something goes wrong somebody comes in and does it for you. With all due respect that self-responsibility and that ethos of doing things for yourself is very much a challenge in our community.'

'Yes, we quite often on a morning have the smell of cannabis that wafts through the school. We were recently OFSTEDed and our safeguarding was quoted as being exemplary and it has to be, it has to be because our families, and I'm being very stereotypical and I shouldn't, because we've got some fantastic families and a lot of fantastic families. Some of our parents do struggle to understand what parenting is.' (Jocinda, Headteacher, Iris Trust)

Chapter Five on accountability highlighted Jocinda's view of the community served by the school, the possibility of a paternalistic interpretation and its alignment with the 'deficit model of disadvantage' discussed by Wood et al (2020). Whilst Jocinda suggests she has a caring, child-centred and supportive approach she is open about her more negative assumptions about the community and indeed anxious to not appear judgemental or overly critical, almost apologising to the interviewer for her views which she appears to be concerned might be received negatively (for example

when she says, 'I would say with all due respect' and 'I'm being very stereotypical and I shouldn't').

Her expressed views on the community can also be interpreted as influenced by a neo-colonial discourse. She is explicit in suggesting that the community is lacking in many of the requirements of good parenting and responsible behaviour and in this sense is an 'other' which is outside of acceptable norms ('that ethos of doing things for yourself is very much a challenge in our community') and conduct ('Yes, we quite often on a morning have the smell of cannabis that wafts through the school') which needs benevolent intervention of the kind invoked by the 'civilising mission'.

This section has examined interview data from the case study MATs and presented an interpretation which is rooted in the discourse and practices of the civilising mission. The next section examines more closely some of the components and features that are present in the discourse of the civilising mission and how these can be assembled from the analysis of the interview data.

6.5 MATs and Superior knowledge: 'Monocultures of the Mind'

6.5.1 Introduction
The previous section analysed interview data and developed interpretations of discussions of vision and mission framed by the discourse of the moral imperative of the civilising mission and its resultant benevolent interventions in schools and communities. This section addresses how the interview data from the case study MATs construct superior knowledge and how it is used to establish MAT dominance over schools and communities.

6.5.2 How superior knowledge is used; an example from the Iris Trust
Superior knowledge claims on behalf of the MAT are evident when Jerry, the Chair of Iris Trust, talks about a group of MAT personnel dealing with schools that the MAT board is concerned about (which was also referred to in the discussion of accountability in Chapter Five):

'… we have what we call wrap round meetings. And at those they have the CEO, they have the school improvement partner, they have three Trustees, they have the Chair of governors, they have another governor, and they have the Head and maybe the Deputy if necessary. And they talk around how we can move this school forward. … So everything is done from an Ofsted perspective' (Jerry, Chair, Iris Trust)

What seems to be suggested here is an inspectorial gaze and application or imposition of external knowledge which will address the schools' difficulties. Jerry stresses this when he adds*: 'So sometimes like the due diligence that we have had where people go in and they do what they think is right'* confirming his view that the imposition of knowledge and expertise from outside the school is the way problems will be resolved. Such an external imposition might be framed as neo-colonial. Jerry seems convinced that this approach by the MAT with its concentration on Ofsted judgements and test results is the right one because '*having people coming in and judging you, in the nicest possible way, but being very thorough and, you know, you have got outcomes from it, so this is what you need to improve, it works a treat.'*

An interpretation of Jerry's words here is that the MAT has a system of benevolent intervention and imposition ('in the nicest possible way') backed up with hard power ('being very thorough'). Jerry contrasts this with his experience of the approach taken by local authorities to school support and intervention.

'You don't want to be reactive which is what Local Authorities always were unless you were very, very lucky but in the ones I have worked in <names removed> they left you alone and then if something goes wrong and then whoosh, that's no good. So sometimes like the due diligence that we have had where people go in and they do what they think is right, the HMI come and search through everything' (Jerry, Chair, Iris Trust)

He seems to have disavowed his previous experience of local authorities' mode of working and relationships with schools, which he characterises as non-interventionist and almost negligent ('they left you alone', 'that's no good') in favour of a mode of operation framed by neo-colonial discourse. The reference to HMI would seem to

reinforce the imposed superior knowledge and imported expert at work; a former HMI was reported by Jerry to be working with the MAT on its 'due diligence' process of interrogation of schools and imposition of external solutions. 'The HMI come and search through everything' is suggestive of law enforcement tactics employed in authoritarian regimes to ensure compliance.

6.5.3 Superior knowledge and the process of taking over schools

The establishment and growth of the Iris Trust offers a narrative that might be termed 'reluctant coloniser'. This begins with an inclusive vision of a partnership of schools which is gradually changed into a colonising force by the neoliberal requirements of the academy world and the business logics and financial pressures imposed by the DfE and other actors in the sector. This leads ineluctably to a single approved mode of organisation, an imposed monoculture of the mind. Sonia, Iris Trust CEO, explained that at its inception inclusivity underpinned the governance of the MAT.

> *'So from the beginning what we felt was that every school should have a stake in that Trust Board. And initially, every school was able to send a representative to be on the Trust board.'* (Sonia, Iris Trust CEO)

As the Iris Trust developed, its original ideals of a collaborative, mutually supporting partnership (which could be seen as an attempt to create a small scale, local self-improving school system) are brought up against the rigid, hierarchical business logics and corporatism of the DfE and its agents and agencies. These logics insist on the adoption of neoliberal technologies of governance which privilege exclusivity, specialist business knowledge and corporate school structures over local connection and democratic modes of operation.

> *'Now when we were asked to support or invited to sponsor Arnica School, the Regional Schools Commissioner said there needs to be clear separation between the local governing boards and the Trust board. And therefore we, at the time, were realising that maybe this structure that we put in place of all inclusivity of everybody, one member from each school, was not going to work and it was certainly not going to work if we were going to get bigger because of*

how many people we were going to have. And we realised that we needed more specialists on the board.'

'So now it is very, very clear and this has enabled us to get to recruit more people onto our Trust Board who have got expertise and see it much more strategically than where we were before. So although what we set off to do about being inclusive seemed like quite a good idea at the time, it isn't a good idea going forward.' (Sonia, Iris Trust CEO)

The inclusive partnership initially constructed on the schools' own ideals of self-governance, mutual support and local community are quite quickly re-directed and repurposed into a neoliberal mould by the dominant business logics of the state and its agents. Promises of autonomy and freedom from external control at the heart of the academy programme promoted by government prove illusory when confronted with the pressure and desire for the MAT to expand and grow. This ensemble of policy and governance technologies not only precipitates changes in organisational arrangements of the MAT, it seems to shift the professional and moral values of those running the MAT who, like Sonia, come to accept that an inclusive MAT is only a 'good idea at the time' and not a basis for the future.

This can be interpreted as Sonia making the transition from a leader operating within the bureaucratic framework of local authority administration of education to one taking on the characteristics of what Thompson et al (2020: 6) identify as the entrepreneurial subject, an 'autonomous, self-responsibilising individual of contemporary governance.' Self-responsibilising individuals and institutions expect and desire autonomy and freedom of action and respect for professional judgement, the promises of which, alongside the additional money, underpin the academy programme. However, the reality, as Sonia discovers, is that a new set of accountabilities, measures and governance requirements come into play, which require significant compromise to the starting value positions in order to accommodate them.

The development and deployment of superior knowledge is the basis on which schools become aligned with the Trust in a form of associateship and then move into

full membership. According to this narrative, the Trust doesn't set out to colonise and take over schools but instead looks to use its superior knowledge of school improvement to form relationships. The business logic of corporate expansion then comes into play. The following extracts from the interview with Sonia, the CEO illustrate this narrative.

> *'Gorse School, became a stand alone Academy. I will be quite honest, the reason that we did that was at the time it was very financially driven because there was an awful lot of grants going around at the time and we knew we had a very old building … we knew it needed a lot of repairs.'* (Sonia, CEO Iris Trust)

Sonia is very open about the initial, pragmatic financial motivation for conversion at an early stage in the government's drive for academisation after 2010. There would seem to be a recognition, and a little embarrassment, that this is the primary motivation behind academy conversion, as if it is a little shameful to be motivated by money and not a more noble intention ('I will be quite honest'). Certainty there is no suggestion that academisation is being pursued for the reasons to do with autonomy, independence, improved standards etc that are set out by the DfE and ministers' justifications of policy.

The financial motive also features in consideration of the school's relationship with its local authority prior to academisation, which, Sonia hints became more mercenary and suggests that, as an outstanding school, they were not receiving their fair share of the resources under the authority's stewardship.

> *'So we were an outstanding school, still are, and what we found was once we got the outstanding we weren't getting the support that we needed from the Local Authority. Because as an outstanding school they had a very much hands off approach, we were still paying the same amount of money into the pot but we weren't, we believed, getting the highest quality school improvement partners that we needed.'* (Sonia, CEO Iris Trust)

The process of conversion and induction into the academy sector then shifts the basis of the relationship with the local authority. Seemingly notions of community of schools serving the area are replaced by the business focused transactional relations centred on value for money criteria.

Having become an academy, Gorse School entered a pressurised environment dominated by acquisitive MATs seeking to take on and colonise schools.

> *'We were under quite a lot of pressure from the local high school and from their governing body to be part of a MAT that they wanted to set up. I had a belief at the time and still hold that belief that there is too many high school former head teachers who think that they can lead a primary MAT and lead a lot of primary schools. And our governors did not want to be led by high school and therefore we wouldn't go in and join that particular MAT.'* (Sonia, Iris Trust CEO)

Sonia can understand the motives and intentions of some of these MATs and resists the advances. She demonstrates an awareness of how the sector operates and a scepticism about the motives and operations of high school head teachers turned MAT CEOs. Perhaps this scepticism is born of personal experience. Elsewhere in her interview, recounting the discussions held with parents of a school joining the Iris Trust, she speaks of friendship with the CEO of one of the large national MATs with a reputation for a hierarchical, centralised, and standardised approach to its constituent schools.

> *And we changed the minimum, we are not a <MAT name> type of academy, now I work very well with <CEO name>, he is a good friend of mine, he has offered a job to me in the past, but we do not go, and everything doesn't become purple, and we have had this conversation many a time. So all the good things that we have got within the schools, not that I am saying <MAT name> take away all the good things, they don't, but … for example they were very concerned about would the music service still exist and children would do… well absolutely of course it would do. All the traditions that they have got at that school, the links with their church and with things that they do in that*

community would that still stay? Yes of course it was going to stay.' (Sonia, CEO, Iris Trust)

Sonia is suggesting her vision of the relationship between a MAT and its schools has been informed by a desire to construct an alternative to the neo-colonial take over and central control exerted by *'high school former head teachers who think that they can lead a primary MAT'* in which individual schools retain a high degree of autonomy in an inclusive partnership.

6.5 4 Superior knowledge and National Leader of Education status

Sonia stated that she used her position as a National Leader of Education, and the superior knowledge it confers, to develop relationships with other schools with the intention of using this as mechanism for bringing those schools into the Gorse School sphere of influence. This then becomes an explicit condition, that the support leads to becoming part of the MAT that she is seeking to establish.

> *'So they asked, the governors at Teasel School came to see me supported by the Local Authority to ask that if we would consider doing an NLE contract for Teasel School which is just a mile down the road. … we agreed but we said we would do this contract but we wanted them to consider, at some point in the year, becoming a member of a MAT.'* (Sonia, Iris Trust CEO)

Sonia's position as an NLE has enabled her to develop influential relationships with local schools. Designation as an NLE also confers on her the role of system leader, a central if largely undefined component of the government's construct of the Self-Improving School System (Greany and Higham 2018: 22). What NLE designation and system leader status does give Sonia is a credible claim to superior knowledge and a form of moral authority to take on a leadership role across a group of schools as the cohesion and mediation provided by the middle tier, represented by the local authority, suffers a slow but steady decline. This collapse of the middle tier is not an unfortunate accident nor a natural evolution of policy; it is fundamental to the government's remaking of a school improvement system in which local authorities have their powers and responsibilities for education curtailed, their budgets cut, and system leaders take on a central role (Courtney and McGinity 2020: 3). Such a self-

improving school system is characterised by hierarchical control and the centralising of power through the imposition of targets, emphasis on Ofsted inspection judgements and test results and high stakes accountability processes (Greany and Higham 2018: 25).

According to Shajahan (2011: 190), the ensemble of policy and performative technologies encompassed by the self-improving system is a neo-colonial enterprise in the sense that techniques and tools of data collection and manipulation and the business of target setting, and monitoring are 'very similar to the techniques used during the colonial era to establish governmentality.' Furthermore, such technologies underpinned and enabled administration and management of the empire and throughout the colonial world, statistical knowledge and surveys were part of colonial governmentality: 'they have been the *predominant tool* used for technologies of governance in colonial rule, and continue to have similar functions and effects …'

In Sonia's account, the business and corporate logics soon come head-to-head with the more collaborative partnership aspirations of the nascent Iris Trust. The cost pressures and income generating imperatives of NLE and support school work quickly lead to consideration of annexation and financial integration of partner schools by taking them into the MAT.

> *'Doing the NLE contracts is all very well but as soon as you start one NLE contract you are looking for the next and that is because in your home school you are taking on additional staff to backfill. And that was… we were starting to think potentially about becoming a sponsor for, and taking on schools, rather than just doing the NLE support for them.'* (Sonia, CEO, Iris Trust)

The deployment of this superior knowledge bestows authority and position in the MAT sector marketplace and this status is used by the nascent Iris Trust to bring other schools into the MAT. This can be likened to a neo-colonial process of acquisition, colonisation, and reward to those with superior knowledge and higher authority. As Courtney and McGinity (2020: 3) put it 'system leaders accepting that label are de facto policy ambassadors, and may be rewarded through empire

enlargement.' The choice of language here with talk of 'policy ambassadors' emphasises that this is an official governmental project.

This imposition of 'superior' knowledge and expertise as external solutions on schools with difficulties, problems, and inadequacies that the MAT has exposed and the obligation to act is also suggested by the Chair of the Orchid Trust:

> *'We've highlighted that we've got some real concerns in one of our primary schools. That obviously I feel that by becoming a MAT that has opened that up, whereas before it wasn't … but actually the CEO coming in, externals coming in has made such a difference because it's unravelled a lot of things in there … I feel we're already thinking, oh my God, we are the Orchid Trust we've got to do something about this, this is one of our schools, these are feeding children through, we've got a real responsibility to these.'* (Leona, Chair, Orchid Trust)

Here the power of the coloniser and its superior knowledge combines with the benevolent intentions and moral responsibility of the colonising MAT to assert control and direction over its schools.

In Orientalism, the classic study of western relations with 'otherness' Said (1978:206) argues that the whole question of imperialism and colonisation in the late nineteenth century was carried forward by a binary typology of advanced and backward races, cultures and societies and that peoples designated backward in such a typology where seen, not as people or citizens to be engaged with but as problems to be solved and, as their territory was coveted by the western nations and imperialist institutions, to be taken over. There is an echo of this when respondents discuss MAT relations with schools in difficulties. The interview data suggest that schools in difficulties are seen as problems to be solved, for example: '*we've got to do something about this, this is one of our schools*' (Chair of Orchid Trust); and '*… where people go in and they do what they think is right*' (Chair of Iris Trust).

The data from respondents suggests that the case study MATs involved seek to portray themselves as producers and repositories of 'superior knowledge' of school improvement and explain how they deploy this knowledge in a way that facilitates

and supports the colonisation of schools by imposing external control and neoliberal technologies of governance in pursuit of improvement and betterment of the school and its community. As Shajahan (2011: 188) expresses it: 'Proponents of evidence-based education thus unknowingly operate from a colonial discourse and a moral imperative – to improve the educational outcomes for all children, as well as strengthen the reputation of the field of education.' The following section seeks to illustrate the ways in which the case study MATs describe their work and interventions in support of improvement in constituent schools and communities and how this can be framed both as benevolence and exercise of power.

6.6 The illusion of benevolence and the rhetoric of power

6.6.1 Introduction

Fryer (1984:185) analyses how the civilising mission moved from something to be imposed by force to something that required the protection and improvement of the those who were colonised; an 'illusion of benevolence' produced by the 'rhetoric of power' as Said (1994:xxi) puts it. Such a mission to improve was driven by pseudoscientific views of the racial inferiority of Black people and the moral obligation of the 'superior white people's and nations' to provide for their moral and material needs.

