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# From the Secret Garden to the Panopticon? Changing freedoms and the growing crisis in primary school headteacher recruitment.

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**RESEARCH  
DEGREES  
WITH  
PLYMOUTH  
UNIVERSITY**

**From the Secret Garden to the Panopticon?  
Changing freedoms and the growing crisis in primary school  
headteacher recruitment.**

by

**Paul Hodson**

A thesis submitted to Plymouth University  
In partial fulfilment for the degree of

**Professional Doctorate in Education (EdD)**

**2017**

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## **Author's Declaration**

At no time during the registration for the degree of Professional Doctorate in Education (EdD) has the author been registered for any other university award without prior agreement of the Graduate Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the Plymouth University has not formed part of any other degree at Plymouth University or at another establishment.

A programme of advanced study was undertaken, which included: EDD611 Policy and Professional Practice; EDD612 Professional Learning; EDD621 Communities, Cultures and Change; EDD612 Researching Educational Practice; EDD631 Professional Doctorate in Education Thesis Proposal.

Relevant seminars and conferences were regularly attended at which work was often presented.

Presentations:

- Sophists, SATs and the Sabre-Tooth Curriculum: To what extent does an imposed curriculum define professional learning? (EdD Professional Learning Conference, Plymouth University, 2010).
- Does moving to academy status extend autonomy and freedom for primary schools? (Lubienski Symposium, Plymouth University, 2012)

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**Paul Hodson. From the Secret Garden to the Panopticon? Changing freedoms and the growing crisis in primary school headteacher recruitment.**

**Abstract**

A headteacher recruitment crisis continues in the primary education sector (Howson & Sprigate, 2011; Rhodes et al., 2008). This research offers a voice for an increasingly marginalised group and synthesises the experiences of 15 primary headteachers, including retired, experienced and new school leaders against the changing educational scenery of four decades. An extended metaphor describing a changing epistemological landscape is utilised (Pascale, 2011), including dramaturgical discourse (Goffman, 1974).

The research assesses whether the lived experiences of school leaders evidence a supposed movement away from the ‘freedom’ of the ‘secret garden’ of the pre-National Curriculum era to a time of reducing freedoms for headteachers under a central panoptic gaze (Foucault 1979; Ball 2006) and then to a new ‘supported autonomy’ as suggested by ‘Education Excellence Everywhere’ (DfE, 2016). The thesis assesses the capacity of phenomenological methodology to address the research questions and distinctions are made between approaches to phenomenology. A case is made for ensuring critical rationalism within the methodology and difficulties of attaining ‘epoche’ and ‘phenomenological reduction’ are debated.

Findings support the view that there have been significant changes to headship over time. Analysis of these changes does not support the concept of a linear movement from a time of freedom to a landscape defined by Panopticism. The research suggests that a new paradigmatic shift is significantly changing the nature of primary headship with new forms of executive leadership and structures for leadership progression. Recommendations call for a reduction in the frequency of change for school leaders, a simplification of the inspection grading system, provision of clearer pathways to headship and greater support for school leaders as local authority services decline and safeguarding for leaders from the growth of social media abuse. This research offers a unique insight into headship and addresses an identified gap in educational research.

<b>Table of Contents</b>		<b>Page</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>		3
<b>Author's Declaration</b>		4
<b>Abstract</b>		5
<b>Chapters</b>		
<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	
1.1	Purpose of the study	9
1.2	Autonomy and freedom for schools – a changing context	11
1.3	Personal professional context	23
1.4	Research questions	24
1.5	Contribution to educational research	24
1.6	Overview of thesis	26
<b>2</b>	<b>An analysis of the literature</b>	
2.1	The Great Debate, the Black Papers and ‘The Secret Garden’	29
2.2	Relating discourse to episteme	31
2.3	Panopticism - epistemological and methodological considerations.	33
2.4	Education as a changing epistemological landscape	38
2.5	Headteachers as actors	39
2.6	A technology of power and the ‘machine’	41
2.7	An imposed curriculum and changing teacher roles	44
2.8	Hegemonic and paradigmatic assumptions	53
2.9	A crisis in school leadership recruitment	56
2.10	School leadership at a time of diminishing external local authority support	59
2.11	Headship - Gaps in the research	60
<b>3</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	
3.1	Methodology selection	63
3.2	Using metaphors	66
3.3	Phenomenology – finding ‘epoche’, ‘noema’ and ‘noesis’	69
3.4	Double hermeneutics – acting in an already interpreted world	71

3.5	Maintaining ‘a respectful conversation with Foucault’	73
3.6	Approaching transcendental-phenomenological reduction	74
3.7	Challenges to the phenomenological approach	76
<b>4</b>	<b>Data generation and analysis</b>	
4.1	Design	81
4.2	Selection of participants	82
4.3	Ethical considerations	85
4.4	Ensuring research quality	88
4.5	Interviews	91
4.6	Data analysis – Thematic template analysis	95
<b>5</b>	<b>Findings</b>	
5.1	Research question 1: ‘Is there evidence to support the view that primary schools have moved from a state of assumed sovereignty and freedom to one defined by panoptic control?’	97
5.2	Research question 2: ‘To what extent are headteachers required to become advocates for their pupils as external support and local services disappear?’	113
5.3	Research question 3: ‘What factors have led to the growing crisis in primary headteacher recruitment and is there a possible solution?’	121
5.4	Headteacher recruitment – looking ahead	127
<b>6</b>	<b>Discussion and analysis</b>	
6.1	Applying the theoretical framework	136
6.1.1	Approaching epoche	140
6.2	Research question 1	
6.2.1	The secret garden	146
6.2.2	The ch-ch-ch-ch-changes paradigm	148
6.2.3	Towards and beyond the Panopticon	151
6.2.4	The impact of Ofsted – inspectors as ‘agents of change’	157
6.2.5	In pursuit of ‘outstanding’	165
6.2.6	Loneliness, stress and responsibility	167
6.2.7	The sacrifice syndrome	170
6.3	Research question 2	173
6.4	Research question 3	175



<b>7</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>	
7.1	What has been learned?	180
7.2	Recommendations	189
7.3	Suggestions for further research	194
7.4	Reflective critique and postscript	195
	– ‘ <i>The Prison</i> ’ by Michael Nesmith	
	<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix 1	Argus Panoptes – the 100-eyed ‘all-seeing’ giant	201
Appendix 2	The curious world of Jeremy Bentham	202
Appendix 3	Michael Nesmith’s <i>Prison</i>	206
Appendix 4	Headteacher consent and information form	208
Appendix 5	Interviews – questions and schedule	210
Appendix 6	Example of thematic coding transcript	212
Appendix 7	Ethics protocol	217
	<b>List of References</b>	218
	<b>Tables and figures</b>	
Table 1:	Retired headteacher group	83
Table 2:	Experienced headteacher group	84
Table 3:	New headteacher group	84
Figure 1:	Outline research design	81
Figure 2:	The Rings of Uncertainty (Seedhouse 1988)	86
Figure 3:	The Rings of Uncertainty fully expressed (Seedhouse 1988)	87
Figure 4:	Athenian hydria	201
Figure 5:	Bentham’s ‘auto-icon’	203
Figure 6:	Abandoned Cuban Panopticons	204
Figure 7:	Interior view of Illinois State Penitentiary at Stateville	204
Figure 8:	‘Like so many cages’	204
Figure 9:	St. Petersburg School of Arts	205
Figure 10:	Michael Nesmith in 1965	207
Figure 11:	The Prison (1974)	207
Figure 12:	The Garden (1994)	207

## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

### **1.1 Purpose of the study**

In terms of primary school leadership, the UK educational landscape appears to be entering a new paradigmatic shift, typified by a diminishing proportion of schools led by a ‘headteacher’ and the growth of multi-school leadership and multi-academy trusts. Within this changing state, the role of headship is changing, with implications for those who have led schools over a number of years, new leader recruits and for those considering moving upward in their careers to take on leadership of a school. With increasing numbers of headteachers deciding to retire early and a growing national crisis in filling vacant headteacher positions, it is important to consider the impact, if any, of changes over time to school leadership.

There is a growing history of rhetoric debating the influence of school leaders on the overall performance of their schools (Ball, 1997 and 2004; DfE, 2010; Earley et al., 2002; Ofsted, 2010) and an equally burgeoning discussion concerning the merits of headteachers having greater ‘freedom’ and ‘autonomy’ in order to utilise their professional judgement for the benefit of their pupils (Gove, 2010; NCSL, 2015). These considerations are shaping school leadership and this study attempts to seek the views of various groups of primary headteachers including headteachers that taught or led schools in pre-National Curriculum times; headteachers that decided to retire early; headteachers that have led their schools into academy status and new recruits to school leadership. Are headteachers aware of changing roles over time? Have changes led leaders to make key career or career-ending decisions? How do new recruits see their

leadership roles? Can the views of current and past school leaders inform the policy makers of today? Can they offer solutions to the growing recruitment crisis?

In looking to the past and present to inform the future, the study identifies with the Churchillian stance, ‘The farther back you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see’ (Cited in Beckham, 2015, p. 67). In looking back it refers to the work of the French theorist Michel Foucault, who is often regarded as an anti-historian par excellence. Foucault’s panorama of ‘histories’ highlights how history can intersect with other disciplines in the social sciences bringing increasing clarity.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1979), Foucault provides an alternative account of ‘power’ and ‘punishment’ in modern society where popular accounts of history view the modern penal system to be more humane. He suggests that over time, power is manifested in more insidious ways with ‘technologies of power’ constructed by those in power to subdue ‘docile bodies’, resulting in the pacification of individuals. Foucault’s ‘archaeology’ suggests that history provides evidence of the setting up of power structures that provide societal control under the gaze of those in power within a growing ‘surveillance society’.

Foucault implied that his work should be of practical use and he stated that his theories and ideas should,

...be a kind of tool-box others can rummage through to find a tool they can use however they wish in their own area... I don’t write for an audience, I write for users, not readers. (Foucault, 1979, pp. 523–4)

This research has been prompted by an interest in school leadership as a former practitioner and also as a long-term assessor of school leadership in my various inspection and moderation roles over two decades. In approaching this study I concur with Bennett, Wood and Rogers (1997) conclusions that a social constructivist

understanding of education would appear to be a useful approach to resolving the dilemmas current in educational debate.

Although there are many forms of inquiry that are useful in collecting information about phenomena, some are more limited in their capacity to unveil the thoughts and understandings of participants. As the aim of this research is to examine these very matters, a direct inquiry into the lived experiences of those involved would appear to be the best method of making a full examination. While it is unusual for small-scale enquiries to inform large-scale policy change, it is hoped that this study will provide some insights into the changing role of primary school leaders and suggest possible factors that have led to the current headteacher recruitment crisis.

## **1.2 Autonomy and Freedom for Schools - A Changing Context.**

According to Grace (1987), headteachers in post-war England and Wales enjoyed a zenith of autonomy with significant freedom and agency to control their professional lives. Whether this freedom was real or perceived is open to debate. Existing teaching cultures, local authority control and individual school policies and practices would certainly have impacted on teacher and headteacher agency. Hargreaves (1994) suggests that substantive change has typified the role of teachers in the neo-liberal era and that the rate of change has been rapid:

In England and Wales, rampant and remorseless change imposed from above has become a pressing and immediate feature of teachers' working lives. The introduction of subject-by-subject, stage-by-stage National Curriculum; the establishment of detailed, age-related attainment targets; the inauguration of a nationwide system of standardized testing; the creation of a new public examination system ... are just some of the numerous simultaneously imposed changes which teachers are having to cope. (Hargreaves, A., 1994, p. 6)

Growing external control over most dimensions of educational work has challenged autonomy (Ball, 1990; 2004; 2006) with a supposed social transformation from a state of relative sovereignty to a Fordist discourse of productivity and into a period defined by ‘a post-Fordist rhetoric of flexibility and entrepreneurialism’ (Ball, 2006, p. 10). The new landscape, built on a foundation of new managerialism embodied by headteachers, is typified by transformative discourse, using terminology based on excellence, effectiveness and quality (Ball, 2006).

‘The Importance of Teaching – The Schools White Paper 2010’ appeared to present opportunities for a new tectonic reshaping of the educational landscape. Offering apparent neo-liberal rebuttals of panoptic power, the foreword by the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, offered ‘freedoms to all schools’ and plans to ‘devolve as much power as possible to the front line’ with a proposal to re-focus Ofsted inspections ‘on their original purpose – teaching and learning’ (DfE, 2010, pp. 3-4).

The foreword by the Secretary of State also appeared to champion neo-liberal values. ‘Throughout history, most individuals have been the victims of forces beyond their control’ and asserts that education ‘allows us all to become authors of our own life stories’ (DfE, 2010, p. 6). The executive summary noted that schools have been, ‘constrained by government directives or improvement initiatives’ with the need for ‘decisive action to free our teachers from constraint and improve their professional status’ (DfE, 2010, p. 8). The white paper described a continuing requirement for inspection but set in a new discourse of increasing freedoms and lessening central control.

‘Educational Excellence Everywhere’ (DfE, 2016), built upon the notion of devolution of power to the ‘front-line’ with a reformed view of autonomy. In this document, the phrase ‘supported autonomy’ is introduced with the caveat, ‘Autonomy will be both earned and lost, with our most successful leaders extending their influence, and weaker ones doing the opposite’ (DfE, 2016, p. 4). The white paper detailed plans to move every school into academy status by 2022 and give leaders, ‘freedom and power, and holding them to account for unapologetically high standards for every child, measured rigorously and fairly’ (DfE, 2016, p. 9). Speaking at the 2016 National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) annual conference, then Education Secretary Nicky Morgan stressed, ‘The autonomy academic status brings means putting power into the hands of school leaders, because we improve outcomes for young people by ensuring the teachers who teach them, and the heads who lead their schools, are given the freedom to make the right decisions in the interests of those children’ (Morgan, speech to NAHT annual conference, 30 April, 2016). During the following week, a major climb-down from this position removed plans to ‘force’ schools classed as ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ to become academies. Throughout 2016, ministers emphasised that all schools will be encouraged to become academies with some underperforming schools being legally required to academise under the supervision of a multi-academy trust. Minister of State for School Standards, Nick Gibb MP, speaking to the Freedom and Autonomy for Schools National Association (FASNA) in November 2016, described ‘numerous success stories’ and the government’s continued promotion of academisation because of the ‘associated school freedoms’ that ‘stimulate innovation’ and ‘drives improvement’ (Gibb, speech to FASNA, 2 November, 2016). Gibb also described the role of regional schools commissioners who have the power to enforce academisation for failing schools or where local authorities can no longer support a school effectively. This policy

position has remained throughout the 2016 to 2017 academic year; however, the future direction is unclear within a rapidly changing political context.

If there has been increasing external control over time then this would require greater scrutiny of schools. Ball (2006) suggests that perhaps the point has been reached where surveillance has been internalized to the extent that external forces are no longer required, unless a particular school is perceived as falling below the required standards. This internalization of surveillance identifies with Foucault's notion of a 'subtle, calculated technology of subjection' (Foucault, 1977, p. 221) or 'auto-opticon' (Ball, 2006, p. 15).

When I think of the mechanics of power, I have in mind rather its capillary form of existence, at the point where power returns into the grain of individuals, touches their bodies, and comes to insert itself into their gestures and attitudes, their discourses, apprenticeships and daily lives. (Foucault, 1980, cited in Ball, 2006, p. 105)

Central to the new education regime is a new school system typified by the emergence of academies, providing apparent autonomy and freedom over curriculum design, relief from bureaucratic tasks and control over teaching and learning. The degree to which these 'freedoms' are real or illusory is unclear at this stage.

The first phase of academy development took place between 2002 and 2010 and during this time the new academies were all, 'secondary schools with a history of educational failure' (Gove, 2014, p. 9). The first three academies opened in September 2002 with year-on-year growing numbers of academies amounting to 203 by 2010. All of these were 'sponsored' and supported by more successful institutions.

In May 2010 the government invited secondary and primary schools, rated as 'outstanding' by Ofsted, to consider converting to academy status and the first 34 of

these opened in September 2010. During 2010/11 529 schools converted, joined by 1,058 in 2011/12 and 731 in 2012/13. Section 11 of the Academies Act 2010 placed a duty on the Secretary of State for Education to prepare, publish and present to Parliament an annual report on academies and the 2014 report (July 2014) shows data to July 2013. This reveals a total of 3,049 academies open by July 2013 with 2,318 ‘converter’ academies and 731 ‘sponsored’ academies. It is interesting to note a sudden rise in the annual numbers of schools being directed to become sponsored academies by the government following the 2010 election. In the years before the election, the highest annual increase in these schools was 50 in 2008/09. By 2011/12 this number had virtually doubled to 93 and in 2012/13 366 schools were directed to become sponsored academies, mainly following poor inspection reports (DfE 2014, 11).

The Academies Annual Report 2014 (DfE, 2014) continually refers to the greater freedom and autonomy enjoyed by academies and how academy headteachers are using this freedom to make a positive impact on standards being achieved. In his foreword, Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove notes how there had been a surge with primary schools ‘flocking to academy status’ and that by July 2014 there were almost 4,000 academies giving the schools ‘the freedom and power to shape their own future’ with headteachers making full use of their new freedom, ‘Hearing from primary heads about what academy status means to them and what they are doing with their freedoms has been immensely inspiring’ (DfE, 2014, p. 6).

More than one half of all secondary schools had become academies by July 2013, 8% of previously state-funded primary schools. More than 1.7 million pupils are now taught in academies and 120,000 teachers (a quarter of the frontline school workforce) are now employed in academies (DfE press notice, September, 2012). The former Secretary of



State for Education has argued that the rationale for the academy movement is the desire to ‘empower’ frontline professionals, giving them ‘real freedom to make a difference’ with autonomy providing ‘liberation’ that will ‘let a thousand flowers bloom’ and deliver better education (Gove 2012, Speech to Haberdashers’ Aske’s Hatchem College, 4 January).

The aim to ‘let a thousand flowers bloom’ was referred to in a speech by Nick Gibb, School Reform Minister, delivered to ‘Reform’ in November 2014, in which he celebrates the structural reforms that have ‘delivered professional autonomy’ and created, ‘a new vibrancy and excitement in the English education system’ (Gibb, 2014, p. 1). Gibb points to 80% of all schools being judged as ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ in current inspections, an increase from 70% in 2012. Children in the Early Years are decoding simple words better, truancy has fallen and entries to challenging EBacc subjects has increased to new heights, ‘A real story of success’ (Gibb, 2014, p. 2):

Autonomy is not about government directives, committees of experts, quango worthies or national strategies costing hundreds of millions of pounds. It is about associations of like-minded people, bound by a common purpose – academy trusts, teaching school alliances... Call it civil society – call it the third sector. It is with these little platoons of idealistic people that the future of our school system lies. (Gibb, 2014, p. 2)

The most substantial research project to focus on academies, ‘Plan A+ Unleashing the potential of academies’, claims to be based on ‘the first hand experiences of our member schools – the schools that have pioneered academy freedoms’ (Reform, 2012). The report is greatly in favour of the academy school movement and describes how ‘schools are seizing their freedoms with both hands’ (Reform, 2012, p. 3). Almost a third of academy headteachers responded to the survey (478 settings) that set out to discover reasons for schools changing to academy status; the extent to which schools used academy freedoms and to ask whether giving schools more autonomy is sufficient

to drive innovation and improvement (Reform, 2012, p. 4). The chapter headings in the report include: autonomy in the English school system; the importance of autonomy; and academies survey: freedom and innovation (Reform, 2012, p. 2). Continual reference is made to ‘autonomy’ and ‘freedom’ in a school context with numerous claims linking autonomy to improving educational outcomes:

As schools in England and elsewhere have been granted increasing levels of autonomy from central prescription, a body of evidence has emerged that clearly demonstrates the positive effects that school autonomy can have on education outcomes. (Reform, 2012, p. 22)

The report supports the use of ‘academic evidence from across the world’ and in particular the former Secretary of State’s claims that, ‘from autonomous schools in Alberta, to Sweden’s Free Schools, to the Charter Schools of New York and Chicago, freedom is proving an unstoppable driver of excellence’ (Gove, 2012, Speech to Haberdashers’ Aske’s Hatchem College, 4 January).

The report refers to the 2009 PISA study:

Many of the world’s best-performing education systems have moved from bureaucratic ‘command and control’ environments towards school systems in which the people at the frontline have much more control of the way resources are used, people are deployed, the work is organised and the way in which the work gets done. They provide considerable discretion to school heads and school faculties in determining content and the curriculum, a factor which the report shows to be closely related to school performance when combined with effective accountability systems. (OECD, 2010, p. 4)

Similarly, the report suggests that, ‘Across countries, students tend to perform better in schools that have autonomy in personnel and day-to-day decisions, in particular when there is accountability’ (Hanushek and Woessmann 2010, cited in Reform, 2012, p. 22).

The Executive Summary of the Reform report concludes that the Government should now ‘unleash the full potential of the academies movement’ and adopt ‘Plan A+’

(Autonomy Plus) by removing national frameworks for curriculum and for pay and conditions that act as ‘barriers to autonomy and innovation’ (Reform, 2012, p. 8).

Christine Blower, General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, the largest teachers’ union, has commented, ‘The Government is forcing primary schools into academy status by any method possible despite there being no evidence at all that becoming an academy will improve educational standards or that it is a model that can work effectively for primary schools’ (NUT Press Release 10 April, 2012). This builds upon the stance taken in a letter sent to all schools from the combined leaders of all teaching unions, ‘All the major unions representing classroom teachers and school support staff believe academy schools are detrimental to education...’ (May, 2011).

Following the release of ‘Educational Excellence Everywhere’ (DfE, 2016), describing plans to force 17,000 schools into academy status by 2022, numerous groups have voiced their opposition. Detractors include the Bow Group, who describe themselves as ‘the United Kingdom’s oldest conservative think tank’. In contrast to the white paper’s suggested widening of autonomy for schools, the group see forced conversion as a move towards greater central control and a betrayal of previous manifesto commitments, ‘...the forced conversion of all schools into academies contradict previous commitments made to localism through an increasing centralisation of power’ (Bow Group Press Release, 2016). Bow Group Chairman, Cllr Ben Harris-Quinney adds, ‘Shifting all school to academies represents not only one of the largest educational reforms in British history, but also one of the largest shifts of power from local to central government’ (Bow Group Press Release, 2016).

The Academies Annual Report 2014 (DfE, 2014) claims that academies are free to innovate:

Academies are at the cutting edge of the education system, using their freedoms to innovate and improve standards. Academies have the freedom and flexibility to run their school, teach and spend money in ways that specifically suit their local community of pupils, parents, staff and those working in partnership with the school. (DfE, 2014, p. 16)

The report gives examples of how academies are using these ‘new freedoms’ and these include: an academy that has introduced a daily 30 minute reading session for all pupils; one where teacher’s pay progression is linked to pupil performance; another where a creative curriculum has been introduced and an academy that has started a breakfast club.

One case study reports:

The academy has used its curriculum autonomy to prioritise early years learning and introduce new subjects, such as Spanish. They have been particularly successful at engaging parents in their children’s learning, offering workshops on supporting literacy at home and arranging visits to the local library. (DfE, 2014, p. 22)

Do these examples represent new freedoms? All of the above are found in good schools whether academies or state-funded. In fact, the linking of teacher pay to pupil performance is a legal requirement for all schools and is inspected under the 2015 Inspection Framework.

‘Educational Excellence Everywhere’ (DfE, 2016) portrays a new educational landscape where all schools will exist as academies, linked to multi-academy trusts. Within this suggested matrix, executive headteachers and directors of learning take on responsibilities for a number of schools, with distributive leadership raising overall quality of leadership across the country. The most effective leaders moving between

academies, overseeing the new breed of ‘Heads of School’ or ‘Heads of Teaching and Learning’.

As this vision becomes a reality, questions need to be asked about the extent to which the assumed benefits are being realised. Do academy trusts that already exist see signs of improving leadership across schools in their trusts? What is the impact of executive headship on individual schools? Is executive headship cascading outstanding leadership to the benefit of more pupils or is it ‘watering down’ leadership at schools where the executive leader has been removed for significant time each week? What is the role of ‘Head of School’ in this new landscape? Is the role merely acting headship, filling in while the substantive leader is working elsewhere? Is this improving overall leadership in schools or reducing quality with ‘Heads of School’ serving as inexperienced headteachers, under a lesser name and working at a much lower pay scale than an overall headteacher?

Battle lines are emerging as pro-academy and anti-academy factions use different research to support their stances. Following an initial reluctance for schools to become academies, there followed a rapid increase during 2011/12 and then a sudden reduction as schools that were considering conversion began to look at other models including trusts and co-operatives. The release of ‘Educational Excellence Everywhere’ (DfE, 2016), has led to a significant surge in requests for schools to join established academy trusts, signifying a radical upward trend in likely conversions.

Currently, many headteachers are undecided about best options for their schools. Some are being forced into academy status due to poor performance outcomes below set ‘floor standards.’ Some are firmly set against any move away from local authority control.

Cornish primary schools were at the forefront of the move to academy status and are also prime instigators for forming co-operative trusts.

In addressing issues of ‘freedom’ and ‘autonomy’ care must be taken to clarify the limitations of such terms within such a complex environment as education. This study will consider Swift’s (2006) suggestion that, ‘The ‘freedom from’ v. ‘freedom to’ distinction is a red herring’ (Swift, 2006, p. 53). Swift argues that any particular freedom offers ‘freedom from’ and ‘freedom to’ concurrently, giving the example of religious freedom, enabling a citizen freedom *to* practice their religion with freedom *from* state interference. Swift suggests that it is more useful to distinguish between ‘effective freedom’ and ‘formal freedom’ giving the example of British citizens being free to holiday in the Bahamas. Whilst they have ‘formal freedom’ to do this they may or may not have ‘effective freedom’ due to personal finance or disability. These are useful distinctions for setting the context for discussions concerning freedom in schools. Another useful framework is that suggested by MacCallum (1967) who suggests that all claims about freedom exist in a triadic relationship with: x, the agent or subject of freedom; y, the constraint or interference or obstacle; and z, the goal or end. This framework may be particularly useful in understanding headteacher descriptions of how removal of constraints, following conversion to academy status, is leading, in their perception, to identified goals.

Swift (2006) offers further relevance to this study in his conception of the political undertones and approaches taken by ministers following a particular dogma. He suggests that a letter sent to political essayist Isaiah Berlin by Tony Blair set out to describe Blair’s centre-leftist support of ‘positive liberty’ as something quite distinct from Berlin’s concept of totalitarian ‘positive liberty’ that was espoused by Hitler and

Stalin. Swift argues that in contemporary politics the right defines freedom essentially as ‘not being interfered with by others’ in a ‘laissez-faire, free-market economy’ whilst the left holds the view that, ‘freedom can be promoted not just by leaving them (citizens) alone, but by putting them in a position to do things that they would not otherwise be able to do’ (Swift, 2006, p. 56).

If successive governments have made decisions on the direction for schools based on divergent dogmas then this has relevance to this study. Conceivably, it is possible for successive education ministers to believe that their actions are improving standards in schools through either increasing or decreasing top-down initiatives. Depending on their epistemological view, ministers may see their approach as one that either promotes freedom in schools by reducing interference, in a free-market, or by increasing interference, thereby increasing the ‘effective freedom’ of school leaders through sharing of new innovative approaches and measures. Does a move to academy status lessen outside interference? Does the former Secretary of State for Education’s 2012 quest for ‘real freedom to make a difference’ with autonomy providing ‘liberation’ (Gove, 2012, Speech to Haberdashers’ Aske’s Hatchem College, 4 January) allude to a right-wing dogma supporting genuine release from central control?

Ball (2013) suggests that Foucault provides another alternative view of ‘freedom’, ‘Foucault, although he is often read in a different way, is all about being free but also about the dangers of freedom’ (Ball, 2013, p. 4). Ball claims that those who read Foucault as merely a historian of power, discipline, subjectification and normalization, are misled. ‘He was as much concerned with the modalities of freedom as he was with the production of docility’ (Ball, 2013, p. 4). Foucault commented, ‘My role – and that is too empathic a word – is to show people that they are freer than they think’ (Gutman

et al., 1988, pp. 10 – 11). Foucault saw freedom ‘not as a state of being, but a relation to ourselves’ and used the term ‘concrete liberty’ (Foucault, 2001, p. 240 in Ball, 2013, p. 147). ‘Here freedom is never stable – it always has to be practiced, sustained and wrestled’ (Ball, 2013, p. 147). This freedom is temporal and, ‘arises in spaces of fragility as a reaction against the context of the moment and a specific state of affairs which we confront rather than as part of a struggle for ultimate truth’ (Ball, 2013, pp. 147 – 148). The ability of people to ‘resist’ is based on a premise of individual freedom to do so. Additionally, if freedom is ‘framed within the limits of history’ (Ball, 2013, p. 148) and a changing phenomena, then this provides a useful ‘lens’ when considering the possibility of changing freedoms or assumed freedoms for headteachers over time.

### **1.3 Personal professional context**

My involvement in this discourse emerges from different roles. I have developed an interest in the Foucauldian perspective due to personal reflection and phenomenological association of the perspective against my life history having worked in a pre-National Curriculum and pre-inspection theatre, in a completely different educational landscape abroad, as an Ofsted inspector and more recently as headteacher, School Improvement Partner and County Consultant. The research has a direct bearing on my current practice and in particular my work with schools considering moving to academy status. When I was headteacher of an ‘outstanding’ school, I was approached directly by the former Secretary of State for Education in 2010 and asked to lead my school to become one of the first Cornish schools to convert. The decision remains unresolved for the school. My sensitivity to and knowledge of the context has resulted in my situation becoming a ‘researcher as an instrument’ with the accompanying opportunities and limitations and this is examined throughout the process. Any perceived underlying agenda will also



require exhumation, investigation and debate in order to assess any impact on the researcher's synthesis of data.

#### **1.4 Research questions**

The research questions stem from the preceding description of the changing educational landscape and the central rhetorical stances and suggestions. Is the assumption of reducing freedoms for school leaders an accurate representation of reality, as seen by current school leaders? Is the evident reduction in local authority support impacting on headship and if so, where can headteachers turn to address any gaps in order to help their pupils? Are these current changes creating or exacerbating the growing crisis in headteacher recruitment?

The aim of the research is to enable analysis of data from a series of interviews, with headteachers in different contexts, to address the following questions:

- Is there evidence to support the view that primary schools have moved from a state of assumed sovereignty and freedom to one defined by panoptic control?
- To what extent are headteachers required to become advocates for their pupils as external support and local services disappear?
- What factors have led to the growing crisis in primary headteacher recruitment and is there a possible solution?

#### **1.5 Contribution to educational research**

There is a strong body of evidence to suggest that there is a growing crisis in headteacher recruitment with many primary schools receiving zero applications for

vacant headteacher positions (Ofsted, 2014). This research aims to collect evidence from interviews with a broad cross section of headteachers and former headteachers to assess how primary school leadership has changed over time. The research collects views from a range of school leaders on how their professional role has changed, considers why many headteachers retire early and asks why it is increasingly difficult to recruit new school leaders. The 2014 Annual Report from Ofsted declares recruitment as ‘a pressing issue’ particularly in view of the expected rise in numbers of school-aged children by 900,000 in the next ten years.

In addition to this, there have been numerous developments to the educational landscape over the last few decades and little research into the changing nature of headship during this time. In the current climate of reducing public services and external support for schools, demands on headteachers require them to act in previously unvisited arenas. Feedback from headteachers on this and reflections of the changing role of the primary headteacher should contribute to educational research.

There is bountiful rhetoric but little research currently regarding academy schools and yet increasing numbers of headteachers are leading their schools into academy status. As they do so, they lead all of their children, staff, parents, governors and communities into a very new situation away from the apparent security provided by the local authorities and into a realm where the school leaders become responsible and liable for the future. As noted by Campbell (2011), playing the academy card is ‘a game of high stakes’ where ‘the long-term impact of this change to the educational landscape is far from certain’ (Campbell, 2012, p. 28).

The research should be of value to all stakeholders. For those that have already converted it may illuminate the efficacy of decisions made. Have these decisions led to the desired results? For those contemplating conversion the research may offer guidance, confirmation (one way or the other) or further questions. For policy makers, the research may add to the growing insights into how schools evolve in response to policy developments and how headteachers think and act in support of their schools.

Findings from the proposed research may contribute to the wider discourse on forms of schooling and educational policy more generally. Notions of freedom and market economies in education are currently part of the fabric of government discourse and feature in recent legislation. Debate concerning possible links between the marketisation of schools and increasing freedom and autonomy could impact on other forms of schooling such as Charter Schools and Free Schools.

## **1.6 Overview of thesis**

Having collected a body of evidence in the form of interviews with fifteen primary headteachers, it is my intention to interrogate the data using a similar theoretical perspective to that suggested by Ball (2013). This, somewhat unconventional perspective, seeks to avoid being anchored to one closely defined theoretical stance. As Ball notes, ‘I no longer have much interest in being a ‘something’ – that is in claiming allegiance to some orthodoxy or community of like-minded scholars committed to a single theoretical position’ (Ball, 2013, p. 2). Ball claims that at different points he may have been a ‘something’: a Weberian, symbolic interactionist or critical ethnographer. His reading of Foucault over time has encouraged him to, ‘find a space beyond traditional disciplinary or theoretical positions’ and become accustomed to feeling

‘uneasy’, ‘unsettled’ and ‘disconcerted’ with research procedures and emerging outcomes. As a researcher, I am excited by the prospect of being challenged and made uneasy about my proposed project. I will attempt to approach the data from differing angles and use lenses proposed by Foucault and Ball to question what is said and what may be hidden behind the words. I will also, present counter arguments to the Foucauldian perspective and challenge my own stance as researcher.

As the research will draw upon the phenomenological discipline and the premise that reality consists of objects and events as perceived or understood in the human consciousness, care must be taken to allow continual challenge and application of alternative perspective. In terms of producing useful data, much depends on the capacity of the phenomenological approach to achieve ‘epoche’ or ‘bracketing’ where individuals in the research (researchers and participants) suspend judgment on the external in order to examine phenomena as perceived by their consciousness. Also, following the Husserlian battle cry of, “Back to things themselves!” with the challenge to, ‘look, look again and keep looking’ and to look from a different angle, frame of reference or different mood, the methodology anticipates the unfolding of deeper layers of meaning as the archaeology intensifies. This pyrrhonic, skeptical approach, the suspending of judgement in order to maintain ‘skepsis’ (always searching), should not present too great a challenge for the headteachers involved in the project. The skeptical philosophy is at the core of much of the educational landscape with related rhetorical descriptions of ‘learning journeys’ and ‘voyages of discovery’ applied liberally in the primary education field. This particular ‘learning journey’ may generate new data that is of great significance to many school leaders who carry the future of their schools on their shoulders. Any new data discovered that addresses the three key research aims should be of value to educational research.

## **Chapter 2    An analysis of the literature**

The selection strategy for the analysis of literature focuses on literature that relates to the research questions. The review does not seek to present an exhaustive account of government education papers and policy documents over four decades. However, those that relate to the research questions are included, in particular those that introduced significant change for school leaders, such as the implementation of the national curriculum or the directive that encouraged headteachers to move their schools into academy status.

The relevant literature will refer to government concerns about the supposed ‘secret garden’ in which schools operated and the possible negative impact on the lives of children. Further analysis reports the suggestion that actions taken by various governments, to address concerns, have been considered, by some writers, as panoptic movements that have attempted to take control of the education system within a form of ‘machine’ across an educational landscape with headteachers as actors working to a ‘script’ written by others on a limited ‘stage’.

The review debates the role of ‘discourse’ and the notion that discourses may be embedded within an episteme and how the ‘not said’ or ‘never said’ aspects of discourse may relate to the study (Ball 2013). It also considers the extent to which hegemonic assumptions (Gramsci 1978) may relate to recent research into the mental state of headteachers (Grant 2015). The review concludes with a commentary on possible gaps in the research.

## **2.1 The Great Debate, the Black Papers and ‘The Secret Garden’**

Foucault’s (1979) analysis of the rationality of government suggests that this rationality shifted from ‘governance of sovereignty’ in the pre-modern era to ‘governance of population’ during the middle of the eighteenth century. The ‘problem of population’, included health, wealth, education, social behaviour issues and required successive governments to create a new regime of power with a focus on state discipline and surveillance (Shore and Wright, 1997). The two competing conceptualizations of governance, social democracy and neo-liberalism have dominated the political landscape of the twentieth century. During the seventies the ‘problem of population’ was exemplified by: the power struggles between the Heath government and the industrial unions (1972); the three-day week (1973); the 1974 election of the minority Labour government; I.R.A. attacks in Britain (1972 – 79); the resignation of Wilson (1976); the Winter of Discontent (1978/9) and the new Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher (1979).

During this decade, ‘emergent discourses were constructed to define the field, articulate the positions and thus subtly set limits to the possibilities of educational policy’ (Ball, 2006). Ball (2006) identifies the publication of the ‘Black Papers’ (1969 - 1977) and the Ruskin College Speech by Callaghan (1976) as significant features that established ‘The Great Debate’ on education. Callaghan’s speech (1976) echoed the critical sentiments of the ‘Black Papers’ with condemnation of progressive education and the notion of the ‘secret garden’ of pedagogy. The ‘Black Papers’ were critical of three major aspects: falling academic standards; the rise of ‘dangerous, politically motivated teachers

preaching revolution, socialism, egalitarianism, feminism and sexual deviation' (Ball 2006, p.28) and growing indiscipline (Ball, 2006). The much publicised William Tyndale Inquiry (1975-76) appeared to present a school that typified these concerns and politicians, across the political spectrum, called for greater teacher accountability and state control.

Shortly after taking charge of the Labour Government in 1976, Callaghan received a memorandum from the head of the Downing Street Policy Unit, Bernard Donoughue, suggesting the political expediency of the Prime Minister focusing on the need to raise educational standards in schools (Chitty, 2009). Donoughue spent much of that summer writing the Ruskin College speech and briefing papers that were used by Callaghan to challenge members of the cabinet. One of these, Fred Mulley (1976), responded by producing a report, the so-called 'Yellow Book', that proposed the need to restore rigour in the teaching of basic skills and the establishment of a core curriculum.

The Thatcher government of 1979 was elected with a mandate to bring in greater central control of education. Their 'New Right' position conceptualized an 'underclass' of people living in a culture of dependency. Thatcher, as political leader of the New Right, rejected the concept of 'society' and her neo-liberal approach was typified by marketisation metaphors where schools were to become 'free', with the freedom to act as competitive, self-governing quasi-enterprises, bound by centralized policy, but able to control their destinies (Shore and Wright, 1997). By this stage it was clear that the 'golden age' of de facto autonomy for teachers was over (Le Grand, 1997).

The final survey of primary education in England by HMI (DES, 1978) was based on a random sample of 542 schools and it raised serious concerns about the quality and

standards in primary schools. The Secretary of State asked Alexander, Rose and Woodhead (the ‘three wise men’) to ‘review available evidence about the delivery of education in primary schools’ (Ofsted, 1999) and ‘Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools’ was published in 1992. The report reflected the view that there was a need to fully investigate schools in order to be able to comment fully on strengths and weaknesses. In the same year ‘The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) was formed with Woodhead, one of the ‘three wise men’ taking the helm in 1994. The days of the supposed ‘secret garden’ where teachers were free to follow their own professional instincts were clearly gone by this stage. Teachers and headteachers were now working in a defined system to a set curriculum and were subject to scrutiny by an inspectorate. Authorship of education was firmly in the grasp of those sanctioned by the government by the nineties and measurement of compliance and success was now possible.

## **2.2 Relating discourse to episteme.**

‘Discourse is that which constrains or enables, writing, speaking and thinking’ (Ball, 2013, p. 18) and is not the equivalent of ‘language’ (Mills, 2003). Foucault referred to discourse as ‘the domain of subconscious knowledge’ and he was far more interested in what was unsaid than said:

Discourse is secretly based on an “already said”; and that this “already said” is not merely a phrase that has been already spoken, or a text that has been written, but a “never said”, an incorporeal discourse, a voice as silent as a breath, a writing that is merely the hollow of its own mark. (Foucault, 1974, p. 25)

In the landscape inhabited by headteachers, as would be the case for many professional situations, there exists examples of ‘already said, yet never said’ incorporeal discourses. For Foucault, the decloaking and analysis of the hidden structures and rules behind these would be of greater benefit than a simple analysis of ‘the texts and utterances’



produced within the discourse (Ball, 2013, p. 19). From my experience of twenty years as a headteacher, I recognise this as a tangible ‘sense of knowing’ when groups of headteachers meet, where discourses often develop with homage to some invisible structure of unspoken but mutually understood ‘already said, yet never said’ principles. As an example, a headteacher arriving late to a meeting saying, ‘I am sorry but I have struggled to complete my s175 this afternoon!’ would probably generate ‘knowing’ nods of empathy (The s175 form was a legal safeguarding form that each headteacher had to complete each year). Each member would be able to reflect on their own similar struggles being responsible for school safeguarding without a word being spoken.

