Chapter 3: Leadership - Living with and working through Paradox

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Educators may position themselves in the role of technician, delivering simply what is demanded by the state and its education policies. For a technician, there may be puzzles to solve but it is clear that these are to be solved with the purpose of maintaining or improving the system – not changing it. Alternatively the educator may attempt to build a more facilitative, democratic approach to education which takes both learners and themselves into possibilities for 'unknown' curricular, where debate and contestation are 'part and parcel' of the way in which the world is conceived. In this model critical positions can be adopted and new insights formed and tested through debate and through practice. Life is however, more complex and unpredictable where there are multiple views concerning the nature of the 'good' and much trickier where there are multiple narratives about how to achieve the idea of the good society and the 'purpose', if any, of life. Paradox arises as an essential feature of such democratic approaches where it claims to be inclusive of all voices, views and narratives, no matter how different they appear to be. Kuhn (1970) referred to 'paradigms' (the way we come to understand and interpret the world around us) as composed of key texts, discourses and ways of seeing the world. Indeed, the way that we identify and determine the facts themselves 'change' according to the paradigm we adopt. Thus, when paradigms are under contest, knowledge becomes a site for paradox where competing ways of seeing are continually brought together as representing the 'real', views often, oscillating between the paradigms. For example, in education with its different etymological roots there is an oscillation between 'rearing' 'training' *educare* (the technician position) and 'drawing out' or 'leading out' *educere* (a more facilitative and unpredictable approach). If one follows a Kantian-style enlightenment where: "nothing is required for this enlightenment, however, except freedom; and the freedom in question is the least harmful of all, namely, the freedom to use reason publicly in all matters" (Kant 1784), then the focus is on the potential of the individual, a potential that involves free will and the dignity of equality with all others. Then education becomes fundamentally a democratic process requiring democratic forms of organisation to ensure all individuals are included in all matters.

What then is the role of education in navigating through the paradox between state control and educational freedoms? Education underpinned by principles of democratic freedom and equality is challenging for any educator constrained by State authorities from 'stepping into the unknown' and engaging in debate about what is 'real', 'knowable', 'believable', of 'value' and 'good' across the curriculum. How then as a teacher, can one explore questions involving the

political, economic, historic, social, cultural and ethical complexities and sensitivities, in the context of vertically organised systems of authority, discipline and management?

Research was undertaken to explore such questions aiming, not so much to provide a research methodology that can deal with paradox, but recognise that paradox is itself the methodology. That is to say, the contradictions and gaps that indicate the presence of multiple stories can be deconstructed, analysed according to values and principles, moving to debate and then to propose forms of organisation that enable democratic reframing of the curriculum in ways that engage all actors and their different points of view, freely, equally and with dignity. In this sense, a curriculum is constructed according to a given 'world view', to construct a picture of, tell an explanatory story about how to see and relate to others and act within that world. As later argued in chapters 5, 6 and 13, a core narrative for education is that it contributes to the providential economy (including health, national insurance and social services as well as education, see FEC 2018) as fundamental to freedom and citizenship for all. The narrative of a providential economy as a cooperative enterprise equally beneficial for all, runs contrary to both predatory neoconservative and neoliberal attacks that have resulted in narrowing the curriculum for nationalistic, elite purposes whilst simultaneously promoting the marketisation of schools to make them competitive (Green 2014). Distinct narratives then underpin cooperation and competition having two distinct and not necessarily compatible systems of values. In the UK, marketisation has been realised in terms of the development of academies, teaching school alliances, free schools and multi-academy trusts (with some schools remaining under Local Authority control) together with confining curricula to approved subjects that are further constricted by examination syllabi, overseen by inspection regimes (OfSTED[1]) Consequently, the conditions for the lived sense of paradox in the work and organisation of schooling as both mutually providential and individualistically competitive in the UK as well as elsewhere in the world seems inescapable. There are then choices to be made, to adopt the policies, or resist, or perhaps, just 'live' the paradox.

In order to make a choice in a given situation, an individual will need to know: 1) what are the rules governing relationships, behaviours and actions; and consequently 2) whose voices count in decision making and in particular who is able to impose the rules that govern decision making; and 3) who and what are disposable? If each narrative seems to the individual to be 'legitimate' or 'desired' or resigned to their irresolvability then they experience paradox. In the following we explore how school leaders deal with such experiences beginning with a discussion of educational leadership and paradox.