Whilst there is no suggestion or implication that such views of racial superiority inform or are driving the actions of the case study MATs, it is possible to interpret the accounts and discussions in the data from respondents in similar neo-colonial terms. This is not about personal beliefs so much as the wider discourses that structure and validate what is reasonable. This frames the MAT as being a superior moral and intellectual force with an obligation and duty of benevolence which disguises and obscures the use of power to impose outside rule and secure the interests of the MAT. These interests are chiefly concerned with control of resources and financial sustainability of the MAT as an organisation (see Chapter Four) and ensuring the demands of high stakes and hierarchical accountability for performance and measurable outcomes are met (see Chapter Five)

6.6.2 Imposing solutions and denying agency

When a school becomes part of a MAT not only does it cease to have any legal status as a separate institution, but the school community is denied agency and influence over the school curriculum. Anthea, Headteacher of Fuchsia school in the Heath Trust explains this shift in relation to changes in the RE syllabus at school.

> *'In terms of other changes when we moved to a different syllabus for RE but that's been a Trustee decision so it's not a consultation with parents decision like it might be at a non-Academy school where you might put it forward as a proposal with the syllabus and it is a consultation if you are not an academy. But as an academy the responsibility is with the Trustees for that.'* (Anthea, Headteacher, Fuchsia School, Heath Trust)

What had previously been, before conversion to academy status and absorption into the MAT, within the control of the governing body and subject to engagement with the parent community is now imposed from outside. What had been an important area for local influence and determination, the nature of RE in a primary school with a religious foundation, is now taken over and centralised by the MAT which assumes complete control.

In talking about the change in the powers of the governing body and the shift of control to the MAT centrally, Anthea raised the question of the MAT's scheme of delegation, how it operates and the importance of the clerk to the local governing body in interpreting it.

> *'But the Clerks who support are really good, they all support, they have got a senior governance advisor I think she is, she works with the Trust and then a Clerk who works with her as well and between them they clerk all the meetings so there is that consistency around clerking and feedback and the messages going to all the schools which is really key.'* (Anthea, Headteacher, Fuchsia School, Heath Trust)

In doing so, she perhaps suggests an important mechanism by which the authority of the MAT is exercised over the governance of constituent schools. The clerks are

now part of the central governance function of the MAT working to a governance advisor rather than the previous arrangement of being responsible to the chair of the school governing body. Anthea is keen to stress the supportive work of the clerks and how valuable that is in the context of a detailed scheme of delegation which defines what the school can do and which she needs assistance to interpret. The effect of the new bureaucracy of the MAT is to disempower the headteacher, the school and its local governing body and shift control to the central MAT.

> *'and I mean we do have to check because I can't know it off by heart so if there is a big decision, you know, we do refer back and sort of say is this, yeah I could spend hours going through … does it need to be a Trustee or a central team decision or is it something for us?'* (Anthea, Headteacher, Fuschia School, Heath Trust)

This suggests that the clerk is in a strong position to direct the school having been taken into a central function which imposes MAT authority over constituent schools because there is now 'consistency around clerking and feedback and the messages going to all the schools which is really key'.*'*

In the Iris Trust, benevolent intervention comes with imposed superior knowledge, as Jerry the Chair describes in this extract where he talks about what the MAT is doing for its constituent schools and communities.

> *'Well you would like to think that they can see there is an awful lot of help coming from the Trust, we have due diligence that goes on in the schools every year. We have actually got someone who is a former HMI who comes in and actually does the due diligence and brings along with her two of the Head teachers from other schools'.* (Jerry, Chair, Iris Trust)

Here Jerry conflates the supportive and helpful interventions he believes that the Trust provides with the exercise of hierarchical accountability (what he terms 'due diligence' see Chapter Five) and the imposition of external knowledge and expertise (a 'former HMI' who 'actually does the due diligence'). There is a suggestion of the discourse of the civilising mission where Jerry expects schools, as neo-colonial

subjects lacking their own agency and ability to act, to be grateful for the interventions and impositions of the MAT.

6.6.3 Benevolent interventions; 'new regimes', individual schools and their communities

As the MAT applies neo-colonial logic to its relations with it schools, so then are the schools expected to apply those same logics to the communities with which they work. In this extract Jerry is speaking about the way one of the Trust schools is working in its community

> *'But the school the way it was handled it managed to turn these children around because usually that's what was needed to turn them around.'* (Jerry, Chair Iris Trust)

The implication here is that the same civilising mission imposition of superior knowledge, expertise and moral authority is applied to children and families who are without agency, adrift in a moral vacuum and in need of the betterment that the school can bestow upon them. The use of the expression 'turn them round' implies that the community is lacking moral direction and needs the intervention of the school (and the MAT) in order to ensure they are set on a better path. This has great similarities with the religious discourse of colonialism as set out for example by Said (78: 100) and Fryer (1984:185).

One of the interventions Jerry discusses in his interview (and one which is common MAT practice across the country) is replacing staff in schools that have become part of the Trust.

> *'Self Heal School is another of the new ones and Self Heal again is about two miles down the road but I think with the staff we have now got in place down there, I think that school will come up.'* (Jerry, Chair Iris Trust)

In the case of Self Heal School the expectation is that the intervention will make the school 'come up', This phrase again has echoes of the religious civilising mission

discourse; the school has 'fallen' but will be redeemed to 'come up' under the embrace of the MAT.

In this next extract, Jerry talks about the Trust's work with another two of its schools and hints at the attitudes to the communities served.

> *'Arnica School that serves one area of <town> which shall we say is a little bit more run down than Harebell School but the children now are really taken off at Arnica with the new regime that's in. Harebell it's always been quite a well-established decent school is the one that we just at the moment are a bit concerned about. We thought because of the catchment area it would be better there but we are always… in other words when you are working with children you are working with the parents to get them on board, so all the time you are working with the community.'* (Jerry, Chair, Iris Trust)

The interpretation rooted in neo-colonialism suggested here is that Jerry makes explicit the intention of the MAT to work through its schools with communities to achieve acquiescence and acceptance of the MATs values. Jerry suggests that these communities will benefit from these values and the way in which this happens is by the MAT imposing a 'new regime', the result of which is that 'the children now are really taken off'. Once again, the MAT's civilising mission has raised up and redeemed the children in a disadvantaged community ('little bit more run down'). There is a suggestion here that the MAT has a value laden view of its schools ('well-established decent school') and communities ('because of the catchment area it would be better') and this shapes assumptions about how schools should perform. When Harebell School does not meet those expectations, the MAT becomes concerned and neo colonial interventions of the kind employed at Arnica School involving installing new leadership, a 'new regime', are considered.

6.6.4 Neo-colonialism, the civilising mission and benevolent interventions; 'dead ideas' with a living legacy

These extracts from interview data illustrate the neo-colonial discourse which offers an explanatory framework for the way the case study MATs relate to and work with

their constituent schools. Fryer (1984: 184), in his examination of the civilising mission, quotes Cecil Rhodes' view of the superiority of the English-speaking race and its 'being the greatest instrument yet evolved for the progress and elevation of mankind' and 'the more we inhabit of the world the better it is for the human race' as an outstanding example of how assumed racial, moral and technical superiority was used to justify the most blatant and brutal acts of colonial appropriation and oppression under the banner of a 'civilising mission'. However, Rodney in his classic text How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (1972: 232), is scathing about what he sees as the 'hypocrisy of colonialism' and is clear about the economic imperative underlying colonialism and the role of any benevolent interventions and practices as providing justification for economic exploitation: '…Europeans were in the colonial game because it was damn profitable, and that was that. However, there were other elements who thought it necessary to peddle a line about welfare of the 'uncivilised natives''. This a stark reminder of the brutal operation of imperialism and colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but it is not intended to equate the scale and severity of the abuses of the age of imperialism with the academisation of the English school system. What is suggested is that the underpinning logics and discourse of colonialism has a strong echo in the way the case study MATs conceptualise schools and communities. In particular: the acquisitive view of schools as institutions to be colonised and taken on as a part of the MATs moral imperative and mission; the manner in which communities are characterised as a problematic 'other' requiring benevolent intervention from the technically, culturally and morally superior MAT for their own benefit and betterment; and the acquisition and control of resources to support MAT growth and sustainability. As Shajahan (2011: 188) puts it 'the language and epistemology that is used to frame such an educational policy discourse (that employ particular notions of evidence), reflects colonial discourses of scientific civilization, rationality, control, and order.' The crucial point here is that MATs are part of the neoliberal reform and remaking of the wider education system in England and that this 'is part of a project of neoliberalism and is permeated by values informed by this colonial economic paradigm' (Shajahan 2011: 193).

It is perhaps tempting, from the vantage of the second decade of the 21 century to dismiss such views of 'backward' peoples and the obligation of the 'superior' races to safeguard their welfare as outdated as well as offensive and without any scientific or

ethical foundation. But as Fryer asserts, 'long after the material conditions that originally gave rise to racist ideology had disappeared, these dead ideas went on gripping the minds of the living '(1984:190). And indeed, not just gripping the minds but driving the actions as shown by the latest turn of events that precipitated the Black Lives Matter movement. This has thrown into sharp relief how such views have a direct and profound adverse impact on lives and communities. As an example of the persistence and pervasiveness of this thinking, UK government ministers' utterances have (perhaps unwittingly) shown how such attitudes are in evidence in the minds, and presumably thereby inform the practices and actions, of those who have power to make and implement policy. For example, the Guardian quotes The then Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson MP as saying:

'Well I just reckon we've got the very best people in this country and we've obviously got the best medical regulators. Much better than the French have, much better than the Belgians have, much better than the Americans have. That doesn't surprise me at all because we're a much better country than every single one of them, aren't we?" (Guardian 3 December 2020)

The idea of civilising mission has a long history in the development and implementation of empire by the British state and other western nations and this section has sought to show the thinking and practice of the case study MATS can be interpreted within this paradigm The civilising mission is intimately bound up with notions of superiority of some nations and peoples over others. As Arendt (1951/2017:168) puts it '… the new imperialist consciousness of a fundamental, and not just a temporary, superiority of man over man (sic), of the 'higher' over the 'lower' breeds.' The next section looks at the history of the civilising mission and the language bound up with it and how this language is reflected in the way case study respondents talked about their MATs and their relations with schools and communities.

6.5 The language of academies and its neo-colonial echoes

6.5.1 Introduction

Fryer traces the history of the civilising mission and identifies two components. Firstly, the idea of conversion which is a frequent aspect of religious discourse and underpinned much of the activity of Christian missionaries in the period of empire. Fryer (1984:185) suggests that this implied informal influence rather than outright coercion of host communities to change their religious affiliations or adopt new beliefs. He suggests a more substantial shift in the relationship between host communities and colonisers comes about when conversion gives way to trusteeship which, he asserts, implies annexation of territory, subjugation, and removal of people's rights.

It is therefore instructive to examine how this language of 'trust' 'trustee' and 'conversion' is located in the discourse of academisation and MATs. Gunter and McGinity (2014:303) highlight how, in the process of schools becoming academies the expansion of the national programme from a solution to school failure, in which the school became a sponsored academy, to a new organisational model for all schools was termed by the DfE as conversion to academy status. Schools and those who run them must be converted to the utility, necessity, and benefits of creating academies amidst an almost religious discourse of conversion: 'literally, people have to be converted to the idea and realities of academies…'. They extend the religion and conversion metaphor by highlighting how the imperative to convince people of the need for conversion 'is based on a form of preaching in oral and written texts and how it is received is integral to whether those in receipt are receptive as converts' (2014:303).

The ideas and associations bound up in the words trust and trustee are also fundamental to the new model of school organisation: MATs are multi academy trusts and the legal power and decision making is vested in the MAT Board composed of trustees.

6.5.2 Preaching, conversion and a new community

The theme of conversion can also be seen as part of a neo-colonial discourse. As a colonialising entity the MAT needs to convince its communities of its purpose and convert them to its values, and this is evident at the Orchid Trust when the CEO says:

> *'But I think one of the fundamental things that the trust has tried to do, on the trust board, is to get across the vision and the values.' So, we had a big launch event, … and we shared what we, as a trust, wanted.'* (Judith, CEO, Orchid Trust)

The Chair of the Orchid Trust is more explicit about what 'Trust' signifies. Not only does she reinforce the importance of spreading word of the MAT's already determined vision amongst the communities as part of the conversion process but makes it clear that the schools and those involved with them will come under its control.

> *'But from our perspective I mean we're looking at the strategic vision. So what we did as a Trust, we've had two big meetings together, we brought out LACs together, and some of the teachers. We invited them all here, so I'd say that was a part of starting that community and making sure that they were part of the Orchid Trust.'* (Leona, Chair, Orchid Trust)

Leona's description doesn't just reference the conversion process and the control of the Trust but hints at a foundation motive too. The Trust is not just converting existing schools and communities to the vision of the MAT but is founding a new community based on a new vision brought to them by the 'higher authority'. There is possibly something religious and even millenarian here with the vision of a shining new future brought to the unenlightened by the Orchid Trust with its superior knowledge and higher moral values as well as its benevolent actions.

6.5.3 Preparing for conversion; missionary work and hearts and minds

Conversion requires patient preparation work with those to be converted if they are to be successfully brought into the fold. The Heath Trust took over two failing schools

whose communities were suspicious and sceptical of becoming academies within the Heath Trust. Rather than engage in takeover by force the Heath Trust embarked on a lengthy programme of what might be termed 'missionary work' so that conversion might be accomplished with consent and the minimum of force. Initially, Theo the Chair states, there was some hostility.

'I am thinking for example of the <town> schools when they were, before they joined and shortly after they joined where the Chief Exec and one or two of the senior staff went across and introduced the Trust to them and indeed faced the flack. Because, you know if you have got a deprived community and things aren't working out for their children and maybe their child has suffered sanctions in school, sometimes the parents will react against that. 'My little Johnny should not have been penalised' who is the best person to have a go at, the person who comes in with the suit and stands in front of you.' (Theo, Chair, Heath Trust)

'So in terms of Heath Trust we had staff working there for many months before a formal conversion.' (Theo, Chair, Heath Trust)

This work was designed and delivered as school improvement support but perhaps also served the purpose of missionary work preparing both the schools and their communities for the forthcoming conversion. 'Faced the flack' might imply that senior staff saw the work of meeting with the communities as being a lightening rod or deflection for community anger at the takeover. There is also perhaps an echo of the selflessness of the coloniser here. Senior staff are willing to put themselves at the front and 'face the flack', something which suggests personal discomfort, as part of their mission to bring enlightenment and a better future to the deprived (and therefore inferior) 'other'. This suggests the external imposition of superior knowledge and authority in a neo-colonial manner, further implied in the phrase 'the person who comes in with suit and stands in front of you'. Staff have to be inculcated into the ways of MAT but not all can make that transition and some senior staff are replaced to ensure conversion is accepted and takes place with minimum resistance, as Theo points out: *'senior leadership has changed, we have new Heads in both*

schools, some of the senior leadership teams are the same but some of them are new.'

A similar process of preparation for conversion to overcome resistance and avoid a more punitive annexation of a school into the MAT can be detected at the Iris Trust. In this extract, Sonia, the CEO talks about the work that went on with a local school to prepare for conversion and becoming part of the MAT.

> *'Then I had a close colleague who was interested in becoming part of a MAT, again they were under pressure from a local high school and they came and joined us in 2017, March 2017 they converted although they worked with us from the summer of 2016 and they converted.'* (Sonia, CEO, Iris Trust)

As Sonia described earlier in her interview, (see section 6.5.3) there is pressure to convert and be taken over by another MAT lead by a secondary school which is perceived as not being sympathetic to the situation and needs of a primary school. In this extract she talks about the conversion process for one of the schools being taken into the Iris Trust. The school undergoes a period of preparatory work over two terms with the Iris Trust to ready them for a smooth conversion with minimal resistance.

> *'Obviously you have to win the hearts and minds of people don't you, and so, the Arnica School one was potentially the difficult one because it was a forced academy, they hadn't chosen it. … So we held, the governing body there were initially not welcoming, although the Chair of the governors was, the others were very belligerent, we had a very tricky meeting with them in the summer term. And we had a meeting with the parents and I felt we were going to face quite a lot of animosity but the feeling was that when they left that meeting, that they were much more positive and the thing is that some parents think it's going to change, everything is going to change.'* (Sonia, CEO, Iris Trust

There is an impression here of missionary work in action; the hearts and minds of a potentially hostile community are won over by the power of the MATs superior knowledge.

6.5.4 Conversion and afterwards: trusting the trust

The processes associated with conversion and the language used to describe it has the feel of a religious discourse such as that underpinning the imperialist role of missionary work; it requires the MAT to 'win the hearts and minds of people'; and may require overcoming explicit resistance of governors and community. Belligerence, tricky meetings, and animosity are in prospect for the senior officers of the Trust. As parents are reported to have left in positive frame of mind it is possible again to interpret this narrative as part of the selfless coloniser discourse. A further aspect of this narrative is worth elucidating since it highlights another meaning of the word trust. Sonia implies that the sceptical parents were won over by assurances about the lack of change and the maintenance of valued activities and traditions (see extract from Sonia's interview in Section 6.5.3 above). However, as Sonia acknowledges a great deal did change as the Iris Trust grew, in particular the inclusivity and representational nature of the Trust governance. Whilst such changes might not be of direct concern to parents, their significance lies in the way that such changes enable the Trust to impose a 'new regime' on a school and change the curriculum and organisation of the school, create new and different traditions and allegiances, all in the name of improved standards or other external performative imperatives. The question thus posed is how far can a Trust be trusted?