Ball (2013) suggests that discourses exist within an ‘episteme’ where this is described as:

... a unitary practico-cognitive structure, a regime of truth or general politics of truth, which provides the unconscious codes and rules of holistic conceptual frameworks “that define problematics and their potential resolutions and constitute views of the world comprising the most fundamental of identificatory and explanatory notions, such as the nature of causality in a given range of phenomena.” (Prado 1995, p. 26 in Ball, 2013, p. 23)

Ball describes a symbiotic relationship between discursive formations and an episteme where discourses are, ‘... nested within an episteme, which makes them possible, and discursive formations and their relationships constitute the episteme.’ He adds, ‘The episteme is a complex set of relationships between knowledges, an open ‘dispersion’, a set of rules that define the objects proper to their own study’ (Ball, 2013, p. 21).

When dealing with scientific studies involving people, Foucault reminds the reader that ‘modern man’ is constituted from an ‘empirico-transcendental doublet’ where, ‘Man as a reflexive and transcendental knower is autonomous and rational, but also the product

of unconscious forces and cultural practices' (Ball, 2013, p. 22). If this is the case, then a headteacher, as both a source of meaning and a social product, offers challenge to a researcher who could struggle to unravel the meaning behind written or spoken discourse. To what extent is what is said or written reflexive information from a transcendental knower? Is this data influenced by 'unconscious forces' and cultural influence, nested within an episteme common to headteachers? Additionally, if divergent discourses exist between older and newer headteachers and these conflict, then is there evidence of marginalization or subjugation of less powerful or 'dated' discourses? It is also important for the researcher to consider what is not said, the incorporeal discourse, the story hidden behind the words.

### **2.3 Panopticism - epistemological and methodological considerations**

There are numerous references to Foucault's reluctance to identify with a particular epistemology or methodological approach (Harwood, 2000; Meadmore, Hatcher & McWilliams, 2000; Tamboukou, 1999) and some suggestions that researchers drawing on the work of Foucault 'strive to avoid the 'positivist trap' of essentialising the research method' (Harwood, 2000, p. 59).

It appears that many scholars using discourse analysis within a Foucauldian framework have adopted a 'Foucauldianistic' reticence to declare method, fearful of the charge of being prescriptive. (Graham, 2005, p. 6)

Graham (2005) suggests maintaining 'a respectful conversation with Foucault' (Graham 2005, 6) and engaging in a form of 'methodological anarchy' (Thomas, 1997, p. 76) in a creative sense using 'systems of thought as catalysts to move beyond the straight-jacketing confines of methodological rules that serve to inhibit or constrain thought' (Graham, 2005, p. 6).

Foucault claims that ‘perception has no causal primacy of ontological pre-existence’ and ‘does not separate perception from conceptualization’, seeing the object, the mode of perception and the concept being produced simultaneously’ (Alcoff, 2005, p. 212):

The object (of discourse) does not await in limbo the order that will free it and enable it to become embodied in a visible and prolix objectivity; it does not pre-exist itself, held back by some obstacle at the first edges of light. It exists under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations. (Foucault, 1972, p. 45)

Foucault rejects positivistic accounts of contemporary knowledge as absolute, final and non-contingent (where contingent refers to the likelihood of a disparate development of knowledge under different circumstances) choosing to reflect an alternate episteme in which knowledge is defined, affected and shaped by context and time. The Foucauldian perspective advocates that the conceptual and methodological approaches used in producing knowledge are historically contingent (Alcoff, 2005) and therefore, ‘one cannot speak of anything at any time...’ (Foucault, 1972, p. 45). Foucault’s own conceptualization of ‘episteme’ rejects the conviction that it is merely a method or form of knowledge, preferring to describe it as ‘the totality of relations (relations of similarity, analogy and difference)’ that produce discursive regularities and unified discursive formations emerging within institutional arrangements with specific actors (Foucault, 1975).

Panopticism is a social theory developed by Foucault (Foucault, 1979) building on a concept for a particular design for a prison, by British philosopher and social reformer Jeremy Bentham, called a Panopticon. Bentham spent sixteen years developing and refining his design that he hoped would transform the penal system. Instead of housing prisoners in dungeons, out of sight, his Panopticon would situate them in open cells in a ring doughnut shaped prison with open barred doorways facing a central courtyard

where guards could carry out surveillance from a central tower hidden behind screens. ‘All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy’ (Foucault, 1979, p. 200). In not knowing when they were being watched, Bentham anticipated that prisoners would conform to expected behaviours through fear of falling under the gaze of their prison masters. Foucault argues that the Panopticon is a disciplinary mechanism designed to control the prisoner through subjection to constant visibility and surveillance through subtle and often unseen forces, ‘...each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible’ (Foucault, 1979, p. 200).

Foucault’s panopticism has been used to describe how central forces have attempted to control human populations through the establishment of surveillance systems that gaze at individuals from a distance. Over time, these systems bring order as subjects conform to expected behaviours and eventually the Panopticon functions automatically with individuals accepting imposed discursive mechanisms. In using the theory when researching school leadership, it may appear odd to consider a headteacher as ‘an actor alone’ when their role is typified by constant interaction with pupils, parents, staff, governors and a plethora of external agents. However, headteachers are on record as stating that they can feel isolated. A very well-used online coaching site for headteachers addresses the question, ‘Is the isolation of headship becoming too much for you?’ In advising on how to overcome loneliness from ‘life at the top’ the coaching site submits:

You will know, more than most, that sometimes headship can feel like the loneliest job in the world! There will be times, even when you are surrounded by a school full of children and colleagues who share the day to day tasks of leading and managing your school, when you feel as though there is absolutely no one that you can turn to. (Grant, Founder of Integrity, Coaching and Leadership Development, 24 August, 2013 blog)

The site describes how this feeling of isolation can lead to serious forms of detachment, detachment from self and detachment from relationships with others. Using the ‘National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers’ as their ‘benchmark’ coaches from the site promise to offer a pathway leading headteachers away from their perceived aloneness. The founder of Integrity Coaching, Viv Grant, is a former primary headteacher who describes herself as, ‘one of the youngest headteachers in the country to turn around a failing primary school’ (Grant, 2014, p. 5). She describes how even though she received nothing but praise and plaudits for improving the school, ‘inside myself another story was unfolding’. After a few years at the school she wrote in her diary:

The job is all consuming and I feel so alone. There seems to be no one I can go to when things go wrong, to talk through difficult situations. I love this school, I love my staff, and I love the children, but does leading have to be at such a great personal cost? (Grant, 2014, p. 6)

Grant describes how headteachers are trapped in an ‘accountability culture’ where a headteacher’s every word is interpreted as a statement on capability. She portrays many headteachers spending days each week ‘on a knife edge’ waiting for a call from Ofsted and ‘sitting in fear’ on the days that GCSE and SAT results are released, worried that their careers will be over ‘in the blink of an eye’. She explains that the public never hear the truth about the fears held by headteachers, ‘The system doesn’t enable them to be honest about the pressure they are under, let alone find ways for dealing with it’ (Grant, 2015, p. 1). Instead, Grant suggests that the ‘comic book hero concept of headship’ is being promulgated, a concept far from reality. Grant calls for emotional support for headteachers and recognition of their normality:

We all need to recognise that headteachers are mothers, fathers, partners. They feel hurt and pain. They experience self-doubt and worry. The superhead does not exist. What do exist are normal human beings who have to survive in a system that sees passion for high standards and compassion and humility as mutually exclusive. (Grant, 2015, p. 1)

Grant's comments present a contemporary image of a primary headteacher as an actor, 'alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible' (Foucault, 1979, p. 200).

Foucault (1979) suggests that 'subjects' are required to remain in the gaze from those at the centre, 'Disciplinary power... imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility.' Further, 'It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection' (Foucault, 1979, p. 187). Relating this to his panopticism social theory, Foucault states, 'Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power' (Foucault, 1979, p. 201). He describes how prisoners would be 'backlit' by light from external windows, not able to hide in the shadows. In schools today, teachers are backlit by a systematic surveillance typified by lesson observations, 'drop-ins', learning walks, book scrutinies, cross school moderation of outcomes and external moderation. The 2015 school inspection handbook requires school leaders to 'use incisive performance management' to hold teachers to account for their pupils' outcomes (Ofsted, 2015, p. 42). Headteachers are also not free to hide in any shadows as they are subject to 'systematic challenge' by governors and external monitoring officials and inspectors. In order to achieve the 'outstanding' accolade under the 2015 inspection regime, they must achieve the prime descriptor, 'Leaders and governors have created a culture that enables pupils and staff to excel' (Ofsted, 2015, p. 42).

Ball (2006) suggests that headteachers themselves may be guilty of imposing institutional surveillance and panopticism, in some cases engaging in acts of fabrication through embedded procedures and practices, geared to meet established or assumed performativity (Ball, 2006, p. 153). This study will investigate the data generated to

search for spoken or implied references to the changing role of headship and any suggestions of possible panopticism and feelings of aloneness or growing surveillance. It will be of interest to examine whether headteachers themselves believe that they have become part of some ‘machine’, willing or unwilling supervisors of institutional imposition.

#### **2.4 Education as a changing epistemological landscape**

This study adopts the extended metaphor of an epistemological landscape. Pascale (2011) describes how the metaphor alludes to ‘geographies of power expressed in technologies for generating knowledge’ (Pascale, 2011, p. 1). Traditional epistemology has been defined in geographical terms with knowledge divided into: fields, topics (from *topos*, or place), domains, realms and spheres. ‘Implied in this subdivision of epistemological territory is a mastery or dominance over knowledge, as the terms ‘subject’ and ‘discipline’ make evident’ (Mitchell, 2007, p. 2). Pascale (2011) identifies a poststructural transformation of classical and modernist epistemology with a new highlight on the subjective and political influences on mapmaking and awareness of constructive processes of interpretation of the maps themselves. The result of an ontological shift in social research has led to an awareness of the impermanence of boundaries, a rejection of the notion of fixed laws governing social life and acceptance of the subjective nature of understanding (Pascale, 2011, pp. 2 - 3).

Just as political boundaries ebb and flow due to changing power dynamics, so too do boundaries in the epistemological map of knowledge. As conquered civilizations ‘disappear’ into history with their lands renamed, there is a similar dynamic movement of epistemological boundaries as more powerful and persuasive epistemes replace older, weaker stances (Pascale, 2011). Of equal importance is the notion that new epistemes

struggle to gain power and acceptance when faced with strong, entrenched positions. It can be argued that in the realm of knowledge, actors who hold less powerful paradigmatic and epistemological stances struggle to be heard over the more powerful dominant forces.

The extended metaphor appears to suggest why it is challenging to associate the Foucauldian theoretical perspective with a particular episteme. As Foucault moved between his roles as psychologist, anthropologist, philosopher, historian and social theorist he openly rejected epistemological labels attributed to him:

A key tenet of the Foucauldian perspective is the notion that anthropological reflection can illuminate the evolving human condition and explain how behaviours, once tolerated in society, become categorised as ‘abnormal’ in an emerging discourse fuelled by normalization. (Hodson, 2011, p. 5)

Foucault’s (1979) identification of ‘technologies of normalization’ that systematically create, classify and control ‘anomalies’ in the social body, normalizing through corrective or therapeutic procedures (Rabinow, 1986) are also examples of technologies of epistemological boundary change. Increasing control over minute aspects of behaviour, justified under a banderole proclaiming ‘the common good’, and the ‘vast documentary apparatus’ required by technologies of normalization, ‘enable the authorities to fix individuals in a web of objective codification’ (Rabinow, 1986, p. 22) and can be seen as manifestations of powerful new epistemes overwhelming existing ones.

## **2.5 Headteachers as actors**

This study considers headteacher ‘actors’ within this epistemological landscape and it is relevant to place these actors within the scene and further extend the metaphor to include dramaturgical discourse (Goffman, 1974). Goffman’s perspective identifies



'borders' as particularly significant with actors able to manoeuvre their borders to manage who has access to their 'front stage', 'back stage' and 'outside' spaces. The actors in this research project are Cornish primary headteachers and their stage is their school, situated in a wider, national educational landscape. There are clear limitations with all metaphors and the real danger of denial of the reality of personal existence. In this research project, the participants are real headteachers living actual lives. None of them are 'actors' and none of them use a 'script' or operate on a 'stage' against a prescribed 'scene'.

Any analysis that limited these real individuals to mere characters in a virtual 'play' would be unhelpful. However, there does appear to be a degree of justification for using the dramaturgical metaphor. Firstly, as noted, Foucault used a similar metaphor to describe prisoners in his Panopticon, 'They (the cells) are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible' (Foucault, 1979, p. 200). Secondly, there is evidence of dramaturgical discourse in schools (Carlson, 1987; Milner-Bolotin, 2007) with teachers claiming to be 'on stage' in classrooms, 'under the spotlights' when being observed. Jeffrey and Woods (1998) describe how schools 'put on a show' in the build up to inspections. When schools had a six-week notification, significant effort went into preparing for the visit by Ofsted. Jeffrey and Woods (1998) describe one example where a new lectern and leather seats were purchased and all wall displays produced to exacting standards, all part of the performance.

The educational landscape has changed dramatically over the past four decades from a space with supposed greater sovereignty and freedom in the seventies to an ever-delineated landscape with increasing control and scrutiny from the centre. Giddens

(1979) expanded on the Comtean notion of ‘double hermeneutics’ suggesting that whilst the natural scientist can employ a ‘tabula rasa’ approach, the social scientist must contend with the ‘categories used by laymen in the practical organization of social life’ (Giddens, 1979, p. 12). It is as though researchers must understand that the ‘actor’ is acting on a ‘stage’, in a ‘play’ written by someone else. In the case of the headteacher, the ‘stage’ is their school and the degree to which they are involved with the writing of the ‘play’ has changed over time. In the seventies (the days of Callaghan’s ‘secret garden’) schools supposedly had great autonomy and headteachers could influence their life stories and those of others significantly. The topography has changed for headteachers.

## **2.6 A technology of power and the ‘machine’**

A Foucauldian perspective of ‘management’ within a developing panoptistic regime suggests it has become a ‘technology of power’ (Ball, 1990) in which managers themselves are subjugated within the ‘machine’:

In this form of management, power is not totally entrusted to someone who would exercise it alone, over others, in an absolute fashion; rather, this machine is one in which everyone is caught, those who are subjected to it. (Foucault, 1977, p. 156)

Ball (1990) claims that, ‘Management is a theoretical and practical technology of rationality geared to efficiency, practicality, and control’ (Ball, 1990, p. 157) and embodies a clear empiricist-rationalist epistemology. Such a view contends that social life can be viewed scientifically and dissected through objective and mechanistic discourse. Within this ‘machine’, the ‘play’ is written by those in power, by ministers and the inspectorate. The new managerialism in schools brings order to social chaos, rationality, sanity, efficiency and meritocracy (Ball, 1990). The managers are responsible for promulgating and sustaining the centrally produced ‘script’, bringing

into line any lesser ‘actors’ that stray from the edicts. The managed are, ‘fragile, prone to irrationality, atavistic practices, and surfeits of emotion’ (Ball, 1990, p. 158). Resisters to the epistemology are social deviants in need of normalization through punishment or therapy (Foucault, 1979).

Appraisal for teachers (1980’s) and appraisal of schools by Ofsted (1990’s) exemplify Foucauldian technologies of power that seek to provide objective codification (Rabinow, 1986, p. 22) and normalization of teachers. Ball (1990) suggests that as teachers become calculable, describable and comparable they fall under a ‘normalizing gaze’ that ‘establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates and judges them’ (Foucault, 1979, p. 175).

Within this changing topographical scene, headteachers as ‘lead actors’ have seen their roles redefined and reshaped. The head of a Cornish primary school in the seventies acted on a very different stage in a role defined at a local level. Pay and conditions of service were arranged externally, buildings were the sole responsibility of the local authority, there was no National Curriculum and no inspectorate apart from very occasional visits from a passing government inspector (HMI) with no fixed agenda. The HMI Primary Survey (1978) analysed data collected in 1975 from 1121 inspected classes in 540 primary schools. The survey found a large degree of similarity across the country with most schools having similar class structure, curriculum content focused on basic skills, teaching approach and attitude to differentiation. This consensus had not been achieved through top-down directive but through other, more local, means.

By the turn of the century, the headteacher of the same school performed a greatly enhanced role of leadership and management: promoting teaching and learning to set

criteria; managing large budgets; preparing their school for inspection by Ofsted and being responsible for meeting new requirements established by the government for pupil well-being and safety. Far from a 'tabula rasa' on which to build, the head of the school in the new century is found situated in a complex topography with a backdrop presenting a 'double hermeneutic' situation with the head performing multiple roles on their stage against the heavily defined background of the national scene with ever changing boundaries. Meeting the requirements of the Ofsted Evaluation Schedule (2015) and managing the school through the devalourisation, deprofessionalisation and reprofessionalisation of teachers with the elevation of value over values (Ball, 2006) presents a far more challenging role for current headteachers. Foucauldian analysis identifies the inclination to 'section' schools into categories with 'normal' schools being those that meet the set criteria and 'abnormal' schools being placed into special categories of failure and subject to discipline and punishment. The two Ofsted categories of concern, 'special measures' and 'requires improvement' (Ofsted, 2015) convey the ongoing impulse to measure the performance of schools against set standards.

Epistemologically, there appears to be a dominant objectivist stance by the government and inspectorate with a positivistic theoretical perspective. The quality of the education system, teaching, leadership and management can all be assessed and measured against an agreed or imposed scale. Headteachers that allow their schools to fall below the expected requirements require 'treatment' and are either punished or supported to return to the set national 'script' and level of performance. The new manifestation of academy status promises to bring a new twist to the educational landscape.

## **2.7 An imposed curriculum and changing teacher roles**

Central to the development of management as a ‘technology of power’ is the requirement for schools to deliver an imposed national curriculum. The Schools Council (1964) introduced a subject-based focus with the objectives-based planning model as the only acceptable model for curriculum planning. The School Council’s inability to bring change led to its reconstitution in 1984. The role for curriculum development was taken over by the School Curriculum Development Council (SCDC), a politically controlled body. A major problem experienced by the Schools Council (1964) was the difficulty in sharing innovations and ideas. MacDonald and Walker (1976) claim that the Schools Council’s (1964) approach relied on ‘diffusion’ of ideas but this was replaced by ‘dissemination’ characterised by planned pathways transmitting new ideas from source to all locations of implementation (Kelly, 2004).

Three models of dissemination are identified by Schön (1971): the Centre-Periphery model, the Proliferation of Centres model and the Shifting Centres model. Kelly (2004) explains that all of these represent a centre-periphery approach where the process of dissemination must be centrally controlled and managed, planned in detail with one-way delivery to schools. Havelock’s (1971) Social Interaction Model recognises the centre-periphery nature of dissemination and suggests that a limiting control to its success is the social climate of the receiving body. Gross et al. (1971) suggests other barriers hindering the centre-periphery model include teachers’ lack of clarity about the innovation, their lack of skill and knowledge needed, the unavailability of required materials, the incompatibility of organisational arrangements with the innovation and lack of staff motivation. These are based on the centrality of the teacher in curriculum innovation and development and Kelly (2004) identifies significant implications for the

professional role of teachers in light of this attempt to ‘teacher-proof’ education through power-coercive strategies.

Kelly (2004) notes how teacher-proofing approaches to education did not exist prior to the establishment of the national curriculum (1987). In the introduction of his fifth edition of ‘The Curriculum’, Kelly (2004) reflects on the evolution taking place in curriculum development during the last three decades. His first edition in 1977 set out to encourage teachers to develop a theoretical underpinning of their work so promoting effective curriculum development. Just five years later his second edition acknowledged a significantly different climate with increasing political pressure on schools. Kelly (2004), either intentionally or not, uses a Foucauldian penal analogy, describing how ‘the shades of the prison house’ were beginning to close around pupils and teachers and he warned of the dangers of placing curriculum control, ‘in the hands of others who are in no position to exercise it effectively’ (Kelly, 2004, p. xiii). By his third edition in 1989, constraints on curriculum planning had become directives, teacher appraisal and accountability were emerging and the role of the teacher in control of curriculum planning and development was being rapidly eroded. Kelly (2004) claims that the insights into curriculum evolution gained during the 1960s and 1970s were stifled and suppressed beneath the wave of politicization sweeping across education. In his fifth edition Kelly (2004) re-emphasises the lost ideal of the teacher as the trusted educator and condemns the politicization of education as, ‘a paradigm of what should be avoided in educational planning’ (Kelly, 2004, p. xvi). If the imposition of a central curriculum has been utilised in this manner, eroding teacher involvement in shaping the curriculum under a growing politicized influence, then headteachers have stood at a nexus where they are held responsible for applying government directives while fielding possible opposition by teachers in their schools.

The argument concerning the deprofessionalising of teachers is developed by Schön (1983) who describes how ‘professionals’ have become essential to the functioning of society where schools are arenas for the exercise of professional activity. He claims that there is a growing crisis of confidence in professional knowledge brought about by well-publicised scandals involving professionals and professionally conceived technologies. This has led to questioning of the previously hallowed position of professionals. Illich (1970) engaged in a wholesale criticism of professional claims to extraordinary knowledge and helped to fuel growing scepticism about professional effectiveness. Headteachers are often referred to as the ‘lead professionals’ in schools and are therefore vulnerable to any erosion of professional status engendered by Illichian sentiment fuelled by reported scandals involving colleagues. This vulnerability is exacerbated in the growing era of social networking where criticism of public figures is expedited and in some cases instant (Simon, 2005).

Kelly (2004) suggests that teachers, as professionals, are able to support or sabotage the externally imposed systems and it is the threat of the latter that required the establishment of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). He describes Ofsted inspectors as ‘thought-police’ designed to prevent teachers from acting as individual educators and enforcing obedience to authority. He suggests that the present political climate discourages teachers who wish to pursue curricular issues beyond mere delivery and this in turn is leading to deprofessionalisation with serious implications for the long-term quality of provision. Headteachers may be placed in a delicate position where they have to provide evidence of curriculum coverage for inspectors while encouraging creativity and professional freedom for their staff. Headteachers themselves may wish to ‘sabotage’ the imposed curriculum system and carry out forms of deception or defiance

and this has become possible under the academisation process where academies are not required to follow the set curriculum but do have to provide a 'broad and balanced' offering for their pupils.

According to Grundy (1987), professionalism as a notion has been hijacked. She believes that a different concept is needed where critical pedagogy goes beyond merely situating the learning experience within the experience of the learner. It requires a process in which both learner and teacher, through dialogue and negotiation, confront real problems of their existence and face their own oppression. Grundy (1987) positions praxis at the centre of the teacher's professional role demanding informed, committed action (Smith, 2000).

Doll (1993) claims that the implications of a post-modern perspective are so 'megaparadigmatic' that a new sense of educational order is emerging with a new concept of curriculum and an evolving relationship between teachers and students. He believes that the linear, sequential system dominating education is giving way to a more complex, unpredictable system typified by asymmetry and chaos. Relationships are moving away from the knowing teacher informing the unknowing students to what Schön (1983) describes as a mutual relationship in which teachers and students work together to, 'probe the tacit understanding both teacher and students possess' (Schön, 1983, pp. 296-297) with a focus on the runner running rather than on the course being run.

In spite of these megaparadigmatic movements, Kelly (2004) suggests that politicians tend to be attracted towards versions of rationalist epistemology based upon Platonic, Kantian and Hegelian philosophies. If knowledge is reified and independent of the



knower then there is a premise for elevating the universal above the particular, the collective above the individual and this nullifies the value of individual questioning and challenge. This epistemology also supports the argument for the inalienable right of certain subjects to be part of the accepted curriculum. Post-modern objections to these absolutist theories centre on philosophical, human and political challenges. Empiricists, such as Locke (in Kelly, 2004), challenge the rationalist nullification of the senses and deny the existence of *a priori* knowledge. People develop, according to empiricists, from Locke's (in Kelly, 2004) state of 'tabula rasa' to knowledgeable beings through experience and reflection. With a view of knowledge as hypothetical and subject to change, empiricists are reluctant to insist on locating particular bodies of knowledge into the curriculum. Pragmatics such as Dewey (1916) insist that we cannot impose our understanding of what is knowledge upon children. We can, however, assist them to develop their own understanding in a more personalised provision. Dewey's (1916) model for all knowledge has a scientific nature where hypotheses are suggested and modified as accepted knowledge evolves (Doll, 1993).

Krishnamurti (1953), writing well before the National Curriculum (1987), was highly critical of education systems with departmental divisions, where children are forced to conform to a particular discipline. He claimed that life cannot be made to conform to a system and children were being prevented from growing into integrated beings. If we are educated merely to achieve distinction, to get a better job or to have power over others then we will live lives that are shallow and empty. Conformity to such a system kills the spirit of adventure and we become sad creatures who fear life itself. Our education system makes us fear to be different from our neighbour, afraid to think contrary to the establishment and unaware of our integrated selves. Krishnamurti (1953) saw education as geared to industrialization and war with its principal aim to develop

efficiency, entrapping people and it is exemplified by ruthless competition and mutual destruction. The system makes people subservient, mechanical and thoughtless, leaving them incomplete and stultified. He warned of the move towards an overemphasis on method where children are considered as important only if they fit in, 'One measures and classifies the child, and then proceeds to educate him according to some chart.' (Krishnamurti, 1953, p. 25) This leads, he claims, to a 'tyranny of opinion' where discipline becomes a substitute for love, and freedom disappears. To Krishnamurti (1953) the best teacher will not depend on a method but will study each individual pupil with patience and love. Systems instil fear into all children and these live on as the children grow, warping their outlook on life. He quotes:

To be without fear is the beginning of wisdom, and only the right kind of education can bring about the freedom from fear in which alone there is deep and creative intelligence. (Krishnamurti, 1953, p. 34)

He suggests that education dogmas, institutions and authority suffocate the hearts and minds of learners leading to most people being 'washed out' by forty-five by slavery to routine through compliance, fear and acceptance.

This image of an imposed curriculum suffocating hearts and minds is developed by Illich (1970) who argues that the institutionalisation of values leads to social polarization, physical pollution and psychological impotence. He argues that 'school' has become a world religion of a modernised proletariat, making futile promises to save the poor. He uses examples from the work of Freire (in Illich, 1970) to show how effective learning takes place when there is intrinsic value to the learner conveying power and political meaning. Freire's (1970) concerns with curriculum as praxis stress dialogical attributes and the development of respect and promotion of community. His emphasis on conscientization features in his views on a pedagogy of the oppressed

where growing respect leads to developing consciousness and power to transform reality. He claims that 'banking education' anaesthetises and inhibits creative power and presents education as the practice of domination. Problem-posing education, however, strives for the emergence of consciousness and presents education as the practice of freedom. hooks (2003, hooks requires that her surname has a lower-case initial) describes how the Freirian approach includes the process of 'self-actualisation' where teachers become aware of themselves and their learners as human beings. hooks (2003) claims that these 'democratic educators' see education as a vocation rooted in hopefulness, far removed from the plethora of teachers who simply transfer irrelevant knowledge that bears no relation to how pupils live or behave. Taylor (1993) criticises Freirian education's attack on product-based education with its 'banking system' designed to deposit information into educatees. Taylor (1993) suggests that Freirian techniques do differ from traditional ones but still involve 'banking'.

Changing power dynamics have altered boundaries in the epistemological map of knowledge over four decades since the supposed freedom of the seventies. More powerful and persuasive epistemes, sponsored by government, have replaced older, weaker stances (Pascale 2011). The new epistemes may have struggled to gain power and acceptance if faced with strong, entrenched positions. However, in terms of curriculum imposition, actors who held less powerful paradigmatic and epistemological stances struggled to be heard over the more dominant forces. Pollard (2005) suggests that there were initial objections to the imposed curriculum. He suggests that recent initiatives have led to radical developments in how schools use the national curriculum (1987). The Labour Party in 1994 criticised the first version of the national curriculum (1987) believing that it concentrated on the timetabled curriculum, ignoring the wider curriculum arising from the school's ethos and creating a climate of failure due to an

overemphasis on testing. The Labour Party also criticised the endless ministerial tinkering and myriad of orders, circulars, folders, ring binders and instructions (Labour Party Green Paper, in Pollard, 2005). Pollard (2005) claims that the 2000 revision of the national curriculum created a new climate where schools were judged on the 'whole curriculum', including the 'observed curriculum' and the 'hidden curriculum'. Personal, social, emotional and health education came to the forefront along with spiritual, moral, social and educational development. In a further development, the 2005 revision of school inspection, schools were required to rigorously seek out stakeholder views and give examples of actions taken based on these in their new self-evaluation form (SEF). Not only must schools seek criticism but they must be seen to act on their analysis of this (Ofsted, 2005).

Pollard's (2005) suggestion is that curriculum development in England and Wales is moving from a product-based to a process and praxis-based style and is diluted by further ministerial tinkering. Dadds (2001) describes an increase in what she calls the 'Hurry Along Curriculum.' She claims that coverage has become more important than learning itself and this diminishes the frequency of responsive teaching and minimises the opportunities to draw children's own interests into curriculum planning and teaching. Dadds (2001) points to research by Black and William (1998) that suggests that when teachers slow down and give children more time to think about learning, benefits emerge.

The relaunched national curriculum (2013) appears to recognise that the defined, imposed curriculum does not constitute the entirety of primary education:

The national curriculum is just one element in the education of every child. There is time and space in the school day and in each week, term and year

to range beyond the national curriculum specifications. The national curriculum provides an outline of core knowledge around which teachers can develop exciting and stimulating lessons to promote the development of pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills as part of the wider school curriculum. (DfE, 2013, p. 6)

Maintained schools in England are legally required to follow the statutory curriculum:

Pupils of compulsory school age in community and foundation schools, including community special schools and foundation special schools, and in voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools, must follow the national curriculum. (DfE, 2013, p. 6)

Schools that become academies are not required to follow the national curriculum and this is one of the suggested 'freedoms' gained from the transition. For schools that have to follow the national curriculum, there are detailed programmes of study for each year group and closely defined 'end-of-year expectations' for all pupils. Measurement against these forms the basis for the assessment of attainment and progress in schools following the removal of 'Levels of attainment' in 2015.

It is important for this research study to refer to these changes in curriculum coverage over recent decades. The curriculum forms the bedrock of the workplace for headteachers and teachers, it is the 'raw material' that is used to deliver and shape learning for all pupils. If it is the case that, over time, the supply of this 'raw material' has changed from one resourced by professional teachers themselves in individual schools, to one carefully selected by centrally located powers and written into law for all schools to deliver, then there are clearly implications connected to professional freedom and school autonomy. Furthermore, if freedom from curriculum imposition is then dangled as 'bait', as some suggest, to encourage school leaders to move towards academisation, then this is also relevant to current school leadership. There are possible

ethical implications as well, in that governments could be seen to be establishing laws to create challenges for schools and offering exemption for those who ‘choose’ to follow a politically motivated dogma (a principle laid down by an authority as incontrovertibly true), in this case the principle that academies provide a superior education than that found in maintained schools.

The curriculum found in schools in 2016/17 appears to have emerged as an outcome following a series of negotiations between powerful agencies rather than as a mere servile response to an imposition from a powerful ruling government. The outcome serves different interests and certain settings are able to provide a tailored programme for their pupils that is very different from the original national curriculum. Headteachers and governors of academies have far greater agency to provide a bespoke curriculum for their students and this presents issues in terms of equity and autonomy across the education system.

## **2.8 Hegemonic and paradigmatic assumptions**

The term hegemony was proposed by Gramsci in 1978 and describes the process whereby ideas, structures and actions come to be seen as pre-ordained and good. In fact, many of these deeply embedded ideas are constructed and transmitted by powerful people to serve their interests. Brookfield (1995) explains how hegemonic assumptions about teaching are eagerly embraced. They appear to represent goodness and truth but actually serve the interests of political groups. As noted, he describes, using another prison analogy, the cruel irony of teachers taking pride in acting on assumptions that enslave them. ‘In working diligently to implement these assumptions, teachers become willing prisoners who lock their own cell doors behind them’ (Brookfield, 1995, p. 15). Acceptance of hegemonic assumptions leads to harmful practices where teachers take

on backbreaking loads, dealing with large numbers of pupils without complaining because they assume that teaching is a vocation. Campbell and Neill's (1994) studies of teachers' work suggest that many count any day on which they do not come home exhausted as a day wasted. Brookfield (1995) claims that critically reflective teachers can stand outside their practice and see that curriculum content and assessment procedures are social products located in time and space. They can also distinguish between justifiable dedication to their pupils' needs and workaholicism. Critical reflection also helps teachers and headteachers to overcome the hegemonic assumption that they must meet the needs of every pupil. This according to Brookfield (1995) is pedagogically unsound, psychologically demoralising and likely to lead teachers to carry around a permanent burden of guilt as they struggle to live up to this impossible task.

Brookfield (1995) suggests that there are three types of assumptions: paradigmatic (underlying world-view assumptions), prescriptive (assumptions about what we think we 'should' be doing) and causal (assumptions about how things work out and how we can make things better). He describes paradigmatic assumptions as the ones that are often the hardest to identify because of their deep-rooted nature. In his opinion, critical reflection can enable school leaders and teachers to identify and scrutinise assumptions that underpin their work and he suggests four distinct, yet interconnecting, lenses.

Firstly, the lens involving autobiographical reflection. When engaging in self-reflection headteachers and teachers can become aware of paradigmatic assumptions and begin to test their validity. Brookfield (1995) contends that a considerable amount of contrary evidence is required to disprove paradigmatic assumptions. He gives the example of the teaching strategy of sitting pupils in a circle instead of rows. It is assumed that the circle

is a physical manifestation of democracy, with each member a respected equal. All pupils have the opportunity to be seen and heard and thereby receive respect and value. Brookfield (1995) points to research carried out by Gore (1993) suggesting that the actual experience of being in a circle is ambiguous, fine for confident pupils but painful and humiliating for shy or self-conscious pupils. Beneath the circle's democratic veneer there appears to be an uncertain reality. This illustration is used by Brookfield (1995) to show how critical reflection can lead to a leader or teacher questioning paradigmatic assumptions and changing their pedagogy through illumination.

The second lens requires leaders and teachers to see themselves through pupils' eyes. Brookfield (1995) explains the difficulties in achieving this because of pupil reluctance to be too honest and because of the tendency for teachers to be hypercritical. Teachers often interpret pupils' disinterest or dissatisfaction as being caused by some inadequacy in their pedagogy. The third and fourth lenses involve teachers inviting colleagues to judge them and the study of theoretical literature to provide multiple perspectives on the teaching situation. Brookfield (1995) suggests that through talking to colleagues and studying theory, teachers gain a broader perspective of reality and are less likely to fall victim to the belief that they are totally responsible for everything happening in their classroom. He agrees with Britzman (1991) who suggested that teachers generally accepted the myth that when things didn't go to plan it was due to them not being enthusiastic enough or using incorrect pedagogical approaches. Reading theoretical analysis offering alternative reasons for pupil disinterest or misbehaviour or hearing how other colleagues face the same problems can be cathartic.

For this study, it is important to assess comments made by the wide variety of school leaders and to consider possible links to hegemonic and paradigmatic assumptions. In



their critical reflection, during interview, are any of these assumptions challenged? Does the researcher offer any challenge in delving deeper following responses to set questions? In discussing findings, it is appropriate to investigate such lines of enquiry because it could be argued that one approach that could be taken by any central, powerful body could be to propagate seeds of thought that may grow into assumptions that in turn become widely accepted as the norm. Does spreading the seeds of dogma suggesting that children will learn more effectively in an academy become an established assumption? Time will tell.

## **2.9 A crisis in school leadership recruitment**

The National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) survey of school recruitment (2015) describes a growing crisis in teacher recruitment and in particular headteacher recruitment. Responses from 2,135 schools show a ‘growing problem’ with schools struggling to recruit headteachers or principals in 72% of cases. A regional breakdown of data shows a nationwide problem and one that was common to academies and maintained schools alike. Responses from schools in the South West show that recruitment of headteachers/principals in 2015 up to the time of the survey showed that 72% of schools recruited with difficulty with 22% failing to recruit.

The ‘Education Data Survey Analysis’ (TES, 2014) reported that of the 261 primary schools that advertised for a headteacher in 2013, 26% were forced to re-advertise. In London, 44% of jobs were re-advertised, more than double the 20% re-advertisement rate for 2012 (TES, May 2013).

Professor Howson (2016) claims, ‘Rarely... has there been as much concern over finding the next generation of school leaders as there is now’ (The Future Leaders Trust, 2016, p. 3). He adds, ‘Although schools have leadership teams, the role of the ultimate leader can be a relatively lonely one’ (ibid, p. 5). A Guardian quote from a despondent headteacher noted, ‘The job is all-consuming and I feel so alone. There seems to be no one I can go to when things go wrong’ (Guardian, February 2015).

School leaders are expected to carry a broad and challenging burden:

The strategic overview function and the need to take frequent decisions while designing longer-term strategic plans for the school, all with Ofsted potentially about to descend, creates an uncertain climate that isn’t helped by the fact that too often nothing proposed by government seems permanent enough to become part of the day-to-day running of the school. (The Future Leaders Trust, 2016, p. 5)

Howson compares the career fragility of the modern headteacher to that of a football manager:

Unlike football managers, for whom being sacked is no bar to being appointed by another club, taking on a challenging school can be perceived as a career risk. That shouldn’t be the case. (ibid, 2016, p. 5)

The Future Leaders Trust Report (2016) points to a body of research that indicates some of the possible barriers preventing middle leaders from stepping up into the role of headteacher. Some refer to perceptions of the role in terms of accountability, workload and stress (MacBeath, 2011; Earley et al., 2009). Others to the reluctance of female (Coleman and Campbell-Stephen, 2010) and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnicity (Smith, 2014) leaders to become headteachers because of a perceived bias in the selection process. Further research (Maloney, 2010) suggests that people are less likely to apply for ‘unattractive’ headships in isolated or deprived areas or in challenging schools that have poor Ofsted judgements. Courtney (2013) explored headteacher experiences following challenging inspections and concluded that there is a career risk

for headteachers that take on vulnerable schools, 'Disadvantaged schools are career suicide for headteachers' (Independent, 16 April, 2014).

In earlier research, Howson (2005) suggested three factors involved in explaining challenges in headteacher recruitment: a demographic bulge of older headteachers; a trend towards earlier retirement; and falling applications for leadership posts. A review of the 2010 School Workforce Census by Earley et al (2012), found a third of all headteachers were aged 55 years and over with increasing numbers of teachers becoming headteachers in their thirties. Almost half of headteachers aged between 55 and 59 years took early retirement and 40% of deputy and assistant headteachers had no wish to become headteachers. Howson's updated stance adds to his existing factors, '... new leadership roles, especially within multi-academy trusts; concerns about the nature of leadership and the support available to school leaders' (ibid, p. 5).

In investigating a decline in aspirations among teachers to become headteachers, Smithers and Robinson (2007) suggest that factors include, '... increased workload and too many Government initiatives that require implementation; excessive accountability and vulnerability to sacking through poor Ofsted reports; and an insufficient pay differential for the extra responsibility of headship, especially in the primary sector' (Smithers and Robinson, 2007). Another factor, suggested by Deakin et al (2010), suggested that average hours worked by headteachers increased annually since 2005 to 56.1 hours per week in 2010 and that this was also a factor influencing them to leave the profession or retire early. Gronn (2003) uses the term 'intensification' to describe the increase in government expectation for headteachers to work at 'relentless pace and always be 'available' and 'totally committed' leading to, 'a reluctance among teachers

and middle leaders to take on further responsibilities, to address burdensome bureaucracy and to lose control of their lives' (NCTL, 2015, p. 9).

## **2.10 School leadership at a time of diminishing external local authority support**

'Educational Excellence Everywhere' (DfE 2016), describes a much-reduced role for local authorities under a new academy-dominant landscape. From a wide-ranging responsibility to oversee the quality of education in local schools, the new local authority's education duties will diminish dramatically. From 2020, their duties will focus on ensuring school places; ensuring the needs of vulnerable pupils are met and acting as 'champions' for all parents and families.

There has been an inevitable growing requirement for schools and academies to seek external support from sources other than those provided by local authorities. This may be through private contractors, multi-academy trust providers or via collective purchasing by clusters of schools.

This movement has implications for school leadership in terms of procurement, quality assurance and management of risk and liability. These may be areas of comfort for some school leaders but highly challenging in terms of required skills for others. Even where a school leader 'buys in' expertise, they still retain overall legal responsibility for the well-being of everyone that uses a school setting. This study will consider the impact of this on headship. Do headteachers recognise additional roles for themselves as local authority support disappears? Have their schools the capacity to cater for or purchase necessary expertise in order to meet the identified social needs of their

families? Does this new feature of school management lead to headteachers thinking differently about their roles?

### **2.11 Headship – Gaps in the research**

The majority of research into school leadership tends to focus on leadership per se and the impact of leadership on standards. The National College of School Leadership (NCSL), now the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL), asserts the importance of effective school leadership in helping schools to achieve improving pupil outcomes (NCSL, 2006). Researchers have suggested that a fall in pupil outcomes can be linked to reducing quality and quantity of applicants for senior posts in UK schools and in other countries (Rhodes and Brundett, 2006; Collinson, 2005; Howson and Sprigade, 2011).