[1] Office for Standards in Education

Leadership And Paradox

In schools, Waller (1932) saw the relation between teacher and pupil as fundamentally at odds. Hence the relation between them was essentially hostile. It may be thought of as a formative experience of the fundamental political frontier between those in charge and those ruled that is articulated throughout adult life in contemporary societies. This is a theme that has been variously explored in the literature. It fits the historical narrative of one form of schooling for the masses who are to be subjected and another form for the leaders, the rulers (see for example Simon 1960). The taming of the impulse to escape subjection to the rules of authority and learning who is a friend and who is an enemy and on whose side you are in the social order begins early. Such rules and relationships are not explicitly defined in the official curricula but rather articulated through the 'hidden curricula' (Jackson 1968) that creates the life-long legacies essential to contemporary friend-enemy politics (see chapter 5) and any sense of class or identity struggle in the context of state organised or legitimised forms of power over people. Thus, competing ways of seeing can be 'resolved' not so much through a cooperative effort of creative reframing but through a reduction to hostility where one is at war with the other. However, democratising narratives disrupt such hostilities and the 'hidden' politics of everyday life by privileging the voices of the many over those in elite controlling positions and in particular by inviting into decision-making debates those who have been marginalised or excluded. By equalising voices, democracy challenges the hierarchies of power elites. The opposition between the hierarchical and the horizonal relations of democratic organisation creates the conditions for paradox when an organisation operates both. This is nowhere better seen than in the paradoxical relation of leadership for democracy.

In any hierarchical organisation charged with delivering a range of policy requirements, leadership of whatever form, is a fundamental structural feature. As in the essential geometric form of the triangle, features can be altered (side length, angles, overall size) to give many apparently different shapes. But adding a side or removing a side changes the essential nature of the triangle. The essential feature in discourses of leadership is inequality between those who lead and those who follow. That essential inequality may be spun to render itself largely invisible, as in the various models of 'distributed leadership' that seek to 'democratise' voices in the pursuit of the organisation's policy commitments. Thus, in education the battle lines can be drawn between what may be called a hard-line managerialism that seeks the delivery of government policy (Barber 2007) and the perceived greater freedom offered by distributed leadership. In this latter position, in order to justify its 'democratic' appearance, it typically involves engaging most staff in operating some level of 'leadership' whereby each leader takes responsibility for those 'following' to conform to particular educational agendas. Hammersley-Fletcher (2005: 46) explained how distributed leadership was presented as,

> … a model which advocates that people work together to develop vision and strategy for their organisation. In this way people utilise and respond to the combined knowledge and expertise of everyone in the group in a manner that offers greater possibilities for creativity and inspiration than could be expected of one individual alone…

However, the whole point of such 'leadership' is to subject itself and its followers to delivering government policy goals (Hall et.al., 2011). Thus, any such 'distributed leadership' is embedded within wider structures of power that are complexly interrelated, at local, regional, state, international and global levels. There is, as Hatcher (2005: 258-9) puts it, a 'seductive ideological character' underlying the adoption of distributed leadership in that 'idealising managerialist practice as democratic, disguises the reality of the ultimately coercive power of management.' Indeed, Hatcher in his review of studies attempting to resolve the contradictions between distributed leadership and power argues that none have successfully disentangled democratic or distributed forms of leadership from power. Indeed, 'progressive' views of education and practices have suffered systematic attacks by influential reactionary conservatives (Cox and Dyson 1975, Bloom 1987). Benn (2012) as a supporter of a democratising comprehensive education called it a war as did the conservative ex-head of OfSTED, Woodhead (2003). However, the idea of democracy has proven to be resilient as the struggles for a democratic public and the development of democratic organisations continue through a range of social and educational movements and practices. Schostak and Goodson (2020) argue that underpinning any democratic process is the struggle for a public engaged in a search for a 'truth'. In a sense this search is always outside of any state definition of what counts as 'democracy'. It is this that led Stenhouse to write:

> Education is learning in the context of a search for truth. Truth cannot be defined by the state even through democratic processes – close control of curricula and teaching in schools is to be likened to the totalitarian control of art.
>
> (Stenhouse, 1988, p. 44)

However, there is a slippage of meaning here. State appropriation of democratic processes and education is a slipping on of masks, hiding its discourses and practices of authoritarianism and mastery over people. Rosanvallon's (2012) idea of counter-democracy – that is, counter to state definitions and forms of organisation – that resides in the conversations and debates of an alert and critical public, provides a means of re-evoking and re-positioning a form of democracy of education

where each individual draws out the intelligent development of the potential of the other in the search for truth. In that sense, democratic encounters are co-existent with educational practice.