The interpretation of the interview data offered here is that of a 'civilising mission' and missionary attitude to schools, and communities within which they operate, at work within the case study MATS. If taken together with the power that is vested in MATs and the individuals who constitute them to control, direct and annexe schools in pursuit of a vision and mission determined centrally by the MAT, this provides a clear signifier that neo-colonialism is potent lens through which to view and understand how MATs operate in relation to those communities. But neo-colonialism, like the earlier manifestations of imperialism and the colonial forces that constituted and maintained the European empires, is not a one-way street. There was, and is, resistance and alternative narratives. Indeed, empires fell, and colonised peoples gained their freedom because the logic and force of anti-colonialism became irresistible. These matters are discussed more fully in Chapter Eight.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has offered an interpretation of the way the case study MATs engage with constituent schools and communities rooted in the discourse of neo-colonialism. Predominant in this interpretation is the idea of the civilising mission in which schools (and communities) are subject to being defined as 'other' and characterised as deficient in the organisational, managerial, technical, epistemological, and moral qualities that the MAT can provide. Whilst the acquisition and takeover of schools that all the case study MATs either are or intending to engage in is presented publicly as providing benefits and an act of benevolence, the more deep-seated position is one of resource acquisition and what might be termed 'empire building'. Such enlargement and growth of MATs figures in the public discourse as being about school improvement through a 'self-improving school system' but the process is also driven by neoliberal corporate and business logics in pursuit of standards, performance efficiency and value for money.

Finally, it is important to stress that whilst a neo-colonial lens has been used to focus on and shape this interpretation of MAT engagement with schools and communities, this does not mean the individuals involved are colonisers or imperialists or that they as individuals exhibit the negative attitudes and behaviours associated with those terms. Motivations are shaped by the desire to do the best for the children, families, and communities they serve. The pervasiveness of the neo-colonial discourse means that the structural and operational options to translate these intentions into action have been unduly narrowed and constrained.

Chapter Seven

Coda: MATs, and the Covid 19 pandemic response and community engagement: impact of crisis

7.1 Introduction

The Covid 19 pandemic and the first public health lockdown measures and restrictions in spring and summer 2020 with the resulting school closures have had a profound effect on individual schools, MATs and the wider school system. The opportunity has been taken to examine the question of community engagement through the lens of responses to and impact of a national crisis. Although interviews and data collection for the study had been completed before the Covid 19 outbreak in the UK, to look at the impact of the crisis respondents from the three case study MATS were contacted by email in June 2020 with the following request:

> 'Things seem very different for schools and their communities since you were kind enough to talk to me in an interview for my research. I have been working with the data I gathered during my interviews and building a picture of how MATs engage with their communities. In doing so it struck me that the changes occasioned by the pandemic may have had a significant impact on how schools engage with communities and I wondered how the pandemic changes things for you?'

Responses were received from Orchid Trust (the Trust chair and senior executive) and Iris Trust (the Trust chair and headteacher of Gentian school). The chair of Iris trust also followed up the email response with the offer of a telephone interview to explore further the emailed response. The interview was recorded for transcription and analysis.

7.2 Supporting communities and families

There is evidence in the responses of greater attention to providing wider family and community support in response to the social and economic needs that the pandemic is creating. For instance, at Gentian school, in Iris Trust, because of the delays and problems with the implementation of the national voucher programme for free school meals children, the school has been providing 'grab bags' of food and packed lunches for families. This has also involved recognising the pressures and stresses on families of having children at home and confined during a lengthy lockdown. Jocinda's response also talked about providing fun and play activities and ideas for families as well as more formal learning materials.

Such concern about the role of schools is not new. As Lowe (2002: 151) argues there is a long tradition of schools being involved in the wider health and well-being of children which, as he points out was a consequence of LEAs, from their very early days, championing the wider responsibilities of schools to their communities. As Wood et all (2020: 13) note, similar concerns about the wider well-being of communities drove the Every Child Matters programme introduced by the 2004 Children Act.

Concerns about welfare and safeguarding of vulnerable children who might be at greater risk of harm and invisible to agencies and means of support were expressed at Orchid Trust. Gina felt this was leading to a significant expansion of the MAT's role in the community:

> *'The role of the school in terms of managing safeguarding and looking after the vulnerable has been interesting and I would say that it has gone far beyond what a school's core purpose is, we have crossed the line into social care.'*
> (Gina, executive director, Orchid Trust)

The use of the phrase going 'beyond what a schools' core purpose is' here might indicate just how far the neoliberal business logic has infiltrated into the thinking of those who run MATs. Wider community welfare has been pushed out of the strategic planning and deliberation that MATs do about their mission and vision. Given that the case study MATs place considerable emphasis on developing and promoting a

vision this raise the question of how little community engagement and community well-being now features in the strategic oversight of local school systems (see Chapter Five). As suggested above, the issue of wellbeing and safeguarding (although not expressed in those terms) have been part of 'core concerns' of schools for over a century. Indeed, Lowe suggests that this concern for community health (in the widest sense) driven by local authorities in the early years if the twentieth century was of foundational significance in determining the purpose of compulsory schooling. In more recent times, the importance of these questions is reflected by the incorporation of statutory safeguarding frameworks and responsibilities of schools into law and the inspection framework.

Gina's comment might suggest that the pandemic crisis may be prompting some consideration of the MAT's engagement with its community and prompting the renewing and strengthening of the relationship with other agencies such as children's social care which will carry on beyond the immediate crisis. Hulme et al (2015: 80) argue that one of the consequences of the post 2010 austerity programme and the current MAT dominated and fragmented school organisation landscape has been to undo any gains from the integration of education, health, social care and family support under the 2004 Children Act. Hulme et al also maintain that the involvement of schools in the partnerships developed has diminished as a result. Gina's comment might indicate that the MAT and its schools are now being brought into full knowledge of the impact of the large austerity-imposed reductions in funding suffered by local authority social care, youth and family support services and the need for a reengagement with the local partnerships that have decayed as a result.

7.3 Exercise of power and the role of governors and local governing bodies

There is a strong sense in all the responses of the importance of providing schooling and maintaining children's wellbeing and education during the closure, both through keeping schools open for vulnerable children and children of key workers and in devising and putting into practice online learning activities. The responses tell of the hard work and stresses for staff that this has entailed and the wider organisational issues of working with rapidly changing and sometimes unclear government

guidance. One consequence of working in such an uncertain and fluid situation is that decision making and organisation of schools' response has become much more centrally controlled by the MAT. In the Iris Trust, Jerry the chair's response speaks of how:

> '*the Trust's CEO, the School Improvement Partner, the COO, the Heads and staff have worked really hard together since lockdown began in ensuring there was a unified approach across the Trust regarding the challenging situation schools have faced.*' (Jerry, Chair, Iris Trust)

However, no mention is made of governors, chairs of governors or governing bodies being involved in this effort. In the subsequent interview, when asked about how governors were engaged in the MATs response and involved in developing the new ways of working, Jerry re-iterated the MATs commitment to involvement of local governing bodies in MAT business.

> '*we've always tried to give governing bodies, what shall we say, within the corporate, we have given them a lot of their own responsibilities*'. (Jerry, Chair, Iris Trust)

There are two interesting points in this response. Firstly, what seems to be a very hierarchical approach to local governing bodies. It confirms what was evident in the earlier interviews, that any responsibilities of governing bodies were delegated from the MAT, but interestingly it is expressed in a fashion that suggests a further entrenchment of the power of the central MAT. The second point is the use of the phrase, 'what shall we say, within the corporate'. This might imply an intensification of the corporate logics at work which were identified in Chapter Four. Perhaps most significant is the use of the word corporate itself, as this is the only instance of the word being used in the case study interviews in relation to MAT governance. Does this indicate that neoliberal logics are now openly accepted and that the MAT is beginning to define and describe itself in these terms?

Later in the interview the chair stated that: *'you've got to evolve all the time and if you find something doesn't work you alter it'.* There would seem to be an indication here that changing circumstances and the requirements of the response to the pandemic crisis had led to some re-thinking and re-positioning of the role of

governing bodies. In describing the mechanism by which the MAT was working to implement new arrangements, the chair spoke of MAT officers and head teachers doing the planning and execution and that information about what was happening was passed on to chairs of local governing bodies by headteachers following the regular (online) headteacher meetings with MAT chair and officers. The way of working that has evolved therefore seems to focus on increasingly close working between headteachers and MAT officers with governing bodies, and individual governors on the periphery almost as observers being informed but not engaged or involved in planning or decision making.

The Orchid Trust takes this even further and Gina, MAT executive director was quite blunt about how the MAT was bypassing local governing bodies (Local Advisory Committees or LACs in their terminology):

> *'the governing elements of the lockdown have all been through the Trust Board and the LACs have had very little or no involvement such that we are reviewing our governance structure'*. (Gina, executive director, Orchid Trust)

Here there is no indication that governing bodies are even being informed about MAT plans and actions, but that the MAT centrally has taken on planning and directing the work of all MAT schools. Gina also says *'so it may have helped to streamline some functions that are not efficient'*. Perhaps suggesting that the new ways of working and the more direct control is attractive as a future model of operating and facilitates the business logic of efficiency. Related to this is a question about the extent of involvement of MAT board members. All responses talked about the way in which MAT officers and headteachers were involved and worked together but there were no references to the involvement of board members other than the chair. This may be an indication that the tendency, noted in the earlier data, of MAT business being dominated by officers is being amplified or it may be a reflection of what MAT officers perceive as the need for rapid action in a fast moving and uncertain crisis situation.

The rethinking of school-level governance is not necessarily a new trend that has emerged during the pandemic response. In his original interview, the Basil, CEO of the Heath trust also discussed the possible removal of individual school governing bodies. *'We are also wrestling with should we get rid of governing bodies in the*

traditional way and replace them with parent hubs' It may be that the idea of moving away from individual school governing bodies, as a way of streamlining operations and concentrating power, is something that has been an area of thinking and speculation within MAT boards but is coming into sharper and more immediate focus as MATs observe the impact of new ways of working brought about by their pandemic responses. In a situation of new challenges, fast and frequently changing advice from government and public health agencies and a requirement for very different ways of working, it may be that existing processes of school governance come under pressure and are modified, suspended or bypassed in favour of a management approach perceived by MAT officers to be conducive to fast and decisive decision making.

7.4 The advantages of being part of a MAT suggested by respondents

The email responses from the Iris Trust suggest that respondents valued being part of a MAT with an ability to build on close relationships already established amongst a supportive and tight knit group of schools. In a crisis, or indeed other circumstances, such advantages might of course accrue from another kind of school grouping too. Thomson (2020) highlights some of the many local responses involving schools and groupings of local agencies working together against a backdrop of urgent need and lack of government support and clarity. Jocinda, headteacher at Gentian school in the Iris Trust found this support and close working emphasised and strengthened her supportive view of the MAT:

> *'I have always valued the support of being in a MAT, but the impact of the support is and has been immeasurable and something I truly value.*
>
> *As a MAT everyone has pulled together to ensure that government guidance has been followed and implemented to ensure that our schools are doing everything possible for our families and community.'* (Jocinda, Headeacher, Gentian School, Iris Trust)

As Jocinda acknowledges, the pandemic has faced school leaders with unprecedented challenges *('the last several weeks have provided challenges that I could never of anticipated in my wildest dreams or thoughts!')* so it is perhaps understandable that joint working within what she perceived as a supportive professional network across a relatively small group of schools in relatively close geographical proximity is described as having been supportive in meeting the requirements and demand the crisis has placed on schools.

7.5 Communication during the pandemic

All respondents stressed that communication with parents, children and students had been a major concern and a focus of their efforts in responding to the emergency. This was primarily concerned with establishing and communicating arrangements for remote learning. This involved preparing materials for use online, finding channels to communicate remotely with parents and children about use of on-line materials, developing regular communications and follow up with individual children and finding ways to conduct existing planned activity, such as primary/secondary transition days and parents' evenings, using various communication technologies. There was an emphasis in the responses about identifying and maintaining contact with vulnerable children, especially those who did not attend schools which were open for vulnerable and key workers' children. Across the two MATs who responded, this issue would seem to have been treated with priority and importance. Jerry, Iris Trust chair explained:

> *'Since lockdown began in March, all schools have been open for the children of key workers and the vulnerable. The vulnerable were contacted twice each week.'* (Jerry, Chair, Iris Trust)

 At Gentian School, which serves an area with high levels of disadvantage and has significant numbers of vulnerable children, the headteacher reported that home visits were being used to supplement 'phone calls (although she didn't clarify how that fitted in with social distancing protocols and Covid 19 risk assessments). And Gina of the Orchid Trust stresses the focus on communication:

'We have had to really concentrate on the communication strategy … Each school sends a staff and parent bulletin out every Friday with lots of info on it – the Nettle School one runs to 30 pages !!' (Gina, Executive Director, Orchid Trust)

Leona, the Orchid Trust chair emphasis the personalised elements of this focus on communication; *'The teachers also ring pupils to see how they are going and set all work.'* This increased communication and contact with parents and students has led to tensions and Gina reported that the Orchid Trust was having to deal carefully but firmly with what she felt were unrealistic parental expectations of what could be provided by the MAT's schools:

'It has been tricky managing parental expectations – virtual lesson, zoom , teams and even one parent asking us to organise virtual social interaction for their child and we have had to stand firm in our approach and ensure the welfare of the staff.' (Gina, Executive Director, Orchid Trust)

Perhaps inevitably the increased communication with parents and families has brought wider use of social media, particularly by parents, both to contact and communicate with schools but also to discuss and share views and information amongst the online community. This is proving challenging in some circumstances where rumours and comment spread very quickly and there is a suggestion in the Orchid Trust that they need to improve how they monitor social media and manage it, both as a tool for communication but also to counter and rebut misinformation. As Gina at the Orchid Trust describes it:

'Social media – increased use of twitter – but still getting the moans on facebook !!! this has required more monitoring in order to quickly move on something that is the doing the rounds !!!' (Gina, Executive Director, Orchid Trust)

Whilst there are clearly issues about parental expectations and the realities of what schools can continue to do within the limitations imposed by the pandemic crisis, there are suggestions that the work done by schools, particularly in the Iris Trust, is valued highly by parents. According to Jerry the Chair, the range of unsolicited positive feedback from parents is leading him to consider how feedback, comments

and views can be gathered systematically and a redesign of the MAT website to improve this and direct communication from the MAT to parents is being investigated.

There is also a suggestion that good communication with parents and children is helping to help allay fears and build confidence about returning to school.

7.6 Summary: some effects of MAT response to crisis

This brief review of additional data gathered from two of the three case study MATs has identified four areas in which the pandemic and responses to it might be having an impact on how MATs both understand and engage with the communities they serve.

Firstly, is the question of the balance of power between the central MAT structure and individual school local governing bodies. What the data here might suggest is that in a situation requiring quick responses to new and very challenging circumstances in an uncertain and fast changing environment, MATs are using their full legal powers to make plans and decisions and direct schools in their implementation. In one case this is through MAT officers, the MAT chair and headteachers working together in what might be described as collegial fashion. In the other instance (the Orchid Trust), the responses suggest a more directive approach with central MAT officers making decisions and giving instructions in a very hierarchical command and control fashion. However, in both cases what is interesting is the lack of any report or mention of the involvement and engagement of local governing bodies, either collectively or as individual governors. In one response it is clear that this has prompted explicit thinking about the need for such local governing structures at a school level and the advantages of concentrating power in the central MAT. Whilst this is not an explicit feature of the other MAT's responses, what is noticeable is the lack of any mention of how governing bodies or governors have featured in the MAT's pandemic planning and action; the descriptions of collegial; working between MAT and schools does not include governors or communities.

Secondly, is the way in which being part of a MAT and being able to draw on and be supported by it has strengthened the value placed on MAT membership. This is only recorded in the response from one head teacher, but the way in which dealing with the crisis as part of the MAT is described gives a strong indication that the experience of managing the pandemic has brought schools together and created a stronger sense of loyalty and greater understanding of the value of a MAT for an individual school. This sense of loyalty may of course have been generated in many groupings of schools at local level and is not necessarily a function of the existence of a MAT.