A number of researchers suggest that many teachers enter the profession for altruistic reasons (Brookhart and Freeman, 1992; Pop and Turner, 2009; Manuel and Hughes, 2006; Watt and Richardson 2007) and this previously resulted in teachers remaining in the profession for prolonged periods. This appears to be changing with increasing numbers of teachers leaving the profession with their first five years of service (Howson, 2016). Gunter (2001) claims that potential headteachers explore their leadership skills as they take on middle leadership roles in school and criticises the ‘canonisation’ of school leadership by the NCSL (Fitzgerald and Gunter, 2008, p. 332). This, according to Fitzgerald and Gunter, has a significant influence on reducing the numbers of middle leaders seeking headship. Gunter and Thomson (2009) reject the view that headteachers should conform to the government’s model of effective headship, ‘They (headteachers) must become legitimate transformatory leaders, working

within a paradigm of educational leadership and school improvement.’ They must, ‘adopt the preferred rules of the game or suffer the consequences of naming and shaming, or being summarily removed from post’ (Gunter and Thomson, 2009, p. 474). The pressure on headteachers to perform at the expected level may be a factor in the current recruitment crisis.

Other researchers have considered: the value of strategic planning in headship (Johnson and Scholes, 1993; Dobson and Starkey, 1994); the importance of distributed leadership (Busher and Harris, 1999; Southworth, 2002); the use of coaching (Goleman et al., 2002); headteachers’ use of time (Clerkin, 1985); and competency (Rhodes et al., 2008). While this body of research does involve the collection of views from headteachers concerning the research questions, there is little evidence of research that asks headteachers to comment on their changing role over time, their burgeoning role as local services disappear and their suggestions for solving the growing recruitment crisis.

Bolman and Heller (1995) suggest:

... most who review research about school leadership judge it to be too abstract and detached from practice or too narrow and disengaged from person and context, and therefore, of little use to those in schools. (Bolman and Heller, 1995, p. 342)

This research aims to address some of the noted gaps and to closely relate findings to person and context and therefore be of use to current school leaders, aspiring leaders and researchers.

This review of literature supports Foucault’s (1979) analysis of the rationality of government with a development from ‘governance of sovereignty’ in the pre-modern era to ‘governance of population’ with an increasing focus on state discipline and surveillance (Shore and Wright, 1997). The emergent discourses of the seventies

emerged from 'The Great Debate' and articulated the positions of schools and the government (Ball, 2006). It will be of interest to see if headteacher participants agree with headteachers noted in the review (Grant, 2014) who allude to themselves as becoming 'subjects' beneath the gaze of those at the centre, under 'compulsory visibility' (Foucault, 1979), 'backlit' by a systematic surveillance typified by data surveillance, lesson observations, book scrutinies and inspections. It will also be of value to gauge attitudes concerning the imposition of a national curriculum and inspection regime and the position of headteachers within this agenda. Will headteacher participants consider themselves as 'actors' performing on this ever-changing stage, working with a script prepared by others, often caught between warring epistemes with a responsibility to deliver nationally prescribed initiatives in the face of antagonism from their teaching staff? Can current practitioners provide possible solutions for the growing headteacher recruitment crisis and the widening role of headteachers as local authority support disappears? These are key questions for the researcher.

## **Chapter 3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Methodology selection**

In identifying the most suitable methodology for the project, a number of methodological approaches appeal within the constructionist epistemology and interpretivist or Critical Inquiry theoretical perspectives. Phenomenological methodology is a logical choice due to the research focus being on the perceptions of headteacher ‘actors’ and the search for possible phenomena that influence their leadership decisions. Another determining factor in selecting the methodology is the link between early phenomenology and the Foucauldian perspective. Although Foucault does not adhere to phenomenological absolutism, there are sufficient associations between the perspective and the methodology to support the research. Chief amongst these are: the emancipatory features; the notion of ‘actors’ acting in an already interpreted world; the encouragement of critical inquiry to challenge established views; and the centrality of individual perceptions as valid research data.

Criticism is a matter of flushing out that thought (which animates everyday behaviour) and trying to change it: to show that things are not as self-evident as one believed, to see that what is accepted as self-evident will no longer be accepted as such ... As soon as one can no longer think things are as one formerly thought them, transformation becomes both very urgent, very difficult and quite possible. (Foucault, 1988, p. 154)

Central to the constructionist approach is this capacity for the participant and researcher to consider the ‘self-evident’ and question what is being discussed, with the possibility of transformative thought. Gergen (2015) describes how this does not have to be at the expense of traditional research practice, ‘... a constructionist approach to research does not at all abandon traditional research practices. It does remove the traditional



justification that rigorous methods get us closer to the truth, help us to understand more fully, or provide an accurate model of the world' (Gergen, 2015, p. 68).

Further, the approach embraces the notion of the researcher enjoying the freedom to select from a range of research methods.

The shift from an empiricist to a constructionist orientation to research has been an inspiration to many scholars and practitioners. It has meant that one is no longer constrained by any particular method or research; one can select – or create- the research practice that helps to achieve one's particular goals. From a standpoint of reflective pragmatics, we can draw from all traditions of research practice, combine or transform these traditions, or indeed generate new forms of inquiry. (Gergen, 2015, p. 68)

The constructionist approach underpinning this study does engage with a range of research methods in a discourse study that explores the constructed worlds of headteacher participants. 'As constructionists propose, our patterns of living originate and are situated in our relationships. Essential to these relationships are our common ways of speaking and writing – in effect, our discourse of the real, the rational and the good' (Gergen, 2015, p. 72). Whilst, all such research is empirical, using observations to support conclusions, the constructionist approach has less of a requirement for large information sampling. Evidence can be drawn from everyday conversations with no requirement, 'to meet the empiricist goal of predict and control' (Gergen, 2015, p. 72).

A major challenge for researchers using a constructionist approach is for them to shake off the fetters of tradition and history and creatively embrace new voices that are, 'not constrained by anything traditionally accepted as true, rational or right' (Gergen, 2015, p. 6):

As we speak together, listen to new voices, raise questions, ponder alternatives, and play at the edges of common sense, we cross the threshold into new worlds of meaning. (Gergen, 2015, p. 6)

There is a link here to the epistemological stance that sees modern man or woman constructed as an ‘empirico-transcendental doublet’, a ‘reflexive and transcendental knower’, autonomous but also the product of ‘unconscious forces and cultural practices’ (Ball, 2013, p. 22). The research methodology and practice needs to maintain a respectful awareness of the participants and utilise an interview technique that listens to accounts of perceived ‘reality’ but then moves on to probe and challenge presented perceptions. These conversations take place using a framework of linguistic formations within a ‘form of life’.

Gergen (2015) reflects on Wittgenstein’s metaphor of linguistic constructions developing and becoming embedded in ‘language games’. In his view, language alone cannot provide an accurate ‘picture of the world’. There needs to be social agreement in order for a picture to have meaning. Gergen gives the examples of two phrases, ‘reading a book’ and ‘riding an elephant’, which are learned from others rather than from mere observation. In Wittgenstein’s (2009) ‘language games’, the meaning of words depends on their use as they are shared with others. In a similar fashion to the movement of a ball in a game of tennis, words travel between people as they speak. Just as the game of tennis is delineated by words, actions and objects such as ‘deuce’, ‘serve’ and ‘racquet’, so are language games in all ‘forms of life’. ‘What we do in a classroom together is thus a form of life, as is a dinner party or having a romance’ (Gergen, 2015, p. 10). Gergen uses the example of words used when people greet each other in what he terms ‘the greeting game’. When someone says, ‘Good morning,’ they ‘enter’ the game and others know the words used on these occasions and what to say in response, ‘Good morning and how are you?’ In this ‘game’ or ‘form of life’ it would be socially unacceptable to say ‘good morning’ at the ‘wrong’ time of day or if a person was, ‘walking about and saying good morning to all of the parking meters’ (Gergen, 2015, p. 9).

In the 'form of life' lived by headteachers there will be words, actions and objects that are distinctive and relevant. There will also be words or actions that may be considered as inappropriate by the 'players' of the game. As the research questions are debated, particular words will 'come into play' and as debate deepens the 'empirico-trancendental doublet' features may arise. For example, when headteachers are describing their reflections of changes to their role over time, they may use phrases that can be identified with them as 'reflexive knowers' but also as products of their cultural and professional backgrounds. As they reflect on their widening roles, as local support diminishes, or on the growing headteacher recruitment crisis, their use of language forms may lead to a crossing of boundaries into a new form of meaning (Gergen, 2015) and a new insight that addresses a research question.

### **3.2 Using metaphors**

Kelly (2011), commenting on the use of metaphor in academic writing, distinguishes between 'writing with metaphorical language' and using 'conceptual' and 'structural' metaphors. He gives an example of a 'conceptual metaphor' from a conversation with a doctoral thesis writer who described her thesis as something like a school of fish, a species of fish that travel very closely together to give the impression of a much larger singular fish. Together, the small fish appear strong but once separated they are vulnerable to attack. She described that in giving a brief conference paper, exposing a small section of her thesis and her argument, that she placed herself in a vulnerable position, as if a few of the little fish had broken away from the security of the main body and could be swallowed whole. Her conceptual metaphor helped her to make sense of her burgeoning thesis and reminded her to maintain a watchful eye on the whole. Her final thesis had no mention of fish.

‘Structural metaphors’, according to Kelly, are used more deliberately in a structural sense to build an argument or to provide links that assist the readers as they look for coherence and understanding of the whole. Much of the research project refers to ‘panopticism’, a structural extended metaphor used by Foucault (1979) and the use of metaphor is common in phenomenology and other social constructionist studies. In traditional research, according to Gergen, ‘where reality counts, metaphors have a bad reputation’ (Gergen, 2015, p. 37) due to them being considered as ‘packaging’ or merely ‘pretty words’. However, from a constructionist perspective, ‘...the difference between literal and metaphoric words is essentially the difference between a conventional and novel use of words. All our descriptions can be viewed as metaphoric if we were to trace them to their origins’ (Gergen, 2015, p. 38).

In ‘Metaphors We Live By’ (1980), Lakoff and Johnson suggest that the use of metaphors as part of daily life can become dangerous if the metaphors become realities that can lead to users becoming ‘victims’. As an example, they suggest disagreements between individuals often have metaphorical links with war. Using phrases such as, ‘he attacked me’ or, ‘he shot down my argument’ allude to conflict and place the individuals as ‘combatants’ who must destroy or be destroyed, victims of war. However, a constructionist view of the same argument could employ a metaphor linked to a game. Here, the individuals may ‘exchange positions’ from time to time, taking the side of the other as part of the game. Seeing the situation from another point of view, as friends rather than as combatants.

As individuals describe emotions, they often refer to metaphors that identify underlying assumptions (Gergen, 2015). These can refer to ‘the animal in us’, as when someone

says, 'her feathers were ruffled'. The metaphors may relate to biology, 'his heart was broken.'

Metaphors should not be feared by constructionists and should be seen as creative, emancipatory devices rather than as restrictive and enslaving (Gergen, 2015). This is of particular importance to this research project where reference is made to panopticism. Care is needed to ensure that in using the metaphor, participants are not merely classified as 'prisoners', enslaved within a rhetorical space, bound and manacled by limitations. Rather, a constructionist use of the prison metaphor is required with the capacity for a creative reflection and the positioning of headteacher participants in a 'form of life' typified by a game orientation instead of one of 'conflict' and 'suppression'. That being said, whilst the methodological approach may intend to promote a creative application, the lived 'reality' described by the participants may reflect a constructed view aligned with feelings of limitations and lack of freedom. It may be possible for the researcher to redirect a conversation that is travelling along a restrictive pathway by suggesting the employment of a 'language game' and in doing so ask the participant involved to possibly reconstruct their view creatively as part of the game. It will be interesting to note whether headteachers allude to 'playing a game' when describing their roles as this is commonplace at headteacher meetings, where colleagues are heard to use phrases such as, 'playing the inspection game' or 'using your trump card'.

Using metaphors and extended metaphors is therefore a key methodological device in the study, whether this is in using the grand metaphor of panopticism or in comparing headteachers to actors on a stage, following a script written by someone else. A

deliberate device designed to create possibilities and lead to deeper shared understanding.

### **3.3 Phenomenology – finding ‘epoche’, ‘noema’ and ‘noesis’**

The Husserlian quest for transcendental epoche expects the participant to gain self-knowledge, ‘As I come to know this thing before me, I also come to know myself as the being who intuits, reflects, judges and understands’ (Moustakas, 1994, p. 32). Accordingly, if headteachers are able to strip away the elaborate packaging of their roles and status then they may see phenomena in its ‘naked form’ with a new understanding. However, as Smith et al (2009) suggest, this quest may be unachievable. In their description of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) they espouse the Heideggerian move away from transcendentalism, recognizing ‘Dasein’ (the uniquely situated quality of ‘human being’) with the person, ‘always and indelibly a worldly person-in-context’ unable to completely leave their situatedness. IPA acknowledges Merleau-Ponty’s concerns with subjectivity and embodiment and the limitations of being a body-in-the-world:

Thus, while we can observe and experience empathy for another, ultimately we can never share entirely the other’s experience, because their experience belongs to their own embodied position in the world. The intentional quality and meaning of the ‘mineness’ and ‘aboutness’ of an experience are always personal to the body-subject. (Smith et al., 2009, p. 19)

Central to phenomenology and phenomenological research are the concepts of ‘noema’ (what is experienced, external perception) and ‘noesis’ (the way it is experienced, internal perception) and both refer to ‘meaning’ (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) claims that phenomenological research is validated through the first person reports of life experiences, particularly where ‘epoche’ or ‘bracketing’ is achieved where individuals in the research (researchers and participants) suspend judgment on the external in order to examine phenomena as perceived by their consciousness.

Possibly the greatest challenge for the researcher is to enable a discussion where epoche can be achieved, where the headteacher reaches a point where they can describe the noema and noesis having hung their 'professional cloak' on a hook away from the conversation. Epoche is hard to achieve whilst professionals describe the external through a professionally constructed lens. For example, if a headteacher is describing the likely impact of recent pupil examination results as 'the headteacher', wearing their headteacher mantle of responsibility, the discourse could merely centre on aspects of the actual data, possibly how a particular key group had performed. This is the level of conversation usually encountered when headteachers meet with their visiting school improvement partners or inspectors. However, this study is not concerned with the performance of key groups or indeed school plans to raise standards, it is more interested in considering what this 'means' to the headteacher, at a deeper and more personal level. Performance data is arguably the lifeblood of the modern headteacher, with the power to promote health and happiness or otherwise. But when sharing this lifeblood in a conversation, what does the noema ('what' is being experienced) and noesis (the 'way' the headteacher is experiencing the information) actually mean to the individual. What are the implications? Do these implications impact on life outside of work? On aspirations? On self-esteem?

The degree to which planned interviews and follow-up conversations achieve epoche will be represented in the transcripts. Evidence of epoche may be found when participants leave their professional linguistic constructions and move into other 'forms of life'. If a participant moves away from describing noesis as a 'headteacher' to describe the way something impacts on them as a 'husband', a 'father' or as a 'young man' then a threshold has been crossed into a different 'form of life' for the individual.

This could lead to the sharing of important information that lies at the roots of the research questions. By describing noesis in different forms of life headteachers may help to clarify how external forces impact on them across their many roles, how the reducing support from local authorities affect them as headteachers but also how this may affect their health or relationships within and outside their professional roles. Greater clarity may provide insight into why so few senior leaders are deciding to step up to the challenge of headship.

### **3.4 Double hermeneutics – acting in an already interpreted world**

The phenomenological approach seeks to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation and at the heart of phenomenology is the notion of intentionality (Husserl, 1931, p. 245). According to constructionism, we construct meaning by ‘reaching out into’ the world and objects in it. There is no ‘intention’ implied, rather ‘referentiality, relatedness, directedness, ‘aboutness’ (Crotty, 1998, p. 44). Crotty (1998) describes how people are born into a ‘mélange’ of cultures and sub-cultures and how enculturation teaches and applies meanings and this relates to the notion of ‘double hermeneutics’ and the conviction that the headteachers are ‘actors’ within an already interpreted world. Phenomenological research attempts to identify and ‘bracket’ these phenomena and encourage a fresh look at circumstances. ‘It is the task of phenomenology ... to make us conscious of what the world was like before we learned how to see it’ (Marton, 1986, p. 40). Husserl (1931) asserts that phenomenology invites us to:

... set aside all previous habits of thought, see through and break down the mental barriers which these habits have set along the horizons of our thinking ... to learn to see what stands before our eyes. (Husserl, 1931, p. 43)

Crotty (1998) adds, ‘Phenomenologists ... long to smash the fetters and engage with the world in new ways to construct new understandings’ (1998, p. 86). This emancipatory



rhetoric adheres to Habermas's (1984) tripartite conceptualization of interests that describe research paradigms underpinning Critical Theory: technical, practical and emancipatory interests. Here, a theory is critical to the extent that it seeks human emancipation, 'to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them' (Horkheimer, 1982, p. 244). Critical Theory is required to meet three overriding criteria: it must be explanatory, explaining what is wrong with current social reality: practical, identifying the actors who can change the reality; and normative, providing clear norms for criticism and achievable goals for social transformation. Horkheimer (1993) sees human beings as, 'producers of their own historical form of life' (1993, p. 21). The 'actors' selected for this research project do possess considerable agency in being able to produce or shape their lives and the lives of others. A headteacher can engender significant changes to the procedures, practices, ethos and politics within the school and in most cases has the power to alter the direction of the school towards newly defined goals. In this particular instance some of the headteachers have done just this, leading their schools into a completely new direction towards academy status.

Critical Inquiry grew out of the Marxist tradition and the Frankfurt School, in particular, at a time of great tribulation with their founding members fleeing Nazi Germany. It is logical to understand how the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School sought 'emancipation from the tyranny of instrumental reason' (Crotty, 1998, p. 146). The great appeal of Marxism for many, including Foucault, was the anticipated ending of the 'march to freedom' that was started by the French Revolution, 'What appealed to these French intellectuals was that Marxism, at least in the version that was influenced by Hegel, guaranteed that this would happen' (Danaher et al., 2000, p. 5). A second major influence on French intellectual life was the emergence of early phenomenological theories (Danaher et al., 2000), particularly those from Husserl and Heidegger in

Germany and Merleau-Ponty and the existential philosophy of Sartre in France. Whereas for Marxism, social issues could be conquered by the ‘spirit of history’, for the phenomenologist the answer lay in enabling people to see the ‘full knowledge’ of the truth about themselves and the world, including errors. Foucault’s episteme differed from that of Marxism, with its teleological view of unfolding history, absolutist and relativistic phenomenology. Instead, Foucault stressed the notion that people’s knowledge was limited by their contexts (from the Heideggerian perspective) and the related notion that, ‘what constituted truth and rationality was not inevitable (scientific breakthroughs, for instance, often happened by chance) and changed across time’ (Danaher et al., 2000, p. 7). Perhaps the greatest influence on Foucault was the Nietzschean conception about the relationship between truth, knowledge and power and the rejection of the notion that history unfolds in a rational trajectory towards a higher plain of reason (Danaher et al., 2000). The Foucauldian perspective situates power at the centre of epistemological change and any methodological approach to research from the perspective needs to allude to this:

... any form of knowledge or truth that emerged in a culture did so, Nietzsche argued, not because it was valuable or eternal, but because one group had managed to impose their will over others. (Danaher et al., 2000, pp. 9-10)

### **3.5 Maintaining ‘a respectful conversation with Foucault’**

In selecting an appropriate methodology for the research project with its reference to panopticism, it is important to recognize Foucault’s focus on historical aspects and how this distances his approach from Saussurean structuralism with its emphasis on ‘horizontal’ analysis of temporal relations of contiguity (Dobrovol’skij and Piirainen, 2005). Further, the Foucauldian view describes how epistemological ‘discursive formations’, viewed synchronically, describe a narrow temporal perspective (Hodson, 2011). The research

project would have been limited if restricted to the time frame occupied by a particular group of headteachers. A fuller diachronic (developing over time) biography should bring a deeper understanding of the perceptions of the headteachers and how roles have changed. This is achieved by selecting participants from three different groups: retired headteachers with experience of schools before the introduction of the National Curriculum; experienced headteachers still in post and headteacher new to their posts. Such historical and horizontal reflection may provide clarity to address the research questions.

### **3.6 Approaching transcendental-phenomenological reduction and construction**

Transcendental phenomenology is a phenomenology of consciousness (Van Manen, 2011) where the researcher, seeking epoche, embarks on a quest to explicate ‘invariant’ (never changing) or ‘eidetic’ (vivid detail, as if actually visible) aspects of a phenomenon. This requires methods of ‘reduction’ and ‘constitution’ of meaning:

First, the transcendental reduction is the moment of withdrawal from the natural attitude and from the everyday world toward the intersubjective level of the transcendental ego; second, the constitution of meaning is the moment of returning to the world from consciousness as it shows itself in consciousness. As a result, transcendental phenomenology could also be called constitutive phenomenology. (Van Manen, 2011, p. 1)

According to Husserl, liberation from ‘captivation-in-an-acceptedness’ enables thinkers to see the world as full of essences, free from presuppositions, contaminations or conceptual frameworks (Cogan, 2014). The phenomenological reduction consists in two ‘moments’, not to be confused with steps, of ‘epoche’ and ‘reduction proper’. The ‘epoche moment’ is where the acceptedness of the world that holds us captive is abandoned and the ‘reduction proper moment’ is where we reach the transcendental insight that the acceptedness of the world is an acceptedness and not an absolute (Fink, 1970). This links with the social constructionist view that individuals who understand

that meaning is socially constructed are better placed to investigate phenomena than those who are realists.

A common misunderstanding with respect to epoche is that where someone withdraws acceptedness from the world they are denying reality:

The misunderstanding that takes the phenomenological epoche to be a *straightforwardly thematic* abstention from belief (instead of understanding it as transcendently *reflective!*) not only has the consequence that we believe we have to fear the loss of the thematic field, but is also intimately connected with a misunderstanding of the *reductive* return to constituting consciousness. (Fink, 1970, p. 43)

The researcher is not anticipating participants losing touch with reality. Rather, the participants are to be encouraged to ‘play the game’ and bracket their presuppositions for a while to view phenomena through a different lens. They are well aware of their reality throughout the process but willingly put it to one side for the sake of the research. In doing so they open possibilities for seeing from new perspectives with links to their other forms of life. In approaching this, the researcher will invite the participants to reflect on the phenomena: their role as headteacher and how it may have changed; changes brought about by the removal of local authority support and the headteacher recruitment crisis. Following this, the researcher will aim to ask the participants to step into a ‘linguistic game’ where they look at the implications of what has been said from different perspectives, as seen from their other ‘forms of life’ to assess the impact on them as individuals and on those around them. It may be at this point that a reconstruction might take place that identifies the invariant and eidetic aspects more vividly.

### **3.7 Challenges to the phenomenological approach**

Phenomenological research methodology suits this research project due to: the focus on the wholeness of experience rather than on objects or parts; the inherent search for meanings and essences of experiences rather than measurements and explanations; the use of descriptions of experiences through first-hand person accounts; the high regard given to the data of experience as evidence; and the recognition of the relationship of subject and object (Moustakas, 1994, p. 21).

Moustakas (1994) suggests that following the preparatory research question, literature review and ethical considerations, the phenomenological research methodology requires an appreciation of epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation and synthesis. A number of challenges question the premises underpinning this research approach.

The modern relative of Pyrrhonism, 'Fallibilism' asserts that 'absolute certainty about knowledge is impossible'. The approach is strongly supported by Popper (1958, cited in Miller, 1985), who develops his argument for critical rationalism on fallibilistic presuppositions and differs from skepticism's proclivity to abandon knowledge, instead encouraging the search for knowledge with the proviso that our understanding may be revised following further investigation. The changing contexts for headteachers and the changing rationality and conception of knowledge and truth within the perceived panoptic journey over the last four decades produces the backdrop, or scenery, for the stages used by these 'actors' in the research project. In applying Foucaultian 'vertical' historical investigation and interpretation to the journey of the researcher and participants across the educational landscape in various roles, accompanied by a

‘horizontal’ synchronic analysis where an assessment of the current nature of primary headship should be attained.

A major challenge for the researcher is establishing a phenomenological foundation with the ‘bracketing’ of the external in the planning phase and in the initial data collection interviews. In order to achieve ‘epoche’ it is important to focus on the first person reports from the participants and the phenomenological reduction process should describe what is seen, externally and internally and the emerging relationships between phenomenon and self. The recording needs to be horizontalizational, with each statement, or horizon of experience, given equal value with the ensuing structural description based on imaginative variation, where the researcher varies the frames of reference and perspectives through the employment of polarities and possible reversals. From this approach it is anticipated that structural themes emerge that can be taken to the next stage of the research journey (Moustakas, 1994).

The insertion of the sharing of transcripts into the second data collection stage is intended to move the research journey along from the pure phenomenological structure towards a critical rationalist methodology. The emphasis here is still on first person responses but looking from a different angle, anticipating the unfolding of deeper layers of meaning.

The sharing of transcripts addresses the claim of Moustakas (1990) that phenomenological research requires researchers and participants to revisit the phenomena:

...verification is enhanced by returning to the research participants, sharing with them the meanings and essences of the phenomenon as derived from reflection on and analysis of the verbatim transcribed interviews and other

materials, and seeking their assessment for comprehensiveness and accuracy. (Moustakas, 1990, pp. 33-34)

The reflection stage may not induce altered perception or meaning. However, there is the possibility that considering phenomena from a different frame of reference may elicit a new noematic experience. Moustakas (1994) suggests that not all phenomena are clearly visible, many are viewed through a foggy lens, 'With every intentional object that appears in imperfect givenness, there is the ideal possibility of its perfection, of its reaching a more definite and dependable shape, a more perfect intuition' (Moustakas 1994, 72). It is the quest for this greater clarity that should encourage researchers to keep researching, reflecting and considering other views, even if this leads to merely filling perceptive 'gaps'.

No thing-perception is terminal and conclusive; space always remains for new perceptions which would... fill perceptual gaps... every perception and perceptual manifold is capable of being extended: the process is thus endless; accordingly no intuitive apprehension of the essence of the Thing can be so complete that a further perception could not bring it something noematically new. (Husserl, 1931, p. 414, cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 72)

In revisiting initial conceptions of reasons for statements made in initial interviews, the headteacher research participants engage in reflection that can lead to new noematic material, taking the discussion to deeper levels. Ihde (1977) emphasizes the phenomenological focus on individuals who continually think, judge, remember and imagine. A sudden memory or phenomenon may 'captivate' a person and lead to a change of direction or attitude. A headteacher, for example, may cite provision of extra money as the key reason for moving the school to academy status. Further reflection may clarify how the headteacher intends using this extra funding and identify further, deep-rooted factors. Extra funding may be used for a wide range of reasons: reducing class sizes; increasing pay for particular staff; improving the structure of the school; providing better learning resources; saving a small school from closure. Each of these reflects particular perceptions of the headteacher and their understanding of what is of

most importance to their schools. As noted, any revisionism of hindsight is worthy of analysis.

A further challenge to the selected approach is the possibility of researcher bias or contamination. In designing the project, the questions to be considered during interviews and the style of reporting, there is danger that the researcher will be guided by his own presuppositions and socially constructed understanding of meaning produced in various 'forms of life', as a headteacher, inspector, school improvement officer, parent and citizen. The researcher is required to enter a journey of transcendental-phenomenological reduction himself at the outset of the study. With so much professional 'baggage' how can the researcher possibly achieve epoche himself? Can he step outside of his constructed world and see phenomena through different lenses? Can someone so schooled in headship, listen effectively to the life stories of other headteachers from a position of epoche? This will need to be addressed throughout the reporting.

The quest to establish epoche may be impossible in practice, as we can never fully bracket our socio-cultural situatedness and understandings or stand completely outside of language. It can be argued that Husserl aimed towards the 'possibility' of epoche where we are liberated to encounter a phenomenon in a new light, for ourselves or with others. Morley (2010) describes the epoche as, '... a profoundly challenging and painfully difficult undertaking' that aims to, 'hold back our existential commitment to the very existence of the world, i.e. the reality-positing power at the very core of consciousness itself (Morley, 2010, p. 301). Scepticism expressed by Ashworth and Lucas (2000), Colaizi (1978 in Ahern, 1999) and Porter (1993) questions the possibility that it is possible to attain the degree of objectivity required for authentic



epoche/bracketing if a researcher has had experience of the phenomenon under attention. Gearing (2004), Ahern (1999), Denzin and Lincoln (1994), Groenewald (2004) and Patton (1990) identify practical distinctions between epoche and bracketing. 'The distinctions emerge from how a researcher engages with data at the pre-empirical, collection stage and how that engagement shifts at the post-empirical interpretation stage' (Bednall, 2006, p. 124). Patton (1990) described epoche separately from bracketing as, 'an on-going analytic process' (Patton, 1990, p. 408), which suggests it should be dynamically integrated into the sequential progress of the whole research method from the very beginning. Acts of bracketing, on the other hand, could occur at interpretative moments when a researcher considers each of the identified phenomena. Care is required at each stage of the study to ensure that the researcher respects the quest for epoche and reports openly on the struggles involved in this.

The selection of phenomenological methodology, due to the research focus being on the perceptions of headteacher 'actors' and the possible phenomena that influence their leadership decisions, relies on the procurement of discourse that illuminate the constructed worlds of the participants. As noted, researcher methodology and practice must allow for an awareness of each participant as an 'empirico-transcendental doublet', a 'reflexive and transcendental knower', autonomous but also the product of 'unconscious forces and cultural practices' (Ball, 2013, p. 22). It may not be possible for headteachers to completely strip away the fullness of their roles and see phenomena in its 'naked form' (Smith et al., 2009) and completely leave their situatedness. However, the methodology requires a journey towards achieving epoche, where headteachers can describe the noema and noesis, as they perceive them. If participants can be encouraged to 'play the game' then this may create possibilities for seeing from new perspectives with links to their wider lives. It will also be vital to ensure that the use of metaphors

does not place participants in the role of ‘victims’ (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) or mere caricatures of themselves. These are important aspects that will need consideration in the process and analysis of the research.

## Chapter 4 Data generation and analysis

### 4.1 Design

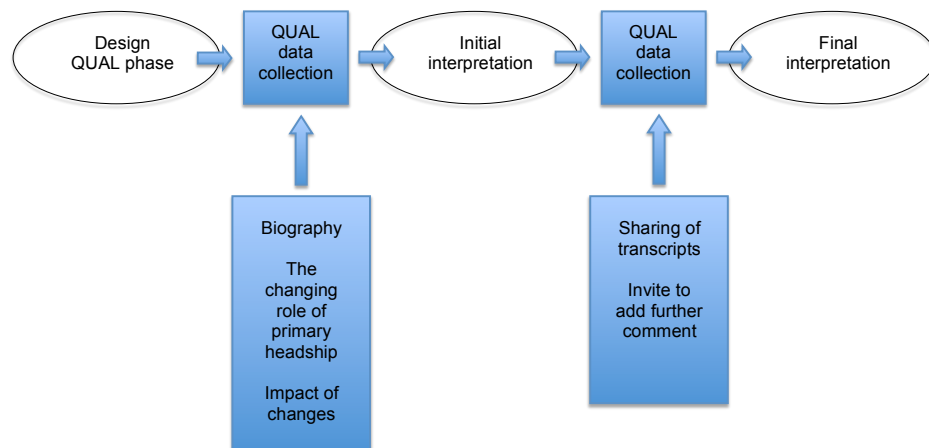


Figure 1: Outline research design.

The research design is shown in Figure 1 and consists of a design phase with two data collection points and two interpretation activities. The steps taken generally followed those suggested by Cohen et al. (2000) with the addition of a second phase of data collection and interpretation.

Cohen et al. (2000) suggest the following research steps:

- identification of the issue or problem to be investigated;
- formulation of the research question/s;
- clarification of hypothesis and procedures;
- review of research literature;

- planning of the investigation (identifying the population, selecting the techniques for data collection and establishing the categories for classifying the data)
- collecting the data;
- describing, analysing and interpreting the findings.

The addition of the second phase of data collection and interpretation is intended to encourage participants to consider their earlier transcripts and have the opportunity to review their comments and reshape or add to their data. It is anticipated that the sharing of transcripts will provide additional information that may strengthen the findings and may also provide valuable reflections as participants reconsider their original statements.

#### **4.2 Selection of participants**

The population consists of Cornish primary headteachers from three distinct groups and the data collection was through semi-structured interviews. The selection of participants was restrictive in that there are limited numbers of headteachers from each group available for the study. Five retired headteachers were available from a shortlist of 12 known to me. All 12 were contacted but seven either did not wish to take part or were not available due to extensive travel plans. The five were from different settings (school size, rural/urban setting, geographical location). Three of the five were formally known by the researcher as headteacher colleagues over various amounts of time. The five available experienced headteachers came from a shortlist of 18 who were invited and again represent different settings. All five for this group have been headteachers for at least five years and three of these have led their schools into academy status. Two of these were previously known to the researcher. The five new headteachers came from a

shortlist of just seven and were the only five able to take part in the study due to work restraints. The initial focus for the interviews consisted of letting the headteachers tell their stories before asking them to reflect on what they have said. Care was taken, due to a possible tension involved where headteachers may not have reflected on the presented phenomena before. I needed to remain aware of residual and ascendant discourse in the interview and when interviewing the data, understanding the possibility that views on freedom and autonomy may arise more clearly from interviewing the data rather than in the interviews with the headteachers.

The following tables give a brief description of each participant. Pseudonyms are used and details concerning schools and length of service are generalised in order to preserve confidentiality because all of the headteachers are connected with schools in a small geographical locality.

Retired headteacher group	
Frank	Frank qualified in the early seventies and entered the profession ‘to make a difference.’ He started his career in a small village school and became headteacher of a medium-sized primary school in the late eighties and moved to lead a large primary school in the mid-nineties where he stayed until he retired from headship at 56 years of age. He currently works full time in a role supporting headteachers.
John	John entered the teaching profession in the late seventies and began his career teaching abroad. He returned to Cornwall where he has worked as a teacher, deputy headteacher and headteacher. He retired from his leadership of a highly successful academy aged 59 years.
Bob	Bob qualified as a teacher in the late seventies and worked in various local authority roles before joining a school as a deputy headteacher. He has led a small Cornish school for four years and a large primary for 14 years. He retired from headship aged 58 years and still works full time in a supporting role for schools and academies.
Mike	Mike began his career teaching in a small Cornish school in the late seventies. He became headteacher of a small Cornish school in the mid-eighties and led a large successful primary school for 15 years before retiring aged 69 years.
Ray	Ray began his teaching career in the late seventies and taught abroad for his first few years. He returned to Cornwall and taught in a large primary school before becoming deputy headteacher and then headteacher of a large school. He led that school into academy status and retired from headship at 57 years to take up a post with a multi-academy group.

Table 1: Retired headteacher group

Experienced headteacher group	
George	George qualified in 2003 and taught in various schools across the UK. Following time as a deputy headteacher, he became headteacher of a medium-sized primary school before moving to lead a medium-sized Cornish primary in recent years.
Jim	Jim entered the teaching profession in the late nineties at what he describes as, ‘a difficult time for schools.’ He worked as a teacher and deputy headteacher before taking on his headteacher role. He led his school into academy status and has been a headteacher for around 12 years.
Charles	Charles qualified as a teacher in the late nineties, teaching in a large Cornish primary school. He has been headteacher of a maintained school for eight years and also carries out significant roles in supporting other schools in the region.
Jane	Jane began her career teaching in a small Cornish school in the early seventies. She became headteacher of a small Cornish school in the mid-eighties and has been a successful, highly regarded school leader for more than 25 years. Jane has no current plans to retire.
Sally	Sally began her teaching career in the late nineties and taught in various Cornish schools. She became acting headteacher of a small Cornish primary and the post then became permanent. She is in her tenth year as a headteacher of a maintained school.

Table 2: Experienced headteacher group

New headteacher group	
Henry	Henry qualified in the early nineties and started his career in a large Cornish school. He became deputy headteacher and then headteacher. He is in his third year of headship.
Patrick	Patrick qualified in the early nineties and moved to Cornwall to teach in a large primary school. He moved to take up a deputy headteacher post at another large Cornish School and he was promoted to headteacher when the existing headteacher retired. He is in his third year of headship of a maintained school.
Alison	Alison is the youngest participant and she qualified in 2004. She has taught in two Cornish schools and became headteacher in 2015. From her earliest memories, Alison has dreamed of leading her own school.
Kate	Kate began her career teaching in a small Cornish school in the late nineties. She became headteacher of a medium-sized Cornish school and has been the school leader for four years.
Wendy	Wendy began her teaching career in 2001 and moved to Cornwall to teach in a large primary school. She became assistant headteacher and moved to a medium-sized primary academy. She has led the academy for two years.

Table 3: New headteacher group

### **4.3 Ethical considerations**

The Faculty Research Ethics Committee granted ethical approval prior to the collection of data and adherence to ethical guidelines was mentioned in the invitation letter to participants:

The research ethics guidelines issued by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) have informed my research proposal and confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured. As a participant, you may withdraw from the study at any time, without providing a reason and without detriment to your relationship to the researcher or to the University. Any audio data will be erased after transcriptions have been finished and transcripts shared with the participants to ensure accuracy. (Research letter of invitation)

#### **Use of an ethical preliminary decision-making device – The Rings of Uncertainty**

Before proceeding to write an ethics protocol I decided to use a preliminary decision-making device in order to assess the degree of certainty that could be established when measured against five ‘expressions’ of the Rings: competence; resources; law; communication and ethics.

The Rings of Uncertainty (Seedhouse, 1988) are used frequently by health professionals when faced with ethical decisions. Seedhouse (1988) argues that effective use of the Rings can reveal, ‘boundaries beyond which health workers ought not to act’ (Seedhouse, 1988, p. 150). Having used the Rings of Uncertainty on a number of occasions when faced with ethical dilemmas in my role as headteacher, I believe that their employment at the outset for this particular research is of value.

The Rings of Uncertainty device is flexible in that the researcher can decide which ‘expressions’ to use and how many to assess. Some situations may require one or two ‘expressions’ others may require ten or more. Another flexible quality is the use of

segments for fully expressed examples of the Rings. These segments can vary in proportion to reflect the relative importance of each consideration depending on the question. For some decisions the ‘resources’ consideration may be more important than the ‘ethical’ or ‘legal’ considerations as is the case when a surgeon is deciding whether or not to tackle a heart transplant (without the resources of a replacement heart and suitable operating facilities the surgeon cannot continue). In other situations the ‘law’ or ‘ethics’ considerations may be the overriding factors, as would be the case where a headteacher is deciding whether or not to inflate teacher assessments in order to improve the image of the school.

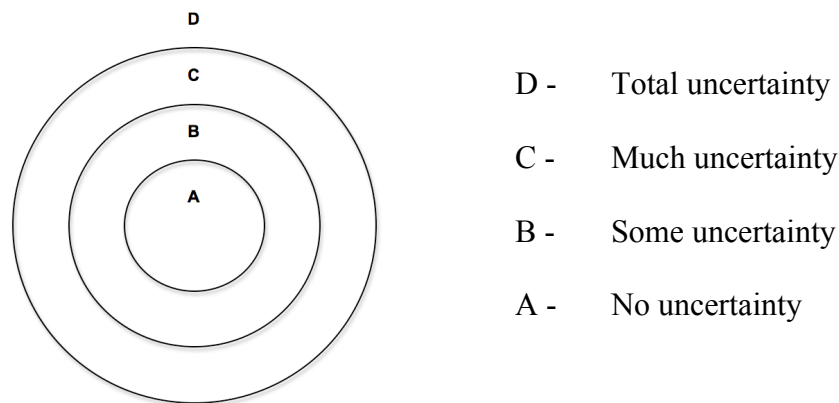


Figure 2: The Rings of Uncertainty (Seedhouse 1988).

For each ‘expression’ the researcher is hoping to be situated towards the central ring of ‘no uncertainty’ or the second ring from the centre, ‘some uncertainty’. Any positioning in either of the outer rings for any ‘expression’ should result in a radical rethink of the project. However, in some situations it may be considered that it is right to continue regardless of a negative set of rings. An example of this would be where an aircraft passenger decides to take over the controls when the pilot collapses. The passenger’s competence would certainly position them in the outer ring with great uncertainty; however, their desire to save life would help them to ignore this. The proposed research

is unlikely to pose ‘life or death’ scenarios and therefore in order to proceed it is expected that the researcher is positioned in the inner rings.

### **The Rings of Uncertainty fully expressed**

Seedhouse (1998) suggests that users of the device simplify the Rings of Uncertainty by making use of one set of rings divided into segments. In doing this there is an added benefit because the selected ‘expressions’ can be examined against each other, giving a visual image of the responses to the consideration. In varying the size of the segments, the user can also exemplify the relative importance of the ‘expressions’ and if required add a scoring system to aid a final judgement on whether to go ahead.