Some steps towards bringing this about are provided by Hammersley-Fletcher's ongoing research – as 'vanishing mediator' (see chapter 10) - with teacher leaders engaged in a variety of forms of action research/ research embedded reflective practice. Only by 'vanishing' could the teachers begin the processes by which they could search for their own 'truth' without appropriation by external authorities. This then could stimulate their own 'vanishing' as leaders to allow 'learners' to engage in their own search. The group – which is on-going - includes head teachers, senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers developing leadership skills[2].

The teacher emancipation project (an introduction to the data)

This work began when a Local Authority made contact Linda as an expert in Educational Leadership and Management with a request that she deliver 60 credits of an MSc in Educational Leadership and Management off-site situated in one of their schools with teaching input coming from three senior leaders from both the host school and their local secondary school. It was in undertaking this she first met the then Assistant head of a Teaching School, and the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) lead within a Teaching School Alliance (TSA) with whom she has continued to work for 8 years. It is a story of Linda adopting positions of leadership then at critical points 'letting go' by engaging with the paradoxes of leadership.

For the first two years Linda delivered the Masters Curriculum to aspirant middle leaders from local schools in the Local Authority. However, working with a team of three senior leaders she began to get frustrated with the narrow curriculum offered within the accredited route and began to create some more exciting and adventurous sessions which went beyond what was strictly needed for the masters provision. She was then asked to deliver some additional CPD sessions to other groups whilst a colleague took on the Masters programme. The teaching school had in this period formed into a Teaching School Alliance, schools in the Alliance looking towards the Teaching School to provide their professional development. A cumulative result of the keenness of the staff groups to know more and the mutual encouragement between Linda and the senior leaders with whom she was working, combined with a price rise in the cost of Masters delivery led to the Lead TSA school asking whether she would work under the umbrella of consultancy to lead research projects similar to those connected to the Masters programme, but without the constraints of programme assessment.

[2] We note that ethical approval was sought and that the BERA ethical guidelines were followed. Names are therefore anonymised and identifying language has been altered to disguise the schools and staff involved

This work in the first year was funded through gaining research income in return for the TSA engaging in undertaking randomised control trials (RCTs) in school. Linda spent time within the schools with staff and at staff meetings exploring the potential reservations about this approach but supporting with some method training and work around ethics. In line with these discussions the teachers demonstrated for themselves the concerns about undertaking experiments where it was necessary to have control groups who didn't experience the initiatives that others did. They discussed the ethical dilemmas of such practice and as a consequence, teacher leaders found ways of undertaking rolling programmes so that all pupils were involved at some point. Further, they began to understand that a process designed for hospitals involving very large samples was not necessarily effective in school settings. Their samples were not large enough to reach any significant conclusions (albeit they did arrive at some potential indications that might inform practice). By the end of that year the schools involved all decided that RCTs weren't particularly effective. This then was a gradual shift of paradigm where teacher leaders were moving from accepting recommended research practices at face value, to understanding these as part of a larger package of research tools that might be used and adapted to the particular work being undertaken. Indeed as Linda moved into expanding their knowledge of other approaches, they also began to see new possibilities for research topics that moved beyond the conventions of addressing issues that they knew were articulated in the school development plan. Thus Linda opened up their experiences of other research approaches through a more varied diet involving trialling questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, storytelling, listening walks[3], drawing on numerical data in new ways and so forth. In each case the teacher leaders used each approach in turn to investigate a single project of each teacher's choosing. So at the end of a year teacher leaders had a range of data around one topic and were then able to combine, reinforce, question and evaluate the various approaches adopted. Alongside this at each stage of data gathering Linda developed their analytic skills through undertaking group analyses and debating the ways in which data can be interpreted. Thus, this work continued to develop staff research skills across a variety of approaches and where each approach was utilised to deepen understandings. The Assistant Head and Linda also engaged in sessions with head teachers to persuade them of the benefits gained from staff involving themselves in these research projects, the TSA funding Linda's time. This project was then orientated around considering alternative approaches to finding out about practice and coming to an understanding that particular methods gave particular insights, some in tension with others whilst some were

[3] Listening walks were inspired by and adapted from the work of Michael Gallagher (eg: Gallagher & Prior, 2013). This involved walking single file around the school and its surrounds without speaking, writing or interacting with others which heightened participants senses to the environment and ways of working in unfamiliar ways. They could 'hear' the 'known' in new ways which made it 'strange'.