Communication with the parent and student communities is the third aspect that can be drawn out from the responses. The data suggests that there has been considerable thought about communication strategy and communication channels. Interestingly this has been consideration by the MAT centrally and the role of local governing bodies and governors does not feature. Community involvement here is framed as problematic; false rumours on social media for example. This can be interpreted as conceptualising the community in terms of something which requires control and management.

The final aspect that can be drawn from this data is the role of the MAT and its schools in meeting wider community needs. There is discussion of enhanced response to hardship and family difficulties by individual schools and an indication of MATs taking a greater role in wellbeing, welfare and safeguarding. Alongside this are suggestions of a concentration of power in the central MAT, whether this is through a closer collegial working between MAT officers and headteachers or a more hierarchical line management of schools by the MAT, the role of local governance at a school level and connection with communities could be diminished.

Chapter 8

Conclusions and Implications

8.1 Introduction: summary of the study

The study has examined how MATs and their constituent schools both understand and engage with the communities in which they are located and which they serve. In order to do so, it utilised a case study methodology. The case study focused on three MATs and used interviews to gather data on the views, ideas, and thoughts of senior MAT personnel, both executive roles (CEO's/executive directors and headteachers of some constituent schools) and non-executive trustees (Chairs of MAT Boards). These data were interpreted to construct understandings and conceptualisations of the following aspects. Firstly, the thesis engaged in an 'inward-looking' exploration of the ways in which community and communities were understood and conceptualised, how these were (or were not) engaged with and the range of interests within communities which were given voice and influence. This exploration then focused on how power, control and autonomy operated within the MATs. Secondly, the thesis engaged in an 'outward facing' exploration of the ways in which the MATs in the case study were held accountable, how they exercised accountability and to whom they were accountable. Thirdly and finally, the thesis explored how the use of the discourse of neo-colonialism can be mobilised to explain the ways in which MATs relate to their constituent schools and communities in which they are involved as a domestic form of neo-colonial practice.

Underpinning the examination of these issues and constructing the interpretations set out in chapters four to seven runs the question of democracy and democratic modes of governance and working; and the extent to which democracy is evident, absent, embraced, undermined, or denied. This chapter reflects on the findings and discussion set out in the analysis chapters in relation to: the research questions investigated by the study; the question of democracy and the importance, actuality and potential of democratic working and democratic modes of community

engagement and governance; and alternatives to the narratives of neoliberalism and neo-colonialism identified in the analysis and interpretation of the interview data.

8.2 Implications for school governance, community engagement and accountability in the case study MATs

This section examines the implications of the findings and analysis in the study for governance, community engagement and accountability. In doing so, it reflects on the ways in which the study responds to the overall research question posed in Section 3.1. and the more detailed research questions one, two and three as follows.

What are the implications of academy status and the creation of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) for school governance, relations and engagement with communities and the accountability of schools in England?

Research question one: What are the factors, forces and mechanisms driving the changes in school governance, community engagement and accountability in the three case study MATs?

Research question two: What are the consequences of the governance arrangements in the case study MATs for the way decisions are made and the influence of community interest and voices have on these decisions?

Research question three: How are the case study MATs accountable to their communities and what factors and forces shape this accountability?

The analysis of data from the case study MATs does not suggest any legislative compulsion as a factor in the changes wrought to governance, accountability, and community engagement. What can be constructed is a neoliberal climate which promotes a presumption in favour of the changes discussed in the analysis (chapters four to six. The elements of the climate can be characterised as push and pull factors influencing the changes put in place by the MATs. There does not appear to be any coherent policy direction providing the impetus to this climate, but it is characterised by the presence and strong influence of components of the neo-liberal logics of business and markets and a data-driven performative and surveillance culture. Ball's

(2018: 220) review of what he calls the 'tragedy of state education in England' characterises this climate as a

> 'contemporary education apparatus is set within the second liberalism (neoliberalism), a mixture of reluctance, penny-pinching, and necessity (political and economic) driven by a factory-based model of performance management that is high-stakes testing.'

The push factors of reducing local authority capacity, capability, and motivation to support schools, the lure of additional resources in a time of austerity and squeezed budgets together with a desire to have local control of their own destinies in a time of uncertainty and a desire to build on and extend existing partnerships and collaborations across groups of local schools are all components of the climate found in the case study. A sense of inertia, and even inevitability of the academisation of the schooling system is also a feature of this climate.

There is a strong sense in the three case study MATs of having entered an unknown and almost alien world upon conversion to academy status and formation of a MAT. There is a sense in which a threshold or portal has been crossed which then demands the acquisition of new ways of working and new ways of being, both organisationally and for individuals. The sense of being adrift and having to learn new approaches to navigation is palpable. What is also striking is the realisation amongst some respondents that the organisational procedures, ways of working and relationships, as well as individual attitudes, approaches, and skills and even values and convictions no longer hold good in this new world. The neo-liberal hegemony of the world beyond the conversion threshold requires the abandonment of representational and inclusive forms of governance and supplanting them with corporatist and market lead approaches. MATs and their schools are recast as corporate business organisations operating in a marketplace with close attention required to competitors, organisational reputation, and risk management. The language of business, finance and audit becomes the lingua franca. Community is transformed from a collective space of active participation and citizen engagement in shaping the purpose and nature of schooling to a collection of atomised individual consumers in a marketplace.

The embrace (willing or forced by circumstance and expectation) of these neo-liberal logics is expressed in the language of rapid immersion requiring quick adaptation, shock to the system and steep learning curve. Having gone through this neo-liberal shock, other factors become part of the ensemble of practices and attitudes. At this point the ensemble becomes enmeshed with a neo-colonial discourse; both that of the civilising mission and benevolent intervention into schools and communities, and the language of takeover, control, and resource acquisition. In all of this, the priority becomes pursuit of sustaining the finances and organisation of the MAT rather than educational objectives or community benefit.

The other factor at work in influencing changes is the view(s) and conceptions of community that can be assembled from the case study MAT respondents and their understanding of the history of school and community relationships. There is a neo-liberal construction of community as a collection of consumers in a marketplace to whom the MAT provides services and with whom the necessary relationship is that shaped by marketing, but interestingly lacking the increasingly sophisticated and digitally driven market research, market segmentation, and consumer profiling that now drives much commercial activity. In the case study MATs, consumers are regarded as passive and requiring only one way transmission of basic information and not as stakeholders in a business who can contribute to shaping service design or who can contribute valuable insights and ideas to help evaluate effectiveness and shape the future service offer. Inherent in this is a hierarchical view of school community relationships which is rooted in pattern of relations which sees the purpose of schooling as controlling and oppressive and those running schools as, in Ball's words (2020: 873)

> 'state actors and enactors of the state, bringing the gaze of the state to bear upon individual bodies and the population as a whole. Schools via their particular 'arbitrary cruelties' were to assume their intermediary socialising and civilising role between family and work'

This paradigm of school as a superior and controlling force meshes with a neo-colonial discourse as the dominant construction of the MAT's relationship to community. There is relatively little evidence of other traditions and interpretations, for example that of school as a force for liberation and empowerment of community

and the teacher as 'technician of hope' (in Ball's words) and agent of social justice constructing an organisation to challenge and overcome the injustices experienced by communities through the actions and inactions of an oppressive state and the neo-liberal economic order.

Nationally, there has been much attention on the directive forces of the state compelling the conversion of schools to academy status as part of a MAT. For example, Mansell (2016: 22) and Male (2019: 9) outline the pervasiveness and opacity of this process as carried out by RSCs and the regional headteacher boards. Miller (2108: 68), cites Kevan Collins, former DCS in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (and government adviser on post-pandemic education recovery) who describes the way this process operates as the 'politics of disruption'. This directive approach is largely applied as a solution to schools deemed to be failing (as identified through the inspection process and its aftermath). In the official language of the DfE, such academy conversion is deemed 'sponsored' since the school being compelled to convert must have a sponsor in the form of a MAT to take it over. Harking back to the earlier discussion of the elision of colonial and academisation language in chapter six, this process moves directly to the 'trusteeship' of take-over by a MAT, missing out the process of influence and persuasion implied in 'conversion'

Greany and Higham (2018: 15) argue that this process is located within business and corporate logics and is analogous to the process of 'acquisition and merger' as MATs jostle for position and seek to grow through acquiring more schools by the use of strategies of business growth seen in the commercial world. This study suggests that the process can also be located in neo-colonial discourse, with MATs taking over the territory, subjects (in the form of staff, children, young people and families) and resources of a school to secure and advance their own financial standing and reputation. This neo-colonial takeover also encompasses an ontological colonisation as MATs seek to impose their version of 'superior' knowledge, values and modes of organisation. New staff are brought in (in a process characterised in the case study as bringing in a 'new regime'), curricula are modified and changed in line with the MATs view of both what is superior and in the best interests of the colonised school, and resources transferred to the central MAT. The civilising mission is a further crucial component of this process of colonisation, in which schools and communities

are portrayed as a problematic 'other' lacking the necessary knowledge, competencies, and values to address difficulties themselves and in need of benevolent intervention from the MAT.

The more directive process of school takeover through sponsorship is not a feature of the creation of the three case study MATs (although such take over through sponsorship becomes a feature of two of the three MATs expansion plans). They have come about through choice, the 'converter' route in DfE parlance, a route reserved for schools deemed to be performing well as judged by inspection. The study suggests that the choice of the case study MATs to convert has resulted in significant change in governance, community engagement and accountability that was not fully understood or foreseen in advance. It is as if the crossing of the threshold into the MAT sector opened a door into a new world of which little was known or understood. This lack of understanding of the changes that would be required perhaps indicates a degree of naivety on the part of those MAT officers in the case study but could also indicate the extent to which the state (in the form of the DfE and its regional officials and agencies) maintains an opaqueness and lack of clarity about what happens following conversion.

In the case study MATs, there was no suggestion of force being exerted in the ways experienced by sponsored academies. Instead, through engagement with RSC, ESFA, legal advisers, support agencies, consultants, and others the case study MATs were channelled in a particular direction which concludes with one approved and acceptable model for governance and accountability arrangements. Governance is a corporate model based on privileging business skills and removing connection with community. Accountability is hierarchical and exercised through judgement of performance against externally derived metrics. This process is conducted in such a way as to be experienced as supportive and helpful to novices in the sector, rather than the application of force. The process is lubricated by funding to offset legal costs and access to experts on contracts, property, insurance, risk, and other technical matters, but it is a one-way street that narrows to a single lane as it approaches the end; once conversion has been agreed there is no going back, discussion is about implementing the detail only. Case study MATs perceived this experience as supportive, helping them to navigate unfamiliar territory rather than a forceful imposition, even though the result was some significant shifts in models of

governance from a representational model to a more exclusive corporate arrangement with no community accountability.

8.3 Power, promises, contracts, and the denial of democracy

This section explores the implications of the findings and analysis in the thesis for the use of power, power relations and the denial of democracy by the processes of academisation and MAT formation. In doing so, it reflects on research question four; what is the significance of the findings from research questions one, two and three in furthering the understanding of how concepts of power, democracy and ideology influence the governance of MATs and their engagement with communities?

The forces at work amongst the case study MATs could be said to be a manifestation of Lukes' third dimension of power; the state and its actors and agencies secure their desired outcomes in governance and accountability by convincing schools that the changes are in their own interests and arise from their own choices. The power is here a strategy of state actors and agencies to secure compliance with the neo-liberal corporatist and business logics through the MAT officers and schools in the case study, as Lukes (2005: 106) puts it, being

> 'enlisted into wider patterns of normative control. Often acting as their own 'overseers', while believing themselves, sometime falsely, to be free of power, making their own choices, pursuing their own interests, assessing arguments rationally and coming to their own conclusions'

The mechanism employed in the narrowing lanes of the one-way street post conversion is that of the 'technologies of government that may lead to a state of domination.' (Ball 2013: 121). Domination, as Foucault suggests (1980:142) is not monolithic or a 'binary structure with 'dominators' on one side and 'dominated', on the other, but rather a 'multiform production or relations of domination which are partially susceptible of integration into overall strategies.'   Foucault (1994/2020:337) defines the kind of power at work here as 'relationships between "partners" … an ensemble of actions that induce others and follow from one another'. He suggests (1977: 194) that power exercised in this way is not something negative that

represses and forcibly coerces, but 'power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.' The case study MATs feel they are participating in the exercise of choice and the structural arrangements and compromises they are being shepherded toward are not only acceptable but right and proper to fulfil their ambitions; they constitute the MAT's 'rituals of truth'. Whilst they may be frustrated by the way the mechanisms work and the processes by which these changes are brought about, they are content with the outcomes and prepared to live with the contradictions. As Lukes (2005:150) puts it willing and unwilling compliance to domination are not mutually exclusive 'one can *consent* to power and *resent* the mode of its exercise'.

The idea of promise has been central to the developing policy framework of academisation and its enactment since 2010. Widespread academisation of schools was promoted by the then Prime Minister, David Cameron and Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, on the promise of greater freedom from central control and bureaucratic interference. Schools, and more specifically teachers (and in this context meaning headteachers) would be free to use their unique knowledge and expertise to provide education free form external interference. They would have complete control over the deployment of budgets, staffing, and resources no longer bound by local and national restrictions such as the national curriculum and national conditions of service. Those in local authorities, higher education and the infrastructure of educational research, administration and support who sought to influence and direct how schools operated were labelled 'enemies of promise' by Michael Gove (Gove 2013).

Arendt asserts (1958: 244) that the function of promise is to counter the unpredictability of the future and create 'islands of certainty in an ocean of uncertainty.' The power of making promises plays a significant role in politics and social structures as evident in the long history of covenant and contract over many centuries and provides the bedrock of many current legal, commercial, and social frameworks. In the case of the academy programme, the power of promise has been operationalised through the use of individual contracts, known as funding agreements, between each academy and the Secretary of State to govern their operation, rather than any primary legislation established through democratic means. With the advent of MATs, these funding agreements are now between the Secretary

of State and the MAT as a corporate body rather than individual academies. As West and Wolfe (2019: 74) explain, this approach has led to widespread variation and fragmentation in the sector: 'While academies are often talked about generically, there is considerable variation between them as a result of their contractual arrangements.' They explain that changing circumstances and shifts in political approaches and priorities with regard to academies means that, despite model agreements being introduced,

> 'as different types of academies have been introduced, multiple models have emerged; these were only applied to the funding agreements under negotiation at a specific time, with different models applying at different times.'

The sector is therefore characterised by many individual academies and MATs, each with its own contractual relationship with the state, creating a situation in which schools in the same area can be governed by different rules and rendering democratic engagement in the process of oversight impossible. Arendt (1958: 244) points to a wider concern about the proliferation of contracts as the mechanism by which institutions are governed and relationships are managed, rather than through the rule of law and popular sovereignty. She argues that when the faculty of promise is misused 'to cover the whole ground of the future and to map out a path secured in all directions, they lose their binding power and the whole enterprise becomes self-defeating'.

This is leading to a remaking of the English system of schooling into a patchwork of individual academies and MATs containing many variations in models of governance and contractual relationships with the state. This is overseen by a national and regional bureaucratic superstructure of the DfE and its agencies and associated NGOs. There is no geographical, strategic, or local community logic in the way schools are incorporated into MATs and the kind of school provided in a particular area. As Ball (2018: 209) observes, the kind of schooling available depends only on where you live, not on any assessment of needs or community priorities. This patchwork develops in a random, ad hoc, and incoherent fashion without any reference to local conditions or needs. In an echo of the neo-colonial discourse and the legacy of imperialism, discussed in chapter six, this uncoordinated and ad hoc

growth and development has a similarity with the seemingly random way in which the British empire grew.

Such an ad hoc patchwork works against a democratic polity and enshrines an approach to governance that Arendt (2017: 241) terms 'a bureaucracy as a substitute for government.' This bureaucratic patchwork is overseen and managed by bureaucrats who, in Arendt's terms 'shun every general law, handling each situation separately by decree because a law's stability threatens to establish a permanent community in which no one could possibly be a god because all would have to obey a law' (2017: 282). The contractual framework of state relationships with MATs avoids and prevents the creation of the kind of inclusive community suggested by Arendt. It actively forecloses the opportunities for democratic engagement of citizens and communities in governance and instead privileges atomised, market-led, coporatised, and bureaucratic control of schools as part of the process of their colonisation and takeover by MATs. The inescapable irony here is that the academy programme was promoted and based on a promise of schools freeing themselves from overbearing bureaucratic control.

8.4 Alternative Narratives?

8.4.1 The possibilities for resistance and alternative narratives

Alongside the pervasive influence and impact of neoliberal business logics and the discourse of neo-colonialism constructed in the analysis and interpretation of the interview data, there is a strong sense from some of the headteacher respondents of a commitment and orientation to more liberatory and emancipatory modes of working, conceptualising schooling as a means of encouraging and supporting children, young people and families. Examining how these possibilities play out in the case study MATs provides a response to research question five (what potential practices might be developed in the governance of MATS to enhance community engagement and democratic accountability?)