For the proposed research project I have used a single set of rings divided into five segments. I have give equal weighting to ‘competence’, ‘communication’ and ‘ethics’ with a lesser weighting to ‘law’ and ‘resources’. This particular research project is not heavily dependent on resources and litigation is unlikely, therefore these segments can be smaller in proportion. However, the other three segments are of crucial importance if an unbiased, meaningful interpretation is to be made of the interview data.

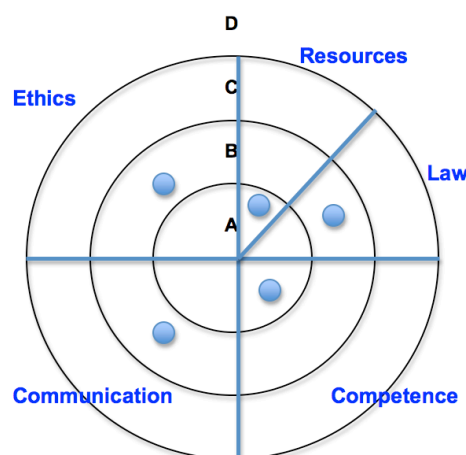


Figure 3: The Rings of Uncertainty fully expressed (Seedhouse 1988).



This full expression of the Rings depicts my decision as to whether or not the project is viable and of sufficient rigour to proceed to the formation of an ethical protocol. The five markers signify my overall assessment and all of them lie within the inner two circles. In terms of resources and communication, there is a high degree of certainty that the researcher has access to the necessary sources for an interview framework and the communication skills needed for the task. In terms of ethics, the research questions are common to the current educational debate and the changing demands on primary headship will be familiar to all headteachers and should not pose a particular shock that could challenge the well-being of the headteachers involved. The researcher's competency stems from his experience across a variety of roles as a school leader and as a researcher. The full expression provided a firm foundation for recommending the project for ethical approval (Appendix 7).

#### **4.4 Ensuring research quality**

Guba (1981) suggests that the indicators of quality in qualitative research are concerned with 'dependability' rather than reliability, 'confirmability' rather than objectivity, 'transferability' rather than generalizability and 'credibility' rather than validity. This research utilises a framework for assessing the quality of applied and practice-based research proposed by Furlong and Oancea (2005) and relate to 'trustworthiness', defined as 'the relation between the research process and its representation of the world' (Furlong & Oancea, 2005, p. 12).

Dependability is concerned with the extent to which the data can be viewed as providing a 'truthful' account of practice. This differs from reliability with an underlying assumption of absolute precision and the possibility of replication by other researchers. Replicability is based on the notion a different researcher acting at a different time

would achieve similar findings if working with the same participants. Replicability is not an appropriate concept for this style of research, with its varied context and the nature of the phenomenon under study. It is quite likely that the same researcher, using the same approach and interviewing the same participants may arise at slightly different outcomes because the data would be collected at a different time and participants will have had varying experiences during the time before the interviews and the questions may trigger new or different reflections at this snapshot of time. The data lies rooted to a particular time and is 'sharply influenced by the nature of the immediate context' (Lincoln & Guba, 2007, p. 17).

In order to achieve dependability and a 'truthful' account, the researcher needs to give participants time to 'relax' into the interview conversation and believe that they can trust the security of the shared data. In this particular case, the researcher and participants know each other and have already shaped trusting relationships. The danger, of course, is that familiarity carries with it a number of potential research pitfalls and the researcher must guard against conveying his views or expectations of what he is hoping participants will share. The open-ended nature of the questioning is of benefit in that the expectation is for the researcher to merely pose the questions and further questions as the reflection intensifies and not add to the evidence base in any way. I am well practiced in this approach stemming from my twenty years of carrying out this style of interview while conducting school inspections. During inspections, inspectors build an evidence based and they are forbidden to 'shape' interviews and thereby skew the data.

Confirmability is concerned with ensuring that researchers' findings 'emerge from the data and not their own predispositions' (Shenton, 2004). It is generally accepted that all

research is influenced by bias to some degree and in this instance the researcher needs to be aware of predispositions and place these to one side. This is further debated in discussions concerning ‘researcher bracketing’ following the identification of my own views.

Gubrium and Holstein (2002) suggest that inexperience of the phenomenon under study may impact negatively on the quality of interviews (ibid, p. 108). In this instance, my experience of being a headteacher enables me to understand the breadth of nuances that emerge and some of the ‘not said’ or ‘never said’ elements of the interviews. My experience also equips me to ask relevant follow-up questions that someone without headship experience may be unable to do.

On balance, I consider the advantages of having personal experience and knowledge of the role outweigh the potential disadvantages. The transcription process, involving the full transcription of conversations, followed by the thematic analysis, is designed to minimize my influence over the data collection.

Transferability refers to the extent to which findings can be applied to similar situations elsewhere. The research is geographically contained to Cornwall and this carries potential risks. Headteacher recruitment, retention and professional development may differ between geographical locations. This is certainly true regarding headteacher recruitment, where some regions experience much harder recruitment challenges than others. The development of multi-academy trusts has also manifested in different ways across the country with some local authorities encouraging all schools to academise while other authorities actively fight against the movement. However, primary headship per se is considered to be a stable phenomenon across the country. All headteachers

share similar pay conditions, union representation and performance review protocols. All headteachers are guided by national strategies and initiatives and assessed by a common inspection framework.

The three research questions are transferable in that the role of headship has changed over time for all headteachers; the reduction of external support is nationwide and all areas face a growing headteacher recruitment crisis. The transferability of these questions enables the research to be applied in different locations within the same education system.

Credibility is concerned with ensuring that effective methods are used to elicit the data required to address the research questions. It can be assessed by the extent to which the participants recognise themselves in the research findings and analysis. Credibility is more relevant to the research than ‘validity’ (Guba, 1981). Giving participants the opportunity to revisit transcripts strengthens the credibility of this research through increasing their engagement and allowing them to add further clarification or reflection (Lincoln & Guba, 2007, p. 18).

#### **4.5 Interviews**

The interview aspect of the research model is based on Kvale’s (1996) seven-stage interview investigation involving thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analysing, verifying and reporting. In the preliminary thematizing stage the theoretical basis for the study needs to be outlined and the general goals of the research need to be shaped into specific objectives. For this study, these specific objectives are to ascertain views of primary headteachers on the three major research questions with time to consider other themes that may emerge during the conversations.

The interview questions (Appendix 5) were drawn from the research objectives that emanated from the literacy review. Kerlinger (1970) suggests three possible schemes for constructing interview schedules. Firstly, 'fixed-alternative' questioning which allows respondents to choose from two or more alternatives. He identified the chief advantage of this approach is the achievement of greater uniformity of measurement therefore reliability. However, disadvantages include superficiality and the possibility of annoying respondents who find none of the alternatives suitable. These weaknesses can be overcome if the interview questions are mixed with open-ended ones or followed up with probes from the interviewer. It was decided that this approach would not be suitable for this study where the researcher was seeking maximum, unrestricted reflection. Kerlinger (1970) also suggested a 'scale' approach where interviewees respond with a degree of agreement or disagreement. Again this method was rejected for this study because of its possible stultifying effect. Kerlinger's (1970) 'open-ended-items' approach was selected for this study. With this approach there is a minimum of restraint on answers. Open-ended questions have a number of advantages: they are flexible, they allow the interviewer to probe further, they establish rapport and they allow the interviewer to make a truer assessment of what the interviewees believe. Cohen et al. (2000) also suggest that open-ended situations can result in unanticipated answers that may suggest unpredicted relationships.

The 'open-ended-items' approach was adopted in a semi-structured interview process. The process uses opening question prompts (Appendix 5) that ask participants to reflect on issues connected with the research questions. The researcher then seeks to deepen the debate by inviting the participants to enter a 'language game' in which particular words 'come into play' and deeper meanings emerge (Wittgenstein in Gergen, 2015). As the

debate deepens the researcher listens for distinctive and relevant words from the 'players' in the conversation, always aware that the participants are commenting as 'reflexive knowers' but also as products of their cultural and professional backgrounds. It is possible for new forms of meaning (Gergen, 2015) to emerge that describe the 'form of life' lived by headteachers.

Tuckman (1972) suggests that in setting up and conducting the interview it is necessary for the interviewer to brief the respondents as to the nature and the purpose of the interview and help them to feel at ease. The procedure should be explained and respondents asked to assent to the interview being recorded and the interviewer should not allow the interview to deviate from the set schedule. Cohen et al. (2000) reflect on the ethical dimension of the interview explaining that informed consent guarantees of confidentiality, beneficence and non-maleficence need to be considered. For this study care was taken to adhere to these recommendations.

Cohen et al. (2000) warn that at the transcribing and analysing stages it is important to be aware of data loss and distortion. Mishler (1986), for example, notes that using an audio recording can filter out certain important contextual factors such as visual and non-verbal aspects that can give more information than the verbal communication. Kvale (1996) notes that the prefix 'trans' indicates a change of state and therefore it is unrealistic to imagine that data on transcripts is anything but already interpreted data. For this study I used elements of Jefferson's (1985) transcription system. For analysing, a simple coding system using a selection of Miles and Huberman's (1994) tactics for generating meaning from transcribed interview data. Care was taken to maintain a sense of the holism of the interview.

It was anticipated that a combination of ‘interview analysis as bricolage’ and ‘interview analysis as theoretical reading’ (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009) would characterise the analysis stage of the research. Using the ‘bricolage’ technique the researcher read through the interviews to gain an overall impression, then returned to specific passages and used a combination of approaches to describe phenomena and generate connections and structures that were significant to the study. ‘Theoretical reading’ refers to using theoretically informed reading techniques to study the interview data and draw on selected interview statements to address specific themes of interest. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) mention a similar approach by Hargreaves (1994) when analysing interviews with 40 teachers and principals. Having established a close familiarity with the data, Hargreaves produced summary reports according to key themes. ‘Themes appearing in the text were registered, classified, and reclassified on the basis of an active search for confirming and disconfirming evidence in the interviews’ (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 237). These approaches rely more on a continuous interpretative text than on a quantified categorization of themes.

Kvale (1996) explains that validation must take place at all seven stages of the process and in qualitative data this might be addressed through the honesty, depth and scope of the data achieved and by the objectivity of the researcher. Gronlund (1981) suggests that validity should be seen as a matter of degree rather than an absolute because respondents have opinions and perspectives of a particular bias. It is important to strive to maximise validity and minimise invalidity. Agar (1993) claims that the intensive personal involvement of individuals in qualitative data collection secures a sufficient level of validity. This is contested by Hammersley (1992) and Silverman (1993) who argue that this is insufficient for validity because it elevates individuals to a superior privileged position. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) identify several forms of internal

validity: the authenticity of the data reflected by the ability of the research to report through the eyes of the participants, the soundness of the research design and the credibility of the data. For this study internal validity as described by LeCompte and Preissle (1993) needed to be characterised by fairness with a complete and balanced representation of multiple realities; ontological authenticity bringing a sophisticated understanding of a situation; educative authenticity and tactical authenticity that should benefit all those involved.

I needed to be aware of residual and ascendant discourse in the interview and when interviewing the data. It was a possibility that views on freedom and autonomy may arise more clearly from interpreting the data rather than in the interviews with the headteachers. It was also possible that a second interview may be required where particularly strong data emerges and this occurred to some degree in the form of participants commenting on their review of the original interview transcript.

#### **4.6 Data analysis – Thematic template analysis**

In considering an appropriate method of analysis, several approaches were examined. Content and discourse analysis were rejected due to their inherent quantitative structures. Narrative analysis was an early consideration due to the nature of the collected data and thematic analysis was selected because of its potential to identify and analyse patterns within qualitative data. It involves searching for and identifying themes that address the research questions. Inductive themes are preferred to theoretically derived themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006) because they arise from the data rather than from an interrogation of data following a strict coding regime.



The data is comprised of interviews with 15 headteachers and compiled during initial visits to their schools and follow-up conversations, usually by telephone, to discuss transcript reviews. Data from these follow-up conversations added to the overall database. Data was collected electronically and transcribed in full. The transcripts were shared with the participants and follow-up discussions took place to add to the data collection. As agreed with participants, all recorded data was destroyed following transcription.

Recordings were transcribed in full and then ‘pasted’ onto a thematic template divided into three columns to represent the three research questions. Template analysis (King, 2004) was then applied and emerging themes were highlighted in colour on the template (as shown in appendix 5). All of the transcripts were added to a master template for each group of headteachers with separations to delineate individual headteachers. The formation of three master templates, with each showing individual responses addressed the possible danger of losing sight of the individual within the data, described by Brooks and King (2012).

Collected data that referred directly to the research questions was clearly coded for placement in findings and emerging themes were identified by collecting statements with similarities. Some of these themes were related to the research questions and some were additional. The findings relate to the evidence collected for each research question and relevant, common additional themes are described in the discussion section.

## **Chapter 5 Findings**

This chapter presents the analysis of data collected through interviews with the fifteen Cornish primary headteachers and the actual words used by the participants provide the bedrock for the analysis and portrayal of the findings. Much of the data is in the form of quotes from the interviews with additional data provided as participants commented on their review of interview transcripts.

The findings are set against the research questions but also against the changing educational landscape over time. As a result, the collected data provides much more than evidence to address each research question. Comments from participants reveal headteachers' ontological views, the very nature of their working worlds and their understanding of how their professional lives impact on their health and broader existence. In some cases the data engenders strong, emotional feelings and these instances add vital gravitas to the findings and possible windows that may illuminate why certain work-related pressures lead headteachers to take drastic life-changing actions such as leaving their career or retiring at an early age.

### **5.1 Research question 1: 'Is there evidence to support the view that primary schools have moved from a state of assumed sovereignty and freedom to one defined by panoptic control?'**

Only one of the experienced headteachers and none of the new headteachers were able to reflect on the education system in the pre-national curriculum era. All five retired headteachers either taught or led schools in the seventies and were able to comment on themselves as leaders or on leaders that they worked with. None used the phrase 'secret garden' but all gave rich accounts of leadership during the seventies and early eighties

at the time when ministers claimed to know very little about what was happening in schools.

Frank qualified as a teacher in 1974 and described a feeling of professional freedom in his first years as a primary teacher:

We felt free! That's one of the reasons for going into teaching. You were there to make a difference. But I can remember doing six weeks and wondering what I would do next because six weeks was the longest I had ever done in a teaching practice. There was no guidance; there was the odd CPD day and the odd course you could go on. We had teachers' centres, I remember going there once a week. In the end, I asked the boss if I could not go because it was so dire! As a teacher I could do what I wanted. I was developing a curriculum that I thought the children needed. I did a bit of planning. It was more record keeping. I worked for some good headteachers in the sense that they let you be free but you were accountable. I remember one headteacher, you had to go in her office every day and wish her good morning. If you didn't you were in trouble! Big trouble! Work, she trusted us to get on with it. (Frank)

John recalls 'real freedom':

I remember real freedom! I qualified in 1978 and for the first three years I had total, total freedom, which I think produced outstanding teaching. I was working with a fantastic group of teachers, probably one of the strongest groups that I have worked with. The results they got were amazing and the children there were entering exams for the top private schools in England. There was no pressure from the headteacher demanding results, but results were got! That's something we have to think about! The curriculum was up to you. There was a syllabus for exams but you brought in your specialism. (John)

Bob recalled an example from his teacher training experiences during 1976. The recollection gives insight into the freedoms given to trainee teachers by schools:

I remember when I was on my first six-week teacher training experience hearing from a fellow student about his experience that had gone terribly wrong. This guy was a little strange in his ways in many respects and didn't mix in much with the rest of us in the hall of residence. We all knew that he was fascinated by trains and for his teaching experience he decided to focus on something he knew well, trains. When his college tutor visited him during the first week he was very pleased to see the pupils studying train timetables in maths, writing stories about famous trains, painting pictures of trains in art and so on. During the visit in the second week, the tutor was impressed that

the children were still interested in trains. By the third week, some of the pupils had clearly had enough of trains and were losing focus. The tutor suggested that the trainee move on to some new topic. However, by the fifth week it was still trains, trains and more trains. The children were climbing the walls and the tutor gave the trainee a warning. The poor chap did not finish the end of the sixth week because he packed up, left college and went home, probably by train! (Bob)

This scenario could not be repeated in the current teacher training arrangements where trainees are strictly monitored by their schools and are assessed against specific teaching standards. In this example there did not appear to be monitoring by the school class teacher or headteacher. They possibly had noticed what was taking place but they had not taken effective action to bring the pupils 'back on track' or modify the behaviour of the trainee. It would be unimaginable for a school in the current system to allow a class of pupils to struggle for half of a school term.

Mike reflected on apparent day-to-day freedoms for teachers at a similar time during the seventies:

I was a headteacher during the seventies and I remember being free to teach whatever I liked. My school was small and we had to walk up a great hill to get to our lovely sports field. Actually, it wasn't fancy it was just a field where we did sport. Lovely views down over the village to the sea. I remember many afternoons, if the sun came out, when we went up to the field at the start of the afternoon and if the children were enjoying their football, we would stay there the whole afternoon until just before the bell. Mind you, we had a fantastic team and even though we were a small school we won the county championships three times! Now I can tell you, those children, if you spoke to them now, would not be able to tell you about a single maths lesson from their school days but they could all describe their football matches and their cup victories in great detail! What does that's say about education? (Mike)

In a similar sport-related recollection, Ray described how headteachers found time to engage in their interests, including watching lengthy cricket matches:

Talking about how free heads were back in the seventies, I'll tell you something that is absolutely true and could never happen nowadays! I started teaching in 1978 and I was in charge of a sport, which was my specialism. My best friend worked at a large primary school in (name of Cornish town) and he was also trained in sport, we trained together. During the summer

term, his headteacher, who was mad about cricket, used to send him out every day to roll the cricket square. In fact, he made him go in at weekends to roll it as well, I have seen him do it.

Anyway, they had a cricket match every Wednesday at home and it was a ritual for the headteacher to come out to watch. He sat in a tiny pavilion and he had children bring him iced drinks. Now I've been a head for over twenty years and right up until when I retired early I taught sport and refereed matches. I can't imagine a head these days sitting watching sport like that sipping iced drinks! Mind you, I know heads these days who shut themselves in their offices or even work from home for day after day, never mixing in with the children. At least (name of cricket-loving headteacher) was with the children and he did know them all well, I know that for a fact. (Ray)

The final point made by Ray resonates with a comment made by one of the experienced headteachers, Charles, who described how his son, who had started in Reception at his village school, asked him to identify a stranger in the school playground:

I went to pick my son up from school last week; he goes to the school in our village and started there last September. He ran over to me and showed me a painting he was bringing home and then he asked me who the lady was talking to other parents at the school gate. I laughed and then explained that the strange lady was in fact the executive headteacher of the school. He could not remember seeing her before. Actually, she runs five schools and is hardly ever at (name of school). Now that is one reason why I would never be an executive head. I know every child in my school and there are more than 200 here. I bet she wouldn't even know the name of my son! (Charles)

The introduction of the national curriculum brought about change:

I became a head in about 1984, before Ofsted and before the national curriculum. For my second headship I moved in '89 at the time of the national curriculum. The books arrived, weighing down one end of everybody's desk. I introduced the national curriculum to my school. So that was the first move! (Frank)

The national curriculum was extremely detailed:

I was teaching in a small primary school when the national curriculum came in. I can remember those 14 files, all those files. The objectives that added up to something like 179. It was monstrous! It was unmanageable. (Jane)

Participants describe how, following the introduction of the national curriculum, they were expected to prepare detailed planning:

I spent the majority of my weekends filling out large sheets with every single subject for the week, all in long hand, all in a fountain pen like archaic days. I would go in on a Monday morning, first thing on the headteacher's desk and then that would be marked by lunchtime and handed back with a critique so we could fine-tune our performance. It was very different then. (Jim)

The introduction of the national strategies (1998 and 1999) added further definition to what should be taught and 'how' teachers should teach, down to the specific language used:

I started in 2004 and everything was very prescribed. Everything was dictated to me down to what your weekly plan looked like and what you were teaching each week. It was all there for you. The literacy hour and the numeracy hour, strategies, your 'starter for ten' and your teaching and your plenary and job done! You could go on the council website and all of the unit plans were there. Our headteacher didn't give us freedom to steer away from that, we had to stick rigidly to it because there was proof that you had got through it. You had to cover the curriculum in the right order and in the right number of hours. The head would check our planning, you had to hand it in and she would carry out work scrutiny, monitoring scrutiny and you would get feedback. You could not be a maverick! (Charles)

For some, this presented a barrier to their creativity:

I can remember as a teacher, and I always considered myself to be a creative teacher with my own way of doing things, I felt that the numeracy hour destroyed this. It told you to stand there for so many minutes and then say this and at twenty past the hour do that. The actual words were written for you to say! So you had teachers, certainly in my school and I'm sure up and down the country doing this with a plan on their desk very close to them. You could see teachers looking down at their notes to make sure they were saying the right things. Verbatim. So my first few years in education weren't the most creative and probably weren't the most enjoyable. (Jim)

Even though most of the experienced headteachers did not reflect on changes to headship in the seventies and eighties, they were able to describe changes to their roles since the turn of the century. Some of these reflections indicate increasing control from central government:

I started in 2003, that's when I qualified. It started fairly free and within a year or two years of it you could tell that it was being ramped up quite quickly. Literacy and numeracy hours. It was a lot more, it became a lot more, focused on book scrutinies, work scrutinies all the time. Folders being

sent in to headteachers and deputy headteachers on a regular basis to be monitored each week. Not necessarily just to check planning but to check things were being done!

It developed from there really. First two years it was less intensive and then the pressure all started to change. (George)

Jane also recognised the growing requirement on schools to focus more and more on data:

I went through a phase where I was in denial! I thought you could raise standards without all of this data. But I had to succumb to the data regime. We all had to!

The headteacher explained that even though she has had to adopt the suggested 'data regime' the 'end product' remains similar:

What hasn't changed for me is that then, 1984 to 1989 you knew what you wanted your Year 6 pupils to be like when they left and that hasn't changed. I still want them to be completely self-reliant and confident, knowing that their greatest asset is themselves. When push comes to shove, what gets you out of trouble? Yourself! I still have that view of the end product and that is children that are resilient and healthy. (Jane)

The newest recruit to headship from the participants described how her role was predominantly one of 'evidencing' for 'someone who is going to ask':

I started as a headteacher in September 2015. It wasn't planned that way! As for freedom, it is sold to you that you are still free, the government says you can do your own thing in terms of the curriculum and your own assessment. You are supposedly free but then it all gets drawn back in because you have to tick all of these boxes. You have to say the right things and come out with the right phrases. There is like a game to play! I spend a lot of my time evidencing things, almost down to evidencing breathing!

Evidencing, every minute of the day. Phonics, when are you doing it and how? Someone is going to ask and want to see the evidence. Evidence of our attendance, evidence of anything they can possibly think of.

You have to make things extra explicit so someone from outside can understand. (Alison)

Some headteachers described the tendency of the local authority to focus on schools in trouble and keep a distant eye on schools where the data looked strong:

I became a head in 2009. In that seven years headship has definitely changed. The best way to describe it is I went from being really supported and kept up to date with things to where I feel I'm on my own. It's quite nice that I don't

get anyone to visit the school. The school's data is good so I guess that is why I don't get someone knocking on the door saying I'm below floor targets so we need to support you. That's quite nice, I am left alone to do my own thing. But I can see why some heads get into trouble. I can see why schools might end up in difficult times because I am on my own and because I choose and want to keep up to date and because I want us to be the best that we can be, I choose to go out there and find the information I need. I get to go into schools and see brilliant practice and bring it back. But, if I didn't do that I could quite easily be struggling and the school could end up in difficult times and nobody would know we were on that downward slide. (Charles)

Experienced headteachers were eager to give their views on the governments recent announcements concerning giving greater freedom to headteachers, particularly for leaders of academies:

The four freedoms that you were supposed to get from being an academy are pay and conditions, the curriculum, holidays and freedom from the local authority. We haven't touched pay and conditions. We daren't touch term times! We have other schools in town and we can't upset families. Just think, now that we have to refuse term-time holidays and if we have a different break from the secondary school, you would cause all kinds of upsets in this town. People would move their children.

As for the local authority, I never felt I was being controlled by them. If I'm honest, I do regret that there isn't some overarching body looking over us. At this juncture, I am not prepared to raft up with another group of academies. We are stand-alone! We are not under the wing of someone else. (Jim)

By contrast, Jane has embraced the freedom to change her term times:

I have to say, I've changed the term times as a pilot. We come back three days earlier in September and have two weeks in October half term. It carved up a very long term, a very exacting term. Two-thirds of the parents are in favour! Parents say they took an early holiday when it was cheaper. Hugely successful! Of course, those parents who don't like it are the ones with children in other schools. Having said that, I have some parents with children in both sectors who said it was so lovely to spend one week with their primary child before their secondary child came home for the second week. I wanted to create the Easter feeling. I know when my staff come back after Easter they are fully refreshed and ready to go. We've got data that looks at attendance figure from that term and it is better than the year before when we had just a week off. (Jane)

The supposed freedoms offered by academisation are not apparent to all headteachers:

Although we are told that there is more autonomy and schools are told they can do whatever they want, there is a caveat with that, if you are doing basically the certain things then actually yes you can do what you want but



still not really what you want to do. You still have to work in that framework so to speak. I don't think it's becoming more autonomous at all, it's becoming a dictatorship and we are now moving into a world where people are feeling they are doing things for other people and it's becoming more about what the government want to see rather than trusting us as leaders to know our children and teachers who spend ridiculous number of hours every single day with these children to get it right and to do what they need to do. (George)

Charles, who suggested that joining a multi-academy trust might reduce freedoms for schools, shared this more cautious view:

I think we are a local authority school and I feel free to do what I want to do. There's nobody pressurising me to do what they want me to do. The feeling of the staff is that if we joined an academy trust we might end up being forced to follow a particular curriculum or forced to use a particular assessment system. As it is, we have chosen our assessment system. That wouldn't be allowed in a trust. (George)

In relation to this point, Mike contrasted the difference between freedoms for a stand-alone academy and one tied to a trust. He agreed with the government claims that academy status can bring greater freedoms and autonomy. The headteacher describes how he has grasped the chance to be self-governing with no wish to be part of a chain of schools, which he would see as a backward step in terms of autonomy:

We are an absolute island, an island. Don't want to part of a chain, neither me nor the governors want to do it. They know when I leave they will fight any attempt either to make us part of a chain under a secondary school for instance or even to get us to lead a chain. Because we have this belief that running a school is about the headteacher being at the school and better to have your own identity and not sharing identity with someone else. So I believe ten years down the road someone will stand up and say, "God what have we done to education to get all these executive heads and all these schools linked together? We've ruined it!" I absolutely believe that! (Mike)

Mike claimed that becoming an academy has certainly delivered greater freedom:

Absolutely! Completely! Some of it is just this strange feeling that now as a school we are just self, everything we do ourselves. I think the first freedom and this might sound arrogant but it was us saying this is going to be one special school and to be special we do have to do something different so the rebranding was a significant part of it but we made sure parents didn't have to pay for that so all the new uniform, not a parent paid a penny for it. We gave all the uniform free with the money they gave us and the greatest freedom this has absolutely come from money because in this school it's transformed the school.

I've now got two deputies. As it happens, my senior deputy was maths coordinator here. We appointed her and she's amazing. So I never had two deputies before. Then we appointed a child welfare coordinator which for this school we would never have been able to afford to do but absolutely these children need that. She's been ... well I keep using the word transform she's transformed the school on her own! Then we appointed a speech therapy assistant. Then I've got two secretaries instead of one secretary. Real key people! What it's done more or less, and then took over the kitchen and not worried about the cost of that because that was the case with having the kitchen taken over. We took over the cleaning. (Mike)

Most of these symbols of freedom could have happened whether or not the school became an academy. The uniform can be changed, cleaning can be taken over and adjustments can be made to the leadership team. The description implies that becoming an academy provided an opportunity for rebranding with the extra funding used to employ additional staff to improve support and in some cases replace external services that were dwindling. The headteacher alluded to this by adding:

Do you know, after becoming an academy, people stopped me in the street to congratulate me on becoming an academy. People in the town thought that is was a tremendous achievement and I let them believe it! (Mike)

The opportunity to rebrand the school was also described by Jim:

We were a good school but had a poor reputation based on historical information. Families grow up here and stay here. Since the late sixties, our school's reputation was poor as we were surrounded by very poor, shelter housing. So we were seen as the poor relation in the town and people chose the other two schools. We were also known as the SEN school. Even though standards were good, people didn't look into that.

For us, academisation enabled us to rebrand the school. We've gone from just over 100 pupils to over 200. We are one of the fastest growing schools in Cornwall. So huge growth and I think it was down to the rebranding! At that time, there was something a bit flagship about the policy. That's where all of the money was and there was a shine, a veneer anyway, so we took it. People saw things were changing and once people came into the school they told friends and as you know once that starts, your reputation changes. (Jim)

George disagreed with the claim that academisation provided greater freedom for schools:

A load of rubbish! Absolute garbage! I think it is a way to try and privatize everything just like what's happening with the NHS the same as education. They are talking about having these chief executives or executive headteachers that might be in charge of six, seven, eight, nine, ten schools. I

mean where is the leadership there? You are forcing out other headteachers or forcing them down to be heads of schools and then be governed by someone else who may or may not have different views to those of the school. To run a school with different catchment areas as one chain, I disagree with that. (George)

Ray also disagreed with the notion of greater freedom for academies, particularly for those within trusts:

In terms of extra freedoms as an academy I don't see any. As part of a multi-academy trust there are fewer freedoms because we were part of a club with common policies and rules. Even though we contributed to the trust, at the end of the day we had to go along with the consensus!

We shared financial services and the curriculum was streamlined across the trust. Assessment was streamlined. We had a common team that arranges the ICT, our websites have common features. There was a whole new set of standards and expectations across the trust which were perfectly good things but in terms of freedom that's not what it's about anymore.

All schools in multi-academy trusts lose their school vision and trade it for a shared vision! There was still room for being a bit of a maverick but not in terms of the core systems you had to toe the line. For example, data across the trust was based on a formula that you had to stick to. School improvement planning was done in a corporate way; you were not free to do your own thing. (Ray)

The newest headteacher did not see greater freedoms on the day of her school's conversion:

Not at all. One day we were a maintained school and the next we were an academy. There is no difference! Clearly, there are differences in the way we work with our MAT but in terms of freedom, no difference! (Alison)

Some headteachers consider the role of executive headteachers within the multi-academy trust model as a means of sharing high quality leadership across a number of schools with clear benefits across a trust. However, other headteachers believe that this is having a negative impact, denuding schools of strong leaders and spreading a thin layer of leadership over schools at an executive level but leaving less skilled and less experienced leaders to face the day-to-day pressures at individual schools.

I think it's either Herefordshire or Hertfordshire that is the top performing local authority in the country and they have the smallest number of academies

in the country. There is no data whatsoever that suggests that having an executive headteacher in charge of an academy chain of schools is the way to get to sustained improvement amongst schools. (George)

Every headteacher mentioned the impact of Ofsted on their roles and while the majority recognised that schools needed some form of monitoring there were clear frustrations concerning the volume of changes that stemmed from Ofsted and in particular, from the chief inspector.

I will tell you the biggest frustration for me. It is the constant changing emphasis from Ofsted and whoever is in charge at a given time. New leaders of Ofsted come along with their pet projects and they are allowed to just impose these on schools. Over the years, this has wasted huge amounts of my time. Time that I could have spent with the children or supporting my staff. I'll give you an example. A few inspections ago, can't remember which one. Anyway, they came up with something called 'community cohesion' and everyone had to stop what they were doing and make sure that they were doing community cohesion. It was top of the list for inspection teams and if you didn't have evidence of good community cohesion then you were in trouble. Heads lost their jobs over it. Now of course it is important to teach children about their society and how to fit in and be good citizens but the problem here was that we all had to go on training courses and learn to do this the Ofsted way, using their model. It must have cost millions to introduce this! If you get inspected today, you will never hear the words 'community cohesion' and inspectors are forbidden to mention it. So what was that all about? More messing with schools from the top. No single person should have that sort of power to be able to make headteachers run around like marionettes dangling on wires, making sure that their wishes were acted upon or else! (Bob)

Other headteachers shared similar frustrations:

I've been upset by the way that pupil premium and sports premium and other initiatives have been ring-fenced and then inspected. That's the way that you coerce your leaders and get them to police your own visions. You say, 'I'm going to give you £9000 for PE and ring-fence it and we are going to come in and inspect it.' So that's telling you, how you will develop your school. You might not want to do it like that. You might already be good at PE, it might be a passion of yours. You might desperately need that £9000 to spend on a TA to work with that cohort that has so many complex needs and that's what matters. Instead, you're focusing on an area that might not be a priority. (Jim)

Another headteacher reflected on the growing focus from inspectors on reducing the gap in performance between disadvantaged children and others:

Closing the gap! Crazy idea! That all came from Sir Michael who decided that disadvantaged children should do better. Well now, I'm sure that every

head in the land would agree with that! I'm sure everyone is working their socks off to help their disadvantaged pupils. They threw money at it and at first it all seemed like a good idea. Then, a couple of years later they told us that they would inspect how we had spent the money and check if it was 'closing the gap'. Some heads got into trouble because they had spent the money on a leaking roof or to take all of their children on a day trip. Typical of Ofsted, they give you some money with a smile and then come and hit you with a big stick if you don't use it exactly how they tell you!

Now you would think that to check if we were closing this gap our children would be compared with other similar children across the country. On no, that wasn't good enough. These children are compared with the nations 'other children' and that is the average achieved by all non-disadvantaged children. Where did that come from? How on earth was that allowed to happen? Everyone knows how stupid that is and yet we all sat there and let it happen.

It is so bad now that heads are losing their jobs over this. The latest data dashboards show how all of your pupils are progressing but then, right next to it, there is a chart comparing your disadvantaged pupils with the average for all of the nations non-disadvantaged pupils. How is that a level playing field? Heads sit there on inspection being attacked by inspectors over this and if their disadvantaged pupils are not doing as well as the national figures the school is put in the 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' categories and if the latter then the head goes! Even the inspectors know that this is crazy but even they dare not say anything! What upsets me is when I see heads having to leave their jobs because of something like this. In many cases these heads run great schools where the children have wonderful opportunities in sport or art or music. Just because a particular group haven't done well for the year before inspectors come, the heads have to go after all that they have built up. No wonder nobody wants the job anymore! (Wendy)

In a footnote added to this when Wendy reviewed the transcript, she suggested:

I've got something to add here. Where I talked about heads having to leave great schools because their disadvantaged pupils had not done very well. It appears that their new chief inspector is not so worried about English and mathematics and maybe about 'closing the gap', in fact I've been told that inspectors can't use that phrase anymore. No, she is passionate about having a rich, lively curriculum.

You just watch what happens now! All of the inspectors will be told to go and watch music or art in schools. At the moment they don't want to see any of that. Reports will be all about the curriculum at the whim of this new big cheese! All of those headteachers who were running great schools in terms of the curriculum on offer, who had to leave because of 'closing the gap' issues would now be held up as outstanding heads. It's not just sad, it is criminal, inhumane! (Wendy)

This important point requires further inspection and discussion because it raises many underlying issues. Is it the case that chief inspectors can dictate policy in this manner?

What checks are in place to ensure that valuable time, effort and finance are not being

wasted on ill-thought-out inspection crusades? Why are headteachers and their unions not rising up to question these interventions in a stronger fashion?

Some positive impacts of inspection were noted by experienced headteachers, two of who could recall early inspections that were often for four days:

There wasn't a great deal of freedom there, I can remember being quite frustrated as a young teacher and then we had Ofsted. Under that regime, they stayed in four days. They came in on a Monday and were gone by Thursday lunchtime. I was watched for seven lesson observations during those four days. That was quite empowering. I didn't get below very good in seven observations and when that happened the headteacher at the time said 'well done' and told me to teach however I liked. That was my first taste of freedom but I needed Ofsted to give me the stamp to do it my way. (Jim)

While most headteachers support the need for inspection and the role of inspectors acting as advocates for children, the vast majority of comments note the extra work required to prepare for inspection, the fear of inconsistency depending on which inspectors visit the schools and the threat that inspections present to the job security of the headteachers.

First of all, to me, most headteachers, I'm sorry to criticise colleagues, but most headteachers are so afraid of Ofsted and what it does, and this happens in local schools and I can see where it happens, they're so afraid of Ofsted they've got to do English and maths in this set way, maybe it seems preparing for SATs from September. So those children are doing maths and English and then you hear about these children doing more maths and English for homework and they're doing maths and English catch-up in the afternoons because the heads are so afraid of a visit that might come once every three or four years. They're so afraid of that that they are damaging their children, I absolutely believe that's true! So that comes from the existence of Ofsted. (Name of supply teacher) told me recently that he was in a school and it was a bit like this and a new head came in September and took down, he described this, wonderful wall displays, beautiful work by the children all about the school. The staff came in at the September and it was taken down and each member of staff had a target, an academic target, for their children to achieve. They had to go up their own ladder and he said, "I couldn't believe it. The atmosphere in the school went from that (gesticulating high) to that (gesticulating low) in a click." Well who trains these people? The leadership? Leadership's the most important part of the school, I think to have a very good school you have to have a very good leader. I don't think one can

survive without the other. Even though you might have brilliant teachers, in the end they might get buried by poor leadership. (Mike)

Fear of inspector inconsistency was described by nine of the headteachers, more than half of the group:

You see the problem with Ofsted is you have a group of people going around who are inconsistent. There are different teams. Once they become a team they become this strange beast. They take on their own characteristics. You hear colleagues talking about that fair team and then you hear about teams going in and imposing themselves from day one. (Jim)

There appears to be a common view that, 'Everything is shaped by Ofsted and it's coming from all angles' (Jim). This 'shaping' is identified by most of the headteachers and one used a cooking metaphor to explore what he sees as the myth of new curriculum freedoms:

It upsets me that we are straightjacketed by people and they are coming in and they have such control. Once every four years they come in and by goodness it is on everybody's mind all the time.

It feels a bit like they say academies are free to teach whatever they like as long as it is a broad and balanced curriculum. So I liken it to a kitchen table on which you have some fabulous ingredients. Some fresh stuff, onions and peppers, mushrooms and tomatoes, all these fabulous ingredients to choose from. Just as you are about to cook someone comes in and says, 'Yes but it better be a lasagne and it better be shaped like a lasagne and at the end someone is going to taste it and it must taste like a lasagne and all along we are going to inspect that this is a lasagne.' It better be this at the end. (Jim)

The headteacher attacks the concept of 'one size fits all' and compares schools with retail outlets that achieve their purposes in different ways, using the expertise of their staff. He is also upset to see how his young teachers return from training events with the latest news of what Ofsted are now expecting and he has a particular dislike for proformas:

I want to be able to say to Ofsted, "Look this is our school and we do things our way. Now come in and listen to us and hear why it works. Don't bring your proformas here, don't use your tick list to note what you've seen." I always say to my staff that if they see an Ofsted inspector with a proforma he or she doesn't know what they are looking at. They are using it as a crutch. The second you see a proforma challenge it or let me know and I'll be in like a rocket. There are no proformas for classroom observations nowadays, they are

blank sheets. Everything is subjective! You can argue a grade on a lesson.  
(Jim)

Headteachers describe the considerable amount of time that they take in preparing for inspection:

You have to question Ofsted. We had a good Ofsted in 2012 and our data would suggest that we were an outstanding school. I almost wanted that accolade for the staff. Whatever I ask of them they do with knobs on. What I prepared in 2012 for the Ofsted, I know was the tip of the iceberg for I what I have to prepare for the one I am expecting this year. It's massive, it's absolutely massive! I resent having to spend the time but it's got to be done! In the end, when the inspectors walk through the door, if I'm not prepared, I'm letting everybody down, the children, the staff, the community and the parents and the governors. I feel the weight on my shoulders. I have fantastic governors, they are wonderful. It's hard! (Jane)

Jim complained about the 'wasted time' in putting together evidence for visiting inspectors:

For me just making an evidence base so that when people come I can just hand them a file and they can go, "Show me that," and they can tick it off, that's a real waste of my time! I could be spending all of my energy on the curriculum. I haven't got time to do that because I'm so busy getting all the files and documents necessary for the Ofsted inspection. If I didn't have that I would be doing what I love most and that is going into class and helping colleagues and not having to tell them what Ofsted is looking for. (Jim)

Ray describes 'putting in all of his time' in preparing for inspection:

The stakes are so high! The accountability is so high! You are always vulnerable. The clock ticks and that makes you vulnerable as a head. The community knew we were a good school and respected us. If we had a bad inspection it would have impacted on me greatly. I put in all of my time ensuring that I was ready for inspection.