complimentary. This empowered the teacher leaders to think differently about not only their project choices but also the actions leading from them. However, giving teacher leaders a free-hand to outline their own project, worried them. Teachers began living the paradox by oscillating between ways of seeing and justifying practices. They had for so long worked in ways that were constrained by detailed plans that the notion that they were free to choose left them wondering what the criteria were and how they would be judged. They were concerned that they 'might get it wrong'. The assistant head fielded a lot of questions and Linda acted to build their confidence and almost 'give them permission to be free' to do something that wasn't necessarily obviously linked to improving test results. This involved a lot of discussion which led to the discovery that Heads in some cases were dictating the remit of the research. This paradox had to be addressed and then resolved through challenging the 'taken for granted' ways of understanding held by all the staff and replacing this with collective analysis and discussion. In fact as staff began to work with heads to demonstrate their analysis and thinking heads too became convinced of this as a positive way forward. Therefore, after the initial panic, concerns died away with staff growing in enthusiasm and confidence. The notion of permissions to gain freedom to experiment has recurred throughout this work whether that be permissions from Linda as a research leader or from Headteachers and senior staff. Thus paradoxically 'freedom' was associated with 'permission'. How could this be dealt with?

Sessions were built around learning about a research approach, teacher leaders then trialled this by going back into their schools to gather some data on their chosen topic. At the next session they brought along the data they had generated, which was analysed together, picking out themes and complexities and discussing differences in understandings. This pattern of research and collective discussion was then repeated. At the end of the first year staff were enthused, argumentative, full of ideas and generally appeared to have thoroughly enjoyed the work. In other words, they were developing freedoms to debate courses of action rather than following the directions of others. As barriers were broken, arguments about time spent disappeared because this work became integrated within classroom practices and around school. This included having a greater voice where senior leaders were taking their opinions more seriously because they were better able to argue their position. In short, these were steps towards developing a less hierarchical form of organisation. An end of year conference was set up, and has been repeated annually since, to celebrate the research activity of staff and disseminate their work across the alliance. This became a key structure in the democratisation of knowledge across schools and with colleagues who hadn't taken part in the research. By coming together to share and debate their own knowledge they became their own experts. This sent powerful messages to colleagues that they could follow their own interests and build exciting projects that provided data in an inclusive arena for change where teacher voices

were able to initiate debate. At this moment some of the steps in the methodology of paradox become visible. By being facilitated to assert their own voices, teachers began engaging equally in debate where their voices were not only heard but counted in forming evaluations and decision making. At the same time Linda stepped back from her role as guide, facilitator and mentor. Similarly, headteachers were witnessing their teachers taking a lead in new initiatives that would benefit the school that provoked them to 'let go' of areas of control and expertise.

Teacher leaders who were increasingly experienced with research, worked with other staff to develop these skills. Meanwhile, Linda focussed her input around themes of critical reflection, teacher voice and democracy, bringing in other academics to support this. It was by this time clear that the research active staff were having an impact on their school practices. A body of work was in progress as staff wrote papers, attended academic conferences with one article being published with the assistant head (Hammersley-Fletcher et.al., 2017). More were in production with a range of staff. As the direction of the TSA became more apparent two schools withdrew from the network, but nine schools remained (one high school and eight primary schools) and, at the time of writing, are still fully committed to these activities.

Moreover, this body of work helped attract a medium sized multi-academy trust (MAT) comprising thirteen schools (of which 3 are high schools and the rest primary) to make contact with Linda because they wanted staff to have opportunities to be involved in a leadership and research journey. They particularly wanted to commission research looking at aspects of practice across their schools linked to Trust values. They also wanted some input into their leadership development programme and to gatherings of the school heads. This work has now been undertaken for three years with year four already commissioned. In addition, research staff have been supported to undertake Masters accreditation and one of the Founders of the Trust is currently undertaking a PhD.