Shajahan (2012: 7) reminds us that, 'staff do not fit neatly into the neoliberal model of performance-based selves.' It is therefore not simply a matter of accepting or

rejecting a neoliberal discourse and its attendant arrangements, for according to Fuller (2019: 32) 'a conceptualisation of resistance as complex and fluid requires a nuanced analysis rather than a binarised approach that identifies headteachers as either compliant or resistant' The alternative orientations of some headteachers would seem to arise from beliefs and values of the individuals concerned rather than MAT policy or direction. In that sense it is perhaps useful to suggest an inversion of Davie's (2015: 78) characterisation of religious belief and affiliation in Britain; the notion of believing without belonging. In the case of some headteachers it would seem to be a case of belonging to a MAT without necessarily believing in them as an article of faith.

The analysis also suggests the possibilities of resistance to the neo-liberal and neo-colonial discourse. As Foucault reminds us (1984/2020: 245) 'aside from torture and execution, which preclude any resistance, no matter how terrifying a given system may be, there always remain the possibilities of resistance, disobedience, and oppositional groupings.' Shajahan (2011: 183) points out that the discourse of neo-colonialism is not one way; there is both the potential and actuality of resistance. He discusses the theoretical framework offered by anti-colonialism and remarks that

> 'colonial power is not always absolute. Such theorizing recognizes that the colonized have the power and discourse to resist these colonial relationships … It argues for heterogeneity and difference as a mode of resistance to homogenizing forces of colonial power, that construct sameness in order to overlook and consolidate power.'

Said (1994) stresses that there are two sides to questions and experience of empire and imperialism and devotes a substantial portion of 'Culture and Imperialism' to dealing with the historical experience of resistance against empire. Resistance was both: long lived, developing in tandem with colonisation and empire to the extent that it was an 'organic part of the imperial experience' (253); and more than just a reaction to imperialism, it became an alternative way of conceiving human history and relationships (276). He stresses the importance of narrative: 'The power to narrate or block other narratives from forming and emerging is very important to culture and imperialism' (xv). Part of the analysis of the case study data therefore

involves the construction of narratives that challenge and offer alternatives to the neo-colonial discourse. Creation of these alternatives involves identifying and using gaps in the official discourse, or what Fuller (2019: 44) citing Bhabha (1994) terms third spaces which allow for

> 'ambivalence, ambiguity and compromise. It is necessarily both confusing and creative. Headteachers read between the lines of reforms to play, reappropriate, mask and reinvent; to interpret and translate policy reforms in the context of a particular school'

The next section offers two examples of this process at work, constructed from the analysis of the interview with Jocasta one of the case study headteachers

8.4.2 Co-constructing knowledge

Chapter six examined how the case study interview data suggested a neo-colonial discourse in the way superior knowledge was imposed from outside the constituent schools of a MAT. Jocasta, headteacher at Betony, a secondary school in the Heath Trust, spoke about a different epistemological process when asked to give examples of changes coming about through engagement with the student community at the school.

'It's difficult to be very concrete in the sense that I can probably give lots of examples but essentially the feedback that comes back from students informs CPD, so it informs staff development and informs how staff then deliver lessons and that can be on a really wide range. So on a really simplistic level students in one subject area say that, say for Science for example, there is not enough practical work, they are not doing enough experiments, there is too much writing, okay so you need to pick on that because there needs to be some writing, but you are hearing something there about actually the practical work really excites and engages, so then the Science team need to look at their schemes of learning and think right, where are these opportunities, where do we need to build more in and how do we improve the scheme of learning through having listened to young people.' (Jocasta, Headteacher, Heath Trust)

Jocasta is suggesting that knowledge about teaching, a core purpose of the school, is co-constructed through engagement with students and that this knowledge is both powerful and influential because it seeks to inform and prompt change in the way teachers operate via the school's programme of CPD. The implication of what Jocasta says is that knowledge is constructed by the school community instead of or as well as being imposed externally. She says that this is 'really simplistic' but it offers a quite significant and different model to that of superior knowledge discussed in section 6.5 of chapter six. Far from 'monocultures of the mind', she is perhaps describing the kind of heterogeneity discussed by Shajahan and thereby offering an illustration of resistance to the neo-colonial discourse.

8.4.3 Find the gap: dialogue and tactics

Jocasta also spoke about how this process of knowledge construction and the attendant dialogue influenced the local governing body.

'However, … that conversation then that stimulates discussion in itself and I personally report to governors in each meeting and that means then that also stimulates discussion. And I meet with the Chair of governors very regularly so we will set the agenda in the sense of yes you have got to cover X, Y and Z but are there any issues that we need to raise or other things that we need to make a decision on, and interestingly that's often organic.'

INT: So tell me more about that?

'In the sense that it comes out of conversation and dialogue, so I suppose like I said, to some extent I am setting the agenda with the Chair of governors I do have quite a steer, but meetings are open and they are informal in the sense that there is lots of room for conversation and for asking questions and from those questions then some people will say, well what about this or have you considered that or there is something in the local community there have you thought about? …. So it's not as structured as saying we are going this way down a straight line.' (Jocasta, Headteacher, Heath Trust)

What is perhaps suggested here by Jocasta is the creation and utilisation of a space within the formal structures of governance imposed by the MAT; a utilisation which seeks to privilege the heterogeneous dialogue and knowledge co-created with the school community. The resulting process fills those spaces in a way that is 'often organic' implying perhaps that is more in the nature of a kind of tactical working within the spaces of the established order of power (De Certeau 1984: 37). What Jocasta's suggests is that resistance and alternative epistemologies to those of the neo-colonial discourse are possible by the use of what De Certeau describes as 'tactics' exploiting the spaces within the central power of a MAT, which despite its centralising tendencies cannot extinguish all vestiges of local control.

8.5 Conclusion

This final section highlights and summarises a number of important implications from the study, and which underpin the claim to an original contribution to knowledge. Firstly, the dominance and influence of the discourses of neo-liberalism and neo-colonialism and their power as an explanatory framework for the ways in which MATs conceptualise and manage their relations with constituent schools and communities. The pervasive influence of these discourses infiltrate and repurpose the professional expertise, personal values and moral positions of those leading MATs in ways which favour the colonisation of schooling by neo-liberal corporate and market logics.

Secondly, the shift towards hierarchical forms of accountability, with answerability only to the bureaucratic structures of the DfE and its agencies, tends to marginalise communities. The associated use of data driven performance assessment becomes a mechanism to impose control on constituent schools and determine the degree to which they are allowed autonomy to manage their own affairs. The dominance of hierarchical accountability denies the possibilities for developing accountability as a reciprocal relation with the communities involved in and served by MATs and their schools.

Thirdly, the importance of spaces, tactics, and oppositional groupings to construct alternative narratives which subvert the hegemony of neo-liberal modes of schooling, and which might form the basis for different visions of the relationship with communities and democratic engagement.

Fourthly, to restate the point made elsewhere in this thesis that neo-liberal and neo-colonial discourse infiltrates and reshapes the noble motivations and intentions of individual actors within MATs, destabilising professional identities and personal values and reconstituting them in the form of the 'entrepreneurial subject' (Thompson et al 2020: 6). These discourses with their hierarchical accountabilities, performance pressures and compliance mechanisms steer individual behaviours in ways which comply with the requirements of the marketised neo-liberal formation of schooling.

Finally, a self-reflexive comment on the personal impact of the process of researching and writing this thesis. From a starting point of belonging but by no means believing in MATs, I have come to what I hope is a critically informed understanding of the flaws in the current dispensation of English schooling and the ways in which it forecloses and denies democratic futures and diminishes the prospects for an education that encourages human flourishing.

References

Anderson, B. (1983), *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* London, Verso.

Andreotti, V. (2011), *Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan

Andrews, K. (2021), *The New Age of Empire: How Racism and Colonialism Still Rule the World,* London, Allen Lane.

Arendt, H. (1951/2017), *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, London, Penguin Classics.

Arendt, H. (1958), *The Human Condition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Arendt, H. (2000), *The Portable Hannah Arendt,* New York, Penguin

Arendt, H. (2006), *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*, London, Penguin

Atkinson, P. A. & Coffey, A. (1997). Analysing documentary realities. In Silverman, D. (Ed.), *Qualitative research: Theory, method and practice*, London: Sage, pp 45 - 62.

Ball, S. J., (2003), The Teachers Soul and the Terrors of Performativity in *Journal of Education Policy* 18:2, pp 215 – 228.

Ball, S. J. (2009), Privatising education, privatising education policy, privatising educational research: network governance and the 'competition state' in *Journal of Education Policy* Vol 24 (1) pp. 83-99.

Ball, S. J. (2013), *Foucault, Power and Education*, New York, Routledge.

Ball, S. J. (2017), *The Education Debate*, (third edition), Bristol, Policy Press.

Ball, S. J. (2018), The tragedy of state education in England: Reluctance, compromise and muddle - a system in disarray in *Journal of the British Academy*, 6**,** 207–238. DOI https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/006.207

Ball, S. J. (2020), The errors of redemptive sociology or giving up on hope and despair, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*,41:6, pp 870-880, DOI:10.1080/01425692.2020.1755230

Barber, B. (2003), *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age*, twentieth anniversary edition, California, University of California Press.

Baxter, J. A. & Cornforth, C (2021) Governing collaborations: how boards engage with their communities in multi-academy trusts in England, *Public Management Review*, 23:4, 567-589, DOI: 10.1080/14719037.2019.1699945

Benn, M. (2012), *School Wars: the battle for Britain's education*, London, Verso.

Bennington, J. (2011), From Private Choice to Public Value in Bennington, J. and Moore, M. (eds) (2011), *Public Value: Theory and Practice*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Bennington, J. and Moore, M. (2011), Public Value in Complex and Changing Times in Bennington, J. and Moore, M. (eds) (2011), *Public Value: Theory and Practice*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Berlant, L., (2011), *Cruel Optimism*, Durham, North Carolina, Duke University Press

Biesta, G. J. J. (2010), *Good Education in an Age of Measurement: Ethics, Politics and Democracy*, Abingdon, Routledge.

Biesta, G.J.J. (2006), *Beyond Learning: democratic education for a human future*, Boulder, Paradigm Publishers.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V (2013*), Successful Qualitative Research: a Practical Guide for Beginners*, London, Sage.

Brinkman, S., (2017, *Philosophies of Qualitative Research*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Brinkman, S. and Kvale, S., *Doing Interviews* (second edition), London, Sage

British Educational Research Association (2018) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*, fourth edition, London, BERA. https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/ethicalguidelines-for-educational-research-2018

Brown, W. (2019), *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West*, New York, Columbia University Press

Carr, W. and Hartnett, A. (1996), *Education and the Struggle for Democracy: the politics of educational ideas*, Buckingham, Open University Press.

Chew, A. W., (2020), Informed Guessing: enacting abductively-driven research, *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*, Vol. 43, no. 2, pp 189–200., https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2019.1626818

Clarke, M., (2018), Democracy and education: 'In spite of it all' *Power and Education*, Vol. 10(2) 112–124, DOI: 10.1177/1757743818756915

Clough, P. and Nutbrown, C. (2012) *A Students Guide to Methodology* (Third Edition), London, Sage.

Courtney, S. J., (2017), The courtier's empire: a case study of providers and provision, in *Corporate Elites and the Reform of Public Education*, Gunter, H. M., Hall, D. and Apple, M. W. (eds), pp 177 – 189, Bristol, Bristol University Press; Policy Press.

Courtney, S.J. and Gunter, H. M. (2015) Get Off My Bus: School leaders, vision work and the elimination of teachers, *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 18:4,395-417, DOI: 10.1080/13603124.2014.992476

Courtney, S. J. and McGinity, R. (2020), System leadership as depoliticisation: Reconceptualising educational leadership in a new Multi-Academy Trust. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1741143220962101

Creswell, J. W. (2007) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Second Edition), Thousand Oaks, California, Sage.

Crotty, M. (1998) *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*, London, Sage.

Davie, G. (2015), *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox* (second edition), Chichester, John Wiley.

Davies, W. (2017), *The Limits of Neoliberalism: Authority, Sovereignty and the Logic of Competition*, London, Sage.

De Certeau, M. (1984), *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley California, University of California Press

Denscombe, M. (2002) *Ground Rules for Good Research: a 10 point guide for social researchers*, Buckingham, Open University Press

Denscombe, M. (2017) *The Good Research Guide for Small-Scale Research Projects* (Sixth Edition), London Open, University Press.

Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (2011) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Forth Edition), Thousand Oaks, California, Sage.

Department for Education, (2010), *The Importance of Teaching: The Schools White Paper Cm 7980*, London, HM Government

Department for Education, (2016), *Education Excellence Everywhere Cm 9230*, London, HM Government

De Tocqueville, A. (1835/2003), *Democracy in America*, London, Penguin

Devine, T. M., (2018), *The Scottish Clearances: A History of the Dispossessed 1600 – 1900*, UK, Penguin.

Dewey, J. *Democracy and Education: an Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, USA, Feather Trail Press.

Eatwell, R. and Goodwin, M. (2018), *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy*, UK, Pelican Books.

Eddo-Lodge, R., (2018), *Why I'm No Longer Talking To White People About Race*, London, Bloomsbury.

Eisner, E. W. and Peshkin, A. (eds) (1990) *Qualitative Inquiry in Education: The Continuing Debate*, New York, Teachers College Press.

Fanon, F. (1963), *The Wretched of the Earth*, London, Penguin

Fielding, M., (2012) Education as if people matter: John Macmurray, community and the struggle for democracy, *Oxford Review of Education*, 38:6, pp 675-692, DOI:10.1080/03054985.2012.745044

Fielding, M. and Moss, P. (2011), *Radical Education and the Common School. A Democratic Alternative,* Abingdon, Routledge.

Fitter, R., Fitter, A. and Blamey, M., (1974), *The Wildflowers of Britain and Northern Europe*, London, Collins.

Foucault, M. (1977), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, London, Penguin.

Foucault, M. (1980), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972 – 1977*, New York, Pantheon Books

Foucault, M. (1984), Space, Knowledge and Power, in Foucault, M. (2020), *The Foucault Reader*, pp 239 – 256, UK, Penguin.

Foucault. M. (2004), *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College De France 1978 – 1979*, New York, Picador

Foucault, M. (1994/2020), *Power: Essential Works 1954 – 84 Volume Three*, UK, Penguin.

Francis, B. (2018) Foreword in Greany, T. and Higham, R. (2018), *Hierarchy, Markets and Networks. Analysing the 'self-improving school-led system' agenda in England and the implications for schools*, London, UCL Institute of Education Press.

Freire, P. (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Education.

Fryer, P. (1984), *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, London, Pluto Press.

Fullan, M. (1998), Leadership for the 21st Century: Breaking the Bonds of Dependency in *Reshaping School Leadership* Volume 55 (7) pp. 6 – 10.

Fuller, K. (2019) "That would be my red line": an analysis of headteachers' resistance of neoliberal education reforms, *Educational Review*, 71:1, 31-50, DOI:10.1080/00131911.2019.1522042

Gibb, N. (2021) https://www.smf.co.uk/events/raising-school-standards-through-a-knowledge-rich-curriculum-with-the-rt-hon-nick-gibb-mp/ Accessed 02 December 2021

Gillborn, D. (2005), Education policy as an act of white supremacy: whiteness, critical race theory and education reform, *Journal of Education Policy* Vol. 20, No. 4, pp. 485–505

Gilroy, P. (2002) *There ain't no Black in the Union Jack: the Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (new edition), London, Routledge.

Glatter, R. (2017), 'Because we can': Pluralism and structural reform in education, *London Review of Education,* Volume 15, Number 1 pp 115 – 124, DOI: https://doi.org/10.18546/LRE.15.1.10

Gove, M. (2013) https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2298146/I-refuse-surrender-Marxist-teachers-hell-bent-destroying-schools-Education-Secretary-berates-new-enemies-promise-opposing-plans.html Accessed 03 December 2021

Greany, T. and Higham, R. (2018), *Hierarchy, Markets and Networks. Analysing the 'self-improving school-led system' agenda in England and the implications for schools*, London, UCL Institute of Education Press.

The Guardian 22 April 2021 available at https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/apr/22/minister-apologises-for-black-and-asian-war-dead-commemoration-failures accessed 22 April 2021

The Guardian 3 December 2020 available at
https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/dec/03/gavin-williamson-britains-a-much-better-country-than-all-of-them accessed 19 Jan 2021

Gunter, H. M. (2014), *Educational Leadership and Hannah Arendt*, Abingdon Oxon, Routledge.