As I understand it, the government's approach is to increase inspections, increase accountability. (Ray)

Frank described how the local authority joined Ofsted in challenging schools when their performance data dropped and how he felt that he was part of an 'Ofsted game' in which data provided the playing pieces:

At times, I found the data and a couple of authority people anything but helpful! It was all about beating you over the head and I think that message had come from Ofsted. Then through Ofsted and through the authority, I



think this is what you have to do now. This is not the best way to get the best out of people! I felt the autonomy was always there because you were running your own school. If you did get good then the people backed off! (LA and Ofsted). At that time (trying to get from satisfactory to good), playing the Ofsted game took up a lot of time, about 80% of my week because you were trying to get everyone working together. (Frank)

Thirteen out of the fifteen headteachers shared concerns about the continuing state of change that typifies the modern education arena and some describe the complexity of a headteacher's position in the face of continual change. Headteachers described how most changes stem from central government and are either based on the political direction dictated by whichever party is in power or on directives from Ofsted who appear to change their inspection priorities each year. Often changes imposed on schools lead to significant additional workload for headteachers and their staff. This was the case in 2015 when schools were told to stop using the perennial assessment system based on levels and produce their own pupil tracking approaches. This caused significant stress across the educational system particularly for the school leaders that carried the responsibility for accurate assessment of pupil progress.

One example of central government control gone mad was the way in which they suddenly decided to get rid of our perfectly good assessment system. The system had been in place for years and pupils and parents had finally got to the point where they understood levels and could describe what progress from sub-level to sub-level looked like.

Now if I am correct, the decision to change all of this for every school can be traced back to just two academics who decided it was a bad idea. It was terrible to label children with a level of attainment, so they said, and it was awful to see children who knew that they were a lower level than their friends. What nonsense! Who are these people and how have they got the power to just change everything for every school, every teacher and every pupil?

Anyway, it happened and what have we got? We still have to assess children and now they are either working towards an expected level, or they are at it or they are at greater depth. Millions have been spent and school leaders have spent hundreds of stressful hours trying to come up with new fancy systems to replace perfectly good ones that actually told you more accurately where your pupils were in their learning. Why did we just sit back and take this? Why didn't we march through the streets and refuse to go down this crazy road? I'm sad to this this but today's headteachers are like spineless minions. Too afraid of putting their heads above the trenches and saying, 'Excuse me I think you might be wrong here!' What are they all so afraid of? I think it must be that

they would be seen as if they had something wrong with them. That they were deviant in some way, in need of correction like naughty children. (Bob)

Change is relentless and some headteachers believe that the changes are not always in the best interests of the children. When reflecting on how headship has changed over time, John stated:

The biggest change of all is change itself! You are not given time to settle on any change. Just as you are really becoming involved in it the goalposts change and the teaching profession is one where we just accept change and go along with it, work hard at it and make it work. But we all know that some of the changes that have been brought in have not been for the best of the pupils. (John)

The collected evidence does support the view that primary headship has changed considerably over the past four decades and that the rate of change itself is increasing. It is likely that headship before the seventies had experienced little central guidance and requirement to adhere to new initiatives. The headteachers in the group that recalled their work in the seventies describe a very different leadership landscape than the one found currently. The degree to which this era can be described as a 'secret garden' of freedom and autonomy will be debated in the discussion chapter along with the notion of the system being defined by panoptic control. There is no doubt that changes have taken place at an accelerated rate, however, the degree to which these can be described as panoptic changes, with all of the respected 'baggage' that entails, is also debated in the next chapter.

## **5.2 Research question 2: 'To what extent are headteachers required to become advocates for their pupils as external support and local services disappear?'**

Increasingly, headteachers are taking on additional roles as external services are being removed:

In my six years, there have been so many changes in my role. I believe the most significant changes have been those to do with safeguarding and child

protection. I now have to attend family group conferences, lots of child protection meetings, team around the child. What we actually do and the amount of time that we have to spend with families, that was not the case before. I will tell you what has gone in the local authority and it is a great shame. When I started we had advisers who knew where all of the best practice was taking place and they would come in and share this. You would work closely with teachers across the county. We worked together on writing projects that made a difference. Now this happens across MATs but for schools like mine that are geographically isolated there is no one to share your best practice with. (Sally)

All of the retired headteachers and serving experienced headteachers described how external support and local services have dramatically reduced over time and how this added to their roles and also to their role as advocates for their pupils. While the headteachers have always seen the role of advocate as central to their positions, there is evidence to show that the range of advocacy has broadened, particularly as social welfare and child protection services have dwindled:

We used to have good relationships with social workers, now it's hard to find one when you desperately need one. Also, when you do, it's not the same relationship anymore. It used to feel like you worked together in the interests of the child and that's how it should be. Now it's all about accountability and covering your own back. I suppose it's because of all of the high profile cases on the front pages of newspapers where social services are blamed for missing vital sign in serious case reviews.

I'll tell you three changes. Firstly, it is really hard to get hold of a social worker, as I've just said. Secondly, when you do, they are very reluctant to help you. In earlier times they would respect your decision. If you said you needed help for a child they just accepted it. Now, you get asked a hundred and one questions, as if they are questioning your professional judgement and quite often they will say it's not their business. Thirdly, when they do meet with you and the family involved, they are very reluctant to be the lead professional. When you have a care meeting you have to designate a lead professional and because they don't want to do it, the role nearly always falls on the teacher involved and in lots of schools, like here, that is the head. Just another role added to my job! I know that some academy groups are hiring their own social workers, I don't blame them! (Ray)

Bob pointed to the disappearing role of the educational welfare officer (EWO) and the impact of this on all headteachers and the loss of a vital link between school and home:

I can tell you about one big change and that is in the role of the educational welfare officer (EWO). Back in the eighties and nineties, all schools had an EWO and by and large they were great. If any child was struggling to come to school they would go to the home, find the problems and then get the child back

in school. I had one who would literally drag children into school! Then a few years ago, they were cut to part time and you couldn't get an EWO to visit homes any more. Now they are gone, completely gone!

Now here is the crucial point! When Ofsted come calling they have a close look at attendance, especially persistent absence. They look at the absence rates for all groups: boys, girls, special needs, free school meals. If the attendance of any group is below national standards then you are in trouble! I know a number of schools that should have been judged as outstanding but couldn't because just one group was not attending well. So nowadays, just imagine how important it is for a headteacher to make sure that attendance rates are high.

Another thing that is very important. When EWOs visited homes, they often saw child protection issues and they were quick to inform social services. Now that this link with the home is gone, who spots the early warning signs? Who protects the children? How is this improving safeguarding?

Lots of schools employ their own staff to monitor attendance and family support workers. In most cases these people do a great job and do get into the homes. However, it costs a lot of money and some schools can't afford this luxury, especially the small schools. I know some heads who go and knock on doors themselves, totally against the advice of their unions. I would never do that and frankly I don't think I should. (Bob)

Mike graphically described the headteachers' greater personal involvement in child protection situations. His account gives an example of a headteacher acting in the interest of the child in an emergency and gives insight into the emotional impact of his actions:

I'm in bed and I really did cry last night. I lay in bed and I thought about (name of child) who was a foster child. I've known her since she was three as a nursery child. Intermittently, three times over her life she's been looked after by mum. Mum goes off the rails, they go into foster care. They come back, they go into foster care. So I've been with them all through, all three times. She is the most amazing child. About a year ago now I said to Social Services "You need to go in there 'cause that mum's gone off the rails again!" and they actually said on the phone, "Tell me why?" and I told them and they said, "Well that aint enough to go in there!" I said, "I'm telling you it is!"

The same day, after Social Services, (girls name) was home, she didn't come to school that day and she phoned me, crying on the phone saying, "Come and get me!" I drove the mini bus down to get three of the family, at that moment mum's throwing their clothes out of the window. I picked them up, got them here and phoned Social Services. They went into foster care for the third and last time because now they're staying in foster care. She was in foster care for a while and it was a plan to let them see their mum a bit and she came here and I sat by her she was crying her eyes out. I said, " (name of child), what's wrong?"

This little girl, age of eleven said something like, "I do love my mum but I know now she is never going to be the person that can look after me so I don't ever want to go back with her. So I don't want to see her today." She is the most amazing child.

So, Ofsted came round, she had all her badges on and I said, “That’s (name of child) and she’s a special girl.” I didn’t say the story about her. Anyway, as I’m coming out of the hall I see her going over to the three inspectors on her own back and by the time (name of Lead Inspector) got there, I think she’d almost been crying and she said, “Do you know what that little girl told me? She said (name of headteacher) changed my life!” (Mike)

This incident had happened to this headteacher almost a year before this interview and the fact that he was reflecting on this the previous night suggests a lingering emotional impact. His physical involvement in rescuing the children and dealing with their distress were vivid memories for him. What appeared to impact more than the incident itself was the resilience of the ‘amazing child’ and how she had become successful at school ‘wearing all her badges’ and being brave enough to tell inspectors how the headteacher had changed her life.

There was universal agreement from the retired and the experienced headteachers that local authority support had reduced drastically:

Everything has gone! We used to have Cornwall Learning, now they are independent. Social services and support services are hit by their budgets, so schools are finding they are spending more money from their budgets on some things that were provided in the past. (Frank)

Mike reflected on the reducing quality of support from the local authority:

When I was first a head you could ring the local authority and speak to people, individuals. If you wanted something you could just speak to them. If something happened in school they’d absolutely support you. But by the time I thought I wanted to become an academy, there wasn’t anybody. They’d all become faceless people. Not their fault because there was nobody up there with the power to do that basically. What we were getting from the local authority I thought was rubbish! Rubbish in that when SIPs (School Improvement Partners) were coming in here to tell me what to do, I totally didn’t agree with anything they were saying. I didn’t agree with the way they were saying it and I sat here for ages with (named SIP) having arguments with him where he would be telling me how to run my school So, for starters, it was the realisation that I didn’t actually need the local authority. Absolutely did I think we would benefit financially, I would say yes absolutely! I had worked that out and I absolutely knew that. It’s interesting though because I don’t agree philosophically with academies. I certainly don’t agree now with people now being forced to become academies. I think if the local authority

was a proper local authority, doing its job, I probably wouldn't have done it to that extent. (Mike)

The lack of support and in particular high quality support is making the headteacher role more challenging:

I feel isolated. I feel undermined in different situations. I don't feel I have enough confidence in the local authority that they will make the right decisions. (George)

As schools ponder setting up new networks, the declining support from the local authority feature in their discussions:

As a head I led the school into becoming an academy. There were several reasons. I was quite frustrated with how we were being supported as a school. It wasn't the easiest of times working for the local authority at that stage. I did feel that we wanted to break away and make our own decisions. The local authority was very strategic in where they put their money. I was watching us miss out on capital maintenance. We would get to the top of the queue and then be knocked back because another school was seen to be more deserving of money than us. I was watching the windows fall out and the children could put their fingers through the panels. The school was in a terrible state! So we looked into this just like every other head at that time. There was big talk about a large sum of money if you academised. Actually, it wasn't a large sum but ten percent was quite considerable! You can do a lot with that. You can get a new teacher and reduce class sizes straight away. So that appealed. (Jim)

This headteacher added further reflection at the transcript review stage:

Reading this again makes me think about the contrast to our current funding situation. Money has been important. Looking back I would say that the extra money has been the greatest difference. It has given me freedom to build and give resources for developing children's education. Catch-up intervention rooms, reading rooms. It has given me the chance to refurbish classrooms. They hadn't been touched since the late sixties. They were old and lovely as it is everything looked a little tired. Over the last couple of years we have secured over a million pounds from the academy fund for maintenance. Each year you can submit a bid. Now this isn't a bid to the local authority who might decide to give the money to a poorer school down the road. You are bidding against schools from Birmingham or Manchester, big city schools with big budgets. You are put on an even playing field with them. For instance, with school dinners and the new law that we have to give free school meals. We are getting a hall extension and a new kitchen. As long as we are doing what the government want, we get the money! (Jim)

The headteacher claims that this level of funding and school development would not have been possible under local authority rule:

Our budget comes from all over, the roll is up so we have more teachers and support staff. I can afford to have a non-teaching deputy head and that has made my job so much easier. She can share the burden of seeing parents, working on improving teaching and learning and so on. When we became an academy we were about to lose £90,000 because the LA were taking nursery funding away. We would have had to lose three-quarters of our support staff. (Jim)

The financial benefits from becoming an academy were also noted by John:

The benefits financially were huge, huge! We became an academy at the time when there was money to cover the cost of becoming an academy. The money covered signage around the school and making the school look a nicer place. We were able to buy the children little bits of uniform. After then it was really good because we were able to put in bids to the DfE and we were able to afford things like a biomass boiler at £150,000 which we would never, ever have been able to afford. We were having the whole of the school reglazed, new doors, new windows at £50,000, half our roof replaced. Under the local authority system we would have been repairing leaks! (John)

Jane described the benefit of employing a school business manager:

My main expertise is not on getting money into the school but I have to say we've got more reserves than we have ever had and I've done more spending. I think it's a combination of more income coming to the school, a slowly rising pupil population and shopping around for different things. The business manager certainly earns her wage. For example, we have solar panels we bought with spare cash. We put in a bid for a new roof and got £50,000 from the academies fund. We got £15,000 when school meals came in. We got new equipment, tables, cutlery the whole thing! That's been good! (Jane)

The reducing quality and quantity of support from the local authority were factors that were considered by other headteachers who moved their schools to academy status:

The local authority was imploding, there was just no real support and you could see all of the services were being cut. As local services have died my role grew. Becoming an academy provided answers and opportunities. (John).

Jane recognises growing social responsibility:

As local services have disappeared, I have taken on much more responsibility for my community. I have to buy in as needs arise but it still isn't as good as it should be. Who else is there to keep fighting for the community?

In some cases headteachers are reluctant to delegate some of these additional responsibilities to staff who are already overburdened:

The job has always been impossible but you had those people around you within the school. Now, heads are trying to make sure that their staff are not being overwhelmed. The danger with that is the heads become overwhelmed! It's a really difficult 'Catch 22'. There's more and more coming down and you want your staff to be able to cope so you take a bit more. It's actually not helping the process! The good headteacher is going to be mindful of that. (Frank).

To some extent, extra workload is being addressed by shared leadership arrangements across multi-academy trusts. An example is where trusts appoint health and safety officers who are responsible for meeting health and safety regulations, producing risk assessments and carrying out monitoring visits to all of the schools in the trust. This distributed leadership is designed to save time for headteachers and heads of school and similar distributed roles are in place for safeguarding, child protection, site maintenance and procurement. All of these can save time but some headteachers have concerns when the distribution of duties across schools can lessen the awareness of leaders in individual schools:

Who therefore has the overall view of a school? In my job I understand the budget, I understand the premises, I know the ins and outs of the whole running of the school. When I am running the school I have all of these in mind. If you have got say 12 schools and one person is doing the premises for all 12 schools and someone else is doing the safeguarding for all 12 schools and so on, who can make joined up decisions about a particular school? (Sally)

The distribution of headship within a multi-academy trust and the quality of monitoring across schools is a concern for Charles who commented:

It does worry me that are these executive heads spread around too thinly. I do listen to academy heads talk and they are told what to do with their budgets, having to keep to strict limits. You become part of this headteacher improvement team. When you join a trust you get monitored by other headteachers and deputy headteachers who come into your school and monitor. I have heard where certain deputy heads have gone from one school into another school and have given mixed messages or incorrect messages. I wouldn't want that. I want to pick and choose who I want. (Charles)



The quality of day-to-day leadership in trust schools is possibly threatened by the instillation of new ‘heads of school’:

The other thing we have got now is ‘heads of school’. Very often it’s like someone says, ‘Oh you could be head of school!’ No training, no discussion, just leave them to it! Assuming that all they have to worry about is teaching and learning. But if you are the head of school then that’s where the parent goes! That’s the person they want to talk to. You’re the one who is there five days a week. That makes life difficult and they need proper training. Otherwise, heads of school will disappear! It could be ideal training for someone who wants to be a headteacher if done properly! (Frank)

A further identified benefit for academy trusts are the growing links between schools and the sharing of expertise:

Links with the other schools in the group are the number one benefit. The links are strong. What it has given us is that all of the teachers see themselves as part of a big team across those schools and our staff are interchanging. We share teachers for a week or a term. We are looking at having one SENCo across a number of schools. We have excellent succession planning happening across the group. We are training our own leaders. So when I retire, the leaders will be there! The governors won’t have to search wide and far because we are building those leaders ourselves.

I think schools say they work closely together; we now do work closely together. We are not shy when sharing data, warts and all. Where there is an issue and we all have issues we support each other. We share the data, we see where the weaknesses are and we send people in to support the school. We monitor each other and that only works if people are honest and up-front and we are! It’s really having benefits. (Jane)

This benefit was recognised by Charles who described the prospect of his staff gaining experience and high quality professional development through sharing their expertise with other schools. It is of interest to note that the headteacher has not yet led his school into academy status:

If I were to become an executive head then I feel my staff would feel it was an opportunity for their professional development. For example, if I took over a school where early years wasn’t strong then my early years teacher could go and support the other school. That would be a fantastic opportunity for her! Another opportunity would be that we would obviously need to have a head of school so someone in this school would be promoted to that position. (Charles)

While schools within a multi-academy trust may benefit from the sharing of expertise and personnel, there are examples of unforeseen consequences for local schools that formerly met in town clusters:

Some schools that are in the same town and who used to meet regularly with all of the other schools in the town no longer do so because they have joined MATs and they only meet with their MAT academies. It's sad; I know a local headteacher who is in charge of a maintained school, the only one in her town, a large town. She was telling me that all of the other schools in her town belong to different MATs and none of the headteachers will meet with her. One academy in the town would only let you train with them if you paid ninety pounds! It should still be free like it always was before! Whoever you are with you should be able to talk with the school next door. In the best situations schools that have joined MATS still meet with their local schools. (Frank)

The evidence supports the view that the nature of external support has changed significantly over time and current headteachers secure support from different sources rather than through a package provided by the local authority. There are clear differences of opinion concerning the adequacy of support offered by multi-academy trusts and whether this presents an improvement from the local authority model or a weaker, thinly spread alternative. This will be debated in the discussion chapter.

### **5.3 Research question 3: 'What factors have led to the growing crisis in primary headteacher recruitment and is there a possible solution?'**

The majority of participants described the increasing breadth of the headteacher role and the growing pressure of responsibility for people, finance and safety. In describing the breadth of the role, Sally commented:

A friend of mine who started as a head in the nineties at the time when the local authority thought it might be a good idea to give headteachers some management training, so they asked local companies to involve primary heads in any management training they had running. This headteacher was offered a day of training with one of the big supermarket groups in Cornwall. She arrived on the day and sat in a semi-circle of managers from all over the county. They were asked to introduce themselves to the rest of the group. The first one said she was the marketing manager for a

particular branch, the next was the health and safety manager for another store, the next in charge of finance, and so it went on around the group. When it came to my friend she said, “Well, I suppose I am all of you! I am in charge of safety, finance, personnel issues, customer relations. All of it!” Needless to say, the other managers were amazed that she had all of their roles with the same degree of responsibility and accountability! It is crazy! Now whilst that is crazy, because she had all of those roles she could see it all together. When making decisions, she could do so based on her thorough knowledge of everything! (Sally)

The headteacher noted that this example was from the nineties and the headteacher role has broadened significantly since then:

You think of all of the changes that are put in place constantly. What a daunting prospect! (Sally)

One impact of this broadening headteacher role is on the hours worked each week by headteachers in comparison to reports from previous decades as noted by retired Bob:

I remember the headteacher at the first school I worked at as a teacher, back in 1979. I don't remember him doing much at all. Every time I saw him he was either sitting behind his empty desk looking out of the window or seated in his chosen chair in the staffroom. When I started at the school I sat in his chair on the first morning. I was scolded by an older teacher who told me it was the head's chair. Sure enough, every breaktime and lunchtime he would sit there holding court. We never discussed teaching or learning, it was just tittle-tattle. No CPD (training). At four thirty every day he would come around shaking his keys telling teachers he was about to lock up. Do you know, he wouldn't let parents inside the school gate, they had to wait in the street outside the school and the teachers would bring the children to them and yet the parents loved him (the headteacher).

At my second school, the head used to take all of the teachers down to the pub on Friday lunchtimes for a drink while the dinner ladies looked after the children for a long lunch break. He was always gone by 4.00 pm because he had a small sailing boat at Falmouth and he liked to lose his stress out on the water every afternoon. Nowadays my wife, who is a primary teacher, gets emails from her head most nights as late as 11.00 pm. What's that all about? (Bob)

It appears that headteachers could choose to work short hours through to the nineties as suggested by John:

A friend of mine was head of a very small school hidden away in West Cornwall. When he was about to be inspected, probably in the late nineties, he got the phone call from Ofsted. The lead inspector told him that he would arrive at 8.00 am the following morning and would need to have a meeting to plan the day. My friend told him that he didn't usually arrive until 8.30 am so

the inspector would have to wait. The inspector then said that he would like a meeting at 5.00 pm to give feedback on the day. My friend said that he would be gone by 4.00 pm. Imagine what would happen now if you said that to an inspector! (John)

Accounts from current headteachers suggest that their working hours are long and they can identify significant impact being made on their family life.

The ridiculous number of hours you have to work the ridiculous number of things you have to fill in, the paper work. Proving you are doing this and that and the other. You never get to see your family. Never get to see your social life and your other things that you do to make you a normal human being. They tend to go out the window because the pressures just get so much. (George).

When asked to comment on whether this was a likely factor in preventing senior leaders from stepping up into headship, George not only agreed to this being the case but broke down and announced that he would be leaving his post at the end of the year and leaving the teaching profession altogether. At the follow-up meeting where he was asked if he wished to change any of the transcript, he explained that the researcher was the first to hear of his decision to leave his profession and that the questions gave him an opportunity to unburden himself. He did not wish to change any of his comments.

People don't want to step up because of the ridiculous pressure that comes with the job. Not just the pressure with the job, yes with this position you are responsible for the education of 200 children which is a big thing. It is more the lack of trust from the government. The lack of autonomy that you have and the hoops that you have to jump through I think! The uncertainty of the education, the future of education. The system. I have no belief in the system anymore! I am going to become one of those statistics myself that drops out and it is very sad and I said when I started that when I started teaching if I ever stopped believing in the education system that's the day that I would stop. This government I feel do more to divide the country in the last few years than has happened before ever. As head it is your head on the line, your neck on the chopping block! I think particularly nowadays because of all the schools needing rapid improvement and headteachers can, if there are signs of weakness, go.

My main thing for wanting to leave the profession is that I don't believe in the education system anymore and I feel it is very sad for children. In a nutshell, the way they think to make smarter children is to give them harder tests! How is that ever going to work? (George)

These pressures and the impact on family life were echoed by two of the new headteachers who had stepped up from being deputy headteachers in their schools.

It doesn't help to be told that you are the key person in the school in terms of improving things or that a school is only as good as its headteacher. What a pressure! If inspectors tell you to improve writing at your school, you are not going to achieve this on your own. You may have a collection of useless or lazy teachers. Maybe you can't change them or move them on. What happens then? Standards don't rise and next inspection they slap a requires improvement on you or worse. You get the blame because a school is only as good as its headteacher. No wonder everyone is pulling out of this job! (Jane)

This appears to represent a significantly different headteacher landscape as painted by the retired participants:

I don't remember in the seventies or eighties so many people being stressed. So many new teachers, good teachers, don't last long in this profession at the moment. We are losing a lot of our talent, which is a shame. You have only got to watch the news on a daily basis. The expectations are getting higher, which is fine, no one minds high expectation, no one minds working hard but when the goalposts keep changing teachers find it difficult. (John)

When asked to comment on possible solutions to the headteacher recruitment crisis, some of the headteachers described giving headteacher 'real freedom' and 'professional trust':

Freedom! What the government are saying and doing are two very different things. More freedom with the job. Being trusted a lot more. You know what's best for your school. I know not every teacher, every leader is doing the best job. I understand that absolutely. If there are things that you are doing are not good but you know how to improve your school then you need to be trusted and left to get on with that as a professional. (George)

None of the headteachers suggested that paying higher salaries to headteachers would solve the recruitment issue:

I think it's a difficult job. You have to deliver difficult messages. Parents as well. I don't think it's money that stops people stepping up. It's definitely pressures from the government like new curriculums, new assessment systems. Look at the SATs how they've messed up there. EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage), you now have to bring in this baseline assessment. We all 'have' to do it because we are told that we have to do it by the DfE when really we don't think it's the right thing to do. The children are missing out on the teacher during those first five or six weeks when their teacher is assessing.

That's quality time lost. Then you get to April or May and you are told it's not the right thing anymore, it's not going to give us the right information so it was a complete waste of time. It's pressure on me and I'm putting pressure on my staff. Now middle and senior leaders see all of this, they live these crises with me. They know it's my head on the block if things go wrong. No wonder they don't want to do my job! (Charles)

When reflecting on why she had taken the step into headship, the most recent headteacher pointed to some of the more positive aspects of the position:

I don't know why I became a head. I ask myself this often! I like the responsibility and accountability in a weird way. I like being able to help everybody. It doesn't faze me that people need to look to me. I quite like being able to make decisions. I don't think people realised that I was going to be a leader. I am not outspoken and I don't shout out in meetings. It wasn't in my plan but as I developed in my role and joined the leadership team I found I liked being responsible for things. I liked being accountable. (Alison)

She went on to add a proviso:

However, my biggest fear is in terms of accountability. If I mess up on Ofsted and the school fails I'm out of it. I would lose my job. That's the biggest thing! There are lots of things that are out of my control, financial things, staffing issues. In my previous school, we had three teachers off on maternity leave at the same time and there is nothing you can do about that. But as captain of the ship you've got to go if it all goes wrong! You hear horror stories all the time about what goes wrong. Especially being so young, it is a gamble I suppose! It is what puts lots of people off! So many really good middle leaders don't want that final accountability! You get the blame for things that might not be in your control! (Alison)

Concerns were raised about the safety of headteachers in the new social media landscape. This is clearly a part of the working landscape that has radically changed over the decades from an educational system with no computers to the scene today where technology is not only essential but also a vital tool for school leaders and for the overseers of schools. Apart from concerns of data security and the use of data to hold schools to account, the greatest worry for headteachers is the mushrooming problem of pupils, staff and parents using social media inappropriately:

The change in the digital world and social networking, the types of abuse you can receive through things like Facebook. You are more in the 'firing line' as a head and I guess some people are thick skinned and can deal with that but others don't want to put themselves in that position. (Charles)

Kate shares this concern and sees the social media problem as a major stumbling block for many of her young colleagues:

Something has got to be done about attacks on headteachers on social media sites. I know quite a few colleagues who are deputies and assistant heads that are actually frightened about what might happen if they became heads themselves. I have only had a minor incident up to now when a small group of gossiping parents were slagging me off on Facebook and one of my staff showed me the comments. They were pretty disgusting and I was hurt by them of course. That's today's world I suppose but it was really hard dealing with it and it took days out of my time. I had to confront the parents about it but without saying how I knew. As it turned out, they said sorry and that was that. Equally, they could have told me where to go and had another rant on Facebook. So you can see why that sort of thing might stop someone from becoming a head. (Kate)

Bob reflected on the growth of what he terms 'judgementalism' and its relevance to the social media issue:

One huge change over the last few decades is the growth in judgementalism! Judgementalism is defined as, 'the quality or state of being too willing to criticize the actions of others' and I have seen this grow over the years. Back in the seventies people by and large didn't criticize or question people in authority like doctors or headteachers. There was a general respect for someone's position so that if a doctor told you what was wrong, he would then go on and tell you what he would do to fix you up. Same thing in education, if a teacher or head said something about your child then you mostly took it as read. Nowadays it is entirely different. People argue with their doctors and teachers all of the time. I blame television. When television first started there were no opportunities to vote for anything or anyone. Now we are told to phone in or text and vote for the best dancers, cake makers, ice-skaters, artists and for the best people who eat bugs in the Australian jungle. We are a nation of judges! Society has made it fine for us to judge whatever we like. As everyone has been through the education system, they clearly have an informed opinion and are now free to judge teachers, schools and headteachers. There are even 'rate your teacher' websites. A friend of mine retired early after reading some terrible comments on a site like that. After 35 years of dedicated teaching and headship she couldn't take the criticism. I would hate to be a head now with Facebook and Twitter. I don't think that I would know how to deal with it! (Bob)

New headteacher, Wendy, is also worried about how to deal with this possible issue:

I spend a lot of time worrying about social media and what to do about it. Some of my friends advised me not to become a head because of this very thing. I have had a few incidents where some of my TAs have used social media to moan about children in the school and that is totally unprofessional.

I had also had to deal with one case of a member of staff putting very adult images on her site.

One of my friends, who is also a headteacher, has had a group of about thirty parents gang up on a social media site because a few of them have got it in for him. Some of the things they have said are awful and it is really hurting my friend who doesn't know how to handle it at all. Something needs to be done about this! (Wendy)

Evidence collected through the interviews and following review of transcripts suggests a number of possible factors that may have led to the headteacher recruitment crisis. It is commonly agreed that there is a crisis and most participants point to the additional stress created by the growing accountability of the position. Some of the accounts are extremely sensitive with some participants explaining how they have decided to make life-changing decisions and others pointing to the growing accountability issues where they feel vulnerable to attacks on social media. This aspect has emerged as an important additional feature within this research project and will be debated in depth in the discussion chapter.

Participants were pleased to share their views on the new leadership structures offered by the academisation movement and how these may offer possible solutions to the recruitment crisis. This body of evidence is described in the following sub-section.

#### **5.4 Headteacher recruitment - looking ahead**

When describing the outlook for headteacher recruitment over the next few years, none of the headteachers offered an optimistic forecast. Eleven of the headteachers described the impact on school leadership made by the large-scale movement of primary schools into academy status and how executive and distributed leadership models were addressing the shortfall in suitable headteacher candidates. Headteachers voiced



concerns over the future for small schools in terms of leadership and safety. Much of the concern is based on the likely removal of small school headteachers following academisation with them being replaced by 'heads of school' and overseen by executive headteachers or principals. The concerns were both for the school having to operate without a headteacher and for the executive headteachers with responsibility for numerous schools.

When you take someone away it is shared leadership. It's a struggle enough to maintain your own school as it is and you are constantly trying to improve. If you then suddenly have to do that across six schools and the staff you have worked with are also shared across other schools, when you become an academy, you can lose your way. The original school can get watered down! I know a local example where six schools got together to form a trust, all with headteachers. Now, a couple of years down the line, none of them have a substantive head! The heads all left for different reasons. However, I know that most left because of the stress put upon them. They had been told, sold the idea, that things will be much easier for you as a head, you won't have the local authority breathing down your neck anymore. Things quickly changed after they formed the trust. Heads were told they couldn't have supply teachers anymore and they would have to cover if supply was needed! They had signed themselves over but their jobs were changed and they had to take on new teaching roles. They had the added pressure of going back to the classrooms. On top of that, because the governors had gone, there was nobody left checking. I know for a fact that in one of those schools nobody came near it for 18 months! How is that ensuring safeguarding for everyone? It was just left. (Sally)

The headteacher added:

My concern is what happens when you have a safeguarding incident? If you are busy teaching then who puts all of the pieces of the jigsaw together? Who has the time to check on the families and make those vital links that can spot danger and keep children safe? (Sally)

Some of the headteachers shared insecurities about their own futures as headteachers:

All small school heads in this area have been told by the regional commissioner for schools to start looking for different jobs as there will not be any small school headship left in a few years when every school has become an academy! So if you are one of these skilled heads, what do you do? Get de-skilled? Go back in the classroom? Can you imagine the frustration of that? The regional commissioner has said publically that headteachers will no longer exist, as we know them now! We were told the headteacher's job is impossible anyway and now they will get rid of us! I've been told basically that there is no job for me! I will have to tell my husband

that in two years time I will have no job. My future is quite bleak. I have got all of these skills but what will I do? (Sally)

The majority of multi-academy trusts based in Cornwall openly share models of executive leadership when they present to schools interested in joining their multi-academy trusts. Their financial models do not support the sustaining of headteachers at each school, particularly for small schools with under 120 pupils. For these schools, leadership is overseen by executive headteachers who have responsibility for other schools with day-to-day decisions taken by a 'head of school' paid at a significantly lower grade than a headteacher and usually in a post with a teaching commitment. Some larger academies have non-teaching heads of school.

I think it is a shame that headteachers are being replaced by heads of school and I would fight this for my school. When you have executive heads dotted around from place to place it is not the same! I can't imagine being an executive head. When you walk through that door you are full on, everyone needs you! If you have three other schools all needing you or part of you then I don't know how that works!

I know a couple of 'heads of school' and they are basically headteachers but on a lower salary! Of course, who else does everybody go to if there's a problem? They go to the head of school! (Alison)

Few of the younger headteachers could see themselves in the same role until retirement:

I don't think I can sustain this level forever. I would like to think that by the time I'm fifty I need to be thinking about something else. Maybe it is just me, but the pace at which I work is fast, very, very fast. There are so many things I want to do and achieve it's spinning those plates. I don't want to let those plates drop! I know that it's already starting to affect my health now and I'm only forty. Goodness knows what I will be like in ten years time! I notice I'm having to go to hospital more often to see people because this or that isn't quite right. It's the pressure of the job and I don't want that to affect my family. I've got a little boy and I want to see as much of his life as possible! (Charles)

Henry could see no further pathway for him as a headteacher:

I know I'm still young but I can't keep this up! I already feel burned out and I think the job would kill me if I kept going for too many years. The problem is where do I go from here? I'm head of a large school so there would be no benefit in moving to another school. I don't want to be an inspector, definitely not! So what can I do? There really isn't anywhere to

go. I have a wide skill set but who would want a burnt out headteacher on their books? I am seriously looking for alternatives outside of education. I can't keep doing this and I have my family to think about. (Henry)

The 'spinning plates' metaphor was also used by Patrick who shared concerns about feeling the responsibility for maintaining everything in his school:

It's funny but the last head was always going on about 'spinning plates' and he said it was something to do with an old television programme where someone used to spin lots of plates on long sticks for some reason and kept them all going. I guess that was before Sky TV. Anyway, now that I have stepped into his shoes I know exactly what he means!

There are so many things to keep going! It's crazy! One thing after another, all piled on by the government or by Ofsted. You've got to keep all of them spinning, you can't let any fall. If one falls off it could be the end of your career. If the safeguarding plate fell off and something terrible happened then that could be the end for you.

The worst thing about the spinning plates is that the government and Ofsted know that you have these plates to spin but instead of helping you they give an evil grin and give you something else to spin and say, "By the way, I know you have all these plates to spin, but to make it even more challenging we will make you do it on a wobbly road!" Just as we got used to assessing by levels and were good at it they told us to change it all. Just when we thought we were on top of teaching English and maths well they are now going to bash us over the whole curriculum. It never stops! It never slows down! I'm just waiting for some of my plates to fall off and when that happens they will all come crashing down. (Patrick)

The headteacher appears to doubt that those in control of the education system care for the well-being of headteachers even though actions have been taken over the years to reduce the workload for headteachers. This is refuted by Frank who also makes a passing reference to those plates:

It's a national crisis! I know some really good young heads! Some of the people out there are stepping up because they fancy the job. Many schools are 'growing their own' leaders and I think that is worth looking at as a way forward. I had two deputies, one who was keen to go forward and got a job as headteacher and one who was very happy to stay as a deputy and support the other one. I tried and tried to get the other one to give it a go and they would be really good as a headteacher but they don't want to know. Why? I asked him one day and he said, "Well I watch you and even though you are positive and cheerful you are driving this and answering that, and dealing with this situation today and one from yesterday. I don't want to do that!" They watch you spinning plates all day and seeing if any fall off! (Frank)

He argues that the workload for teachers is impacting on training and recruitment:

Teachers are under so great a workload that the last thing they want to do when they get home is study and improve their qualifications to become leaders. We are losing teachers after two or three years. It is all about finding better roots to leadership but it is difficult. (Frank)

The most recent recruit to headship amongst the participants describes her enjoyment of the interpersonal aspects of her job but is disappointed by the breadth of the role and how it stops her what she sees as her primary function:

The thing I like the least about my role is working hard to produce data and things for someone else's benefit and not for the children. For example, I haven't done one thing today that is to do with teaching and learning! I've done a teacher advert, induction, some policies, helped with a DBS check, the renewal for our accelerated reader system, I'm now looking at the budget because we have not as many children arriving in September as we had hoped, now I'm trying to look at staffing and see where I can make cuts. There are so many things! I have spoken to the boiler man, nothing to do with what I was trained to do at all! So this is my learning on the job bit! You are a 'Jack of all trades' as a headteacher! And, what you don't know you learn as you go along! (Alison)

A number of experienced and retired headteachers alluded to the apparent disappearance of a once well-trodden pathway to primary headship in the county and the lack of a recognised route in the modern landscape:

Any head from my era will tell you that there was an accepted route that you had to follow in order to become a headteacher, certainly in Cornwall in any case. You had to be a senior leader, usually a deputy headteacher first for a few years. I don't remember there being many 'assistant headteachers' a few years ago. After being a deputy you could then apply for a small school headship. Back in the eighties and nineties you could not apply for a big school headship unless you had been head of a small school first. I guess the local authority liked to test you out first before letting you loose on a big school. I suppose you can see why. Nowadays, that has all changed and I am not sure what the pathways are now. There was a time, a few years back, when you had to go through NPQH (National Professional Qualification for Headship) and many schools would not accept an application unless you had NPQH. That has now stopped. There is still NPQH but you don't have to have it to apply. I suppose schools are just happy if anyone applies these days! It makes me sad thinking about it! (Mike)

Following a similar description, Bob added:

Under the old unwritten arrangement in Cornwall, everyone had to do their apprenticeship and be a deputy then head of a small school and then head of a large school. Also, you were trained and supported along the way. I was put

in a programme named ‘headlamp’ along with 29 other new heads and it was great! We met every term in hotels across the county and trained together. We developed friendships that have lasted forever because of that programme and we learned so much! There was always someone to call and talk things through if you were having a bad time or if you felt like giving up because you had made a terrible mistake. I suppose today heads train with other heads in their academy groups. (Bob)

Another retired headteacher who had travelled along the same pathway gave his assessment of why this route was favoured by the local authority:

I suppose the local authority thought that if you had been successful in running a small school then you were less likely to mess up with a big school! I think they brought in the training for Cornish headteachers in the nineties because there was a sudden rush of headteachers who retired early, probably because Ofsted had just started and scared heads to death! The training was excellent and I know for a fact that the retention rates for Cornish headteachers improved dramatically over the period of specific headteacher training and support. Money well spent I would say. (Frank)

One of the new headteachers described the lack of a similar pathway in the current arena:

I’ve got a teacher who is about to complete his NPQML (National Qualification for Middle Leadership) and he recently shared his concerns about how to move from where he was to becoming a headteacher. He told me that he had looked for available jobs on the internet. For that week across England, there were 680 posts for headteacher. There were only 27 posts for deputy or assistant headteacher. His point was how to move forward. He couldn’t apply for headship yet but there were never any assistant heads jobs around and it is like deputy heads jobs have gone altogether. There is clearly a hole here! There must be hundreds of teachers with leadership qualifications but with nowhere to go. Now that’s worrying! Who is applying for the headteacher jobs? I told him to jump and apply for a headteacher post in a small school. If he applied for any assistant heads jobs he would be up against maybe a hundred others. If he went for a small school headship then he would probably be on his own or up against one other. (Patrick)

Pathways appear to be less clear for middle leaders aspiring to become headteachers and this is a probable factor in why so few apply for current headteacher vacancies. Following a government ‘shake-up’ in 2016, the National College for Teaching and Leadership began to reshape the NPQH, NPQSL and NPQML programmes and asked for schools and organisations to bid for licenses for these qualifications and for ‘study

modules for middle and senior leaders'. This is a possible signpost to the government's preferred pathway for school leaders across the sector. While these arrangements offer nationally recognised qualifications that could strengthen the application of an aspiring leader, they are no longer a requirement and there is no proposed funding for schools.

In some cases, multi-academy trusts are looking at their own pathways for developing future leaders as described by Jane:

I have noticed that trusts across Cornwall are not supporting their staff to do NPQH or other national accredited qualifications. I think it is because these are national qualifications and it is probably not necessarily in the interests of the schools across a trust. If they pay for these teachers to get these qualifications and those teachers go off and use their qualifications to move to schools outside the trust then that is money wasted. Remember, we all have business models now! So what tends to happen, I think, is that trusts plan leadership training across their schools and bring in their own trainers. They plan things that are specific to their trusts and are of use to them. They can see immediate value for money and they can probably recruit their own leaders within their own schools. (Jane)

If this is the case across the country then senior leadership and headteacher recruitment could be taking various pathways. There is the route preferred by central government, where aspiring leaders achieve qualifications as milestones on their journey to headship. There is also the plethora of leadership training opportunities being provided by multi-academy trusts. There are clearly questions concerning the transferability of continuous professional development, particularly where middle leaders have undertaken bespoke training within a trust. There are also questions concerning the quality of training being provided.

The apparent multi-directional, or as some would describe 'confusion', of leadership training pathways presents challenges in terms of equality and equity for the workforce. For example, a teacher who has worked in a state maintained school for many years, taking on greater responsibility over time, may have found that their school became an

academy and was joined to a multi-academy trust. Clearly, that teacher would not have had agency to influence the move to academy status. Now that the teacher is working within the trust they become subject to the trust arrangements for continuous professional development. If this teacher wished to take part in an NPQH or other leadership programme then they would have to seek permission from their trust because they would need to have a school-based sponsor who would engage with the assessment of the qualification. If the business plan for the trust does not support staff to take these qualifications then it is likely that the teacher would be unable to take part in their choice of leadership training. They could follow the training prescribed by the trust but this may not be transferrable. In this case, they would not have the option to pay for their own training for the official programmes because, as noted, they are required to have approval from their schools.