What emerged in both the MAT and the TSA as the most problematic issue was senior leaders (including heads) who supported the research-based work yet paradoxically did not always help facilitate it. Time, opportunity and space to disseminate the work done by staff, needs to be resourced by Heads. Shifting cultures and shifting perceptions can only take place if material resources are re-deployed. In research sessions Linda openly discussed issues around the changing culture and perceptions she observed at regular intervals, moreover, inviting staff to discuss strategies for explaining the importance of their work and to demonstrate how this adds to the development of the school. In this way schools were becoming more informed in ways that they could defend at inspection and were developing narratives about how they identified issues within their school and what they were and could do to address this based on evidence that they had collected. Staff were also encouraged to work in teams across schools to add depth to the

recommendations they can make to their senior leaders. They were able through this device not only to share and adapt ideas but also to work through how to articulate their research in ways that other educators could understand, embrace and resource. In addition, Linda has worked with TSA and MAT level leaders to explain to heads the indirect benefits of developing more challenging staff because they become much more engaged and enthusiastic than they might otherwise have been. This generates incredible opportunities for high quality self-directed professional development. As Marie a teacher within the MAT said in 2018,

> Just an example, you know, we're revamping the curriculum here and that's been me as the driver for that. Well never before would I have thought oh I'm going to stick my head above the parapet and say right this is what we're doing and these are the reasons why we're doing it, but that confidence helps you grow as a leader.

Moreover Linda has worked to challenge the heads more directly, engaging them in philosophical exploration of their values and purposes and how these marry with or contradict practices and the wider organisation. In this way staff are facilitated to engage with their own enthusiasms using their research, the literature, varied research approaches and their shared experience to further their knowledge. The key resource of time has been allocated to staff to meet to form and enact their research and attend development sessions. It is notable in every case when dealing with new groups of staff, that they grow in confidence and knowledge as the research activity progresses. As a consequence, momentum is gathering around staff engagement with research and teachers are becoming less cynical about gaining support from their senior leaders. It is however, important to note that this has taken time and effort and the building of trust is a fragile process. One senior leader with a different agenda, can easily undermine teachers enthusiasms where they are then forced to face the paradox between espoused support and the reality of little support. For example as MAT teacher James in 2019 states,

> schools are probably a very good place at implementing things which they think you know are going to be fantastic, which is someone's sort of you know 'baby' for want of a better expression. And then they're either not committed to it, or there's no time to implement it – and that becomes problematic.

This was why it became apparent that senior leaders and particularly head teachers, needed to deeply understand, respect and resource the research agendas of staff. It was exactly this tension

that led the two schools as mentioned earlier, to leave the TSA. Getting the fundamentals right for sustained democratic organisation is critical.

The Values, lived experience and organisation

In 2018, MAT secondary head teacher Jess summed up the attitudes of the majority of those interviewed at that point, as a need for social justice, personal integrity and holding a moral and conscience-driven viewpoint. There was however, little explanation of what any of these elements might look like in practice, or indeed how these were being interpreted by these head teachers. The possibilities for democratic action in schools can only become clearer when the personal values that teachers bring to the profession are highlighted and some of their competing and paradoxical elements untangled. At any time, personal, organisational, community and state values can all come into conflict. Mostly, however, they may be safely compartmentalised into scenes of action located in different places, at different times, with different people. Consequently, when asked about personal values, many find it difficult to bring the complexity to light answering in highly generalised terms along with 'feel good' instances:

> I wanted to make more of a difference that you can see visibly. You know like you can see the difference when you bring that child to the theatre or when you see that they're reading and they couldn't read last year, you know and you see that joy and that success, so I think it is a meaningful career… (Bella–MAT high school head teacher, 2019)

> … there's high pressure, there's high expectations, but everybody in this building shares the same values and vision and so it feels very collegiate. (Lou, MAT Primary head teacher, 2019)

However, Lou went on to say "It's not hierarchical. We are, yeah, I mean I'm the boss obviously…". This oscillation between the hierarchical and the vertical sets values against values that can only be resolved through compartmentalisation or by changing the broader form of organisation. Perhaps values and their implication for organisation most easily come into view when they clash. Thus, for example, one MAT primary school head teacher Sally (interviewed in 2019), expressed the relation between values, organisation and practice as:

> if you don't think clearly about what you, what the values or the vision are built on, then you won't achieve it. I think it's really important to be mindful of that, so the three foundations

> you know it is what we build everything on, so we have to keep them in mind and explicitly include that in whatever it is that we're doing.