Gunter, H. M. and McGinity, R. (2014), The politics of the Academies Programme: natality and pluralism in education policy-making. *Research Papers in Education* Vol 29 (3) pp. 300-314

Hatcher, R. (2014), Local authorities and the school system: The new authority-wide partnerships. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, Vol. 42(3) pp. 355–371.

Hayward, C. and Lukes, S. (2008) Nobody to shoot? Power, Structure, and Agency: A Dialogue, *Journal of Power*, 1:1, pp 5-20, DOI: 10.1080/17540290801943364

Heisenberg, W. (1958/1989) *Physics and Philosophy*, Penguin, London.

Horner, L. and Hutton, W. (2011), Public Value, Deliberative Democracy and the Role of Public Managers in Bennington, J. and Moore, M. (eds) (2011), *Public Value: Theory and Practice*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Hulme, R., McKay, J. and Cracknell, D. (2015) From commissar to auctioneer? The changing role of directors in managing children's services in a period of austerity, *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 43 (1), pp 77–91. 10.1177/ 1741143213494886.

Institute on Governance Canada (2020), Defining Governance, Online: https://iog.ca/what-is-governance/ (Accessed 31 January 2020)

Jupp, V. (2006), Documents and Critical Research in Sapsford, R. and Jupp, V. (2006) *Data Collection and Analysis* (second edition), Sage, London.

Kamberelis, G. and Dimitriadis, G., (2005), *Qualitative Inquiry: Approaches to Language and Literacy Research*, New York, Teachers College Press.

Kotsko, A. (2018), *Neoliberalism's Demons: On the Political Theology of Late Capital*, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press.

Kulz, (2021) Everyday erosions: neoliberal political rationality, democratic decline and the Multi-Academy Trust, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 42:1, pp 66-81, DOI: 10.1080/01425692.2020.1861928

Kvale, S., (2007), *Doing Interviews*, London, Sage.

Lincoln, Y. S., (1990), Toward a Categorical Imperative for Qualitative Research in Eisner, E. W. and Peshkin, A. (eds) *Qualitative Inquiry in Education: The Continuing Debate*, pp 277 – 283, New York, Teachers College Press

Lingard, B. (2011), Policy as numbers: Ac/Counting for Educational Research *Australian. Educational. Research*, 38:355–382 DOI 10.1007/s13384-011-0041-9

Lingis, A. (1994), *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

Lowe, R. (2002) A Century of Local Education Authorities: What has been lost? *Oxford Review of Education*, 28:2-3, pp 149-158, DOI:10.1080/03054980220143333

Lukes, S. (2005) *Power: A Radical View* (second edition), London, Palgrave Macmillan.

Macmurray, J. (1999), *Persons in Relation*, New York, Humanity Books.

Male, T. (2019) *Governance in multi-academy trusts (MATs): Evidence from the field*, London, UCL, Institute for Education, London Centre for Leadership in Learning

Mansell, W. (2016) *Academies: Autonomy, Accountability, Quality and Evidence.* York, Cambridge Primary Review Trust.

McCutchen, R. T. (1999) *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: a Reader*, London, Continuum.

McMullen, R. (2016), Tread warily in this brave new academy world, Schools Week online https://schoolsweek.co.uk/tread-warily-in-this-brave-new-academy-world/ (accessed 02 June 2020).

Menzies, L., Baars, S., Bernardes, E., Theobald, K. and Kirk, C. (2017) *Report Summary Building Trusts: MAT Leadership and Coherence of Vision, Strategy and Operations*, London, Ambition School Leadership Trust

Middlewood, D., Abbott, I. and Robinson, S. (2018), *Collaborative School Leadership: managing a group of schools*, London, Bloomsbury

Miles, M. and Huberman, M. (1994), *Qualitative Data Analysis* (second edition), Thousand Oaks CA, Sage..

Miller, F. *The Best for My Child: Did the Schools Market Deliver?* Woodbridge, John Catt Educational.

Moncrieffe, J. (2011*), Relational Accountability: Complexities of Structural Injustice*, London, Zed Books.

Moore, M. (1995), *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press

National Governance Association (2019), *Moving MATs Forward: The Power of Governance*, Birmingham, National Governance Association.

Nixon, J. (2012), *Interpretive Pedagogies for Higher Education: Arendt, Berger, Said, Nussbaum and their Legacies*, London, Bloomsbury.

Nixon, J. (2015), *Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Friendship,* London, Bloomsbury.

Nixon, J. (2020) "Arendt and 'Worldliness': Education in and for a World of Difference." In Veck, W. and Gunter, H. M. *Hannah Arendt on Educational Thinking and Practice in Dark Times ,* pp 46 – 60, London, Bloomsbury Academic.

Noddings, N. (1995), *Philosophy of Education*, Boulder Colorado, Westview Press.

Papanastasiou, N. (2019), Revealing Market Hegemony through a Critical Logics Approach: The Case of England's Academy Schools Policy in Wilkins, A. and Olmedo, A. eds (2019), *Education Governance and Social Theory: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Research*, London, Bloomsbury.

Paxton, M. (2019), *Agonistic Democracy: Rethinking Political Institutions in Pluralist Times*, London, Routledge.

Polkinghorne, J. (2002) *Quantum Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Pring, R. (2000) *The Philosophy of Educational Research*, London, Continuum.

Pring, R. (2015), The Teacher as High Priest and Usherer in of the Kingdom of God, *Power and Education* Vol 7 (1) pp. 19-28

Punch, M., (1994), Politics and Ethics in Qualitative Research in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. eds, (1994), pp 83 – 97, Thousand Oaks, Sage.

Putnam, R. D., (2000), *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York, Touchstone.

Ranson, S., Arnott, M., McKeown, P.,Martin, J. and Smith, P. (2005), The participation of volunteer citizens in school governance, *Educational Review*, Vol. 57, (3), pp 357 – 371.

Ranson, S. (2012), Schools and Civil Society: corporate or community governance, *Critical Studies in Education* Vol 53 (1) pp. 29-45

Ranson S. (2018), *Education and Democratic Participation: the making of learning communities*, London, Routledge.

Richmond, T. (2019), *Trust Issues: How to bring academies and maintained schools into a unified state school system*, London, EDSK

Rizvi, F. and Lingard, B. (2010), *Globalizing Education Policy*, Abingdon, Routledge.

Rodney, W. (1972), *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, London, Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications.

Roman, L. G. and Apple, M. W. (1990) Is Naturalism a Move Away from Positivism? Materialist and Feminist Approaches to Subjectivity in Ethnographic Research in Eisner, E. W. and Peshkin, A eds. (1990) *Qualitative Inquiry in Education: the Continuing Debate*, New York, Teachers College Press.

Runciman, D. (2018), *How Democracy Ends*, London. Profile Books

Rushdie, S. (1982), The New Empire within Britain in Rushdie, S. (1992), *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981 – 1991* (pp 129 – 138), London, Granta Books.

Sahlberg, P. (2012), *How GERM is infecting schools around the world?* Internet available from https://pasisahlberg.com/text-test/ Accessed 07 December 2021

Said, E. W. (1978), *Orientalism*, London, Penguin.

Said E. W. (1994), *Culture and Imperialism*, London, Vintage.

Sandel, M. (2012), *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*, London, Allen Lane.

Sanghera, S. (2021), *Empireland: How Imperialism has Shaped Modern Britain*, London, Viking.

Sapsford, R. and Jupp, V. (2006) *Data Collection and Analysis* (Second Edition), London, Sage.

Savin-Baden, M. and Howell Major, C. (2013) *Qualitative Research: The Essential Guide to Theory and Practice,* Abingdon, Routledge.

Sennett, R. (2013), *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*, London, Penguin

Shahjahan, R A. (2011), Decolonizing the evidence-based education and policy movement: revealing the colonial vestiges in educational policy, research, and

neoliberal reform, *Journal of Education Policy*, 26:2, pp 181-206, DOI: 10.1080/02680939.2010.508176

Shahjahan, R. A., (2012): From 'no' to 'yes': postcolonial perspectives on resistance to neoliberal higher education, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, pp1 -14 DOI:10.1080/01596306.2012.745732

Shain, F., (2020), Race matters: confronting the legacy of empire and colonialism, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 41:2, 272-280, DOI:10.1080/01425692.2020.1717104

Silverman, D. (2010), *Doing Qualitative Research* (third edition), London, Sage.

Stake, R.E (2000) Case Studies Ch.14 of Denzin and Lincoln (ed) *Handbook of Qualitative Research* second edition, Thousand Oaks, California, Sage.

Stern, J. (2018a), *A Philosophy of Schooling: Care and Curiosity in Community*, Cham, Switzerland, Palgrave Macmillan.

Stern. J. (2018b), *What Does Autonomy Look Like?* York, York St. John University.

Thompson, G., Lingard, B. & Ball, S.J., (2020): 'Indentured autonomy': headteachers and academisation policy in Northern England, *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, DOI: 10.1080/00220620.2020.1850433

Thomson, P. (2020), *School Scandals: Blowing the Whistle on the Corruption of our Education System*, Bristol, Policy Press.

Thomson, P., Gunter, H. and Blackmore, J. (2014) Series Forward in Gunter, H. M. *Educational Leadership and Hannah Arendt*, Abingdon, Routledge.

Tisdall, L. (2020), *A Progressive Education? How Childhood Changed in Mid-Twentieth-century English and Welsh Schools*, Manchester, Manchester University Press.

Wellington, J. (2000), *Educational Research: Contemporary Issues and Practical Approaches*, London, Continuum.

Wellington, J. (2015), *Educational Research: Contemporary Issues and Practical Approaches* (second edition), London, Bloomsbury.

West, A. and Wolfe, D. (2018), *Academies, the School System in England and a Vision for the Future: Clare Market Papers 23*, London, LSE Academic Publishing

West, A. and Wolfe, D. (2019) Academies, autonomy, equality and democratic accountability: Reforming the fragmented publicly funded school system in England. *London Review of Education*, 17 (1): 70–86. DOI https://doi.org/10.18546/LRE.17.1.06

Wilkins, A. (2017a), Rescaling the local: multi-academy trusts, private monopoly and statecraft in England, *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 49:2, 171-185, DOI: 10.1080/00220620.2017.1284769

Wilkins, A. (2017b). The business of governorship: Corporate elitism in public education. In: Helen M. Gunter; David Hall and Michael W. Apple, eds. *Corporate Elites and the Reform of Public Education*, Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 161-176.

Wilkins, A. and Olmedo, A. eds (2019), *Education Governance and Social Theory: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Research*, London, Bloomsbury.

Wood, M., Pennington, A. & Feng Su (2018): Prefigurative practice and the educational leadership of Sir Alec Clegg in the West Riding of Yorkshire, England (1945–1974), *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, DOI:10.1080/00220620.2018.1501010

Wood, M., Pennington, A. and Su, F. (2020), 'The Past No Longer Casts Light Upon The Future; Our Minds Advance In Darkness' : The Impact And Legacy Of Sir Alec Clegg's Educational Ideas And Practices In The West Riding Of Yorkshire (1945-1974), *British Journal of Educational Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/00071005.2020.1799935

Woods, P.A, and Gronn, P. (2009) Nurturing Democracy: the contribution of distributed leadership to a democratic organisational landscape in *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership* Vol 37 (4) pp 430-451

Yeats, W. B. (1999) The Second Coming in Forbes, P. (ed) *Scanning the Century: the Penguin Book of the Twentieth Century in Poetry*, London, Viking.

Yin, R. K., (2009), *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (fourth edition), Thousand Oaks, California, Sage.

Abbreviations

BAME Black and Minority Ethnic

BERA British Educational Research Association

CEO Chief Executive Officer

COO Chief Operating Officer

CPD Continuing Professional Development

DCS Director of Children's Services

DfE Department for Education

EdD Doctor of Education

ESN Educationally sub-normal

ERA Education Reform Act (1988)

ESFA Education and Skills Funding Agency

EU European Union

GERM Global Education Reform Movement

GMS Grant Maintained Status

HMI Her Majesty's Inspector

LAC Local Advisory Committee

LEA Local Education Authority

LMS Local Management of Schools

MAT Multi Academy Trust

NGA National Governance Association

NLE National Leader of Education

OECD Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

Ofsted Office for Standards in Education

PISA Programme for International Student Assessment

RSC Regional Schools Commissioner

SEN   Special Educational Needs

UK   United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Appendix 1 Participant information sheet

York St John University School of Education

Invitation to take part in a research study

Multi Academy Trust Governance: community engagement and democratic accountability

About the research

I am conducting research into aspects of Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) governance for my PhD degree at York St. John University. My interest in researching this area comes from my involvement in school governance over many years. The aim of my research project is to examine how the governance arrangements of a MAT can develop and promote collaboration between the member schools, partners and the wider community.

To do this, I would like to interview senior staff in MATs and member schools and volunteer members of school governing bodies and MAT trust boards. I would hope that the completed research would be of interest to researchers, policy makers and those involved in the governance and leadership of MATs. My research is being supervised by Professor Julian Stern and Dr. Tony Leach at York St. John University.

What I am inviting you to do

I would like to invite you to take part in an interview, conducted by me at a time and place of your convenience. The purpose of the interview is to explore your views on the questions of MAT governance, community engagement and democratic accountability. I would envisage the interview lasting between 30 and 45 minutes.

If you choose to participate in the research

I very much hope you will agree to take part, but of course participation is entirely voluntary. If you choose to take part, I will ask you to provide written consent by means of a consent form which will explain the conduct of the research and your rights to withdraw, confidentiality, data protection etc. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice and any data collected from you will be destroyed. I will record interviews using a digital audio recorder and transcribe them into written form. Interview transcripts and any interview notes will be anonymised and securely stored on my York St John encrypted laptop PC and secure storage at the university. Only I

and my supervisors will have access to these data. Any information you provide will remain confidential during all stages of storage, analysis and reporting.

Risks if you choose to participate

Participation in this study should involve no physical or mental discomfort, and no risks beyond those of inconvenience. If, however, you should find any question to be invasive or offensive, you are free to omit answering or participating in that aspect. Pseudonyms will be given to all who participate to anonymise identities and locations/places of work. Results that are written up or may be published will be presented in such a way that it will be very unlikely to link any data with you or other participants. It is important to note that whilst I will seek to ensure your anonymity, this cannot be absolutely guaranteed. However, I will report results in such a way as to make identification unlikely.

Ethical approval

The study will adhere to the policy and guidelines of York St. John University on the ethical conduct of research and has received approval through the University's ethical approval process. Details of the policy and process can be found at https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/research/research-ethics--integrity/. I am very happy to discuss any aspects of my research or answer any queries and my contact details are at the end of this document. Should you wish to raise any concerns or complaints about the study or its conduct, you may contact the Research Office at York St. John University.

Thank you for your consideration of this invitation, I very much hope you will wish to take part in my research.

Andrew Pennington

Postgraduate Researcher

School of Education, York St. John University

a.pennington@yorksj.ac.uk

Appendix 2 Consent form

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Name of Researcher
Andrew Pennington
Title of study
Multi Academy Trust Governance: community engagement and democratic accountability

Please read and complete this form carefully. If you are willing to participate in this study, ring the appropriate responses and sign and date the declaration at the end. If you do not understand anything and would like more information, please ask.

• **I have had the research satisfactorily explained to me in verbal and / or written form by the researcher.**	**YES / NO**
• **I understand that the research will involve a face to face interview of 45 – 60 minutes duration which will be taped with a digital audio recorder.**	**YES / NO**
• **I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time without having to give an explanation.**	**YES / NO**
• **I understand that all information about me will be treated in strict confidence and that I will not be named in any written work arising from this study.**	**YES / NO**
• **I understand that any audiotape material of me will be used solely for research purposes and will be destroyed on completion of your research.**	**YES / NO**
• **I understand that you will be discussing the progress of your research with your supervisors and others at York St John University**	**YES / NO**

I freely give my consent to participate in this research study and have been given a copy of this form for my own information.

Signature: …………………………………………………………….………….