A colleague working in a state-maintained school may have similar restraints if their school leader was unwilling to support the programme. The difference is that the decision to support the teacher would be based on the individual school's position and not dictated by an overriding trust agreement. There is no 'right' for teachers to be enabled, by their school leaders, to take on training of any kind and it has been the prerogative of school leaders to design the professional development programme for their staff for many years. However, the move to academy status changes the training landscape for many schools and this may be causing new tensions between school leaders within a trust and raising ethical concerns. As one academy-reluctant headteacher commented:

Now we are a great school on many levels. My leadership team have a really clear picture of what we need to work on next and what training everyone needs to achieve our targets. One thing we have really worked on is improving writing and we are now really good at it. Our children produce amazing published books and right through the school writing is fantastic! Now most schools are really struggling with writing! If we suddenly joined a

trust then you can bet that the priority for the schools in the trust would be writing. So they would plough money into training to improve writing, some of that would be our money. They would put on writing training events and have monitoring of writing. Now, yes they could all see what we have done and get a lot from us but what would be in it for my staff? Say if our priority was maths. We would want to spend out time on that not on something we were already good at. (Charles)

The same headteacher commented on the development of his assistant headteachers:

I've got two amazing assistant heads. They are really amazing and I want to help them to achieve their ambitions. One definitely wants to be a head one day and I will support him in any way possible. If he wants to do NPQH then fine, I will even support that because it would benefit the school. The other one doesn't want to be a head but would still like to keep learning and would probably want to do a Masters next. Again, I would support her because whatever she studied would be to do with her role in the school. Now as a head of a maintained school I can do all of this. If I was part of an academy chain then I would have to pass everything by a business manager and they would probably say no. I would hate that! How is that giving me more freedom? (Charles)

There is something in this comment that reflects on a possible diminishing freedom for academy headteachers or principals to control the direction of professional development within their schools and a possible regret that decisions concerning the future of teachers might be made by a business manager who is probably based in a different setting with no working knowledge of the people involved and their particular needs and aspirations.

The new pathway to headship, if there is one, is certainly not a clear, freshly surfaced highway delineated by clear signs and milestones. It is a rather muddier and twisting route.

These findings suggest that the new educational landscape, defined by academisation and the establishment of multi-academy trusts, offers challenges and opportunities for school leaders. Supporters of the academy movement tend to suggest that new leaders can be 'grown' and nurtured within a trust and enabled to step back from leadership if it



is unsuitable. Other school leaders are more skeptical about this trend and suggest that academies provide ‘leadership on the cheap’, placing inexperienced and lowly paid heads of school into positions of responsibility. These issues are debated in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 6 Discussion and analysis**

### **6.1 Applying the theoretical framework**

An early challenge in applying the chosen theoretical framework was the selection of a mode of research from the available smorgasbord of possibilities. Chief amongst the early challenges was the requirement for the researcher to set aside prejudgements as much as possible in order to try to see, ‘freshly, as for the first time’ (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22). Moustakas (1994) recommends that to achieve this researcher ‘epoche’ there is no requirement for the researcher to ignore their previous experience of the phenomenon under scrutiny. Instead he suggests that the researcher reflects deeply on their own experiences in order to identify their particular stance. When this stance is fully illuminated, the researcher can embrace it and consciously place it to one side, always in view but bracketed for the current purpose. As an example, I can remember visiting a school in crisis in my role as a school improvement partner. While talking with the headteacher and governors, the headteacher broke down when sharing some of the extreme pressures that she was suffering. At that point, I asked if she would like me to leave so that she could talk with her governors and she asked me to stay. I stayed and made the point of removing my official badge, thereby stepping out of the role defined by the local authority. The role was still there and everyone in the room was aware of this. However, I had chosen to ‘bracket’ that role and step into the roles of ‘caring colleague’ and ‘friend’. For this study, I made sure that I spent considerable time

thoroughly interrogating my views on the research area from my varied roles. I put them into a tangible form and then made my best efforts to put them to one side during the interview planning stage, during the interviews and during the writing of research findings.

Another major challenge has been carrying out the research in a rapidly changing epistemological landscape (Pascale, 2011) where ‘geographies of power’ (Pascale, 2011) and political influences are continually changing the educational landscape. The research reflects the impermanence of boundaries, and challenges the notion of fixed laws governing social life and acceptance of the subjective nature of understanding (Pascale, 2011). The ‘ebb and flow’, created by changing power dynamics, alters boundaries in the epistemological map of knowledge.

The educational landscape in Cornwall has changed significantly during the timescale described by this research study. The pre-seventies landscape for primary schools had remained relatively unchanged for many decades. Schools stood alone, governed by the local authority who controlled all financial and site issues and by small groups of school governors who met each term. A senior local authority leader once described the landscape as one inhabited by schools that acted as ‘tribes’ with staff, parents and pupils closely allied to their schools and their tribal symbols, such as uniforms and school mottos. Individual schools were clearly recognisable in the larger towns with a distinctive ‘look’ and tribal history.

Within this terrain, headteachers were the keepers of each school’s history and they had the legal responsibility of adding to the school’s logbook each week. Indeed, school logbooks and attendance registers were the only legal documents that had to be

scrutinised when inspectors made random visits to schools. Cornwall Council collected school logbooks during the nineties when the legal requirement for completing them ceased. An analysis of these artefacts sheds light on what was important to headteachers during the past century. Entries in logbooks up until the nineties, seldom mentioned the quality of teaching and learning. They recorded attendance and the behaviour of pupils along with a narrative of school events.

Cornish headteachers were encouraged to meet with other school leaders during the eighties and geographical groups were formed in each of the five Cornish regions. One of the largest was the Penwith Headteacher's Group with around 30 headteachers attending the meetings each term. This group, amongst others, began to voice collective opinions and concerns that impacted on county policy making and led eventually to the formation of the Cornwall Association of Primary Headteachers (CAPH). Other 'clusters' of schools formed and it became commonplace for headteachers to meet together on a regular basis with the agenda increasingly focused on teaching and learning and the sharing of ideas and expertise.

Since 2010, the landscape has changed again and the five regional headteacher groups have fragmented, being replaced by multi-academy trust collectives and cooperative trust groups of schools. As noted in the findings, it is currently common for headteachers of schools in the same Cornish town to meet with headteachers from other regions on a regular basis and never meet with schools that are very close geographically. Schools still have their 'tribal' and cultural paraphernalia and their individual identities, but many have 'rebranded' and share corporate identities with collegiate schools. In many cases, this includes shared policies, procedures and

protocols with shared leadership under the gaze of ‘hub masters’, chief executive officers and trustees.

During the short timescale of this study, more powerful and persuasive epistemes have replaced older, weaker stances (Pascale, 2011). An example of this has been the ebb and flow concerning the requirement for schools to become academies caused by political and other power dynamics. During the study, this tidal movement has seen boundaries change. Initially, only ‘outstanding’ schools were invited to become academies. Then ‘good’ schools were invited to join the movement. In a radical shift, schools that were failing were forced to become academies and then all schools were told that they had to academise before 2022. At this stage, there was no other choice for schools and many quickly moved to become academies. Following a political U-turn in 2016, this was overturned and the current position is that schools can choose their own destiny with no official requirement to become academies.

The design of the study included two data collection periods and two interpretation activities. The second of these took place following the sharing of transcripts with the participants. It was anticipated that this sharing activity would produce additional information and reflection and this was the case.

The mode of research broadly followed the systematic procedure suggested by Moustakas (1994) where the inquirer identifies significant statements in the database, clusters these into meaning units and themes then synthesises the themes into a description of the lived experiences of the participants. Finally, the researcher ‘constructs a composite description of the meanings and the essences of the experience’ (Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell, 2004).

Various significant statements were clustered and synthesised to address the research questions and other significant statements, tangential to the research questions were also clustered and added to the commentary. While peripheral to the central discourse, these themes add light to the context, representing aspects of the lived experiences of the headteachers over time. These additional themes are strongly represented in the transcripts and bear weight in terms of their impact on the headship experience. As such, they require description and synthesis and a secure footing in an analysis of the changing educational landscape. These supplementary themes include: the impact of Ofsted and in particular the role played by the various chief inspectors; the emotive reports of growing loneliness, stress and responsibility; the manifestation of the sacrifice syndrome and the growing challenge of being a headteacher in the age of social media.

### **6.1.1 Approaching epoche**

During the interviews, the headteachers were invited to describe noemata (thoughts about what they had experienced as headteachers from an external perception, the objects involved) and their noesis (how their internal perception of events has impacted upon them). They were encouraged to ‘enter the language games’ within their ‘form of life’ as a headteacher but then to describe phenomena from a different ‘form of life’, particularly when describing noesis. In doing so they approached ‘playing at the edges of common sense’ and ‘crossing a threshold into new worlds of meaning’ (Gergen, 2015, p. 6).

While responses show that there was a clear divergence in headteachers’ external perceptions of the objects of change (noema) there was an even greater disparity in how

the changes impacted on the headteachers internally (noesis). In some cases, a change was perceived as a positive experience with a powerful internal impact of empowerment for a headteacher, while a similar change wrought havoc to another participant. An example of this can be seen the responses to the imposition of inspections on schools and the impact of this on school leaders. John described how an inspection that he lived through provided a springboard for his leadership career, a very joyous and positive experience. In contrast, retired headteacher John described how an inspection led him to retire at a very early stage, even though the inspection had been very positive with the school achieving 'outstanding' status:

The inspection finished me off! I would have happily carried on for another ten years but I just couldn't go through another inspection. I loved my job and I loved my school. When the inspector was staring at me and debating whether to give the school good or outstanding it just broke my heart! I felt that everyone, the children, the staff, the parents, the town, were all depending on this moment. The pressure was too much and when he finally gave the verdict I broke down. When I thought about it the next day I decided that I couldn't go through that again and that was the day I decided to retire early, so early that I have had to get another job until I reach retirement age.  
(John)

The headteacher went on to describe how the trauma of his sudden retirement impacted on his life, viewing the object of change through different lenses, through his different 'forms of life' as a husband, as a father, as a significant figure in the local community. In this 'language game' the discourse moved from one centred on headship to one reflecting his life across a broader landscape. As the conversation deepened, the 'empirico-transcendental doublet' nature of the man became more apparent. His responses were that of an autonomous 'reflexive and transcendental knower' with a clear view of the perilous situation that he found himself in but at the same time 'the product of unconscious forces and cultural practices' (Ball, 2013, p. 22). He no longer wished to be 'a product' within a 'machine' and could no longer carry the burden of such great responsibility.

As noted, transcendental phenomenology is a phenomenology of consciousness (Van Manen, 2011) where the researcher, seeking epoche, embarks on a quest to explicate ‘invariant’ (never changing) or ‘eidetic’ (vivid detail, as if actually visible) aspects of a phenomenon. In this case, the headteacher had provided eidetic descriptions that were still clearly vivid and that still caused considerable hurt. This is perhaps an example of a discussion approaching epoche where the impact of a change agent (the phenomenon) is seen from various vantage points.

All of the headteacher participants were asked to review the transcripts from the initial interviews and asked if they wished to change or add information. Feedback from these follow-up conversations revealed some insight into the impact of the interviews on each headteacher. In most cases, participants did not wish to add to the information. However, their comments add to the evidence base considerably because they provide possible evidence of the interview experience leading them to share unexpected information. This was exemplified where headteachers used phrases such as, ‘I can’t believe I shared that with you,’ or ‘reading this now makes me wonder why I became so emotional!’

When headteachers suggested that the interview questions elicited memories that had not been shared before or where layers of questioning encouraged them to see things in a different way, there could be evidence of the conversation approaching epoche. While epoche itself can never be claimed, because neither the participants or researcher could bracket themselves entirely, it is argued that when a line of questioning leads someone to see things from a different angle or through a new lens then a movement towards epoche is possible.

Bob described how his review of the interview transcript had helped him to view a regularly repeated account in a new light. During the first interview, he had described how a trainee teacher had failed his six-week teaching practice because he could not teach the pupils without referring to his love of trains. When asked to review the transcript the headteacher noted:

Actually seeing what I said in black and white has made me revisit the story, a story I have told numerous times over my career. Now I think about it in a different way! What on earth was the headteacher doing? Didn't he or she know what was happening with this trainee teacher? After all it was six weeks! What about the class teacher? Why didn't they challenge this trainee? Who was responsible here? Surely, it shouldn't be down to the college tutor to point out that these children were wasting week after week with a poor trainee teacher. It could never happen now! Gosh, I've never looked at it like that before and it was 1976, forty years ago! (Bob)

Using phrases such as, 'I've never looked at it like that before,' and '... made me revisit the story' suggests new thinking, reformed reflection, seeing the situation from a different perspective. In this case, seeing the situation from the perspective of different 'actors' in the scene and not just from the view of the poor trainee who gave up his career. The teller has recontextualised the story from different views. What was that six weeks like for those children? Where was the class teacher while this was going on? Who was responsible for monitoring this? The teller is using reflective language that could suggest some 'bracketing' of a previous view. He is not disregarding his headteacher or class teacher identity. However, his use of language suggests that he has thought, for the first time, about the other 'actors' and who should have been responsible for solving the crisis before it had gone too far.

The event does cast light onto a single classroom situation in 1976, the very year when ministers informed the Prime Minister that they were unaware of what was happening in schools on a day-to-day basis. The nexus of the 'secret garden' assumption centred on



the supposed freedom of teachers to do whatever they wished in their classrooms with the assertion that in some instances this could lead to low standards of education. While this is one example and therefore possibly not typical of all schools at the time, the response of the participant suggests that he had not considered the event from different perspectives before this conversation.

The review of transcripts led to further suggestions of participants reflecting on seeing situations from new perspectives, especially when headteachers voiced surprise at how emotional some of their responses were and also at the personal information shared with the researcher.

Mike commented:

I can't believe that I admitted to crying in bed about a child. Thinking about it now, I realise that I had become so emotionally involved with that family that it was living on inside my head. I think I was reviewing in my mind, like you do, about all of the children I have worked with over the years. Probably because I'm retiring soon. When I got to thinking about that little girl it just shook me. When she said to the inspector that I had changed her life of course I felt proud of that, not of me, but that my school had changed her life. But really, really sad that that little girl had to go through all of that, all of that rejection and her only help was someone like me! It shouldn't be like that in this day and age. (Mike)

The response suggests that the interview questions had led the headteacher to reflect further on why he had been so emotionally upset by the description and while he had not hung his headteacher role on his bedroom door, he had possibly thought about the girl he rescued through other lenses, as a father, as a humanitarian. His eidetic description suggests a depth of emotional attachment to the event and to his role as headteacher over many years.

## **6.2 Research question – Is there evidence to support the view that primary schools have moved from a state of assumed sovereignty and freedom to one defined by panoptic control?**

In addressing this research question, the central object of discussion was ‘change over time’ as experienced by the participants in their roles as teachers and school leaders. The breadth of reflection introduced data with direct relatedness to the question but also data concerning change per se. While some of this data does not refer directly to a perceived movement from an assumed era of freedom to one defined by panoptic control, the information does pertain to changes from central powerful forces and this is relevant to the study.

Following discussion concerning perceived freedoms in the supposed ‘secret garden’ era for schools, the discussion will consider:

- the reflections from headteachers on the increasing pace of change and the possible sources of this movement
- the accuracy of panoptic imagery used by researchers and commentators to describe change over time in the educational system
- the impact of Ofsted and the role of inspectors as possible ‘agents’ of imposed change
- the dynamics involved when school leaders seek the ‘outstanding’ accolade for their schools
- reflections on the impact of loneliness, stress and responsibility over time, and
- the sacrifice syndrome.

All of these elements refer to the changing role of headship over time and provide information that informs the research question, providing a broad view of headteachers' perceptions.

### **6.2.1 The secret garden**

While it is clear that there was no literal 'secret garden', where headteachers and their pupils could run freely with the wind in their hair and majestic nature set before their inquisitive eyes, there are numerous examples in the data to suggest that life for a headteacher in the seventies was quite different than that for current school leaders.

Descriptions of a 'sense' of freedom and a lack of close surveillance are prevalent in the accounts from those headteachers who could remember that era. The degree of freedom was dependent on where the teachers taught, but it appears to be the case that the headteachers of these schools were in charge and were, by and large, the writers of their own life scripts. It was the headteachers who decided the extent to which teachers were expected to provide planning and each school leader decided how to assess the quality of education within their schools.

Descriptions of headteachers watching lengthy cricket matches or heading away at the end of the school day to go sailing or to the beach, suggest that there was no particular hegemonic assumption that they had to stay at school for long hours. The data suggests that many of the 'deeply embedded ideas that are constructed and transmitted by powerful people to serve their interests' (Gramsci, 1978) were not held by headteachers of that era. The evidence suggests that few headteachers became, 'willing prisoners who lock their own cell doors behind them' (Brookfield, 1995, p. 15). While reports suggest that headteachers were dedicated to their pupils' needs, few suffered from workaholism.

Brookfield (1995) suggested three types of assumptions: paradigmatic (underlying world-view assumptions), prescriptive (assumptions about what we think we 'should' be doing) and causal (assumptions about how things work out and how we can make things better) were less evident in the seventies. Paradigmatic assumptions at that time appear to suggest that the 'world-view' of headship differed considerably from that of today. Headteachers were the lead professionals in their schools and they were left to get on with their professional job in a similar fashion to doctors, policemen and service personnel. Everyday actions were not under general scrutiny unless problems arose that could trigger an inquiry. Actions by headteachers were not debated across social networks. Prescriptive assumptions concerning what headteachers at the time believed they 'should' be doing were not fed by central dictate. Ministers openly stated that they had little idea about what was happening in schools. Causal assumptions would have been more dominant at this time with headteachers planning their activities and acting on the outcomes in order to improve their schools. This is in stark contrast to current headship where school leaders are continually influenced by paradigmatic assumptions that shape prescriptive assumptions and suggest what leaders 'should' be doing with definitions describing of 'good' or 'outstanding' leadership with warnings of inadequacy if these 'shoulds' are neglected.

It is Brookfield's (1995) assertion that critical reflection can enable school leaders and teachers to identify and scrutinise assumptions that underpin their work and in doing so make a more distant assessment of the impact and possible damage being caused by unrealistic expectations.

### 6.2.2 The ch-ch-ch-ch-changes paradigm

Analysis of collected data suggests that there has been a dramatic paradigm shift from the era of the supposed ‘secret garden’ to the present landscape, typified by continual change.

All of the headteachers reflected on the constant changes in the educational landscape, the impact of continual change and their coping strategies. The volume of comment on this issue suggests that is of fundamental importance, weighing heavily on the headship role. One retired headteacher suggested that coping with change was his greatest challenge:

When anyone asks me what it was like being a head I usually break into song, ‘Ch-ch-ch-ch-changes...’ Yes, I’m sure that Bowie wrote that song for headteachers! Actually, learning to cope with change was my biggest challenge and everyone copes in different ways. When the changes come, the pressure builds up and you either deal with it or go under. (John)

Jane described the increasing pace of change:

The biggest change over the years is change! In the early days, nothing changed much at all. Then the national curriculum came in, then Ofsted, then this, then that and the pace of change has speeded up. (Jane)

Retired headteacher Mike shared his pragmatic coping strategy:

Coping with change has been a big issue for most heads and frankly some have not coped at all. Over the years, I have known heads that jump and rush around like headless chickens every time there was something new. They would rush into their staffrooms and say, ‘We’ve got to do this now!’ My way of dealing with change was to do nothing! I would get a letter or email saying I had to do something and I would just ignore it. Quite often whatever it was would go away or change. If it was really important then you would get another letter and know it would have to happen. (Mike)

Following a similar line of thinking, Jim, also suggested the need to address changes with cautionary steps:

Back to the idea of spinning plates, change is like they are giving you another plate to spin, “Here you are, you can spin closing the gap now!”

Some colleagues just keep trying to spin all of the plates, adding more and more until their schools are full of spinning plates and you can't see the wood for the trees. It's just a matter of time until it all comes crashing down!

The sensible heads have a careful look at the new plate and decide if it is a fad or something really important. They then decide if they can get someone else to spin it or if it has to be them, can they give some of the existing spinning plates to others? Also, the wise head realises they can't keep all of the plates spinning and they look for ones that they can stop, "Oh look, nobody cares about that anymore so why are we spinning it?" (Jim)

One of the new headteachers believes that many of the changes stem from the ambitions of individual chief inspectors or ministers:

It seems to me that every time someone new comes along, they try to do something to write their names in educational history. Every time we get a new education minister there is some change. We had Gove with his academy agenda and look what that has led to. We had Nicky Morgan who's big project was to solve bad behaviour in our schools by ploughing money into recruiting ex-soldiers to become teachers and teach the children 'grit' and how to be resilient.

Now we have a new head of Ofsted who loves the arty side of the curriculum, so guess what heads will have to lead now. After being told to forget the other subjects and focus on reading, writing and maths by her predecessor, we will now switch back to a focus on the other subjects.

The world is mad! There should be a law to stop this sort of thing. These individuals should not be able to just turn up and say we have to jump to their favourite tune. They stay for a while, cause chaos and then disappear. (Wendy)

The comparison between ministers and the Pied Piper is of interest. The argument follows that these figures are given the power of authority and they, probably with good intent, decide to clear the rats from the town. The problems for the people of Hamelin compounded when the Pied Piper decided to take all of the children along his winding pathway, following his hypnotic tune. Wendy may be implying that our 'town', our educational landscape, is visited by multiple pied pipers, all playing different hypnotic tunes, all leading our children along different and sometimes slippery pathways.

Bob asks, 'Where are the checks and balances? Who is stopping these people from just telling us what to do based on their whim?' This is a valid point and this relates to the notion of 'double hermeneutics' and the conviction that some headteachers see

themselves as ‘actors’ within an already interpreted world. These headteachers believe that they construct meaning by ‘reaching out into’ their world they do so as ‘actors’ working to a script written by others. It is a challenging task to work towards a given script. It is even harder to perform on your stage when that script is constantly changing at the behest of new writers and performance judged with fresh eyes by a new director.

The sharing of these insights may be an example of headteachers ‘bracketing’ phenomena and taking a fresh look at circumstances. This could represent a Husserlian approach and the setting aside of, ‘previous habits of thought’ and ‘seeing through and breaking down the mental barriers which these habits have set along the horizons of our thinking’, learning ‘to see what stands before our eyes’ (Husserl, 1931, p. 43). In asking why nothing is being done to address the imposition of changes and searching power dynamics to see if there is ‘anyone out there’ who can put a halt to the change revolution, headteachers are asking challenging, and possibly revolutionary questions. It is of interest to note that none of the headteachers mentioned the power, or lack of power, held by headteacher unions to ‘shield’ them from imposed change.

Crotty (1998) uses emancipatory rhetoric in stating, ‘Phenomenologists ... long to smash the fetters and engage with the world in new ways to construct new understandings’ (ibid, p. 86). His description of ‘smashing fetters’ bears overtones of panopticism, calling for a release from bondage so that individuals can see from a new perspective and take actions, empowered by their liberation. In seeing the possible dangers presented by continual change from various perspectives, headteachers are better placed to assess the likely impact of change and where necessary stand against this.

It is certainly the case that all of the headteachers in this study are calling for less change and some form of legislative structure to slow down the pace of changes. It could be possible to create a system where stability was assured for a set period of time with changes only possible following full consultation and careful reflection. An example is the Ofsted inspection handbook that is continually updated. Headteachers are instructed to ensure that they have the up-to-date handbook and refer to any changes. In some years, there have been as many as three different handbooks with radical changes in each successive version. If legislation insisted that Ofsted could only change their handbook once every three years or so then they would not be able to keep making adjustments and schools would be able to work towards a stable framework over time. Similarly, legislation could prevent new ministers and new inspection leaders from introducing ‘pet’ improvement priorities until they were clearly debated and brought in only when there was overwhelming evidence to support their efficacy. This group of headteachers would welcome the cessation or the slowing down of the ‘ch-ch-ch-ch-changes’ paradigm.

### **6.2.3 Towards and beyond the Panopticon**

In interrogating presented information for signs of movement from the supposed ‘freedom’ of the ‘secret garden’ towards a supposed landscape defined by greater surveillance and direction from central government and the agents of government, the supposition itself requires discussion. The search for illumination and the identification of an accurate account of the lived experiences of the participants has to be treated respectfully, particularly where ‘supposition’ is taken to mean, ‘a belief held without proof or certain knowledge; an assumption or hypothesis’. If ‘supposition’ is to lead to ‘summation’ (the process of adding things together) and on towards a summational



reflection then care must be taken to welcome contradictory or differing suppositions into the summation process in order to test the validity and accuracy of the research.

Writers warn of the suppositional challenges for researchers who use the Panopticon as a socio-material template against which societal structures can be viewed. As noted by Simon (2005, p. 2), 'The discussion of panopticism, so often presented as the ultimate Foucauldian set piece, is predictably a more complicated and nuanced tale than many literal and historical readings would seem to suggest.' The danger, according to Simon, is that, 'the Panopticon as a diagrammatic object is somewhat nebulous and while this makes it a perfect fulcrum for social theorizing, it is arguably also prone to iconic simplification' (Simon, 2005, p. 3). A researcher may easily become seduced by the strong image of the Panopticon with its threat of total surveillance over powerless individuals trapped within a terrible institutional machine, with no escape, no agency and no joy. This supposition is, of course, an oversimplification and unable to agree with contradictory stances that reject the notion of panopticism and differing perspectives that recognize growing central direction and control but not in horror or subjection but with positivity and acceptance.

A sinister strength of the Panopticon imagery lies in the subjugatory relationship between the unseen viewer and those in view. 'Sinister' because the supposed viewer operates out of sight with shadowy motives and practices that can cause anxiety, discomfort and even terror in those being watched (Simon, 2005). A good example of this is seen in Orwellian literature:

There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time... You had to live – did live, from habit that became instinct – in the assumption that every sound you made was

overheard, and, except in darkness, every moment scrutinized. (Orwell in Sclove, 2000, p. 22)

Alison used Orwellian tones to describe, ‘evidencing everything, almost down to evidencing breathing’, a possible example of ‘the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility’ (Foucault, 1979, p. 201).

Another possible manifestation of simplification of the iconic image is the lack of reference to the agency of those under scrutiny. A simplistic view would contend that those caught within ‘the machine’ have little or no agency. Goffman (1959) and Wieder (1974) point to the possibility that ‘inmates’ may feign conformity. These actors may simply conform, while under the gaze, to the expectations but carry out clandestine activities in opposition to the system. Participants who describe, ‘playing the Ofsted game’ or ‘telling the government what they want to hear but doing your own thing anyway’ could be describing examples of militant or extreme behaviour.

A Deleuzian critique (1992) of panopticism suggests that the ‘disciplinary society’ presented in the panoptic model is not an accurate description of western society since the Second World War. Deleuze describes a western landscape typified by scepticism and an awareness of efforts to ‘enclose’ and ‘control’ individuals. He describes how individuals have become ‘dividuals’ and that western societies have shifted from using surveillance apparatus as a disciplinary tool to its use as a ‘dataveillance’ device geared to the collecting of data that can be stored and used to profile ‘dividuals’. Poster (1992) postulates that the developing digital and technological landscape has altered and is continually reshaping how power is being used to control society. This is not via the use of panoptic external forces that act on individuals so that they internalise required

behaviours and thereby conform to expected norms. Instead, Poster suggests that the 'inmate' is not 'abandoned', sitting alone as a willing 'prisoner' in a self-imposed prison but 'sublimated' into a culturally higher position, identified and defined within a database. The computerised database is at the core of a form of 'superpanopticism' where, 'computers become machines for producing retrievable identities' (Lyon, 2001, p. 115).

As Simon (2005) suggests:

The diagram of superpanopticism is not a diagram of surveillance in the traditional sense; no one is watching us and we do not perceive ourselves as being watched. We simply go about our business while our databased selves are assembled, scrutinized and evaluated in much more detail than the inmates at Foucault's Mettray prison ever experienced. (Simon, 2005, p. 17)

The growing computerisation of school documentation has been well described over recent decades and school personnel and performance information is shared electronically with central databases and across academy trust shared systems. School inspectors are expected to systematically check various databases containing information about schools as part of their pre-inspection analysis. This includes scrutiny of any safeguarding complaints and a detailed review of the school websites. Inspection reports and monitoring visit letters are added to the inspection database and used as a reference by future inspection teams.

All of the participants reflected on the growth of external surveillance over time and the headteachers who worked in the pre-inspection era describe minimal monitoring from external sources. Younger headteachers, who voiced concern over the growing uncertainty of headteachers when dealing with issues connected to use of social media by staff, parents and pupils, also signposted a new form of surveillance, surveillance of teachers and school leaders by pupils and parents. Now that most people have an

advanced technological devices readily to hand, it is becoming more commonplace to see these devices used to gather evidence. Patrick gave this worrying account:

I can give you a good example of why I worry so much about modern technology. Not long ago I had a complaining parent sitting where you are sitting wishing to make a formal complaint about one of my teachers. He had met with this teacher to complain about her telling him off in front of other parents about something to do with his son. He told her that he felt she had acted unprofessionally and demanded an apology. He wanted to complain because he received no apology and thought the teacher had spoken rudely to him.

As I tried to pacify this angry parent, he suddenly produced his iPhone and asked me if I would like to hear the recording of his meeting with the teacher. He had recorded it secretly and wanted to play it back to me. I was flabbergasted! I mean what do you say to something like that? I asked him if he was recording our conversation and he said no, he had too much respect for me to do that.

I told my teachers at the next staff meeting to imagine that every conversation with parents could be being recorded so be very careful. (Patrick)

Another headteacher reported a similar scenario:

I have had parents come to see me and put their phones on the table to record our conversations and I am not sure of my position with that. I know they are probably putting their phones on record in their pockets anyway but what am I supposed to do? Can I search them first before we start talking? This is a very grey area and I would like some good guidance. Of course, I want to tell them they can't do it or refuse to speak to them but I can't refuse to speak to a parent about their child.

I have friends who teach in secondary schools and they are having a terrible time with kids playing with their phones all of the time and they get really aggressive if someone tries to take their phones away. Some of my friends get secretly filmed or recorded and these end up online somewhere. It is all very worrying and we are not really given any protection from this. (Wendy)

The headteacher is correct about this being a 'grey area' and there is no official guidance for headteachers or protocols for dealing with these new daily challenges. The modern technological landscape could be seen as one that offers the possibility of 'superpanopticism' or 'hyperpanopticism' where the definition of 'hyper' as 'excessive or above normal' would appear to be apt. The possibility of this heightened degree of surveillance is clearly something that headteachers from the seventies could not have experienced. There were undoubtedly clusters of parents at the school gate who could discuss the quality of the school's leadership and occasional visits from the local

authority that may have caused stress but nothing towards the scale of surveillance experienced by the current headteachers.

In an overview of surveillance theories, Galic, Timan and Koops (2016) describe three chronological/thematic phases. They describe the first of these as ‘architectural theories of surveillance’ typified by ‘centralised mechanisms of watching over subjects’ (Galic et al., 2016, p. 1). The second phase describes a movement away from ‘physical technologies’ to ‘networked surveillance’ through digital means with ‘distributed forms of watching over people. Deleuze, Haggerty and Ericson, and Zuboff suggest theoretical frameworks that differ from panopticism within this paradigm. The third suggested phase draws from and extends theoretical frameworks from the earlier phases:

The third phase of scholarship refines, combines or extends the main conceptual frameworks developed earlier. Surveillance theory branches out to conceptualise surveillance through concepts such as dataveillance, access control, social sorting, peer-to-peer surveillance and resistance. With the datafication of society, surveillance combines the physical with the digital, government with corporate surveillance and top-down with self-surveillance. (Galic et al., 2016, p. 1)

The etymological meaning of ‘surveillance’ as ‘watching from above’ appears to offer an inadequate description of the breadth of surveillance being described here, where surveillance from ‘above’, ‘beneath’, ‘at great distance’ and ‘from inside’ are all noted. While the quantity and location of surveillance is accepted by current school leaders, it is perhaps the ‘purpose’ of surveillance that is paramount. Lyon (2006) suggests that surveillance is about ‘caring and controlling’ where the subject is ‘controlled and disciplined’ but also, possibly at the same time, ‘protected and cared for’.

Reports of nation-states conducting mass surveillance of communications of citizens and growing use of social media are diffusing the roles of watcher and watched (Galic et al 2016). Galic et al. (2016) suggest that, ‘we are letting ourselves be watched

collectively and (seemingly) voluntarily, and we eagerly watch each other and the watchers' (Galic et al., 2016, p. 19). To be watched or 'liked' is sought after on some social media sites where being watched is a social norm. Lyon (2007) uses the term 'panopticommodity' to describe a positive aspect of current citizens encouraging others to gaze into their 'life stages' or, as Whitaker (1999) describes it, their individual 'participatory Panopticon'. Lyon (2006) suggests that we should not disregard the notion of the Panopticon but to embrace other sources of theory in order to achieve a balanced view of the current surveillance practices. In an era where many individuals consider being 'in view' as part of their culture and desire to be 'liked' or 'followed' by eager watchers, care must be taken to deliberate how this may impact on the well-being of people. Dholakia and Zwick (2001) warn of the dangers of 'ultra-exhibitionism' when individuals use social media and suggest that this may not be a 'negation of privacy but an attempt to reclaim some control over the externalisation of information ... an act of resistance against surreptitious models of profiling, categorization and identity definition that are being performed by others' (Dholakia and Zwick, 2001, p. 13).

Surveillance from multiple directions is therefore a concern for current headteachers and appropriate guidance is needed for school leaders as they balance openness and transparency with the need to protect themselves and their staff from harm.

#### **6.2.4 The impact of Ofsted – inspectors as 'agents of change'**

As noted, every headteacher gave their views on the role played by Ofsted and the impact of inspections on their leadership roles. Fears of inspection and in some cases fear of the consequences when an inspection goes wrong, are common features in the

transcripts. As noted by John, ‘We are still scared stiff by Ofsted! You can ask any head, when they are looking grey, when they are looking shaky, you know why, Ofsted’s imminent!’ He added, ‘the problem with Ofsted is there is no consistency of approach between one Ofsted team and another. It depends who you get! Safeguarding is one issue. The approach some inspectors take’ (John).

Bob likened the Ofsted regime to the fabled ‘Federation’ in the *Star Wars* franchise:

There’s the chief bad guy, the Chief Inspector, dictating events like a Darth Vader character. Actually, the current one does look a bit like Darth Vader (referring to Sir Michael Wilshaw). He sends out his mindless stormtroopers, the inspectors, to check that everyone is doing the ‘right’ thing and if not they are to be removed or destroyed. Just as everyone in *Star Wars* is under surveillance all of the time, so are all of us in education. Powerful computers watch our every move. Of course, Darth Vader himself answers to some other higher being, an evil supreme master. This master has selfish, sinister intent and demands total obedience. Michael Gove, what more can I say? (Bob)

Bob clearly regards Ofsted inspectors as unthinking agents of regime change, as though they do not have the capacity or opportunity to think for themselves. Their role is to ensure that central directives are followed and to mete out punishment where necessary. This analogy refers to panopticism within an imaginary galaxy where central forces keep everyone under constant surveillance and where change is enforced by powerful leaders and their footsoldiers. These enforcers believe that they are acting for the common good and to maintain order. However, underlying this intent is a hidden cause motivated and driven by a central dictator. This analogy is compared to the current educational world defined by pupils and teachers beneath the watchful gaze of inspectors and politicians. The headteacher points to one significant difference within his suggested analogy:

The difference, of course, is that in our universe, the real universe, there is no resistance! Imagine *Star Wars* without the resistance standing up for freedom, thwarting the ‘dark side’. Well, that’s us! No Han Solo, no Chewbacca, no Princess Leia! Where is Luke Skywalker when you need him? (Bob)

This comment refers to a perceived lack of resistance against the central forces of change and the ‘change agents’ themselves. This would constitute a powerful suggestion even without the ‘Ofsted as enemy’ stance. There are likely to be objectors to centralised change within the educational community but the headteachers in this study see them as low profile or in the shadows. It is logical to assume that new changes are not always welcomed by all headteachers and yet few are prepared to openly resist, ‘If there are rebels out there, then they are seriously outgunned or disorganized’ (Bob).

There has been some successful organised resistance to change, usually in the form of teacher and headteacher unions. Threats of examination boycotts or strikes certainly challenge and in some cases slow down change. An example was the wave of protests in 2016 to government plans to make every school become an academy. These protests led to a major U-turn by the government and were seen as a factor behind the removal of the Secretary for Education at the time. While Bob may regard this as a victory for the ‘rebels’, he would probably not see this as a fatal blow to the ‘Death Star’. Indeed, central forces calling for schools to academise are still apparent, as shown in the speeches made at regional levels by the regional school commissioners. The goal is still alive but the means have changed, taking a persuasive rather than coercive route.

The ‘supported autonomy’, that can be, ‘both earned and lost, with our most successful leaders extending their influence, and weaker ones doing the opposite’ (DfE, 2016, p. 4) was lauded in ‘Educational Excellence Everywhere’ (DfE, 2016). This document promised to give leaders, ‘freedom and power’, and hold them to account for, ‘unapologetically high standards for every child, measured rigorously and fairly’ (DfE, 2016, p. 9). This central mantra of ‘excellence everywhere’ gives government forces,



including the ‘agents of change’ a powerful foothold in the school system. After all, which headteacher is going to object to such a fine mantra?

Ball’s (2006) suggestion that perhaps the point has been reached where surveillance has been internalized to the extent that external forces are no longer required, unless a school is failing, is possibly an oversimplification. Interview data suggests that continual surveillance and regular visits to schools by government agents act as powerful ongoing reminders to school leaders, encouraging them to keep up standards and make sure that they have got evidence of compliance to all of the current mandates, as so strongly illustrated by Alison with her need to evidence everything including her own breathing. The internalization of surveillance that identifies with Foucault’s notion of a ‘subtle, calculated technology of subjection’ (Foucault, 1977, p. 221) or ‘auto-opticon’ (Ball, 2006, p. 15) appears to require persistent policing.

Lyotard (1984) defines coercive attempts in schools as threats of ‘terror’ and he refers to ‘players’ being threatened with removal from their ‘language game’ unless they comply with directives:

By terror I mean the efficiency gained by eliminating, or threatening to eliminate, a player from the language game one shares with him. He is silenced or consents, not because he has been refuted, but because his ability to participate has been threatened. The decision makers’ arrogance consists in the exercise of terror. It says: ‘Adapt your aspirations to our ends – or else. (Lyotard, 1984, pp. 63-64)

According to Webb (2006), this terror has led to some teachers and school leaders creating elaborate fabrications to placate the visiting inspectors. His discussions with teachers uncovered a substantial willingness to subvert practice with examples of teachers preparing two sets of lesson plans and keeping two sets of books, ‘the set of

books for the auditors' and the actual set of books that pupils use on a daily basis (Webb, 2006, p. 206). Ball (2003) describes the complexity of this form of resistance:

There are indications here of the particular performativity - the management of performance – which is 'called up' by inspection. What is produced is a spectacle, or game-playing, or cynical compliance, or what one might see as an 'enacted fantasy,' which is there simply to be seen and judged – a fabrication. (Ball, 2003, p. 222)

All of the headteachers acknowledged the need for schools to be regularly inspected and while the majority of the group question the consistency of judgements made by inspectors, they also recognise the role that inspectors play as advocates for the children:

I totally agree that Ofsted should be visiting schools and doing something about terrible teaching. I was speaking to a friend of mine who is an inspector and he told me that if I stood in some of the classrooms like he had and saw the terrible teaching going on then I would shout and scream about it for the sake of the children. He's right, someone has got to stand up for the children and there are some pretty hopeless schools out there! If that's what inspectors are doing then that's fine. It is when they go to perfectly good schools and knock them down for some stupid reason. That's when I disagree with Ofsted. (Patrick)

Kate commented:

If inspectors didn't come and check on things then how could the government know that their initiatives were being effective? When the pupil premium funding was given out at first there were schools that spent it on a whole school jolly trip to somewhere nice. If Ofsted didn't check then those schools would still be doing that. Nice to have a trip but that's not what the money is for. (Kate)

The collective view from the participants agrees with Ball (2001) regarding the acceptance of the need for inspection but note the uncertainty that inspection brings in terms of consistency:

... there is not so much, or not only, a *structure* of surveillance, as a *flow* of performativities both continuous and eventful. It is not the certainty of being seen that is the issue. Instead, it is the uncertainty and instability of being judged in different ways, by different means, through different agents; the 'bringing-off' of performances – the flow of changing demands, expectations and indicators that make us continually accountable and constantly recorded. (Ball 2001, pp. 211-212)

If teachers and school leaders are fabricating ‘public performances’, created for the sole purpose of being seen and assessed, then this, according to Ball, constitutes attempts to undermine the coercive efforts of neoliberal surveillance. Fabrications by school leaders and by teachers represent ‘teacher resistance born from the panoptic gaze’ and are used to ‘refract the accountability gaze’ and ‘throw a wrench in the panoptic machine’ (Webb, 2007). One headteacher gave a good example of a public performance designed to refract the gaze of inspectors:

A friend of mine teaches at the local secondary school. At their last inspection, the children all walked in on the day of inspection to see their usually shabby corridors festooned with wonderful photographs. They were life-size photographs showing pupils doing all kinds of wonderful things. They had obviously been hidden away somewhere for the big day because you can’t produce something like that, on such a big scale, overnight. Apparently, one of the inspectors commented on the photographs to one of the children who said, ‘Yes they are nice, when did they go up? They got outstanding so they won’t be inspected anymore. Now that’s not really judging the school as it really is. (Henry)

While there is evidence to suggest that headteachers generally prepare for inspections, the degree to which current headteachers are ‘free’ to challenge visiting inspectors during the event is debatable. Ball (2013) suggests that Foucault provides an alternative view of ‘freedom’, signalling the ‘dangers of freedom’ and remaining concerned with ‘the modalities of freedom’ (Ball, 2013, p. 4). Foucault’s view of freedom, ‘not as a state of being, but a relation to ourselves’ (Taylor, 2011, p. 112), and his suggestion that, ‘freedom is never stable – it always has to be practiced, sustained and wrestled’ (Ball, 2013, p. 147) is useful in this context. If freedom is temporal and, ‘arises in spaces of fragility’ as suggested by Ball (2013, p. 148) then this has implications for school leaders and for any analysis of changing ‘freedoms’ over time.