These three founding values-based themes for the Trust focused on 1) issues of entitlement to a broad curricular experience; 2) the celebration of the local community of the school; and 3) developing achievement across a wider curriculum than simply focussing on those aspects tested nationally. Of course questions then arise about what entitlement might mean and how and by whom are these chosen. In this case the notion of entitlement was driven from the Trust and it was based around a sense of giving children the widest possible curriculum as they were 'entitled' to a full and rounded education (such as giving more prominence to performance arts and sports). This was moreover linked to notions of privileged education where those with money receive more variety than those without. Next, celebration of the local community was linked to historical figures, places, traditions within the school and providing a sense of place and belonging with which staff pupils and families could affiliate. As a consequence, the input of ideas and histories from pupils and families became part of this process and as understandings deepened there was growing evidence of family involvement in school activities. There was also evidence of the schools working with disaffected parents/carers to engage them in debate and discussion that would bring them into the conversation. It was understood that none of these 'foundations' were simply given to the Trust schools. They have to be thought about, discussed:

> Um, it's really funny because Lucy [senior leader] asked the question to them [staff] why these foundations? Why did, why were they chosen? What do we mean by them? Why couldn't they have been something else? Why that? So engaging with them in that way has been really useful and it's, you forget, when you're using them all the time, you forget that teachers have lots of other things they're trying to remember, particularly with such a young staff, so when we spoke about the three foundations, you know some of them kept mixing it up with our school kind of motto... (Sally)

It is through this critical and challenging engagement with school staff that values become meaningful as a means of shaping practice and allocating resources. Sally was clear that it was healthy to challenge and be challenged. With each challenge "I align with their vision and their values and back to that idea of being challenged" (Sally).

In the TSA moreover this was also clearly demonstrated by pupils as well. In the lead school pupils conducted their own research activity and as one primary pupil said in a focus group "the teachers don't know everything and we need to research it for ourselves". Another responded with

giggles "yeah and we have to teach the teachers", which made the pupil group laugh. The sense of reversal – whether of knowledge, or of authority – created a dissonance, expressed through laughter. It was a matter of seeing things differently: although the pupils commented that they weren't making their teachers look very good, the Head responded that on the contrary, they were demonstrating how they were all learners and could take initiatives. This sense of 'all' as learners achieves a levelling through a recognition of mutual aid yet still clashes with the more 'vertical' demands for 'achievement' expressed as exam results.

Examinations place a market value on individuals and by extension on the schools and teachers. Middleclass parents try to get their children into the 'best' - which typically means high performing - schools. The richest pay to get their children into the private sector considering this to provide the best education for their needs. There is therefore a prevailing pattern of differences between the poor going to the 'worst' and the rich going to the 'best' that led Simon (1960) to write that education historically has been divided through schools into 'two nations'. Thus as Marsh (2011) argued contemporary forms of teaching and learning are not the road to abolishing inequality. Indeed, as Blacker (2013) contends the returns on learning - the 'rate of learning' - have been falling in the 'neoliberal endgame'.

As one year 6 (aged 11, 2018) pupil from the MAT said, "When we were all in year five we were kind of laid back and then we got to year six we had to step up our game." The endgame forces a narrowing of thinking and practice which in turn constrains the use of resources. The game involves changing gear, 'stepping up' and meeting the demands in appropriate ways:

> sometimes change is forced upon us, given the situation that we work in, but ultimately any change needs to be sort of really well thought through… teaching is a profession, I suppose you know the onus is also for teachers to act sort of you know professionally. So I think in some ways they're kind of victims of their kind of own measured response to things. (Paul, MAT teacher, 2018)

Being 'measured' to meet the demands of the neoliberal endgame rather than the wider possibilities of being open to a more complex world of experience. Indeed Paul continues:

> I always find it bizarre that we are telling students that we're preparing them for life within the outside world, and we tell them to wear a uniform, not use their mobile phones, to go to lessons at specific times and to … I mean they follow a kind of pattern of their day which bears no relation whatsoever to the outside world at all… you can imagine you know the Daily Mail, if you were to turn round and say well actually what we're going to do is we're

> not going to have a fixed curriculum … not that I think that's a good idea you know abandoning a fixed curriculum … but you have a much greater degree of freedoms than you had.