Date: ……………………………………………………………………

Appendix 3 Example of interview transcript analysis form

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
Ok, right, ok. Ok , so what I'm interested in really is this business about engaging community, how the MATs engage community, so maybe you can start by giving me a few thoughts, how you define community, that the MAT serves, or communities that the MAT serves.			Themes constructed by looking at the codes and aggregating on the basis of the frequency and the saliency to the research question.
Res: Well, the vision of our trust is that we are a trust at the heart of our community, so at the moment we've got the two primary schools, which are our feeder primary schools, that are within our geographical priority area, so I would think that our community is the schools that would send the children to us, in our geographical priority area. So, that's how I would define our community at this moment in time.	Vision/value/ideological position - school at centre of community Geographical definition of community. Linked to school admissions of sec sch Possibility of change in definition of community	Trust's vision At the heart of the community Community based on schools linked to Trust Community as school admissions area Community as geographically defined area Community definition fluid and changeable	1. Aspiration to be at the heart of the community 2. Fluid, flexible and multiple definitions of community 3. Membership of the community – who is part of the community 4. Beginnings, starting a journey (in relation to community engagement
AP: Thank you. So, can you tell me about how the MAT board engages with that community then?			5. Communication and consultation with community.
Res: We're very, very early in our journey, so we only actually became a trust 18 months ago, and we only just took the primary schools on, from February. So, one of the things that we, it's something that we'll be developing in terms of how we start engaging with them. But if we look at Nettle as a lead school, if we	Just beginning, early days Journey, on a journey Future – will be developing engagement	Community engagement comes later	6. Community engagement and its relation to core

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
look at how we have started to engage with our community as Nettle school, which then we might permeate across the other schools. We've always been a, I suppose we've got our local community, and then we've got our wider community, and in terms of the things that we've sort of started to develop, is around the emphasis on developing the character of our young people. So, what we do is we have extended our community, and the way that we have sort of done that is through our strategic plan for careers and employability skills. So, what we've got is we've got a lot of employers which are friends of the school and are involved in working with the school and we use those for a whole range of different activities, and opportunities, for our young people.	Models of sec sch engagement to draw on – these permeate across Community as place – local, wider	Lead school provides model for CE	business; how much of a priority is it?
			7. Children and young people and character, citizenship, and behaviour and school's responsibility for wider well being
		Multiple definitions of community	
	Community linked to outcomes for young people – character, employability	Community is about YP and what we offer them	8. Who does the school belong to?
			9. Power in relationships with the community; who has it and how is it used?
AP: **So, they come into school and organise things… within the school…**	Community as employers Employers as friends of the sch – who are the school's friends?	Extending community to increase offer and opportunities for YP	
		Using the community	10. School/MAT role in supporting/developing the community and the priority given to this in senior/middle management job roles
Res: So, they come into school, and do things in school, or we take them out to their places of business. We have an enterprise adviser, who is somebody who's got, who has volunteered her services, to work with schools to give us the benefit of her experience, and that's been really valuable to us. So, we've been able to engage with that community, of employers, supported by her, which has given our students loads and loads of different opportunities that they probably wouldn't have had. So, that's one way of looking, in terms of our extended community…	Linked to provision – ops and activities	Developing the community Character development as community development Strategic plan for employability as community development Community as friends of the school	
			11. Community and friendship
	Interaction with employers as community – why does business have this interaction?		12. Neighbourliness and good neighbours
	YP – character – employability/skills – employers working with sch – active participation	Importance of enterprise and employability	13. Mutuality of caring for school and community
	Engagement with employers as community. Rlns with business	Engagement with employers is community engagement	

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
AP: **Yeah, and you employ someone, you got employability adviser…** **Res:** We are an enterprise adviser, no she's a volunteer, and I manage that, I manage careers across the school, and she is our enterprise adviser, and we work with her, and I have a team of people, who are working on developing those relationships in terms of employers. **AP:** **So, the trust has given that, all the schools, just given that priority, because it's a senior person in charge, and you've got some resources to organise in our programme.** **Res:** Yeah. So, I have a team of people who work with me, to develop those opportunities. So, we also have other organisations, I suppose local community, that we have very strong links with, so we have really strong links with the fire service, so the fire, so they come into school, and we take the children down to them, so that's a nice community sort of link as well. And then we do, obviously parents are our community, and so in terms of our parental engagement, that's something that we're sort of developing and working on, at the moment, in terms of those being involve in their child's learning, but probably we've not quite gone out with anything else, around that, so we don't consult with them	Employers/business are the important community Our extended community is business/employers YP get loads of opps (but what do employers get?) Teams of people working on this relns – employers - v significant relns Hierarchy of relns with community – is this hierarchy of community business, public service (fire), parents	Employers/business as our community Resources and priority given to enterprise/employer relationships Hierarchy of importance in community relationships	14. Enterprise and employability for young people and engagement with business community 15. Commercial activity and selling services to the community. 16. Resources – funding and staffing – for community engagement and activity 17. Involving and engaging with parents (including communication, consultation seeking views etc). 18. Structural arrangements for governance and how the board are informed and make decisions about community matters. 19. Image and reputation of the school/MAT and

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
on policies and things like that. That's maybe something to think about in future.	Less positive and definite about parents as community (sort of developing)		managing and maintaining it.
AP: **Is this, in terms of thinking about the board, or advisory committees, does any of those views or issues from those communities end up being brought to the, into the decision-making process in any way?**	Don't consult on policies – relns about children's learning	Degree of engagement with parents - lack of engagement on policy	20. MAT superiority – this is our building and we ration access on our terms colonial attitude?
Res: Yeah, I mean we've got parents on the local advisory committees, so the parents, we've got two elected parents on each of the local advisory committees, so the views from the parents, they represent the parents. That comes in that way. In terms of the trust board, we've got, the trust board is, everybody on it is our local people, so we don't, I suppose there's a feed-in from the community, sort of that way, to that…	Maybe something to think about – lukewarm about engaging parents		21. MAT as external power imposing on community
			22. Accountability – measured by parents sending children to the sec school market/commercial measures
	Structural parent representation – but how much of a voice?	Structural arrangements for parental engagement	
AP: **So, I mean, was that a deliberate decision to keep it local?**		Trustees and their connection to the community	
Res: No, not really, I think it was just the right people and that just happened at the time, so yeah, the majority of them are sort of local, and I suppose we, in terms of what else do we do, we would consult on things that we statutorily need to consult on, so you know your admissions, and maybe some building, when it's done and, we bring the community in then. We have a really nice event which is a community event, so we do	Trust board is local (accident or design?) Our local people – ownership, connection? Tentative, unsure– I suppose there's feed in	Local connection of trustees – accident or design	

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
the Christmas markets, every year, so we have a Christmas fair, in effect, and that is a community event, which we invite people to come in and do. We try and involve parents, but its generally around the learning, rather than the management, saying that, particularly, the parents, come in about and look at the children, and support the children's activities, so we have lots of parents evenings, and you know, they come in and they work with the careers advisor, talking about the child's pathways, and so, I suppose we do have a bit of a pattern. We work with the leisure services, the grounds people, from the council, because the park's across the road, so we've got a connection with them and we've got a peace garden, like a quiet garden, and a sensory garden, which was given to us from the council, and they come in and we're just early in our journey of working with some of the community at the park. In fact, I've just started developing that relationship. They've got a garden in, they want some children to go and do some gardening there, so, what we try and do is, if there's an opportunity given to us, which allows us to be seen in the community, then we would take that on. Have we got any specific initiatives that we've developed – not really. Not yet, anyway.	Local by accident/chance

Consult community when required
What is consultation – telling community what is happening when decided? When its done we bring the community in then
Different concepts/definitions of community at play – interchangeable not specific about who community is?
Community at different levels
Parents engaged about their children's individual learning not running of sch/MAT

Physical environment and schools place in it and connection with others using the public space (park) | Degree of consultation with community

Consultation as information giving

Degree of parental engagement on policy

Parental engagement linked to children's learning

Community as place | |
| **AP:** **Ok, have you got any plans for developing anything, in the pipeline, or…** | Beginning to think about these things | School's contribution to place

Intentions – what we might/will do

Beginnings | |

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
Res: I think one of the things, what we've done is we've done some restructuring this year, so what we've got, is we've created three extra roles, so we've now got what's called Senior Directors of Key Stage 3, 4 and 5, and now we've appointed Directors of Key Stage 3, 4 and 5. And part of their brief is going to be doing initiatives around developing this character for our young people, because developing that character for young people means that we are making them to be good citizens, which is about engaging in the community, and then being proud of their community and looking after their community, and that is what will be part of their workload, for the next sort of like 12 months really, so I suppose we are trying to instil in our young people through some of the things that we do, about them being good members of the community, so I think that's a nice positive thing. The other thing that we are, we've got, we're on our, we're never at the end of the journey, so we start, is that we have past members of the school who come in and do work here, so we use a lot of our old students to come in, and so I suppose they're still part of our community, and they come in, and they work in schools, and that's a very deliberate approach to saying to our young people, that this is what you can achieve. You know, dare I say, you come from <town>… it's like an alumni thing, you know.	Journey, future focus, beginning to… , just started… I, rather than we, started to dev relns Beginnings, just started Involvement in the community – about our visibility/image? Reactive, responsive to opportunities presented Link to management and staffing structure Engaging community linked to dev character for YP, explicit – good citizens, pride in community, taking responsibility, Giving com engagement (defined as character building for YP) profile through making part of KS directors' roles, giving status and importance. It gets done if its part of someone's job	Image - Community engagement as visibility in the community CE given priority/importance in exec/mgt structure Community engagement as character building and citizenship with YP YP and Community pride	

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
AP: **So, it's a bit like a mentoring thing.** Res: No, we don't do mentoring, the research that we've been reading about mentoring is that it don't really work, but we do use our young people to come in and share their experiences that, you know what, I'm a girl from \<town\> and I have achieved x, y and z, and that's really positive in terms of raising aspirations and expectations for our students. **AP:** **That all sounds really positive and exciting. In terms of thinking about those things you do through those community activities that are built into those new jobs, is there any way, any mechanism for getting ideas from the community about what their priorities might be, and what they would like you to focus on? And how do the decisions about what that programme's going to focus on, get made…** Res: Yeah, yeah, I mean we've not, to be honest with you, we've not really thought about that, and whether or not that would be something that we would be, I mean we're just so early in our journey, at the moment, that that comes, I suppose, comes later, when you're sort of like really settled in what your doing, with the governance, when we've got that in place. I suppose having links with like, you know, the park, that sort of allows you to sort of be linking into sort of, uh, I	Community engagement as part of the curriculum Journey, continuing Community in time as well as space Drawing on the past, our past our YP to inspire current cohorts Those who have gone before and their membership of community Explicit rejection of mentoring – evidenced based Community in time used to promote/support current YP (and org goals) Community in time as positive eg, look up to, look at what you can do	Community extends through time as well as place/space	

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
think one of the problems is that, uh, and there's lots and lots of benefits, around linking into the community, one of the things that, it's about the building, and, we've not quite opened our building up to the community, I mean it's a fantastic resource, it's absolutely beautiful, we have at the all weather pitch, which is absolutely wonderful, we've not opened that up to the community, and the reason that we've not opened it up, is because possibly we've not got the structures in place to make sure that that is looked after when people are in it. So, the experiences that we've had, of when we open it up to the community, and loads of people ask us to use this building, and we, I do say no, because I know that when they come in, that that will not be a positive experience for us, when we've gone, so, we've had NCS, you know, National Citizens, those came in, and they wrecked the place, so we've given them another chance, we said come in again, they did it again, so then you say, Well you're not coming again, because it's too, you can't, it's just not worth it, so, we just, because we are so proud of our building, and we look after it, that for someone to come in and damage it, and abuse it, then, we just think, you're not coming in. So, that is definitely an issue. I mean we have, the all weather pitch is mostly rented out to <town C> juniors, and so that's nice, that we have one relationship with one person, so actually if we've got any trouble, we talk to them about it, so that's a,	Early in journey, haven't thought about that – admission it wasn't part of their plg and priorities in establishing Trust?

Acknowledgement that Trust has not done what I'm asking them about, questioning is prompting them to think about it? Its an add on, comes later, not part of priorities and the structures set up

School is a community resource but this create problems (sharing our resource with community who does the resource belong to?)
There are lots and lots of benefits BUT (the meaning/power of but!)
There is a tension here
Concern that community can't trusted with the building – they will damage it (I and we say no – | Engaging the community in governance and determining priorities and plg is an afterthought/comes later

Tension/conflict - Community access to and ownership of resources - who does the school belong to?

Identifying and understanding community needs

Controlling community access
Power over community | |

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
so I suppose in terms of the community, we work with <town> juniors, well that relationship is not the most harmonious, because they definitely have their opinion of what they want and what they expect, and you know, we have ours, so sometimes you know, they're all England managers. **AP:** **[Laughs].** Res: They all think they're England managers. So, you know, and they think that they, and yet you know, it's really simple things, which really stop your school being at the heart of a community, and you know, maybe it's they don't know. But you know, people come and park their car, and they run all over your grass, and ruin your grass, and it's really simple things like that, so in terms of being at the heart of the community, and having ownership of something, then people have got to respect it, and look after it, and people don't. **AP:** **Have you, like at a strategic level with the board, thought about how you might still try and address those issues, and make it more available to the community. I mean obviously that's practical stuff about having the right supervision, and arrangements, and all of that, but…**	personal ownership/pride)? Community access mediated through her view of what is acceptable. How well are community(ies) and their needs etc understood? Conduct of users and their impact Dual use conflicts Wrecked, abused damaged the place – strong words Controlling and rationing the resource. Use of resource conditional on behaving as we want you to. This is ours you can use it on our terms. Learning from bad experiences? Pride – YP pride in school, community, pride in the building Different communities in conflict – what school community wants/needs doesn't match with views expectations of others in community	power over community Tension – community access Community relationships difficult Power in relationships with community	

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
Res: Yeah… I mean one of the things is, and some of it comes down to cost as well, so what happens, is that you turn round and you say, you know what, and you're engaged with these people, and you talk to them and keep sending notes out, and they send notes out, and then it's good for a couple of months, and then it reverts back. But actually, you know, when people say, well you know, ideally what we want is we need somebody sat on that all-weather pitch, watching it, making sure that we've got security on there, making sure that nobody misuses it. Although there's a cost to that. And then that cost then puts up your hire cost, and then that becomes unmanageable for community group, because it's too expensive, and then it becomes really, you know, it becomes really difficult. So, we do have people within the community, I mean we work very well with a little playgroup across the way, they always have their Christmas party here, we've had their summer fair here, because it was raining, they wanted to come, they brought donkeys on here, but we've got that relationship with them, where we know, that absolutely they will look after it, but we do keep getting asked can we bring this in, you know, can we bring Stagecoach in, can we bring this in, can we do all these things, but when you look at what the cost will be, that becomes prohibitive for them, because they don't want to… and we, what is really important to us is, what's our core business, our core business is when they come in on	If simple things are the problem why can't they be solved/addressed? Does the community have to do things on school's terms? Where is the power in the relationship? Is the school acting as provider of largesse? This is ours but you can have a controlled share of it Ownership and access to resources is conditional and on our terms. Access is controlled in accordance with power relations. This is ours and we let you have access not this is a community owned resource that we manage on your behalf. What view of community and its members is this demonstrating? Surveillance and security to look after resource and control those who use it	School at the heart of the community School at the Heart of the community Ownership and control of the resource Resources for CE and community access Relationships with the community Surveillance of our resources and community behaviour	

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
Monday morning or the next day, and this school is in a state for them to learn in, and that we're not finding doors that are hanging off in toilets that have been abused, and, so, we get a bit mean with it. But in terms of the community, coming in to, and we do, because I am the complaints officer as well, so I deal with all the complaints. So, we get a feeling… so if we've got, if the community says you know we've got, all these phone calls this morning because they're all egg and flouring each other on noddies, that's what they're all coming through…	Who pays for the community access? Who should pay the full cost? Can the school subsidise the community? (resource allocation and budget decisions made by the board – how are these influenced by community considerations and community voices – who has power to allocate resources?	Tensions with community	
	Community as a source of conflict/difficulty for the school	Ownership and access to school resources	
		Relationships with the community	
AP: **Oh, right, because last day of GCSEs, yeah.**	People in the community who are compliant get better treatment and access?		
Res: So they won't be, that's what happened, so I've got four on there already, I know I have. But, we've got, so if we've got an issue where we've got like, you know, something that's not pleasantly happening in the community, then we will work with our students to try and resolve that.	How are the right relationships built? Who decides what is 'that' relns?		
		Resources for community engagememt	
Now <name>, who is one of our assistant heads of year, he works very much with our, with the Bangladeshi community, so he probably has a bit more of a way in, so he talks to people about current issues, so that we have a harmonious relationship with that community, so that we understand, and that seems to sort of work well, so, there's a link there, with those type of people. We don't, I mean, and I suppose on our LACs, our local	Community use/access as a commercial/market/business transaction	School's core business – conflict with community access	
	Protecting core business – community is 'add on'	Community use as transaction	
	Protecting school for one community – community of learners	Protecting the resource/tension over use	
	Hierarchy of communities and use of the resource	Managing school/YP interface with community	