The ability of people to 'resist' is based on a premise of individual freedom to do so.

Two of the retired headteachers described resistance to change in the seventies and eighties:

Most school leaders have suffered a pay cut in recent years. They are at the top of their scale and have had tiny pay increases over the last seven years, much lower than the rate of inflation. We would not have put up with that in the old days! We would have gone on strike and marched around with placards. You don't see much of that these days. Teachers in some academies hardly ever get a pay rise and usually it's all related to their pupils making ridiculous rates of progress. You don't ever see them complaining though. (Frank)

Ray suggested:

I don't think people stand up to the changes like they used to and I think that's true across society generally. We are all told we are lucky to have jobs and that strike action is not good for anyone so we don't complain anymore. I suppose that's good for the children but the danger is that we could end up with all kind of unfair things happening to schools because the government think that nobody will make a fuss. (Ray)

If perceived freedoms have changed over time, then it may be possible to argue that headteachers operating under little surveillance in the pre-inspection arena may have perceived greater freedom and the capacity to resist changes that they did not approve of, overtly where necessary. Current headteachers, acting under much heavier surveillance, may perceive themselves to be free but possibly not to the same extent. From a dramaturgical perspective (Goffman, 1974), these headteacher 'actors' within this epistemological landscape, manoeuvre their borders to manage who has access to their 'front stage', 'back stage' and 'outside' spaces. Over time, their overriding 'plot' may be similar to that of the government and inspectorate, to 'provide the best possible education for all pupils'. However, as the 'script' changes and 'scenes' become more prescribed, agency to change that script has fluctuated over the years. At times, the script has been closely defined, as when schools had to deliver the national strategies with lessons prescribed to exact minutes with all teachers actually reading from a set

script each day. At other times, central directives have offered greater flexibility, although still set within a collection of defined, overall objectives.

The requirement for teachers to ‘put on a show’, when visited by inspectors in order to achieve defined grades for each lesson observed has been removed and it is now forbidden for inspectors to grade lessons (Ofsted Handbook, 2016). Teachers are told to ‘act’ as if they were taking part in a normal day during inspections and to ‘not put on a show’ because inspectors will be assessing teaching and learning over time through book scrutiny and discussion with pupils. However, this does not enable teachers to be entirely free. If their pupil workbooks match up to requirements then inspectors move on, if they are not up to expectations then teaching is judged as requiring improvement or inadequate. The teacher can write the ‘script’ for that day, but if the script over time is not leading to a successful outcome then the teacher will need support to raise the quality of education in their class. Their classrooms, ‘small theatres in which the actor is alone’ (Foucault, 1979, p. 200) have become places for forensic investigation by inspectors who search for evidence to show that each teacher is addressing the prescribed changes.

While the impact of Ofsted is significant for headteachers, the nature of the impact has changed over time. The current approach, typified by new ‘short inspections’, requires inspectors to plan the inspection activities with the headteachers as the first requirement of the day. This appears to be quite different from previous inspection frameworks where inspectors arrived with set inspection lines of enquiry and proceeded with their own agenda for the inspection. However, underneath this mantle of supposed congeniality there is an agenda. The inspector will have pored over school performance data and the school website looking for compliance and previous inspection findings.

The inspector will have formulated lines of enquiry and these will be shared in the first meeting with the headteacher. A very brave headteacher may wish to object to the proposed lines of enquiry. However, it is expected that school leaders will 'freely' go along with the suggestions from the inspector.

### **6.2.5 In pursuit of 'outstanding'**

One of the additional themes raised by the thematic analysis was strong evidence to suggest that the inspection grading system was being used in an unethical manner and was causing significant stress to school leaders. The issue is not inspection per se but the use of an 'outstanding' grade in the inspection framework. The strength of argument and descriptions of the perceived impact of this on headship roles requires examination.

For some, the outstanding issue is not an issue at all:

Now I like the new system where an inspector calls once every three years. I'm not at all worried about chasing after an outstanding grade, it's like searching for the Golden Fleece, it will never happen here. No I'm fine with good. They can drop in and have a cup of tea, maybe a biscuit if they're lucky. Chat about the data and have a quick look around and say, "Yes everything still looks good, keep up the good work!" Then they are off again, job done for another three years. (Jim)

However, evidence from the data suggests that there are tensions within schools and in particular across academy chains and growing pressure to achieve the ever-diminishing 'outstanding' accolade. Bob describes what he believes is a 'perfect storm' with the eye of the storm centred over the Ofsted 'outstanding' badge of honour:

Since retiring as a head, I have worked a lot with inspectors and HMI in various roles and from what I am hearing, there could be a 'perfect storm' brewing. Inspectors have been told to only give 'outstanding' to schools on inspection in extremely rare conditions where absolutely everything stacks up and I mean everything! It's because the outstanding grade gives a school exemption from inspection by law. To go back into an outstanding school, Ofsted have to seek a legal reason and it has to be a really strong reason. Now because of this, HMI and inspectors hardly ever give outstanding anymore, in fact I spoke to an HMI recently who has been inspecting for three years and he has never given a school outstanding. Now he inspects around 70 schools a year, so that is a lot of schools. So it is almost impossible to get outstanding.

The other half of this perfect storm is the growing pressure on academy heads to get outstanding at their next inspection. A different HMI told me, so this is not hearsay but from the horse's mouth, that she had more and more situations where at the start of an inspection at an academy, top celebrity trustees are wheeled out to meet the HMI. She told me that one of them was an adviser to a senior minister and quite often there were members of the House of Lords. Of course, these people are very welcoming but they put pressure on the inspectors to give their schools the top grade. Of course they would do this and in their mind they are doing it for the good of their school and multi-academy chain, but how unfair is that? Who can the head of a backstreet school in Birmingham wheel out? I hope that these influential people are not influencing inspections but who knows?

So there you have it, the perfect storm! Growing pressure to be outstanding but little or no chance of achieving it! Who is in the eye of this storm, waiting for the waves to crash over them? The headteachers or principals in this case! (Bob)

One new headteacher commented on the stress of taking over an outstanding school:

When I applied to take over this school I was amazed to find out that only six people had applied for the job and there were only two people at interview. Being an outstanding school you would think that lots would apply. I guess that people thought that there was only one way to go (gesticulating downwards). It's actually a bit of a poisoned chalice taking on an outstanding school and I suppose that being the head I'm drinking from that chalice.

I know of six other Cornish heads that are in so-called 'outstanding' schools. We compared SEFs (self-evaluation forms) recently and it was funny to see that only one school was still judging themselves as outstanding. Four were claiming good overall and one RI (requires improvement). How mad is that? All six of these schools are exempt from inspection and yet only one would probably get it again. It doesn't seem fair to all of the other schools that are working so hard and it can't be ethical. Even though I am running an outstanding school I think they should just get rid of it and inspect every school and tell them they are either fit for purpose or not. (Patrick)

This sentiment was shared by four other headteachers in the study even though it was not sought through questioning. All five commentators described the unfairness of the outstanding grade being awarded and the subjectivity involved in its allocation by inspectors. All called for the removal of the grade from the inspection framework and described how this would alleviate some of the pressures bearing down on headteachers:

Now if they did away with outstanding that would really take some of the pressure away! The CEO of our trust is desperate for the schools to get outstanding, he talks about it all of the time. We even have to look at the descriptors for outstanding in the handbook and plan for meeting all of them. If 'outstanding' wasn't out there it would be lovely! All of the heads would still work their socks off and keep improving their schools but we would have

to waste time poring over tick boxes. We could talk about teaching and learning and fun things! They should get rid of it! (Jane)

In accord with this, Henry added:

I would love them to get rid of outstanding! You can't get it these days anyway so just get rid of it! It is not fair that a school down the road from here is still living off their 'outstanding' inspection even though they only rate themselves as good now. They will never be inspected again and will go on being seen as the top school in town. People send their kids there thinking they are getting a better education and that is so unfair on us, on my teachers. Just get rid of it and tell us if we are good or not! (Henry)

Analysis of the data suggests that some headteachers face additional external pressure, either because they are part of a demanding academy group or because their governors are expecting the school to reach the top grade, while some do not experience such duress. Bob, who has experience from 'the other side' of the inspection stage, suggests that inspectors themselves are generally not in favour of the outstanding grade:

I know that many inspectors are lobbying the new chief inspector and asking her to remove the outstanding grade so that schools can be judged as meeting the standard or not. She is listening so fingers crossed!

One HMI told a group I was working with that at a recent inspection an academy trust CEO met her first thing and actually told her he was expecting her to give the school an outstanding grade. He actually said, 'I expect you to give the school outstanding!' Now that is plain wrong! That is real pressure for whatever reason. This has to stop! (Bob)

If this evidence does typify feelings on both sides of the inspection terrain then a serious assessment of the need for the outstanding grade should be considered.

### **6.2.6 Loneliness, stress and responsibility**

It is interesting to note that in a role surrounded by people, 200 pupils in an average-sized primary school, around 50 staff, governors and a few hundred parents, so many headteachers describe the loneliness of their role and how they mete out information to different people in various ways but carry the overall burden of school leadership themselves. Sally described her anxiety of sharing roles across numerous schools in an



academy group and the ‘watering down’ of leadership in individual schools. Her description of herself as the key figure who can make decisions based on her broad knowledge of all school matters provides support for the reflections of inner-city head Viv Grant (2014) based on her work with a number of experienced London primary headteachers. One of these shared:

Nothing prepares you for headship; the realization that the buck stops with you, the weight of the responsibility for a community that believes and trusts that whatever the problem, you can fix it.

We spend our days surrounded by pupils, staff, parents – their joy, their anger, their fear. We sway from highs to lows, joyous moments to deep sadness, from success to managing failure. We face fear and courage on our own, and there are few opportunities to show our own vulnerability. We share different issues with different people in a measured way – we don’t want to burden anyone.

We are paid to carry the load; it’s the responsibility of the job. As a consequence, no one else is the keeper of the whole school picture. It sets us apart and leads to overwhelming feelings and loneliness – despite being in constant demand. Outwardly we model calm, order, positivity, but as the capacity to cope diminishes, over time we become over-absorbed by school life and detached from our own feelings and relationships. (Grant, 2014, pp. 5-6)

The reference here to becoming ‘over-absorbed by school life and detached from our own feelings and relationships’ is shared by three of the participating headteachers. One experienced headteacher (George) is leaving the profession completely because he has lost faith in the system as a whole but also because his commitment to his role is impacting negatively on his family life. Much of this is due to stress and anxiety. During the follow-up interview, he described how his decision to leave education had become even stronger, ‘My family life is in pieces and I am worried about my mental state. The other day I had a total panic attack for the first time in my life and it scared me!’

Two of the younger new headteachers, Henry and Patrick, shared almost identical stories as they described how the step up from deputy headteacher to headteacher had

led to significant changes to their levels of stress and had impacted significantly on their home lives. Both were looking to leave their posts and both were looking outside of the education system. As one of them explained, ‘Where can I go in education after being a head? I can’t go back to the classroom and I don’t want to be a head somewhere else because it isn’t the school it’s the job that’s the problem!’ Both of these headteachers, in their mid-forties, expressed the need to keep working but were anxious about working in a new environment. As Patrick noted:

Three of my friends, all headteacher and all in their forties, have resigned this term. They hate what their jobs are doing to them. Two of them are jumping ship to work in the tourism industry at huge cuts in their pay and one is just quitting and doesn’t know what he will do. I’m very worried for him because he has two young children so he has to get something. (Patrick)

This very limited survey has identified three headteachers that are looking to leave headship at a very early stage and some of these know of others in the locality doing the same. If this is typical for headteachers across the country then this would support the findings of the 2015 ‘Headteacher Survey’ (The Future Leaders Trust/TES, 2015) that found 28% of headteachers in the survey planned to leave headship within five years and more than half did not expect to be a headteacher for a further ten years.

John described how joining an academy trust had alleviated feelings of loneliness:

My job as head became much less lonely. We had school improvement planning every fortnight where heads and deputies worked on school issues. We shared each other’s school improvement plans, we shared each other’s SEFs. We worked on the issues. It was not a lonely place any more! (John)

The emergence of multi-academy trusts is, in some cases, providing headteachers with new supportive networks and as trusts grow in size, there appears to be greater capacity for funding roles and practices to improve the well-being of school leaders. For example, one of Cornwall’s largest trusts has established a new role for an experienced headteacher to provide pastoral support for all of the heads of school across the trust.

This is an open-ended role where the post holder is free to support school leaders and may involve individual counselling meetings, visits to other schools or support within the school of the individual headteachers. In other examples, headteachers are being offered experienced ‘mentors’ at the start of their headship tenure.

### **6.2.7 The sacrifice syndrome**

Boyatzis and McKee (2005) claim that when leaders sacrifice too much for too long and reap too little, they can be trapped in a ‘sacrifice syndrome’ where dissonance becomes the default. Grant (2014), in identifying with the syndrome, describes how as a headteacher she accepted tiredness, emotional overload and irritability as the norm, ‘I can recall countless moments when I gave and I gave and I gave. There were times when I cried from the sheer exhaustion of giving all of the time’ (Grant, 2014, p. 29). Grant describes how this exhaustion weakened her resilience over time until one particular event brought her to an emotional breakdown. She had gone to visit the mother of a pupil, concerned that this pupil’s parent was sending him to the wrong secondary school. When she expressed this to the parent she was met with a furious and personal torrent of abuse. The parent told Grant that she should be at home with her own child so late in the evening rather than in this house telling someone what to do. She reached her car and broke down emotionally:

She was right. My priorities were skewed. I had equated putting the children of my school first, sacrificing my own life outside school and failing to meet my own responsibilities and needs as a parent with being an effective school leader. If I hadn’t been so caught up in the endless round of giving and making less-than-conscious decisions, I would not have been in my car that night, emotionally spent. (Grant, 2014, p. 30)

Grant claims that this life-changing experienced led her to establish a coaching company for headteachers based in London, with the aim of supporting school leaders to overcome the stresses of school leadership. Central to her message is the need to help

school leaders to identify the signs of the sacrifice syndrome and develop strategies for coping with the stresses and strains of the job. There are parallels between Grant's life-changing epiphany and the description of what led to Bob deciding to retire early from his very successful headship:

I don't know really why I am sharing this but you did ask me about how stress of the job has impacted on me emotionally. I had intended staying in my job until I was sixty. My school was classed as outstanding and so there were no more inspections to worry about and everything was running so well, like a well-oiled machine. Then suddenly, I announced I would be retiring at the end of the following term. I sat there at the end of the staff meeting and just announced it out of the blue. Worst of all, I broke down and started to cry as I said it all. I never cry and I like to think that I am very cool in any crisis. Most unlike me! Looking back now, I think I was having a bit of an emotional breakdown. I think I was in a state of total mental and emotional exhaustion. A few days earlier, a parent had sat in my office and started to threaten to make a formal complaint about the school. I listened to her case and basically she was angry because her son's teacher had told her that he had special educational needs and she didn't like that at all. He had, by the way! Anyway, I did the usual and explained that one in three children at some time were identified as having some additional needs and not to worry we would look after him and he was a lovely boy and so on. She left my office very satisfied with no intention of complaining and as she left I thought to myself that I could no longer do this. Having been a head for twenty years and having seen hundreds of parents with their quirks and issues I would normally have just brushed this off. For some reason I couldn't this time and I knew deep down that it was time to hang up my headteacher's coat! I thought it over for a couple of days and made by decision to retire two years early. I knew it would affect my plans for retirement but deep down I knew I had to leave my job! (Bob)

It is notable that both Grant and Bob led outstanding schools and Grant describes how being held in high regard in educational circles did little to salve her internal wounds.

One of her diary extracts noted:

Despite the fact that I've taken my school out of special measures and had my leadership praised by Ofsted, it hasn't made the slightest bit of difference to how I'm feeling inside. Everyone turns to me; I have to carry everyone and everything. Right now, I just feel that it's all too much. I am tired of being tired. I am tired of giving every day. I am exhausted! (Grant, 2014, p. 6)

The extract was written a few years before her emotional breakdown and this illustrates how inner tensions and feeling of exhaustion can grow over time. Clearly, headship is not the only occupation causing stress and emotional issues. However, the evidence

does support some of the findings of the 'State of Education Survey Report' (The Key, 2015) that shows a clear decline in positive perceptions of headteachers since 2009 when the National College of School Leadership annual survey found 92% of headteachers thought being a headteacher was 'a great job'. The 2015 report suggested that 87% of respondents believed headship was less attractive than it was five years earlier.

Evidence from the interview data suggests that headteachers are well aware of the possible dangers of their stressful roles and equally aware of the stresses impacting on their staff. John described how he feels responsible for protecting his staff from this to some extent:

The pressure of data and standards are enormous and you have to be driven as a headteacher, that has to be your number one. As headteacher of a large school, you have to make sure that your staff have a good balance between work and home. I think that's one of my key jobs at the moment. I expect high standards from my teachers but I make sure that they've got time for themselves as well. (John)

Evidence from this small-scale research project suggests that tiredness and burnout may well be factors in leading headteachers to retire early from the profession and also a factor involved in headteachers resigning and moving into other spheres of work. It is clear that many headteachers accept the high expectations that they perceive come with their roles and diligently try to meet these. This may also present a barrier to potential headteachers who may regard 'stepping-up' in their careers as 'stepping-down' in terms of their quality of life.

### **6.3 Research question – To what extent are headteachers required to act as advocates for their pupils as external support and local services disappear?**

The interviews provide strong evidence to support the view that headteachers are increasingly required to become advocates for their pupils as external support and local services disappear and it is likely that many school budgets will be further reduced when the funding formula for schools is restructured in 2018. This will put further pressure on school leaders to find savings and on multi-academy trusts as they consider the costs of the leadership structure across schools. Headteachers are worried about the sustainability of a school's largest cost centre, staffing. There are active conversations across multi-academy trusts about the viability of maintaining teaching assistants in schools:

I am really worried about the future! We have had to cut back on TAs (teaching assistants) considerably and we are now down to the bare bones. We have to keep the ones we've got because they play such a vital role in raising standards. They don't put up displays or just tidy up these days, they lead teaching in all of the classes. Our academy business manager has asked us to find further savings and I can't cut anything else other than staffing. If I cut the TAs down then standards will drop, I know they will! We will end up like the old days with no TAs and just one teacher in front of a huge class of pupils. (Patrick)

It is unlikely that schools are moving towards the third of Bentham's four Panopticons, the 'chrestomatic-Panopticon'. This was a design for a Panopticon-shaped school where one 'master' can supervise around 600 pupils without being seen, based on Bentham's 'scholar-teacher principle' where more advanced pupils teach the less advanced. However, headteachers are reporting raised class sizes and the reduction of support within schools. This, combined with the disappearing support from the local authority is placing more pressure on school leaders who still carry the legal responsibility for safeguarding the pupils in their care. It is becoming increasingly difficult to add to the workload of teachers because they already have increased expectations placed on them

to raise standards and to abide by the school assessment and planning policies. These factors are resulting in many headteachers being the only ones who can take on additional supporting roles and lead interventions for families in crisis. The interview responses illustrate that this is a drain on leadership time and on the emotional well-being of headteachers.

Multi-academy trusts are leading the battle to address these challenges in Cornwall and many are developing business models that account for the need to employ specialist support staff who are able to work across a group of schools. While it would be extremely difficult for a stand-alone school to afford a specialist, such as an educational psychologist, it becomes more feasible when the cost can be shared amongst a group of schools. Three of the headteacher participants have these arrangements and they all report positively on their time saved and the provision by someone with greater expertise than that of the headteacher. Sally raised an important limitation of this corporate use of expertise. She described how engaging in a multiplicity of roles enables her to make balanced decisions when faced with a sudden crisis. Her breadth of knowledge helps her to see possible consequences of actions taken to address a problem. She argues that this breadth is lost in schools where the responsibilities are shared out to individuals who may spend a few hours in the school each week. An example of this, given by this headteacher, is where she was made aware of the poor attendance of a Year 6 pupil. Her actions in dealing with this were informed by her knowledge of the family from her role in the provision of family support for the girl's family. She knew that the pupil had to act as the main carer for her mother at certain times when the mother was recovering from treatment. This information tempered her approach to supporting the family and helping the pupils to attend more regularly. The

headteacher is reluctant to narrow her role but may be forced to do so as the school grows and as other demands arrive on her desk.

#### **6.4 Research question – What factors have led to the growing crisis in primary headteacher recruitment and is there a possible solution?**

Howson (2016) describes the reluctance of many senior leaders, many with young families, to step into headteacher roles and calls for greater ‘support’ and ‘recognition’ along with early recognition of potential future school leaders as the key approaches to solving the recruitment crisis:

Leading a school will only become an attractive career option again once it is accepted that leaders themselves need support and recognition for their work. Increased support will attract greater numbers willing to take on the role, but we also need to implement early identification, support and training for potential headteachers – especially if we are to fill vacancies in the most challenging schools. (Howson, 2016, p. 5)

Brian Lightman, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, acknowledges the challenges and the ‘sheer scale of the job’, particularly while facing a ‘non-stop flow of reforms, all implemented in a great hurry, alongside new high-stakes accountability measures and ever-increasing expectations’ (Lightman cited in The Future Leaders Trust, 2016, p. 7). However, he sees headteachers across the country, ‘rising to these challenges and going into work each day with the resolve to make a difference’ (ibid, p. 7). He believes that notions of headteachers becoming isolated, soulless and distant from what happens in the class are modern myths that must be dispelled. Successful modern headteachers form positive relationships with other school leaders to avoid isolation; maintain contact with pupils in each of their classrooms by making regular visits and holding pupil discussions; avoid becoming soulless by fighting for and leading a school vision and by ‘leading’ by example towards a future



for all stakeholders. According to Lightman, ‘Overcoming the challenges adds to the enormous job satisfaction of headship’ (ibid, p. 7).

Jan Renou, Regional Schools Commissioner for the North, suggests that school leadership is entering a new era typified by schools forming partnerships in multi-academy trusts in which a new career structure is being formed including new roles of: head of school, headteacher, executive headteacher and chief executive officer. She describes a different view of that suggested by most of the headteacher participants who believed that the roles of ‘head of school’ and ‘executive headteacher’ were watering down leadership capacity and spreading strong leadership thinly across a number of schools. Renou sees these new roles as well defined and fully supportive of leadership development. She claims that the position of head of school gives senior leaders the opportunity to ‘learn the ropes’ with the ‘safety net’ of a mentor executive headteacher to guide them. The higher-ranking roles give experienced headteacher opportunities to develop beyond their individual schools, opportunities that were not available before the academy movement. She sees the development of academy trusts as the solution to the leadership crisis and sees a positive future for school leadership:

The demands on school leaders are changing at a pace. This is an exciting and dynamic phase in the history of headship with the profession seeing an increase in autonomy and influence over the development of the educational system as a whole. We must continue to promote and encourage our future leaders to continue this transformation so that every child is able to attend a good school with committed teachers energised and supported by their leadership. Successful leaders are the key to this new landscape. (Renou cited in The Future Leaders Trust, 2016, p. 10)

This utopian idyll appears to echo the government mantra linking the forming of academies with greater autonomy and improved performance. By adding, ‘...so that every child is able to attend a good school with committed teachers energised and supported by their leadership,’ could imply that academies are more likely to be ‘good’

schools where teachers are more likely to be full of energy and commitment than at other settings. ‘We must continue to promote and encourage,’ appears to suggest that this regional commissioner sees this as a prescribed direction of travel and a promotion of particular values, ‘...to continue this transformation...’ The statement does not suggest that autonomous school leaders continue ‘the’ transformation of schools based on their professional judgement working in a new system based on freedom. Rather, they are to be ‘encouraged’ to continue ‘this’ particular movement of travel. The statement does not mention what is likely to happen to school leaders who autonomously choose to transform schools according to an alternative framework rather than to ‘this’ model. Does this suggest that school leaders are free to act as long as they do so within the prescribed ‘script’ as suggested by disenchanted Headteacher B1 who describes claims of greater autonomy for academies as, ‘A load of rubbish! Absolute garbage! ... a way to privatise everything?’ (George)

The majority of the headteachers in the survey warmly welcomed the concept of using short inspections for good schools (Ofsted, 2016):

The idea of an inspector calling in for a day every few years appeals to me. It sounds like a much less onerous a task. The thing is, there should be triggers. Actually, if there is a current issue at a school such as real parent dissatisfaction, and I’m not talking about three or four friends who have decided to take exception to the headteacher because he has said no to them on something. If there is real dissatisfaction or standards are on the floor then of course you go in. I’m not saying people should be free of that kind of scrutiny but on the face of it if it appears fine then leave the school alone. (Jim)

All participants called for less change in the education landscape, ‘I would like less change. Less change and less frequent change.’ (John).

Jane described the impossibility of being an effective headteacher and teacher at the same time. However, her choice to still teach each day is ‘keeping her feet on the ground’, reminding her of her main mission as a headteacher:

When I was a class-based head in my first headship I realised that you can’t do both jobs well. There would be one week where you immersed yourself with the children and the teaching and you had a great week. Friday night would come and you hadn’t done a jot in the office and you would think, ‘The head’s report to governors, I haven’t done it! It’s rubbish, I’m a rubbish head!’ Then you would get on top of the office and you realised you haven’t done the marking. So that was not a good situation to be in but I kept myself afloat. That hasn’t changed too much because I still teach now. Only an hour a day, but I’m lucky that I’ve got an outstanding senior management team and school business manager that enables me to do that. I couldn’t indulge myself with the teaching if I haven’t got my magnificent backup. The teaching charges my batteries. A day without teaching maths would be awful, I would hate it! (Jane)

Retired headteacher, Frank, calls for headteachers to fight to maintain a balance between work and home and to consider having ‘fun’:

I know a couple of local heads, both male and in their thirties, who are thinking about giving it up and moving out of education altogether. The trouble is when you have a young family the job robs you of precious time. You miss them growing up and even when you give time to your family they get the poor worn out creature that walks through the front door! I always viewed the weekends and holidays as family time. The headteacher today works at weekends. Some of them spend three weeks of their five-week summer break in school! It isn’t going to make the school better! It’s the same at half term you should take the full nine days. Many of the new heads are not able to have a laugh. A lot of this has been lost. We are spending so much time planning and assessing and moderating that there is no time to have fun! It is not too many years ago that headteacher meetings were great fun and we would all leave at the end of the day with smiles on our faces. Those days have gone! (Frank)

Maintaining a balance between work and home and considering having ‘fun’ are worthy ingredients for a headteacher’s job description and should feature in any planned initiative to solve the headteacher recruitment crisis.

## **Chapter 7    Conclusions**

The methods used for this research project relied primarily on the collection of evidence from semi-structured interviews with 15 headteacher participants and feedback following the sharing of transcripts. Limitations exist due to: the small number of participants included; the division of participants into three specified groups; the location of participants in a geographical area and the decision to use interview data as the prime source of information with no additional triangulation of data collection from alternative sources. Such limitations could restrict the validity of the project and the usefulness of any findings in providing a commentary on the established research questions. However, the noted limitations can also be regarded as strengths. For example, the division of the participants into groups does enable a consideration of a collective view from retired, experienced and new headteachers, albeit as part of a small group. The use of one geographical location (Cornwall) does restrict the research to a narrower view than a nationwide survey. However, all of the participants have experienced similar changes in the Cornish educational context in their different schools and this may be considered as a strength. A broader research arena with many more participants across a wider geographical area may provide opportunities for comparative evaluations but may not provide the depth of related evidence that emerges from a more tightly defined project.

I have confidence that the evidence collected from this small sample of Cornish headteachers does provide a rich insight and a detailed account of headteachers' views of how their roles have changed over time. The evidence is based on headteachers' experiences in a similar area but each participant reflects on very different settings. These settings range from small village schools to large city schools, some in areas of

high deprivation. I believe that the depth of reflection, exemplified by the vivid descriptions given, offers an accurate account of changing Cornish headship over time and suggestions that have local and national relevance. Primary headship is not defined at a local level and therefore the participants have experienced the same directives as fellow headteachers across the country. What has differed is the varied local authority attitudes to academisation and the extent to which local authority support has diminished. I am confident that the recommendations suggested by this research project refer to primary headship in a national context and shine additional light onto the growing recruitment crisis and threats to the professional security of those intending to lead schools.

## **7.1 What has been learned?**

The aim of the research was to enable analysis of data from a series of interviews, with headteachers in different contexts, to address the following questions:

- Is there evidence to support the view that primary schools have moved from a state of assumed sovereignty and freedom to one defined by panoptic control?
- To what extent are headteachers required to become advocates for their pupils as external support and local services disappear?
- What factors have led to the growing crisis in primary headteacher recruitment and is there a possible solution?

In terms of the first research question, this small-scale research project has provided evidence to support the view that primary school headship has changed over time from an era of relative freedom in terms of school leaders determining their roles and working practices, towards a time of increased central direction. However, this research suggests that it would be far too simplistic to suggest that current headteachers have less

freedom than their predecessors. Ball's (2013) description of Foucault's alternative view of 'freedom' is relevant to the research findings. 'He (Foucault) was as much concerned with the modalities of freedom as he was with the production of docility' (Ball, 2013, p. 4). This temporal freedom 'arises in spaces of fragility as a reaction against the context of the moment and a specific state of affairs which we confront rather than as part of a struggle for ultimate truth' (Ball, 2013, pp. 147 – 148).

While the majority of the participants describe frustrations when having to spend large amounts of their time in addressing central dictates and preparing for inspections, their descriptions are not generally those of 'docile prisoners' operating in a Panopticon. There is a general acceptance of the need for inspection and a form of appropriate surveillance in order for schools to be openly accountable to their communities. The pressure that they perceive is placed on them by central government and by the inspection regime that has clearly significantly distressed a few of the participants. However, some welcome inspection and others describe 'playing the game' of inspection and 'playing along' with the latest government directions. This relates to Foucault's comment, 'my role – and that is too empathic a word – is to show people that they are freer than they think' (Martin, Gutman et al., 1988, pp. 10 – 11). Foucault saw freedom 'not as a state of being, but a relation to ourselves' (Taylor, 2011, p. 112), and used the term 'concrete liberty' (Foucault, 2001, p. 240 in Ball, 2013, p. 147).

Reflections by participants provide evidence of dramaturgical discourse (Goffman, 1974) used in schools and by school leaders (Carlson, 1987; Milner-Bolotin, 2007) with reference to being 'on stage' and 'under the spotlights'. Some of the headteacher 'actors' within this epistemological landscape describe having considerable agency in adapting the centrally produced 'script' for their schools and successfully manoeuvring

their borders to manage who has access to their ‘front stage’, ‘back stage’ and ‘outside’ spaces. There is a general acceptance of ‘double hermeneutics’ (Crotty, 1998) and the conviction that the headteachers are ‘actors’ within an already interpreted world. However, the majority of headteachers are seemingly happy to work within the established boundaries and use their creativity to personalise their approach to delivering the ‘script’, in a similar fashion to a talented actor taking on a traditional Shakespearian role and applying his or her distinctive touch.

In terms of changing freedoms, the participants were generally more concerned by the challenge to freedom for schools that join multi-academy trusts. This research brings ‘fresh’ evidence of a growing tide of concern as more schools become academies. Descriptions of schools being ‘taken over’ by trusts with headteachers and governors replaced by heads of school and trustees suggest that this recent phenomenon is more of a challenge to freedom than the suggested panoptic flow described in educational literature. Headteachers describe how moving into a corporate landscape may threaten school individuality and place key school decisions in the hands of individuals who have more distant relationships to schools than the previous headteachers and governors. Again, this is helping to provide evidence to address a gap in educational research and challenges much of the established rhetoric from recent education papers.

The greatest concern registered by all of the participants is the amount of change and the increasing frequency of change in primary schools and the challenges and pressures that this brings to school leaders. Headteachers describe their frustrations with ‘pet’ changes that follow the appointment of new chief inspectors and education ministers and call for checks and balances to ensure that changes are well thought through and agreed by stakeholders before they are introduced. Of the 15 participants, nine

headteachers believe that this would significantly reduce the number of changes that are introduced and later scrapped, reversed or reshaped, causing frustration and further work for the school leaders and their staff. This suggestion of checks and balances is based on a clear groundswell of opinion from headteachers and the evidence from interview data illustrates the strength of feeling of headteachers. This provides new evidence to support the need for change and addresses a gap in research that questions the accountability of those at the helm of education direction. This may constitute an example of school leaders identifying that ‘freedom is never stable’ (Ball, 2013, p.147) and ‘wrestling’ to hold back changes imposed by those in power.

The second research question considered the additional roles that headteachers play as advocates for pupils as external support and services diminish. All of the headteachers are keen to point out that they have always acted as advocates for the pupils under their care and that they have always seen this as their prime responsibility. However, all of the serving headteachers agree that their advocacy role has broadened as external support has dwindled and in some cases disappeared. Some headteachers choose to delegate some of the additional responsibilities to other members of staff and others have used their school budgets to either purchase external support or have employed their own staff.

This research provides new light on the current suggestion that headteachers from academies that are linked to a multi-academy trusts are generally better placed than headteachers of maintained schools to share any additional responsibilities. Some of these academy leaders described how they are employing strategic specialists to lead support across schools. Family support staff and welfare officers are amongst the new posts that are being created across the county and some trusts are employing educational



psychologists on a part-time or full-time basis. The extent to which schools are challenged to provide additional support, at a time of constraint on school budgets, is another area for further research and findings from this research fills some of the gaps in this domain in terms of suggesting possible practical solutions that are already under trial across trusts.

Reflections from participants suggest that the extra responsibilities are leading to headteachers spending time dealing with social and emotional issues and in some cases large amounts of time. Headteachers describe the strain of this on their busy roles and also the impact of the emotional burden that often accompanies these responsibilities. Two of the headteachers broke down as they described how they had become overwhelmed when dealing with particularly harrowing situations. Headteachers are not specifically trained to deal with many of the counselling and advisory circumstances that they find themselves leading and these are often when the headteachers are tired at the end of a challenging day. Headteachers expressed concern about their abilities to deliver appropriate advice or make the best judgements in some situations and are aware of the tightened safeguarding requirements of the current inspection framework with all of the legal ramifications should they make an error.

In sharing reflections on this research question, a number of the participants engaged in discourse based on ‘already said’ and ‘never said’ elements, what Foucault would term as ‘an incorporeal discourse’ (Foucault, 1974, p. 25). In some instances, examples given by headteachers hinted towards the Foucauldian concept of modern man as an ‘empirico-transcendental doublet’, giving responses that allude to them as reflexive knowers, autonomous and rational, but also as products of cultural practices. In examples, deeply felt views were given concerning the duty of the headteacher to

safeguard all of the pupils, suggesting a hegemonic view that this is an expected responsibility. Yet, the incorporeal discourse, as demonstrated with ‘already said’ and ‘never said’ discourse along with sighs and tears, demonstrated a rational appreciation that this responsibility is too great to bear.

The third research question considered possible reasons for the growing headteacher recruitment crisis. Feedback from the participants generally supports the 2016 National College for Teaching and Learning Report *‘Heads Up: Meeting the challenges of headteacher recruitment’* (NCTL, 2016). Descriptions of the impossibility of headship and headteachers having to keep ‘spinning plates’ while more are added, align with the acceptance of hegemonic assumptions that lead to harmful practices where headteachers take on backbreaking loads (Brookfield, 1995). Campbell and Neills’ (1994) accounts of teachers’ work, suggesting that many count any day on which they do not come home exhausted as a day wasted, are also relevant for headteachers. Brookfield’s (1995) claims that some teachers and school leaders struggle to distinguish between justifiable dedication to their pupils’ needs and workaholism are also relevant. Headteachers face a battle to overcome the ‘unsound’ hegemonic assumption (Brookfield, 1995) that they must meet the needs of every pupil and this can be demoralising and likely to lead headteachers to carry a permanent burden of guilt as they struggle to live up to this impossible task.

Feedback from the interviews suggests that school leaders perceive a general disciplinary mechanism in place with headteachers subject to ‘constant visibility and surveillance through subtle and often unseen forces’ (Foucault, 1979, p.200). Prospective headteachers may be unsure about stepping into the ‘spotlight’ into a lonely position where there is no one to turn to (Grant 2013) and nowhere to escape to.

This research provides strong evidence to show reasons for the reluctance of school middle leaders to step up to headship. Senior and middle leaders in schools are reluctant to step up to the evident demands of the headteacher role and a further barrier is the notion that once a leader steps into the headship role, there is no way out if the job is not suitable. It is possible for headteachers to step back down to previous positions but seldom seen in reality. Usually, their former positions have been filled and these are generally at different schools. Participants suggest that the new model of leadership development being introduced by some multi-academy trust may offer a solution to this issue. Often, smaller schools within a trust create a new post of head of school, with overall leadership responsibility given to an executive headteacher who oversees a number of schools. This offers senior leaders the opportunity to work in a school leadership role with the possibility of stepping back into the classroom if the head of school role is unsuitable. This model also enables trust executives and trustees to ‘trial’ senior leaders in preparation for future headship roles. The research findings offer new evidence into a relatively unexplored area of educational management and offer possible solutions that are, practical and worthy of further research.

The research findings also offer evidence to highlight a growing issue for headteachers and a major potential barrier to recruitment. There is little or no current research into the impact of surveillance by social media on headteacher well-being. Participants shared growing concerns about the vulnerability of headteachers when dealing with increasing accounts of abuse on social media sites and by misuse of mobile devices by parents and pupils in school meetings and classrooms. The legal uncertainties are seen as a further barrier to teachers stepping into leadership roles. Even though classroom teachers face issues related to social media misuse, headteachers are seen to be stepping into the

‘firing line’ due to their overall leadership responsibility and due to the knowledge that their decisions are usually likely to divide opinion between parents and pupils. Participants have shared disturbing stories of situations where groups of parents have used social media to attempt to remove headteachers following unpopular decisions. In one example, a large group of parents protested on social media about a headteacher’s hard stance on parents taking holidays in term time. Even though this clear government policy and the headteacher is merely obeying what is required by law, the use of social media to aggregate complaints has caused momentous stress for the school leader. Participants suggest that clear support should be provided for all school leaders who have to deal with this growing problem.

Other significant issues emerged from the interviews that bring fresh insight and are related to the research questions in their relation to the changing role of headship. Chief amongst these were concerns about the quality of school inspections and the grading system used by inspectors and the implications of the grades on schools and academies. While headteachers generally approve of the need for regular inspection, they question whether inspectors can collect enough evidence during a two-day visit to a school and be confident to award an outstanding grading. Some headteachers are under considerable pressure to attain the top grading and they are aware that inspectors seldom award outstanding to schools. The pressure is particularly intense in some multi-academy trusts where chief executives and trustees openly share their ambitions for all of their schools to reach outstanding status. Most of the headteachers surveyed would prefer the outstanding grading to be removed and replaced by a judgement of ‘fit for purpose’ or ‘requiring improvement’. This issue is regularly debated by school leaders and school inspectors and further research is required to assess the likelihood of the

‘perfect storm’ described in this research where school leaders are under pressure to achieve an outstanding status that is increasingly hard to achieve.

In summary, this research adds fresh insight into the rapidly changing role of primary school leaders, working in a highly politicised, increasingly marketised and increasingly surveillance-dominated landscape. Its original contribution centres on current aspects that are under researched and yet are of vital importance to the educational world. It is commonly accepted that the role of primary headteacher has changed over time and that the pace of change has quickened. However, educational literature has often located these changes within paradigm shifts that have led to an increasingly panoptic position in which school leaders operate according to greater dictate with less freedom. This research contributes to the small body of investigation that suggests a much hazier landscape for headteachers, particularly as the academisation movement gains momentum with school leaders grasping at completely new opportunities. While some headteachers are deciding to leave the profession due to their assessment of the pressure from external forces, others are embracing new opportunities and describing empowerment and greater agency to lead schools in their preferred fashion. Other headteachers describe an alternative approach to the changing scenery, defined by fabrication and game playing. The richness of accounts by participating headteachers provides lived experience of these aspects and adds conviction and evidence to support the research recommendations.