Rather than freedom, there is the comfort of degrees of freedom, an extension of the leash as it were instead of being freed from the leash. The leash can be made attractive, as well as creative, even for the basic skills of reading writing and arithmetic:

> I had the kids running up and down with their coordinates, plotting it on massive graphs, so actually it's that there is a real openness to go to try things out, see if they work and if they don't then that's fine. They're still learning. (Jo, MAT primary school teacher, 2019)

Especially when the business world and conservative policies places the 'need' for maths, science and technology over the need for the arts, staff discuss the value of the wider curriculum:

> …every Monday we've got a group of teachers and we're going to be looking at the curriculum map and thinking of how can we make it more creative. And maybe we don't all just teach maths and English in the morning, maybe it's an art lesson that will lead into an English lesson or something … you know something like that. (Sue, MAT primary school teacher, 2019)

Sue was pointing out that as a school they were beginning a journey of challenging the conventions of curriculum priorities and opening out ideas that lessons could be more linked and expanded upon in terms of focus and direction that moved beyond English and Maths. A year 6 pupil (2018) from the MAT commented on the widening of the curriculum he had experienced in terms of, "sports tournaments or shaking up Shakespeare". In small ways, then, changes accumulate and spread, but are they sufficient to bring a transformation?

Reworking The Work Of The Teacher And Head Teacher

Rethinking the work of the teacher and headteacher as leader is critical to bringing real transformation. The critical centrality of the headteacher as leader in relation to teachers as workers and pupils as materials is reminiscent of the business logic that Dejours (1998; see also, Dejours and Deranty 2010) sees at the heart of neoliberal managerialism. Here leadership is defined as taking the hard decisions - for example, decisions to cut resources, discipline, punish and sack to meet targets of profitability, or in the case of schools, exam results. Dejours, drawing upon Arendt

(1998), re-works the market conception of work. Rather than work being an alienated form of labour undertaken for others in return for wages, work is transformed into a central organising force bringing people together as equals into cooperative relations to achieve projects of mutual benefit. In educational terms, the work of the teacher cannot be accomplished without the co-participatory work of the 'pupil' or indeed of their colleagues. Each change towards equality breaks the prevailing structural logic of hierarchy so that each individual becomes a contributory owner of what is produced. This provides a very different narrative of work to its neoliberal, performance and measurement driven, version.

Given the dominance of the neoliberal narrative making changes may start with simple steps. For example a year 6 girl (2018) talked about how pupils benefitted from meeting with other schools within their MAT:

> sometimes on special events we go to one huge school and a lot of people meet up for special events… and they did lots of activities, like running, cycling, orienteering, archery and things like that.

Just meeting is an important step in itself. It provides opportunities for conversation, for making new acquaintances, for understanding the points of view of others. And as one boy put it:

> …it's more fun, like, there are more [Trust] based activities and things like that. In other schools they won't have that… I think in our school it's more open, so we're not shy to say what we think…

Going further to make a bigger structural change however, is not easy. As a head teacher explained to Linda in an earlier research project:

> It is very difficult to stand back and allow pupils to make and value their own choices and decisions. When you are accustomed to taking charge and responsibility, you must develop a leadership style that is supportive. I have developed a shared vision within the context of the constitution, prompted the group to question their actions and advised them of possible areas of strength and improvement. (high school head Jay, 2015)

As this quotation illustrates, it is hard to let go, to stand back and to stop adopting an instructional mode. However, taking it step by step, learning from the effects of each attempt, the potential for a democratic organisation based upon principles of equality of voice can be realised (see for example

Fielding 2005). Such development would be informed not just by the teaching staff but also by the students and the wider community. However, before that becomes a reality, the data continues to speak of the difficulty of engaging staff and pupils in relation to a perceived loss of control. How then were the tentative transitional steps managed organisationally?

One Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), for example, faced challenges around purposes in the context of predominating external school agendas. In particular, MATs are often founded by particular people with a particular vision about what education should look like and /or how to get schools to be outstanding (in Ofsted terms) based, one might presume, on their own belief that they have a better solution than others. This Trust was set up with a social justice agenda very much at the forefront of its thinking targeting schools only in economically deprived areas. The trust founders had a vision of education of developing schools as places where all doors are opened to children. And to that end, they have a strong focus on the non-core curricular. This has involved the need to convince others (including teachers) that it is possible to achieve good Ofsted results through this alternative emphasis which not only enables the schools and Trust to survive in a neo-liberal setting, but which begins to push back against these prevailing forces. Given the strength of the prevailing forces and their widespread acceptance, all organisational and perceptual structural changes remain frail.