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
advisory committees, we have community representatives, that's what they all are, they're all community representatives, and the two parents. **AP:** **Yeah. How does the board kind of, find out what's going on, what's happening, and what the issues are for each local advisory committee? Is there a mechanism by which the board find out, and understand?** Res: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. This is we've got a governance structure. So, our governance structure, is that the LACS all meets, before the trust board, the LACS have, ,Denis clerks them all, the LACS all have a representative from the trust board at those meetings, and then all those minutes and those reports go to trust board. And what we're talking about doing now is establishing at the beginning of each term, a trust, the chair of the trust board meeting up with the LAC chairs, so there'll be that going, and then of course we've got all the management systems, for the CEO, to work with the schools, and that happens every month. **AP:** **So, there's like an executive group of heads, meet together and all the kind of day-to-day operational business gets sorted out…** Res: No, they do, the lad that's teaching and learning, and the, and then we have MAT business meetings, where we have the head again, and the business managers, and we	Complaints as communication and engagement with community Reactive – dealing with difficulties in sch/community relns. Smoothing over, person to person, the human face of sch, a real person who community can talk to and voice concerns. How is the intelligence gathered from these interactions used? Difficulties with/in community are addressed and students are involved in – resolution? mediation?, reparations? Staff resource devoted to community engagement – part of the JD of someone with status on staff Specific reaching out/engagememt with a BAME community. Seeking harmony - is this community difficult/ and lacking harmony with sch? Special treatment for 'those type of people' Why focus on this community Structural – community reps on LGBs	Use of complaint handling Engaging young people in relationship with community – behaviour, citizenship, character Special attention to relationships with BME community Views/attitudes to BME communities Structural connections with community, role of LACs	

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
talk to them about the business, so we try and keep it separate so that we don't end up with really long agendas, so in terms of the work that we do over there, we do a lot of, we're very closely wedded to the schools. **AP:** **Right, so it's part of that kind of close-knit wedding, is there a specific agenda item about this, any communities use any community perspectives?** Res: I mean we're doing a working together project at the moment, because we got a grant, but at the moment, we're more looking at the students working together, and the staff working together, we've not actually, but, they are in our community, so it's the same community, so all their children come to us, so they've got brothers and sisters here, so it is the same community, so we're not looking at different communities, Thistle's communities, Nettle's community, and Feverfew's community. Because they're all within our geographical priority area. And they are physically very close to us, so they're <town A> schools. It might be a bit different if it was <town B> school, the <town B> school, the <town B> school came on board with us, and that might be because it's geographically further away, but not, but we are a <town A>, and <town C>. **AP:** **So, it sounds rooted in the community served by the school, and there are lots of**	Clerking and role of clerk in collecting and sharing information with board - eyes and ears role Informal and formal info sharing with Board (mins and trustee attending each LAC) So the system is in place but what issues/decision does it affect? (check Board mins) What we're going to do – future intentions Close connection with schools	Structural arrangements Role of clerk – info gathering and sharing Board gathers and shares info from LACs Structural arrangements	

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
things going on, and sound like the ways in which any issues that have come up in a particular bit of the community would find its way back to the board, through the…	Separation – T&L and business in discussions		
Res: Through the community and through the community members, yeah, so there's a mechanism for doing that, and I suppose what happens is sometimes, it's really hard to pick out, isn't it, what community things are going on, because you know we've got this <town C> Park, it's <town C> Junior, <town C> Park.. they, they use our…	How these structures support board consideration of community issues?		
AP: **Next door?**		Resources for CE – who pays	
Res: No, it's a separate, it's one of the largest sports clubs in the country, who do our, who rent our rooms, so all their children, most of them, come here, who are part of this football, but they do football and netball, and they do, they have a whole range of different activities that go on, so they, I suppose they would be a very big part of our community, except they're all England football managers.	Financial incentive – we do it because we have funding	Who is/are our community?	
	Thinking it out – re-defining community – the YP are part of the community	Community as school catchment Community as a place and proximity Community as children, young people and families	
AP: **[Laughs].**	Multiple definitions of community – use the most advantageous definition to suit? Community is a flexible concept that can be bent and moulded to fit a		
Res: And they get on my nerves…! Because they all think they're Premiership managers.	variety of contexts and situations and opportunities. Time, interest, geography/space etc YP are a constant feature of community as defined understood and used by school		

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
AP: **Yeah, yeah, bit precious.**			
Res: Oh – bit! Bit, bit, behave…!			
AP: **Well it's nice to be popular, Gina, right!**			
Res: Yeah, so I suppose we could do something, we could, but I suppose they are a big part of our community, but anyway.		Understanding what is happening in community and its needs, expectations and trends	
AP: **Ok, that's really helpful, the other thing I wanted to ask about was, accountability, because obviously there's a formal accountability mechanism, which are many and various, but being accountable to that community, you know, people, parents particular, how does the board and the MAT exercise it's accountability?**	But despite structural arrangements and mechanisms for gathering and sharing info its hard to know what s going on in community and what is important to community		
Res: Well, we do, I mean, we do, every parents evening, we'd have a parent questionnaire, so that's every parents evening. So, we get a report back from that every parent in, so that's some, if things are not going right, you get some sort of accountability. We have, I'm the complaints officer, so there's a mechanism for complaints, becoming, for, and I try and resolve them at an early stage. So, they don't come to me when they've gone formal, they come to me when they've	Is there something about relative power and power relns within the community – who has the power Does the MAT/sch feel it should have power and control and sees large well organised community orgs as a challenge to be managed (or a business opportunity to be exploited)	Relationships with community and community orgs Power in relns with community	

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
got to a stage where no one can sort them out. **AP:** **But you are able to kind of report on them, you know, the trends coming out, are there issues around… [talking over each other]** Res: I report to the – yeah, no, I report every year, I report every year, to the local advisory committee, on the number of complaints I've got, and where they, what's happened to them. So that's that formal reporting system, and of course, all the stuff that we have to put on the website, which is all the statutory stuff, and minutes and things, I suppose how are you accountable, well, I suppose people don't send their children here do they at some point, maybe it's becoming, maybe it's becoming, not in a good place, but, but… we are very, we absolutely believe that the parents are just a key part of the success of the children, and that is where you come from, where you start from, so that means that your approaches to your parents is very different, so, we make sure that we always give opportunities for parents to be involved, in, it's a shared approach, it's a shared approach to it. **AP:** **So, give me some examples of how that shared approach manifests itself.**	We'll only engage with them if they are compliant and accept our authority Survey to gauge parental opinion (but only about parents' eve) – surface level evaluation Negative accountability – things that are not going right	Power in relns Gathering and surveying parents' views Using complaints as source of information about parent/community views and opinion	

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
Res: Well we do, I suppose it would be, there's lots of communication with the parents. We have a formal communication mechanism through some sort of messaging system, and then we have formal evenings, where we involve, where we bring parents in to explain to them about the curriculum delivery, for the parents, all parents get invited, which in secondary school is probably not the same as a primary school, you're always in, in a primary school, so we invite parents in, to our achievement assemblies, which is termly. So, they all come in for that. If there is something that we feel parents need to know, so we have been doing quite a lot of work on promoting apprenticeships, we do a parents evening, that's really successful, we give parents telephone numbers and email addresses of people, so they can email them direct, and speak to them direct, so that's another way of sort of saying, you don't have to go through the switchboard, you can get hold of people easily. And, you know, we welcome parents in, and we welcome their views, and I think that, I don't know whether you can sort of record that, except if somebody makes a complaint, and we've got something wrong, we hold our hands up and say we've got it wrong, and we'll do something about it, and, so we're quite, you know, we do, value, genuinely value opinions of our parents. So, we have a magazine that we share everything with, a termly magazine, called exchange, which goes out with all the information, that's another mechanism that	Accountability through complaints process and resolving complaints informally/at an early stage

Accountability as a consumer choice – parents don't send their children if they are not happy
Recognition that statutory requirements and compliance with them is not necessarily accountability
Recognise importance of parents to YP educ therefore need to have approaches that are genuinely involving? | Formal reporting and communication
Reporting on views of parents and community – structural mechanisms

Parental/consumer choice

Parental involvement as key to CYP success

Involving parents

Shared approach | |

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
we communicate with parents, I suppose that's it really. **AP:** **Ok, so does, thinking about what, I mean that's an impressive array of activity and things, you know, communications, just thinking about the decisions the board made, you know, when decisions are made about spending money or, does any of that influence the decisions that are made, if somebody says, well actually how will it affect… [talking over each other]..parents or… this group of people…** Res: I suppose what we do is… yeah, I think what happens, and this is probably part of our risk register, so we have a risk register, and we have to, when we make decisions, of course some of the controls that were in, we always assess the risk of a decision that's been made. Now, that is done at our level, with me and Joy and Sarah, and particularly me and Joy, at MAT level, so we always think, what is the risk, what will this do, and then, we go back to the trust, when we go to the trust board with it, we will be saying, this is, we'll talk about the risk, and then trustees will be talking about the risk. So, we have a risk trustee, someone who is solely responsible for managing risk, and that's not just risk in terms of health and safety, that is risk in terms of, you know, any risk to the organisation.	Communicating to parents – telling about what is going on, explaining to them, telling them what we feel they need to know – one way messaging giving info, not about consultation or discussion of priorities, enabling parents or giving them a voice. Hierarchy - school at top in community in position of power. Power exercised openly – we tell you about what we are doing Differences in approach between pri and sec Make the school and staff accessible – informal opportunities for conpact and exchange and talking Is this openness the same as welcoming their views and engaging them in discussion about direction and priorities? An indication of willingness and openness or so far and no further? How are views welcomed? What does welcomed mean? Does this affected policy and decision making?	Communicating with parents Involving parents Inviting parents Power in relationship with parents Communication as telling parents Making school accessible to parents Parents' views welcome Complaints as engagement/gathering info etc Parents' views welcome Mechanisms for communicating with parents	

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
AP: So, if you're making a decision about, I don't know, spending money on a particular issue, take part in the consideration, maybe well there's a risk here, then this might, then this might not, and be happy with that… [talking over one another] …	Don't know how to action views of parents? Welcoming views is about communication out from the Trust	Conviction/commitment to community/parent involvement	
Res: …Absolutely yeah, well I'll give you a great example, increasing our PAN, our pupil admission numbers. The authority came to us and said, can you increase your pupil admission numbers, it's because of the, there's a shortage of places, there's a real, and there's a bulge coming through, so they said to us, how many can you do it by, so we said, so we really thought about it, and we thought about, so the risk is, right, you bring in more kids, you've got miles more traffic, you've got more buildings that are needed, which will upset the community, and we assess that risk, so we said, we can take 30, knowing that we can manage 30, and it won't damage our school in the community. If we take 60 on, completely different ballgame, if we took an extra 60, each year, we'd have so much more traffic, we'd have so much more buildings, that would upset all our neighbours, because it's a beautiful site, and they don't want to have all these buildings that don't pretty on there, and we don't want to do that, because, and our community around here, you're looking at our neighbours, they're really important to us, touch wood, we have no, we have never had a break-in here, since this school has	Lack of conviction and certainty – 'I suppose that's it really' Influence of parents views on decisions managed with risk register – engagement and its consequences a risk to be managed Risk register – does impact on community/views of community feature in risk assessment? Engagement framed as risk	Parent/community influence via risk management	

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
been opened. We've never had any vandalism at weekends…			
AP: That's very impressive.	Using risk management to determine impact on community		
Res: Which is, because, our neighbours are really good neighbours. So, if there's a spinoff from that, the way that we look after our neighbour, so every neighbour rings me, they ring me and say, we've got some kids coming, running through our garden, we do something straight away, we go and we sort it, because our neighbours are so important to us, in terms of looking after, and being proud of, our school. That is really important. So, when they asked us to take 60 on, we did not want to damage our standing, with our neighbours, by upsetting them. I mean you know we all, that's not the right thing to do.		Com Engagement as risk mgt	
	In assessing inc in PAN board (or senior execs?) think about implications and impact on community		
AP: But it's interesting there's a full mechanism through the risk register to do that.	Community as neighbours, concern to be a good neighbour and not upset neighbours	Living (harmoniously) with our neighbours – community as neighbours	
Res: Yeah there is, yeah, yeah, there is, yeah, yeah.	Impact on neighbours – visual impact, traffic, congestion etc(classic plg concerns)	Benefits of good neighbourliness	
AP: It's not just, it's not forgotten, it's all part of the consideration, when decisions are being made [talking overlapping over one another]		Good neighbours	

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
Res: …Because one says, it, absolutely, definitely, absolutely, because on that risk register, it will say, damage to reputation, so we always think about, does that damage our reputation, because what we don't want to do, is damage our reputation, we need to make sure that we are, and because our community is important to us, our neighbours are important to us, for probably selfish reasons, that they look after our grounds, and we welcome them, that's what we do.	Benefits and positive impact of good neighbourliness	MAT/school standing and image	
		Caring for our neighbours	
	Care for neighbours		
	Good neighbourliness is an important value for the Trust Doing right by our neighbours		
AP: It's a good indicator though, isn't it, that kind of, the vandalism and damage bill, of an institution.		Good neighbourliness	
		Caring for our neighbours	
		Importance of our neighbours	
Res: Honestly yeah it is, we don't have any.	Good neighbourliness managed formally through risk register/risk management. Ensures community values/concerns are given formal consideration?	Image/standing with our neighbours	
AP: You don't have to spend much money on that, or no money on that.			
Res: Nothing, nothing.			
AP: That says something about the institution's place in this community.			
Res: Yeah it does, yeah, and actually what it also says is that the kids that are here are not coming in to damage anything, even though they know, they would know how to get in, but students would know how to get,			

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
because you always can, can't you, you know how to get in, you know where, we know where the weaknesses are in the school, we know where we can go and spray paint a wall if we want to do that. But, they don't, so, that's a positive thing. **Keep talking…** Res: I thought, what I'd like to do, and this is part of my, whether I get to do it before I retire, but I would really like to have an outreach team based here, like a youth work outreach team, an outreach by not bringing them in, not bringing them into the school, but a team that works out of here, with our children, who know the children, that are terrorising the park, that are running round riot and causing trouble, can work with them, can work with school, so we've got a real joined up approach in terms of looking at what they do in school, and what they do when they've gone home, because we're only open five hours a day, even though we're always quoted as being, you know, we are supposed to resolve all societies evils, we can't do that, because actually when they're in the middle of rioting, at the weekend, and we get a phone call saying they're your students, what we supposed to do, I don't know, but for me, if we could get, and we wouldn't be high priority, because it's a nice area, but if we could get somebody who would be, like a couple of youth workers, who could do	Selfish reasons – about the Trust's interests and protecting assets? Who do these assets belong to?	Risk management Image and reputation maintenance and management Neighbourliness/being a good neighbour Caring for and being cared for by neighbours	

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
outreach work, knowing that them are our kids, and never the same ones that are running round rioting, jumping up and down outside the shop, do you know, that for me, would be something that would be… and you could, working with the primary schools, because this is the same, same families, same children, but you can get them at that early age, and we can get them doing something, we have in school what's called, Let's Get Activities, so we're trying to develop, and trying to encourage people to get new hobbies outside of school, so we're sending some students to boxing, in the middle of <town., we've got a range of other things that are going on, to try and encourage them to do something different, so the next move from that, would be to be getting them off the streets, or at least to do something different. And I think that school has got a role in that, but not necessarily, having a youth club here, that's not what, that's not…	Good citizenship, stewardship., taking care of resources OR private property and fostering respect for things that belong to others?	YP, citizenship and character building Protecting our resources/building Aspiration to work more in/with community	
AP: **It's finding the appropriate role, isn't it, and I mean, given the way the other services have been…**	Recognition of services needed by YP and community but not provided by others because of cuts and service reductions	YP behaviour, character and citizenship Extending reach of school	
Res: Stripped away, absolutely, yeah, yeah, yeah.			
AP: **Then, schools are having to respond to those kind of pressures in all kinds of ways, aren't they?**	Acknowledgement that some YP are behaving badly – Terrorising,	Role/purpose of school and schooling in the community	

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
Res: Yeah, absolutely. And then you <mark>can respond to, then you can work with the place,</mark> so you can bring the place in, you can bring the community of shop people in <town A> in, and you can say, Right, and we <mark>know who the students that riot,</mark> what we can do, we can have a joined-up approach to, and the other agencies who are working with them, let's have a joined, otherwise, it's just, it's not co-ordinated is it, and we have a joined up approach to that child, to that family, rather than it being all disco-ordinated. **AP: That's great.**	causing trouble – what is the community view/need here? Pressure and expectation on schools to sort out all society's issues/problems Priority for the community? School in the community dilemmas Knowing them are our kids Acknowledging the role that school could play in the community in working with CYP and across the age range (made possible by the primary and secondary membership of the MAT) Positive activities and diversion model Affirmation of school's role in the community Working with the place – community as geography Riot, and what we can do	 Extending work with our CYP Role/purpose of school and schooling in the community Extending reach of school and work with CYP/families Role/purpose of school and schooling in the community YP behaviour, character and citizenship Extending work of school into the community	

Data (interview transcription)	Initial notes and observations	Emerging Codes	Possible Themes
	Integration and school role – aspiration but what is constraining this		