The research findings and recommendations offer new and exciting insights into a possible forward movement for school leaders in the current climate. These are particularly significant at a time of recruitment crisis. The recommendations are based on rigorous assessment of strongly held views from this small group of headteachers.

While small, this group is representative of the wider body of headteachers due to the noted fact that the role itself is defined at a national level. Some of the participants have moved to Cornwall from leadership posts in other parts of the country and the headship role is certainly transferrable. The following five recommendations are therefore based on firm rationale that stem from the research findings. All five relate to the current leadership environment and all five are worthy of further research at a time when educational leaders are seeking solutions to new school leadership challenges.

## **7.2 Recommendations**

Five recommendations stem from the research findings and discussion. These are for government policy makers, government education ministers, inspectors, leaders of multi-academy trusts, serving headteachers and those considering stepping into school leadership roles. It is my belief that these recommendations could improve the quality of life for school leaders, help to curb the movement of headteachers out of the profession and boost the prospects of recruiting future leaders.

### Reduce the amount and frequency of changes

All headteachers involved in the study describe the challenges of dealing with the amount of significant changes that they face as school leaders and the increasing frequency of changes over time. They are particularly concerned about the changes imposed by senior ministers and chief inspectors that are seemingly based on personal preference rather than on a firm research-based rationale. Headteachers are also agitated by changes that are introduced and subsequently amended or reversed, such as the decision to enforce academisation on all schools.

School leaders would like to see a series of checks and balances that prevent sudden change across the system and that require full consultation before any change can be introduced. Headteachers agree that this may frustrate ministers who are requiring urgent action to address a particular issue, however, the checks should ensure that proposed ‘improvements’ are well founded and adequately tested before implementation. This recommendation would apply for all changes, including those from chief inspectors. Such checks could also slow down the frequency of change and provide a more stable platform for headteachers as they plan from year to year. The impact of this recommendation should be to stabilise the position of school leaders and give them time to think through and assimilate those improvements that pass through the checks and balances system.

#### Simplify the inspection grading system by removing the ‘outstanding’ category

All of the participants reflected on the challenges that inspection brings to school leaders. Every headteacher recognised the need for schools to be inspected but most were concerned about the quality of inspection and in particular the granting of an ‘outstanding’ judgement for schools. Schools that are granted this top judgement are legally removed from further inspection and this is seen as unfair by the majority of headteachers. Many schools that were judged as ‘outstanding’ are currently judging themselves as good or requiring improvement, based on their current performance data and should be involved in the inspection cycle, according to the participants.

It is extremely difficult for schools to meet the ‘outstanding’ descriptors under the current inspection framework and yet headteachers, particularly those who are members of multi-academy trusts, are under pressure to reach for the outstanding grade for their

schools. For some, the pressure is intense. For others, the pressure is leading to headteachers deciding to retire early before they face another inspection.

A simplified inspection system that required all schools to be inspected on a regular basis is suggested by headteachers. No school should be exempt. A simple inspection judgement of being either 'fit for purpose' or otherwise would address the serious concerns of headteachers who question whether any inspector can accurately judge a school as outstanding from a brief two-day visit. The removal of the outstanding grading would also reduce the pressure on headteachers and lead inspectors from well-meaning chief executives and trustees.

Critics would suggest that schools should aspire to be outstanding and that removing this grading could lower expectations across the system. However, most headteachers argue that school leaders will still promote improvement and seek to achieve highly positive inspection reports without the pressure of trying to achieve the increasingly elusive 'outstanding' accolade. A simplification of the inspection grades would certainly remove much of the fear felt by school leaders as inspection approaches for their schools.

#### Provide clearer pathways to headship with the option of stepping back

There is clear evidence to show that there is a headteacher recruitment crisis and this research supports the findings of recent surveys on the current crisis. Many senior leaders in schools are reluctant to step up to headship. In many cases they see the challenges faced by headteachers that they work alongside and they realise that once they step into headship they cannot suddenly change their minds and return to the classroom.



This recommendation is being met to some degree within some of the newly formed multi-academy trusts through the role of head of school. When academies choose to employ an executive headteacher to be in overall charge of a number of schools, each school promotes a middle or senior leader to be head of school. This is providing opportunities for senior staff to perform many headship roles but without the overall responsibility and usually with the possibility of stepping back into their former role if required. The benefit to the trust is in helping to prepare senior leaders for future headteacher or executive headteacher roles. The trust leaders can also step in and return a head of school to their former role if they are not coping under the additional pressures.

It could be possible for maintained schools to utilise a similar system where headteachers could be employed as an apprenticeship with the option to return to their former posts, although this would require the agreement of both schools and be difficult to implement. The benefits, however, could include a greater rate of applications for leadership posts and the opportunity for senior leaders to experience headship in a supportive environment where there would be the option to step back.

#### Provide greater support for school leaders as local authority services continue to decline

Reflections from participants agree with the national reports of headteachers taking on additional roles and becoming more emotionally involved with social issues as external services are reduced. Some participants share detailed accounts of becoming emotionally involved in a wide range of issues and in some cases having to step in to safeguard children in their care. In some cases, the headteachers are the last remaining community figures in small towns and villages where access to social support and

parental guidance is not available. An additional challenge for headteachers is the added pressure of having to meet strict inspection guidance for safeguarding pupils and staff under their care. This burden is overwhelming for some school leaders who spend much time in dealing with serious issues that have legal ramifications and carry a heavy emotional price.

Some multi-academy trust and school cooperatives are solving this issue by self-funding external services and in some cases by employing their own professionals. A number of Cornish trusts employ educational psychologists, family welfare officers and behaviour and attendance specialists. School leaders that utilise these services reflect on the time saved and the higher quality of provision available to their pupils and families. Sadly, this degree of support appears to be for a minority of schools in the county and more help is needed so that all schools can benefit.

#### Provide greater support and protection for school leaders in the face of growing social media abuse

Research findings agree with the national concerns for headteachers facing problems caused by the misuse of social media by parents, pupils and staff. Serving headteachers are increasingly facing social media issues and there is little available guidance to help school leaders to deal with this growing cause of anxiety. Headteachers are unsure about the legal boundaries involved and the degree to which they can stop parents from recording conversations and sharing negative comments over the internet. Teachers and headteachers are ‘rated’ on internet sites and it is becoming more common for groups of parents to use social media to aggregate concerns or complaints about schools and members of staff.

School leaders need clear guidance and support on this issue and protection from abuse and harassment.

### **7.3 Suggestions for further research**

The research findings suggest that the educational landscape is continually changing and the emergence of new models of school leadership and management, within a range of school associations, has created a confused topography. There has been little in the way of research into the effectiveness of multi-academy trusts in terms of the quality of leadership and its impact on individual schools within the collectives. A strength of this research project has been in the collection of information and ideas from school leaders themselves, those who have chosen to lead their schools into academy status and those that are considering the move. The findings suggest that further research, involving a larger body of headteachers along with the new collective of 'heads of school', many of whom have been thrust into leadership roles, would be of value at this time of leadership crisis. Research that investigated how different trusts create and develop effective leadership structures would be of clear value to all schools. It would also be of value to consider how senior leaders and heads of school are being developed and whether this is leading to an increase in the numbers of school leaders applying to take up headteacher positions.

Further areas for research, that stem from the inspection findings, may include: an assessment of the quality of the external support bought in by schools to replace disappearing local authority provision; an assessment of the possible impact of a proposed removal of the outstanding inspection grading on schools and headteachers; and research that leads to a clear set of guidelines to assist headteachers as they address the growing crisis in the misuse of social media by parents and pupils.

#### **7.4 Reflective critique and Postscript – ‘*The Prison*’ by Michael Nesmith**

The greatest challenge for my research has been the requirement to set aside prejudgements as much as possible in order to try to see, ‘freshly, as for the first time’ (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22) in an attempt to achieve ‘researcher epoche’. Having started my career at the very time of the supposed ‘secret garden’ and working in various roles to the present day, where my current chief role is to quality assure school inspections, I have lived through the whole timescale presented in the research. It was of great comfort to find that there is no requirement for the researcher to ignore their previous experience of the phenomenon under scrutiny (Moustakas, 1994), something that would have been impossible for me. Instead, in reflecting deeply on my own experiences in order to identify my particular stance, I have been able to identify and assess my own convictions, beliefs and sentiments concerning my lived experiences. This has been a demanding, exacting process, difficult and burdensome yet stimulating and reflective.

While I cannot claim to have fully achieved ‘researcher epoche’, the process of attempting to achieve this has brought a degree of enlightenment and the opportunity to rethink and ‘bracket’ many long-held opinions as I have listened to and conversed with fellow school leaders. I can accept that a researcher with less attachment to the subject would bring a differing light to the research and more of an external view. However, I believe that there has been value in the research being undertaken by someone with experience from across the educational spectrum as teacher, deputy headteacher, headteacher, inspector, consultant and quality assurance inspector. The ‘value’ derives from an understanding of some of the ‘not said’ or ‘never said’ aspects of the research, something that an ‘insider’ can comprehend that may be missed by an ‘outsider’. This

became very evident to me during my interviews with retired headteachers. As they described factors that led them to choose to retire at an early age, there was much 'not said' as when Bob shared, 'One of the reasons leading to my sudden decision to retire early was following a run-in with a very demanding vulnerable parent who was angry that her vulnerable son had been diagnosed with special needs. You know what I mean!' Bob's use of, 'You know what I mean' was a possible recognition that as a former headteacher I did indeed know what he mean by the 'not said'. I do have experience of dealing with 'vulnerable parents' with concerns and I also have a degree of empathy in terms of the 'not said' possibly referring to the frustration of a headteacher trying to do the best for a child with needs but being faced with a complaint from an angry parent. Bob probably would not have used the phrase to a researcher without a similar background.

In terms of ensuring research quality, the research sought to achieve: dependability rather than reliability; confirmability rather than objectivity; transferability rather than generalizability and credibility rather than validity (Guba, 1981). It also sought to relate to 'trustworthiness', defined as, 'the relation between the research process and its representation of the world' (Furlong and Oancea, 2005, p. 12).

Dependability is concerned with arriving at a 'truthful' account of practice and this was engendered through assuring participants that their reflections were confidential and creating a relaxed environment for the conversations. I was able to use my experience of effective listening and reshaping of questions to approach deeper layers as questions were explored. Possible examples of the degree to which 'truthfulness' was achieved were the comments made during the sharing of transcripts where participants were surprised that they had shared particular deep emotions or information.

Confirmability requires findings to emerge from the data rather than to confirm predispositions. Good evidence to suggest that this occurred lies in the emergence of findings that were not anticipated. One of these was the finding that so many school leaders are fearful of the rising surveillance of them and public analysis by the use of social media by parents and staff. Another new and important finding was the suggestion that headteachers recognised that new ministers and inspection leaders tended to bring along personal agendas and changes that caused problems for the system. These suggestions that this should change are of significant importance.

It is my conviction that the research project meets transferability requirements because the three research questions are transferable in that the role of primary headteacher has changed across the country, the reduction of local support is nationwide and all areas face a recruitment crisis. I believe that similar findings and recommendations could have been achieved by another researcher, whether an insider or otherwise, due to the strength of the responses and clarity of messages from the participants. Clearly, the nature of some responses would differ if given to a researcher without headship experience, however, the essence would remain.

Credibility was also confirmed during the sharing of transcripts as participants recognised themselves in the transcripts and this strengthened the research by offering participants to change or add to their comments (Lincoln & Guba, 2007, p. 18).

I believe that 'trustworthiness' was achieved as shown by the comments that recognise the transcripts as accurate representations of the world as seen by participants. The five recommendations stemmed from the participants and were not preconceived or

anticipated. Indeed, the recommendations concerning providing restrictions at the very summit of the education system and the real concerns about the undermining impact of social media at the coalface of education illuminated an aspect that I feel I should have considered in my various roles but these had eluded me, even though they are commonly discussed by school leaders. I believe that the research is trustworthy in portraying the lived experiences of the participants and presenting their suggestions for practical solutions to current issues.

During the writing phase, I was reminded of something that I experienced during the first year of my teacher training and this has become of significant importance to me and relevant to the subject of the thesis. My reflection would not be complete without reference to this element of my considerations.

Music was my greatest interest at college. I enjoyed playing instruments but my main pastime was finding new music and adding to an eclectic vinyl collection. In 1975, I was excited to discover a new musical experience when I purchased *The Prison* by Michael Nesmith. Nesmith's new concept involved listening to his music while simultaneously reading his short story *The Prison*. If the reader/listener did this correctly then they reached the halfway point in the story as the first side of the record ended and they then moved on to the flipside. Trying to listen to lyrics and reading a story at the same time was a challenge but after a few attempts I achieved this and enjoyed the experience.

In short, the story concerns a man named Jason who transfers to a prison in the middle of a valley. He notices the formidable walls and bars at each window. He is surprised to see that the inmates are happy with many forming strong relationships. He falls in love

with an inmate, Marie. Jason notices that there is a hole in one of the walls of the prison and he is surprised that inmates are not using this to escape. Marie explains that some have and they have never returned. He must not risk escaping through the hole! Of course, Jason does escape through the hole in the wall and following a challenging night he climbs to the top of a hill and falls into a deep sleep. He is found by Tom, a man who lives in a shack outside of the prison.

Tom takes Jason to a high point where they can look down on the prison and to Jason's amazement he sees that there are no walls around the prison. He can see all of the inmates moving inside the prison as though they are bound by invisible walls. Tom explains that the walls are in the imaginations of the inmates and that they are free to leave if they wish, but few ever do. He had escaped from the prison and had waited for the next escapee. Now it was Jason's turn to do the same and he would move on. Jason returns to the prison and persuades Marie to escape with him. The following day, Marie tells Jason that she is going back to the prison, she can see the truth and how the inmates are 'trapped' in their imaginary walls, she has tasted the freedom outside the prison and she wishes to go back. She was happy being in the prison, she was happy to be an inmate, she did not wish for freedom.

Nesmith's story was written during a time of political unrest, where political forces across the western world attempted to suppress the freedoms offered during the late sixties. Nesmith's message was for the inmates of the societal 'prison', living within established barriers that held everyone in check, that maintained order. The barriers were illusionary and people were free if they chose to be free.



It is of interest to note that after a break of many years, Nesmith released a companion to *The Prison* entitled *The Garden* (1994) and this followed Jason's journey from his shack to a wonderful garden of freedom and beauty. Whereas this study considered a journey from the supposed 'secret garden' of the seventies to the supposed 'prison' of the nineties, Nesmith's journey suggested an opposite trajectory.

The parallels between Nesmith's analogy and the research study are discernable and offer an interesting lens for review. As in Nesmith's tale, there is no Panopticon for headteachers, no physical barriers to freedom. However, reflections from headteachers often describe feelings of imprisonment, where they describe their offices as prison cells and their tasks carried out under surveillance. Perhaps all of this is illusionary with no substance at all. Perhaps there is nobody attempting to control school leaders and freedom is there for anyone willing to go through the hole in the wall. Perhaps many leaders see that panoptic control is an illusion and understand that they could break free from barriers that are not there in reality. While some may have discovered their 'freedom' as school leaders, others have chosen the security of 'the known' aware of the dangers of freedom (Foucault, 1979).

Perhaps, in the ever-changing educational landscape, headship can still be whatever you wish it to be!

**Doesn't freedom look good?**

**Would you go if you could?**

(Nesmith, 1974, p. 19)

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Argus Panoptes – the 100-eyed ‘all-seeing’ giant

According to Greek mythology, Argus Panoptes (Argos) was a hundred-eyed giant from Argolis in the Peloponnese. He derived his surname, Panoptes ‘the all-seeing’, from his possession of a hundred eyes, some of which were always open. His superhuman strength enabled him to defeat many foes including: a ferocious wild bull, a robbing Satyr, a giant serpent and some known murderers. As such he qualified as a useful watchman and guardian.

When Zeus realised that his jealous wife, Hera, was about to catch him with his lover, the nymph Io, he turned his mistress into a beautiful white heifer. Hera knew of course and demanded the heifer as a gift from her husband. She appointed the giant Argus Panoptes to ‘keep an eye’ on the beast as her guardian.

Zeus commissioned Hermes to rescue his lover and the following account from the Roman poet Publius Ovidius Naso (Ovid) describes how he achieved this:

So Atlantiades [Hermes] joined him, and with many a tale he stayed the passing hours and on his reeds played soft refrains to lull the watching eyes. But Argus fought to keep at bay the charms of slumber and, though many of his eyes were closed in sleep, still many kept their guard. He asked too by what means this new design (for new it was), the pipe of reeds, was found. Then the god told this story [of Pan and his pursuit of the Nympe Syrinx]. The tale remained untold; for Cyllenius [Hermes] saw all Argus' eyelids closed and every eye vanquished in sleep. He stopped and with his wand, his magic wand, soothed the tired resting eyes and sealed their slumber; quick then with his sword he struck off the nodding head and from the rock threw it all bloody, spattering the cliff with gore. Argus lay dead; so many eyes, so bright quenched, and all hundred shrouded in one night. Saturnia [Hera] retrieved those eyes to set in place among the feathers of her bird [the peacock] and filled his tail with starry jewels. (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1, p. 624 trans. Melville)

Figure 4: Athenian hydria

Zeus, Hera, Io as heifer, Argus Panoptes and Hermes, Athenian red-figure hydria C5th B.C.

*Figure has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.*

## **Appendix 2: The curious world of Jeremy Bentham**

The philosopher and jurist Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) was born in Spitalfields, London, on 15 February 1748 and is regarded as the father of utilitarianism. His ‘fundamental axiom’ was the principle that ‘it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong.’

He further stated:

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand, the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. (Bentham, 1780)

Bentham argued that all humans seek to maximize their happiness and he defined happiness as the surplus of pleasure over pain. Love, duty, altruism, the desire for freedom, faith, and obeying the law are all reducible to a calculation involving pleasure and pain. He rejected all ‘ipse dixitisms’ (moral judgements based on ‘intentions’ or ‘sympathy’) and abstract notions such as ‘social justice’ or ‘natural rights’. For Bentham, all actions should be judged by their consequences and whether these benefitted general utility. These driving principles lay at the centre of many of his radical political ideas.

Bentham supported:

- Individual and economic freedom.
- No person’s utility counting for more than another’s.
- The separation of church and state.
- Freedom of expression.
- Equal rights for women.
- The right to divorce.
- The decriminalising of homosexual acts.
- The abolition of slavery.
- The abolition of the death penalty and physical punishment, including the physical punishment of children.
- Animal rights.

He started life as a child prodigy. While still a toddler he was discovered sitting at his father's desk reading a multi-volume history of England and he studied Latin at the age of three. At twelve, he studied at Queen's College Oxford. Bentham became disillusioned with the law, against the wishes of his father and spent his life criticising existing laws and suggesting ways for improvement. He lived in Westminster and was a prolific writer producing between ten and twenty sheets of manuscript a day until his death. He left instructions for his body to be dissected and then preserved as an 'auto-icon' and this can be seen at University College London (UCL).

*Figure has been removed due to  
Copyright restrictions.*

Figure 5: Bentham's  
'auto-icon'.

University College  
London students  
bringing Bentham's  
'auto-icon' to a  
student council

During his life, Bentham proposed designs for structures to bring about legal and social reform. His Panopticon prison building was developed over sixteen years. It was never built in England and Bentham was convinced that this was due to the influence of the King. Bentham's Panopticon was based on an idea of his younger brother, Samuel, who had suggested his 'central inspection principle' to his Russian employer Prince Potemkin. Samuel's idea was introduced to facilitate the training and supervision of unskilled workers by craftsmen. Jeremy Bentham visited his brother in Russia in 1787 and he introduced the theory behind his Panopticon or 'The Inspection-House' in a letter sent from Crecheff in Russia to a close friend in England. He described his idea for a 'new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind' and the supposed benefits:

Morals reformed – health preserved – industry invigorated instruction diffused – public burthens lightened – economy seated, as it were, upon a rock – the Gordian knot of the Poor-Laws are not cut, but untied – all by a simple idea in architecture. (Bentham 1787, cited in Bentham, 1995, p. 29)

So why did Bentham give so much of his life to designing his prison blueprint? The Panopticon can be seen as a physical manifestation of Bentham's utilitarian ontology. In Bentham's view, people should be treated with dignity and helped to conform to the majority view. Prisoners should be treated equally, fairly and with respect. The very structure of his prison design offered prisoners equal cells, equal surveillance and the opportunity for reflection under the invisible gaze from the centre. Self-correction and a willing acceptance of moral and social norms were preferred to punishment and enforcement. Objectors to his design, in his opinion, failed to see the value of offering criminals improved conditions and the chance to conform through reflection rather than because of fear of punishment.

*Figure has been removed due to  
Copyright restrictions.*

Figure 6:  
Abandoned Cuban Panopticons.

Figure 7:  
Interior view of Illinois State Penitentiary at  
Stateville.

*Figure has been removed due to  
Copyright restrictions.*

*Figure has been removed due to  
Copyright restrictions.*

Figure 8:  
'Like so many cages.'

Many of Bentham's other designs shared the 'central inspection principle'. His 'pauper-Panopticon' was designed to house children and their families for a small stipend in exchange for their labour. Bentham claimed that 500,000 people could be utilised in these establishments across the country with numerous benefits for society including lower taxes for the relief of the poor as these establishments became profitable. The residents would not be enslaved but empowered to enter the general workforce or become self-sustaining. The pauper-Panopticon or 'industry house' would become the employment engine for society.

Bentham's final panoptic design was the 'chrestomatic or chrestomathic-Panopticon' a day school where one master could supervise more than 600 pupils.

*Figure has been removed due to  
Copyright restrictions.*

Figure 9:  
St. Petersburg School of Arts. A chrestomatic-  
Panopticon built under the supervision of  
Jeremy Bentham in 1810.

### Appendix 3: Michael Nesmith's *Prison*

Michael Nesmith is best known as an American songwriter and actor and a member of the iconic pop rock band *The Monkees* (1965 – 1970). He has also worked as a producer, novelist and businessman. Following the breakup of the band, Nesmith continued with his solo career and also formed his own band.

Nesmith claims that his concept for *The Prison* stemmed from his habit of reading album sleeves whilst listening to the music. He hoped that *The Prison* would present a new form of art in which the artist created synchronised forms that required the listener/reader to experience a 'layered' experience. In recent interviews, Nesmith expresses the opinion that this may have detracted from his music:

The songs from *The Prison* are especially close to me. I wrote a short story to be read while the music played, and that may have been a mistake. I think the music by itself has a lovely and well-appreciated long life ahead of it. I may not be around for that, but I believe it deserves it. I find it truly beautiful. (Nesmith in interview with Goldmine in 2013)

Over the years, Nesmith has never claimed that the story was inspired by events in his life although the release in 1974 followed a challenging time in Nesmith's life. Nesmith expressed his frustrations publically about the fabricated, restrictive control of *The Monkees* and this led to him paying a large sum to leave his contract before the agreed date. He was particularly annoyed by the limitation imposed on him to write just two songs per year for the group. The payout led him into financial difficulties for the next decade until he inherited his mother's fortune following her invention of 'liquid paper'.

In 1972, Nesmith divorced from his first wife and he moved to California. It is possible that his costly escape from his restrictive music bosses and the collapse of his marriage led him to consider life as a prison, but a prison with illusionary walls. A prison that can be left behind if the 'prisoners' decide to leave the security of their place of confinement. The prison described in his short story was no ordinary prison:

It seemed like most prisons. The walls were dark and strong; the bars over each window were rusty in spots but secure. The difference was in the inmates. Most of them were happy. Occasionally even laughter would be heard in the dining hall or in the main exercise yard. (*The Prison*, 1974)

In the story, Jason soon discovered the hole in the wall and understood that it was fear that stopped the inmates escaping through it. Fear of the unknown:

Doesn't freedom look good?  
Would you go if you could?  
Fear keeps you locked up for good without keys.  
But do not you suppose  
That you could be among those  
Standing in the shadows of release?  
(*Opening Theme* from *The Prison*, 1974)

It is possible that writing the story during 1973 in his new Californian home, Nesmith to some degree was commenting on his own escape and feelings of freedom:

See the lingering doubts cast  
Now fading with the gloom.  
Showing you at long last  
The welcoming arms of Truth.

So don't cry, my good friend.  
Fear has no substance of its own.  
These problems simply  
Are coming to be answered.  
(*You're Fine* from *The Prison*, 1974)

It is also possible that Nesmith was also aware of his personal internal battles and his obsession with being in control, with his *Monkee* band members describing him as cranky, self-absorbed and unable to collaborate with anyone (Massingill, 2005). Nesmith's later lyrics possibly allude to this:

So I want total control of emotions  
And total control of the wind  
And total control of beginnings  
Total control of the end  
Yes, I want total control of beginnings  
Total control of the end.  
(*Total Control* on *Newer Stuff*, 1989)

*Figures have been removed due to Copyright restrictions.*

Figure 10:  
Michael Nesmith in  
1965

Figure 11:  
The Prison (1974)

Figure 12:  
The Garden (1994)



## Appendix 4: Headteacher consent and information form

**PROFESSIONAL  
DOCTORATE  
IN EDUCATION  
WITH  
PLYMOUTH  
UNIVERSITY**

Plymouth University  
Faculty of Health, Education and Society  
School of Education  
Rolle Building  
Drakes Circus Plymouth  
PL4 8AA  
UK

date

Dear

As you may recall from our recent telephone conversation, I am carrying out research as part of my thesis for a Professional Doctorate in Education with Plymouth University. I am writing to ask if you would be willing to be a participant in this research.

I am planning to interview a small number of headteachers and ask them questions about how primary headship has changed over time and whether the changes have led to greater freedom and autonomy from the perspective of the headteacher. There has been very little research in this area during this current period of academisation and federation for schools. I believe that it is of national interest to provide research into the impact of changes being experienced by school leaders, particularly at a time of crisis in the recruitment of school leaders. I hope that my findings will be of value to aspiring school leaders, researchers and those with responsibility for recruitment and policy-making. The research may also offer new information to the wider educational landscape, where there are many debates concerning giving schools greater autonomy and freedom.

If you are willing to be involved in the research, then I would like you to take part in a short interview. The interview will be an informal conversation and can be held at your school or at another place of your choosing. I expect the interview to take approximately one half hour and I would like to record our conversation. In the interview I would like to ask you about your memories of education when you began as a teacher, about changes that you have experienced over time and about the impact of these on your role as headteacher. Following the interview, I would like to send you a transcript of our conversation to see if, on reflection, you would like to add any further comment.

The research ethics guidelines issued by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) have informed my research proposal and confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured. As a participant, you may withdraw from the study at any time, without providing a reason and without detriment to your relationship to the researcher or to the University. Any audio data will be erased after transcriptions have been finished and transcripts shared with the participants to ensure accuracy.

If you are willing to take part in this research then I would be grateful if you could complete the attached written consent form. Please do not hesitate to contact me sooner, should there be any queries.

Yours sincerely

Paul Hodson

Tel: xxxxx

Email: [xxxxxxx](mailto:xxxxxxx)

<b>Study title: Has moving to academy status extended autonomy and freedom for primary schools?</b>	
WRITTEN CONSENT FORM	
I understand what is in the written information about the research.	✓
I have the chance to find out more about the study if I wish to.	✓
I know what my part will be in the study and I know how long it will take.	✓
I have been told if there are any possible risks.	✓
I know that the appropriate Research Ethics Committee has seen and agreed to this study.	✓
I understand that personal information is strictly confidential: I know that the only people who may see information about my part in the study are the researcher and his supervisors.	✓
I freely consent to be a participant in the study.	✓
I know that I can stop taking part in the study at any time and withdraw my data up to the point of final return of transcripts and final writing up stage.	✓
I know that if there are any problems I can contact the researcher's Director of Studies, Peter Kelly at peter.kelly@plymouth.ac.uk	✓
<p>I am prepared to be involved in the study and am happy that my anonymous data is included in the research.</p> <p>Your signature: ..... Date: xxx</p> <p>Your name (please print) xxx</p> <p>Contact address: xxx School</p>	
<p>As the researcher for this project, I confirm that the nature and purpose of this research have been explained to the participant named above.</p> <p>Researcher: xxx</p> <p>Signature: ..... Date: xxx</p>	

If you wish to receive an executive summary of the research then please inform the researcher.

## **Appendix 5 Interviews – questions and schedule**

**Can you describe primary school education when you started teaching in terms of how free you were to decide what to teach or how to teach?**

- *Look beyond superficial responses to find which factors enabled the participants to feel free or not free.*
- *Who had the agency to provide freedom?*
- *Do the retired headteachers reflect any sense of working in a ‘secret garden’ arena?*
- *Can newer heads explain what they understand may constitute freedom in their practice?*

**There has been much talk about giving back freedom and autonomy to schools since 2010. Do you as a leader feel that you have more freedom now?**

- *Look for suggested links with academisation.*
- *As for specific examples that illustrate greater/fewer freedom.*
- *Are there examples where participants believe that there is little change?*

**When you think of how you spend your working time, do you feel that you are able to focus on what you decide are your priorities or do you feel that you ‘have’ to do certain things because of particular reasons?**

- *Try to gain information that informs how heads are using their time.*
- *Explore examples where participants describe ‘having to do’ particular tasks. Explore ‘why’ these have to be done.*
- *Listen for examples where heads describe ‘playing a game’ or working to meet external pressures.*
- *Listen for descriptions or current workload and whether this had grown over time.*

**Do you think that role is changing as local authority support services are changing and in some cases being reduced?**

- *Listen for examples of changing roles or increasing/decreasing responsibilities.*
- *Explore examples where heads are finding solutions to the changing levels of support.*
- *Listens for examples of the impact of any additional responsibilities.*

**Do you have a view on why there is a growing problem in recruiting primary headteachers? Can you think of any possible solutions?**

- *Listen for personal examples.*
- *Explore any factors suggested by the heads that may be causing the crisis.*
- *Explore suggestions for possible solutions.*

**Why did you decide to become a school leader?**

- *Try to find specific examples.*
- *Explore whether the heads feel they have made the right decision.*

**What do you enjoy most/least about your job?**

- *Look for specific examples.*
- *Important to ask ‘why’.*

**Interview schedule**

**Initial interviews**

**September 2014 – March 2015**

**Follow-up interview**

**June – October 2015**

## Appendix 6: Example of thematic coding transcript

Head	Changing freedoms	Changing roles	Recruitment/retention
A	<p>I started in 2003, that's when I qualified. It started fairly free and within a year or two years of it you could tell that it was being ramped up quite quickly. Literacy and numeracy hour. It was a lot more, it became a lot more focused on book scrutinies, work scrutinies all the time. Folders being sent in to headteachers and deputy headteachers on a regular basis to be monitored each week. Not necessarily just to check planning but to check things were being done! It developed from there really. First two years it was less intensive and then the pressure all started to change.</p> <p>I became acting head 2013. I feel that it's becoming a bit, although we are told that there is more autonomy and schools are told they can do whatever they want, there is a caveat with that, if you are doing basically the certain things then actually yes you can do what you want but still not really what you want to do. You still have to work in that framework so to speak. I don't think it's becoming more autonomous at all it's becoming a dictatorship and we are now moving into a world where people are feeling they are doing things for other people and it's becoming more about what the government want to see rather than trusting us as leaders to know our children and teachers who spend ridiculous number of hours every single day with these children to get it right and to do what they need to do. I</p>	<p>My opinion on that if you are not doing a good job then you need to either improve or you are out has changed slightly since becoming a head. Because I'm now aware more of the pressures I'm under as a headteacher and now more aware of the pressures that the teachers are under.</p> <p>I've not been here for that long. I must say that in general that the school improvement team is not supportive. Not supportive at all. I feel isolated. I feel undermined in different situations. I don't feel I have enough confidence in the local authority that they will make the right decisions.</p> <p><i>What aspects of the job are the best parts for you?</i></p> <p>Whereas once I saw that teachers need to get the results, in this position now that I'm in here and the having such fantastic staff I really value them as the individual people that they are and everybody goes through different stages in their life when they need support. We've got quite a supportive role here. I really enjoy that side of it.</p>	<p><i>What do you think about the role of head of school as a concept?</i></p> <p>I think that it's maybe pushing middle leaders into positions of leadership without the necessary experience to handle that or without necessarily the recognition and pay that goes with that. I think a lot of it is a vast money saving scheme. Some chief executives that what I've heard have come in and are business people. Yes they may be able to run a business but what do they know about education? And they are making decisions based on teacher's pay and all the other things that go on.</p> <p>The ridiculous number of hours you have to work the ridiculous number of things you have to fill in, the paper work. Proving you are doing this and that and the other. You never get to see your family. Never get to see your social life and your other things that you do to make you a normal human being. They tend to go out the window because the pressures just get so much.</p> <p>Seeing the progress the children make. Watching success stories as teachers grow. Amazing success story of watching a teacher grow who was seriously underperforming and that person has really blossomed as they have undergone some personal things as well in their life but we have had a really supportive process in school.</p> <p><i>Why do you think there is a</i></p>

<p>think as a head that's what my, I've always been quite opinionated I must say and when I was an assistant head back in xxxx and I used to get really frustrated with the headteacher. What is it all about? She's not about standards. She was all about making sure the children were happy and for me I was very black and white at that point. If you are not doing a good enough job you need to do this that. If you are not improving you need to take steps to sort that out. I used to get really frustrated. That's why I went into headship. I kept saying to myself that the only way I could change this is if I can do something about it. I can't just sit hear complaining all the time.</p> <p>The teachers are under an enormous amount of pressure and stress every single day and I find really difficult is because of the pressures from the government and the expectations that they think they want when really they have people in charge who don't have a clue about education. They put all these pressures on and then obviously I am accountable to that then I've got to filter that down to certain levels to the teachers. What I find really hard is going to teachers that work really, really hard putting all the hours in and saying, 'Now that's not good enough! You need to do it better than that! We'll show you how but to watch and see how much effort and time everybody puts in. The staff here are incredible. They love the children. Thjey are really passionate about their job, they put in all the hours</p>		<p><b><i>recruitment crisis in primary headteacher recruitment?</i></b></p> <p>People don't want to step up because of the ridiculous pressure that comes with the job. Not just the pressure with the job, yes with this position you are responsible for the education of 200 children which is a big thing.</p> <p>It is more the lack of trust from the government.</p> <p>The lack of autonomy that you do have and hoops that you have to jump through I think! The uncertainty of the education, the future of education. The system.</p> <p><b>I have no belief in the system anymore! I am going to become one of those statistics myself that drops out and it is very sad and I said when I started that when I started teaching if I ever stopped believing in the education system that's the day that I would stop.</b></p> <p>This government I feel do more to divide the country in the last few years than has happened before ever.</p> <p><b><i>Is there an answer to the recruitment crisis?</i></b></p> <p>Freedom! What the government are saying and doing are two very different things. More freedom with the job. Being trusted a lot more. You know what's best for your school. I know not every teacher, every leader is doing the best job. I understand that absolutely. If there are things that you are doing are not good but you know how to improve your school then you need to be trusted and left to get on with that as a professional.</p>
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	<p>every single day and they should be trusted to go and get on with what it is they need to do. We should be trusted that we trust the teachers that they are doing what they need to do.</p> <p><i>In terms of time management as head do you spend a lot of that time doing things for someone else rather than things that you would choose to do?</i></p> <p>I think it's very easy to get drawn into that and every now and again we have to do a reality check and say hang on a minute who are we doing this for? I have an open relationship with the staff and we have an open dialogue quite often in the staff meetings and they know that I will back them and say, 'Hang on a minute we will get the deal that's right for us.' Whatever the government says we will do what's right for our children because what's right for some children is not right for every child. We are in the best place to decide that rather than someone sat in a minister's chair which I completely disagree with.</p> <p><i>The latest White Paper is saying that all schools should become academies and that academies will have greater freedom and autonomy and will spread great leadership across schools. What is your feeling about this?</i></p> <p>A load of rubbish! Absolute garbage! I think it is a way to try and privatize everything just like what's happening with the NHS the same as education. They are talking about having these chief</p>		<p>Now there's talk of giving more power to parents and in a catchment area like this that would be lethal because the parents, yes they need to be informed, but at the end of the day we are the professionals and there are far too many people who are not professionals who have an opinion about education and how things should run in schools. They don't really have an educational background and an understanding of that.</p> <p>What would make people stay? I suppose if Ofsted stopped. <b>As head it is your head on the line, your neck on the chopping block! I think particularly nowadays because of all the schools need rapid improvement and headteachers can, if there are signs of weakness, go.</b></p> <p><b>My main thing for wanting to leave the profession is that I don't believe in the education system anymore and I feel it is very sad for children. In a nutshell, the way they think to make smarter children is to give them harder tests! How is that ever going to work?</b></p>
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<p>executives are executive headteachers that might be in charge of six, seven, eight, nine, ten schools. I mean where is the leadership there? You are forcing out other headteachers or forcing them down to be heads of schools and then be governed by someone else who may or may not have different views to those of the school. To run a school with different catchment areas as one chain. I disagree with that. We work in a cluster of schools that is exceptionally strong and we have a school improvement model that is probably the best one within a lot of schools within Cornwall. We are not an academy chain but we meet every single week without fail. We meet once a week. We talk about school improvement. We talk about dates for monitoring. We talk about issues and agendas that go on in each other's schools. We support each other that go on in each other's schools. We have a panel between us where we can talk with each other about decisions that need to be made particularly to do with term-time attendance so it doesn't fall on one person's shoulders. We can go to parents and say we have consulted with a panel of other headteachers. We are not an academy chain but it works extremely well for us.</p> <p>I think it's either Herefordshire or Hertfordshire that is the top performing local authority in the country and they have the smallest number of academies in the country. There is no data whatsoever that suggests that having an executive headteacher in</p>		
--	--	--



	<p>charge of an academy chain of schools is the way to get to sustained improvement amongst schools. We have a number of different schools that have very, very different backgrounds, very different makeup of children and we all work very successfully together without the need for there to be one overarching person in charge. I don't see what the benefit would be!</p> <p>One thing that is very, very clear for us as a cluster of schools is that if we are to go as an academy chain we are keeping hold of our budgets. We do not want to enter into something where we have to all agree with each other on what we are to spend our own budget on. That is a non-negotiable for the schools in our cluster.</p>		
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## Appendix 7 Ethics protocol

### From the Secret Garden to the Panopticon? Changing freedoms and the growing crisis in primary school headteacher recruitment.

PROFESSIONAL  
DOCTORATE  
IN EDUCATION  
WITH  
PLYMOUTH  
UNIVERSITY

**Paul Hodson**  
Plymouth University

#### **ETHICS PROTOCOL** (to be read in conjunction with the letter of introduction)

The research question refers to the 2010 Schools White Paper, 'The Importance of Teaching', with its focus on school-led improvement replacing top-down initiatives and the development of self-governing academy schools. Data collected through interviews should clarify the extent to which the decision to move to academy status is extending autonomy with a volitional or unintentional trajectory away from panoptic control and towards assumed sovereignty and increasing freedoms. The research ethics guidelines issued by BERA have informed this protocol.

#### **Aims of the research**

Analysis of data from the series of interviews should provide insight (an accurate and deep intuitive understanding of a phenomenon) into:

- The degree to which moving to academy status has extended 'autonomy' and 'freedom' for primary schools in the view of headteachers;
- A clearer understanding of what constitutes 'freedom' in this context;
- The extent to which the development (from pre-1977 'sovereignty' through the supposed panoptic era to the current governmental position championing academy status) represents a return to 'freedom' or a veneer covering on-going central control of primary education.

#### **What it will entail**

- Interviews with 15 primary headteachers
- Sharing of transcripts and offer to add extra comment
- Initial interpretation of data
- Final interpretation of data

#### **Informed Consent**

The headteachers will be invited to engage with the research project by letter with a separate consent slip (see attached). The letter informs the participant of the focus of the research; notes the requirement for the interview; mentions the need to record the interview and clarifies the right to withdraw and safeguards against harm.

#### **Right to Withdraw**

Participants will be informed at the outset of their right to withdraw themselves and their data up to the point of final return of transcripts and final writing up stage. There will be no perceived risk to themselves if they decide to withdraw.

#### **Feedback**

Participants will receive feedback, in the form of a transcript, following the interview and they will be invited to add further comment. A summary of the research findings will be available for all participants at the conclusion of the study. Efforts will be made to include the 'voice' of the participants in the report.

#### **Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured through: encoding of transcripts to disguise participant's identities and schools; secure storage of paper and electronic data in locked or password protected files; erasure of audio data following the conclusion of the study; secure research data storage for ten years followed by appropriate disposal. Responsibility for the interpretation of data remains with the researcher.

#### **Thank you very much for taking part in this research.**

If you wish to discuss this study, please contact:

Paul Hodson

Tel: 01736 754060

Email [paulhodson14@gmail.com](mailto:paulhodson14@gmail.com)

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