Having spent several years developing a supportive Trust Board who understood and believed in these ambitions, one of the core Trust members stepped back from chairing the trust board to accomplish other work necessary within the Trust and to allow others to take a lead and develop new strategies and ideas to support this core focus. However, the person stepping into this vacuum 'became someone else' and was not as convinced by the core and underpinning purposes as the Trust leaders and founders expected. Much to their consternation the chair roused other board members and effectively began to stage a coup. The founders, unsympathetic to having the core purpose of the Trust undermined and finding the board recalcitrant were faced with the notion that the 'members' – people appointed to uphold the purposes of the Trust and tasked with holding boards to account as well as CEOs and with the power to dismiss any of these - decided to reconstitute the board. The Trust leaders and founders explained that they were not entirely sure what had happened. In our musings we presumed that with constant pressure outside for a more conventional set of school improvement targets, and without a chair person to remind them of these goals and reinforce confidence in them, the Board had lost confidence, retracted to traditional perspectives and had decided that they now had the power to overthrow the leaders of the Trust.

The Trust leadership was distressed that the board members seemed to be treating the trust as if it was there to serve them when surely all should have the pupils benefit at heart. Unfortunately it is not possible to know what was in the minds of any of the players in this drama, however it

illustrates that in any transitional situation there is the ever present potential for the balance of forces between the old structural forms and the new to revert back and re-evoke the traditional or mainstream discourses, practices and forms of organisation. How then, to prevent this reversion from taking place?

In another MAT that Linda works with she noted a potential strategy. At a Trust Board meeting, the heads of the three schools involved in this MAT together with the executive head overseeing two of the schools, it became apparent they were working together to identify where there were issues in a given school and what strengths each of them could offer to help respond to these issues. Their identity appeared to be at the MAT rather than at school level and as such each school wanted to support the other. It seemed that not only the heads collaborated but also there were teams of staff who worked to support other staff through knowledge sharing and practicing together to demonstrate this knowledge. Clearly this MAT had set up this cross-fertilisiation of learning as a way of working that emphasised everyone's strengths and worked to lessen hierarchy. This structure of collaboration and cooperation enables potential tensions to be spotted so that they can be worked on to resolve any issues. This was taking place in the context of national policy, to free schools from direct state control and placing them in a market where competition is rife.

In some schools, as in the first example above, this national policy could be divisive, setting school against school. And yet paradoxically in the above case we have schools who collaborate for the benefit of all. What becomes apparent however is that the structural organisation and day to day operational conditions of MATs, relies on the vision or strategy of the CEO. This remains the key position in the structure. It is hierarchical with the CEO and Trust Board at the top of the pyramid. In this case this is a MAT with a CEO who believes in developing people and opening opportunities for all. This could however be very different if a CEO is focussed simply on results where for example the CEO prevents heads collaborating. Can such a powerful structural element be challenged and changed?

What Next?

There is no end to developments nor can they be entirely predictable. Certainly, if the values of democracy - freedom and equality of voice – are to be embedded in organisation and people's practices then the very multiplicity of views that are expressed, the shifting support for one view rather than another and the innovations involved in coming to shared mutually beneficial understandings is the very antithesis of the delivery models of neoliberal engineering and the limited, elitist, nationalistic curricula of neoconservatives. Thus even the most powerful structural elements are open to challenge by the collective views of a critically debating public. Education is central in creating that public. So, in practical terms, what next?

The project undertaken by Linda continues and may perhaps never be finished. These are schools struggling within a paradox where they must please the neoliberal regime in order to survive and yet, given their understanding of child development and desire to expand minds, they are also fighting against these forces to liberate practices and even curricula to facilitate deep learning. They moreover, understand their reliance on others, be that colleagues, heads, CEOs or pupils and their families for developing a lively and creative educational environment. They are also building enthusiasm through taking greater responsibility for their work based on research, experience and reading. In a time of crisis, where teachers are leaving the profession in large numbers, then giving them opportunities to develop their excitement about learning in ways that they can transmit to pupils and colleagues is paramount. The tensions expressed in teachers work is unlikely to disappear, but teachers can act together to challenge and critique practice, acting to flatten hierarchies and whilst they may not solve the leadership conundrum, they may at least learn to act as vanishing mediators moving on to take on fresh challenges which will feed their ongoing enthusiasm and interest in the work of educators.

This work is a part of the great history of democratising initiatives whose legacies it draws upon. If such initiatives are to make real differences in the lives of people generally, then they need to be more than exemplary 'one-offs'. By focusing upon cross-school alliances an infrastructure is created capable of embedding democratising forms of organisation and practice that generates the necessary resources (of time, people, and, of course, critically, finance) required to provide a countervailing framework able to resist and indeed ultimately overcome the antidemocratic forces set in train by elite domination of markets and government. At least that is the hope. And democracy is the politics of hope made real.